

WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE...

COVER STORY

14 PRIDE OF NEW YORK

Helene Dunbar on the band that just had to happen sometime.

FEATURES

16 THE SECRET OF KÍLA

Conor O'Hara catches up with Colm Ó Snodaigh to discuss the forthcoming *Best of Album* from Kíla.

18 THE FAMILY ARE REELIN' TOGETHER

Edel McLaughlin meets with the musical Mulcahy family to discuss their third family album, *Reelin' in Tradition*.

20 NEW MUSIC FOR CAMDEN TOWN

The Return to Camden Town Festival enters its second decade, commissioning and premiering the performance of a brand new suite of music by Charlie Lennon.

22 LOVE OF THE LAND

Bill Margeson talks to Christa Burch about her debut album.

23 SHANTALLA

Seán Laffey catches up with Monaghan native, Gerry Murray, on the eve of Shantalla's reunion tour of Belgium.

24 LIAM KELLY

Liam Kelly talks to Edel McLaughlin about his debut solo recording, *Sweetwood*.

26 GAVIN WHELAN

John Brophy meets the whistle maestro, Gavin Whelan to discuss his new album.

36 THE CHERRY TREE

Derek Copley went beyond the famous roundabout to learn a thing or two about the future direction of folk in the capital.



LOVE OF THE LAND

Bill Margeson talks to Christa Burch about her debut album.



California, Christa Burch has just released her new album, *Love of the Land*. There are lots of interesting stories about this album; lots of interesting stories about Christa. Here's a peek at one. Her parents met on a tank in Korea. True. We could go on, but this is about this talented singer, and her fresh take on the music.

Musically, this is pretty much the common American story of how a woman came to traditional music. Unlike the common Irish story, there was no long family background in the music. As a young woman, Christa heard it in a number of venues, fell totally in love with it all, from sean nós to Len Graham to Silly Wizard. The dream took shape; then took wing. Voila! An album. Not all that different, really, from a lot of American singers' stories. But, there is something else.

In Irish music there is a sneaky way to find out if a brand new singer is any good. Sneak a peek at the album notes on the back of the jacket. This doesn't always work, but it does enough times to be a pretty reliable clue. Check out the guest musicians on the album, and the producer. After you get to a

and to those who prefer a more modern take. Yes, it is possible to combine the two. Christa has immersed herself in both the Irish and Scots musical scenes for years, including a stint of living in Scotland in 1997. The songs range from old favourites like *Lowlands of Holland* to the more arcane Scots number, *Gloomy Winter's Noo Awa'*. Traditional numbers sidle up to other creations from songwriters like Robbie O'Connell, Danny Carnahan, the iconic Stan Rogers and the superior Scots couple, Mairi Campbell and David Francis, also known as The Cast.

Cahill's production is elegant, as usual. There is certainly a 'Cahill sound'. Spare. Lean. Basic. Nothing fancy-shmancy. It is a sound designed to emphasize the singer. No overproduction, splashy effects here. We are sure Dennis can do that, and may well have for other types of albums, but he and his company are in growing demand as album producers because he clearly understands the music, is a master himself, and - most important here - he understands singers. Pretty rare. No one seems to relax a new talent on the scene more, such as Christa, and effectively bring the whole deal to the fore.

“Produced in California and Chicago, the 14 songs cover a full range of the tradition, and should appeal both to the purist and to those who prefer a more modern take”

certain level as a musician, you are asked constantly to be on this album and that. But, the new talent has to be able to carry the musicians as an equal. No excellent musician is going to do any favours and appear for an artist in whom they do not believe. Let's look at the back of *Love of the Land*. Produced and accompanied by Dennis Cahill of Hayes/Cahill; John Doyle; Richard Mandel. Getting the picture? There are more. Olivier Longuet, John Williams (yes, *that* John Williams), fiddle goddess Liz Knowles, Kieran O'Hare, Larry Grey, and harmonies from the superb Kat Eggleston. All of these masters of the form heard the same thing from this soprano/contralto/alto. As stated, this is not always proof. Each year there are wondrous albums that come out from artists of whom nothing has been heard previously, accompanied by others equally unknown but, you have to figure that, with these many stellar players on board, this is something special.

Produced in California and Chicago, the 14 songs cover a full range of the tradition, and should appeal both to the purist

Of course, when all is said and done, the voice and artistry have to be there. This is no quivering little reedy soprano warbling sean nós classics to the uninformed who think you have to have that warbly soprano bit down to sing Irish. This is a full-voiced, confident woman at the height of her powers. The one, sure thing you can bet on is that when you hear a first album, you are hearing the very, very best the artist has to offer. No question. Here is the dream first realized. Here is the unadulterated vision of the singer, musicians and producer, all at their best, offering their best. This is the first dance. And, it's lovely.

Nothing is harder to write about than a vocal album. When all is said and done, it must eventually and always rest with the voice. You either love it or not, and how do you describe it? Nothing is more subjective than what listeners like in their music. So, go ahead. Be subjective. It is what is in *your* ears and heart. And, that is where this album will be for a long time. And, to think, it all started on a tank in Korea. But, that's another story.