

The Arts

Reviews

Trad Woman Whelan's, Dublin

SIOBHÁN LONG

First nights must be forgiven for being ropey betimes. Slated as the first of a series on women in traditional music, Sunday night's revelries in Whelan's consisted of a handful of sublime moments and a flabby *mêlée* of instruments vying for space.

Aine Furey wears her lineage lightly. Bearing only the slightest resemblance to her piper father, Finbar, she possesses a voice that's all her own, balancing an earthy, primal quality on the one hand with a fragile, nervous tension on the other. Her time with Bohinta has served her well, in that she has forged an unmistakable vocal identity, yet her on-stage diffidence hints at a singer more at home in a singing circle than on a podium.

Niamh Parsons' voice has always set her apart from most of her peers, its belly-deep sigh lending the slightest of ditties a gravitas, and her unapologetic joy in the act of singing a reminder of the way in which stories can buoy the spirit like nothing else.

Accompanied by her regular compadre Graham Dunne on guitar, she revelled in a glorious reading of *An Páistín Fionn*, and delighted in reinventing *Black Is The Colour*, replete with a jazz line that suited it well.

Siobhán Warfield, the night's MC, fronted her band, Gael Slí, with a feisty confidence that whispered of years of experience. Her harp and piano accordion struggled for position alongside Adrian Hart's superb fiddle, Dave Keegan's subtle percussion and Robin Hurt's guitar, and her vocals shifted awkwardly between a fine folk reading of Ewan McColl's *The Ballad Of Tim Evans* and a curious Shania Twain-esque take on *My Ain True Love*.

Sandy Denny's *Maddy Groves* suffered most at the hands of Gael Slí, its tale of tragedy bowdlerised by their sledgehammer arrangements and blithe indifference to the story's lyrical strength. The song has always borne close kinship to Planxty's *Little Musgrave*, but such lineage was nowhere to be seen amid the calcified skeleton that was laid bare by Gael Slí.

Warfield's undoubted charisma and organisational skills hint at a future for this showcase of women with an appetite for the tradition.

Next time out, with a tincture of restraint and a whole lot more honing of her own

vocal identity, she might manage to strike a note that's all her own.



Niamh Parsons: her voice sets her apart.
Photograph: Alan Betson