

The unadorned voice rings true

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Heart's Desire
Niamh Parsons
Green Linnet
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ASINGER'S album requires a balance of three essential elements — voice, repertoire and arrangement. On Heart's Desire, Niamh Parsons delivers this elusive equilibrium. On previous albums, her voice was framed in often dense instrumental arrangements.

Here, she strips down to essentials. The accompaniment is minimalist, led by Graham Dunne on guitar, with contributions from Dennis Cahill, who also produces, Josephine Marsh, and Mick Kinsella.

My Lagan Love, traditional but with strong parlour traces, is the opening statement, a declaration of intent. This is the purest music — the lone, unadorned human voice. On one hand, there is no barrier between listener and singer; on the other, there is nowhere for the singer to hide. This transparency gives the performance its immediacy and strength.

In contrast, The Rigs of Rye has vocal reinforcement from Tony Gibbons and Terry Coyne over an unobtrusive guitar and mandolin.

Mark Knopfler enters the tradition with a new take on an old theme. Done with Bonaparte is a powerful expression of the disillusionment of a Napoleonic foot soldier, a veteran of

jigs&reels

Pat Ahern

Heartfelt: Niamh Parsons delivers songs from both traditional sources and modern writers.

Moscow and Austerlitz. The original appears on Knopfler's Golden Heart album, but Jerry O'Reilly, the Dublin singer, transformed it by setting it to the air of Cuan Bhéil Inse (Valentia Island). The result is a song that sounds as if it had always existed. On two tracks, Graham Dunne steps forward to display his guitar picking skills. Jenny Picking Cockles/The Colliers' Reel contrast nicely with a brace of his own — The Brown Bull of Cill na Móna and The Tipperary Temptress. There must be a great story in those titles; unfortunately, we are not told.

Familiars such as The West Coast of Clare and Syracuse are there, as is A Kiss in the Morning Early. The Napoleonic issue is revisited



on Broken Hearted I'll Wander, in which the singer laments the loss of her "bonny light horseman".

There are many fine songs here, but this is the one that remains in the head for days.