

I CAN HEAR YOU CALLING

Anne Marie Kennedy met up with Anna Falkenau ahead of the September launch of her new album with Lena Ullman.

Anna Falkenau



Photos: Ben Taylor

The collaborative album from German born fiddler Anna Falkenau and Swedish banjo player Lena Ullman gets a weighty endorsement from Andy Irvine. Ben Taylor's stunning photographic images and design contribute to making the recording refreshingly stylistic and contemporarily relevant.

AMK: "You have been successfully collaborating with Lena for years but is this your first recording?"

AF: "We've played together for a long time, in a variety of settings, from sessions in Tigh Neachtains and the Crane bar, to performances at Galway Arts Festival, Westport Bluegrass Festival, and others too numerous to mention. We'd like to think that this album is a distillation of our joint creative energies and a shared passion for a variety of musical genres."

AMK: "You have a Classical background, discovered Irish music in Scotland, American old-timey and South Indian music in Ireland and went on to study all of these in the US. The album might be representative of your own musical journey?"

AF: "Perhaps, I've always had a curiosity about other cultures, began travelling after leaving school, heard traditional Irish music in the Orkney Islands, the highlands and Edinburgh. I had played classical guitar and violin previously and was captivated by the idea of learning tunes by ear, not notation. It took a while to transition but proved worthy. Taking the time allowed me absorb the subtleties and nuances of the tunes from the beginning."

AMK: "You were also influenced while studying music at UCC."

AF: "Yes, I was fortunate to meet Mick Daly, Frank Hall, The Lee Valley and Rough Deal String Bands and Lena of course. I subsequently went to Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, where I emerged myself in the East Coast Trad scene, delved into American old-timey music and studied South Indian Music for my Master's, fascinated by its melodic and rhythmic richness. I came back to Ireland, thrilled to discover Frank Hall, Johnny Moynihan and Lena were engaged in a lively old-timey scene in Kinvara. Lena and I began playing together then and happily, our musical sensibilities dovetailed, in terms of enjoyment and ambition."

AMK: "Lena's composition on this album, *Fog*, is an unusual, enigmatic tune?"

AF: "It's innovative, a modern piece, with a ragtime feel and intricate layering, and similarly the tune for yours truly, *Waiting for Anna*, which is in two distinct parts: the first part lends itself to my use of South Indian fiddle technique, the second part is in a Swedish polska style."

AMK: "And your own composition, *Apatchy Hunting in the Garden*, is also a lively piece."

AF: "That tune came to me with urgency, named after our cat. It's American old-timey in style, very rhythmic and driving, so as to reflect the antics of a young feline, frolicking around our garden."

AMK: "Charlie Lennon's *Easter Lambs* sits nicely among your own compositions and gives a rousing finish to the CD."

AF: "It's appealing because of its depth and range, more classical in style, reminiscent of O'Carolan's work. It's a very lyrical and beautiful piece."

AMK: "And the opening tune, *Chilean Horsemen*, composed by Skip Gorman is from a different genre?"

AF: "Yes, it's an unusual tune with great life and energy in it. It's one of those very distinct tunes, an amazing piece of art in a nutshell."

AMK: "Lena has two songs on the album: *Blueberry/Snowdrop* and *Homeless*."

AF: "Yes, both are old-timey in style and delivery, deeply personal in content, one a poem of loss, the other inspired by the homeless community in Galway. Lena also puts her own stamp and style on *Red Rocking Chair* and *Black Jack David*."

AMK: "You are both innovative but respectful of the various traditions."

AF: "We are constantly looking to push boundaries, explore new ideas and love experimenting in our playing and with arrangements. Lena and myself tend to be detail oriented yet at the same time spontaneous. We continuously bounce ideas of each other. When we set out to record, our intention was to capture this combined energy and passion and not to lose spontaneity. I believe the recording captures this in a natural way. It reflects our individuality and togetherness, and shows how we've both evolved musically within the various genres."

"We are both open-minded, detail oriented and at the same time spontaneous"

The CD can be pre-ordered from www.annafalkenau.com, release date for online sales is September 14th and an launch concert will be held Upstairs in The Crane Bar, Galway on September 23, 6.30pm.

Lena Ullman

