

## STEP INTO MY PARLOUR - REVIEWS

### **THE IRISH TIMES \*\*\*\***

**Siobhan Long**

Now here's a revelatory collection.

Michelle Burke takes leave of her role as lead singer with Cherish The Ladies and makes her considerable mark on a delicious selection of parlour songs, each one delivered with a curatorial ear for detail that reveals more with each return visit.

At first, it's as though she's channelling Blossom Dearie, but Burke takes each song by the scruff of the neck and makes it her very own.

There's a warmth at the core of this collection that begs for translation to her live performance, which by all accounts is a mix of songs, sherry and a row or two of knitting.

Cathal McConnell's accompaniment on Dan O'Hara elevates this time-worn tale from maudlin sentimentality to gossamer romance. Guests include Rhiannon Giddens, Heidi Talbot and Maura O'Connell.

### **THE SCOTSMAN \*\*\*\***

**Jim Gilchrist**

This album emerged from the Scottish-based Irish singer's surreally homely Step Into My Parlour Fringe show, in which audience members are as likely to end up knitting or sipping sherry as singing along. Accordingly, this album could be sheer kitsch, but the beguiling quality of Burke's singing and the idiosyncratic yet spot-on accompanying core band (including pianist James Ross, guitarist Anna Massie, trombonist John Kenny and Brendan Power on harmonica) make this a delight to listen to. Guests include Cathal McConnell, Maura O'Connell, Heidi Talbot and the Carolina Chocolate Drops' Rhiannon Giddens. Inspired by the family knees-ups of her East Cork childhood, there are affectionately rendered versions of the jaunting car romance of Eileen O'Grady and the trombone-slide drolleries of Whooped and Died. "Folksier" repertoire is delivered with great clarity, including A Kiss in the Morning Early, a beautiful version of The Gypsies, delicately spun out over Ross's piano, and the warm-hearted glass-raiser So Here's to You.

### **Folk Radio UK**

**Michelle Burke – Step Into My Parlour**

by MIKE DAVIES on 1 MAY, 2015

Formerly lead singer with Cherish The Ladies, Michelle Burke's sophomore album, six years on from her solo debut, started life as a show by herself and longtime musical partner James Ross during the 2012 Edinburgh Fringe, a performance inspired by the characters, music and family gatherings of her childhood in East Cork. The show gradually expanded, returning to the Fringe in 2014 and, this year, as part of Celtic Connections. So, it only seemed sensible to put it down on disc.

Here, in full brogue, she and Ross are joined by a core band of Anna Massie on guitar, mandolin and banjo, trombonist John Kenny, Brendan Power on harmonica, accordionist Kathleen Boyle and bodhran player Martin O'Neill alongside guest appearances by mentor Cathal McConnell on flute and vocals and Maura O'Connell, Heidi Talbot and Rhiannon Giddens, from the Carolina Chocolate Drops, on backing vocals and harmonies.

As you might assume, the songs are pretty much – though not exclusively – the sort of traditional numbers that would have formed part of the family's parlour repertoire, kicking off with Eileen O'Grady, a jaunty singalong courting song by Will. E. Cormack popularised by Josef Locke. Another vintage number, Dan O'Hara, by traditional Irish singer Delia Murphy, recounts the true story of the titular gent and his wife and seven kids who, when the landlord increased the rent after Dan increased the size of the windows in his cottage in Connemara (giving birth to the phrase 'daylight robbery'), upped sticks for America, his wife and three children dying en route and Dan ending up selling matches on the New York streets.

Elsewhere, trad. arr. credits include the folksy guitar strummed A Kiss In The Morning, an Irish street ballad about the romance between a cobbler and his sweetheart, and her father's anger at such an impecunious union, a burping trombone, accordion and banjo rendition of My Boy Billy (a variant of which was collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams as Billy Boy) featuring Talbot, a piano accompanied arrangement of The Gypsies and, joined by Burke's parents, sister, cousins and friends with Ross on saloon piano and Kenny on trombone, Whooped and Died, a wheezingly jaunty music hall tune about dying from pneumonia that used to be her Aunt Peggy's party piece.

Two numbers celebrate particular Irish joys; duetting with Giddens, Dear Old Donegal was written by Stephen Graham and popularised by Bing Crosby while Dublin Diner, despite sounding like an old music hall waltz,

was in fact penned by contemporary Edinburgh songwriter Sandy Wright. Another Scottish contribution comes from veteran folkie Alan Bell in the form of the poignant So Here's to You, a song previously covered by Niahm Parsons and Mary Black, Burke here joined by Maura O'Connell and Cathal McConnell.

The remaining tune actually comes from a different tradition, but the arrangement by Burke and James Ross makes The Platters classic, Twilight Time, feel perfectly at home among the soda bread, Guinness and whiskey that would have been the staple of any self-respecting and sentimental parlour gathering. It'll all mean a lot more if you have Irish roots and a vein of nostalgia, but even if not it's still rather lovely listening.

Review by: Mike Davies

## **SCOTSMAN REVIEW - STEP INTO MY PARLOUR - EDINBURGH FRINGE**

### **Step Into My Parlour: Michelle Burke**

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Published by Jim Gilchrist

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Edinburgh Festival Fringe Scotsman review (music):

Step Into My Parlour: Michelle Burke at Summerhall (Venue 26). Review by Jim Gilchrist

Edinburgh-based Cork singer Michelle Burke launched her bizarrely homely Fringe soirées a couple of years back in the tiny basement of the Royal Oak Pub. She's now moved into the comparatively palatial precincts of Summerhall's main auditorium – and the amount of domestic bric-a-brac bedecking all surfaces not occupied by sherry glasses and biscuits has increased exponentially.

Then there's the knitting, with audience members and even guitarist Jenn Butterworth purling like mad while Burke's sister Laura assists with dispensing sherries and household tips drawn from their grandparents' scrapbook (cure for ringworm? Just ask them).

Her excellent band has expanded too, with a core of Highland pianist James Ross, guitarist Butterworth and trombonist John Kenny joined by guests such as flautist and singer Cathal McConnell of the Boys of the Lough and button box player Julian Sutton.

Inspired by the sisters' memories of childhood gatherings, the show is daft and heart-warming, but also brings the songs – a mixture of Irish vaudeville and traditional – back into their context as domestic entertainment.

Burke is a fine singer and after her opening jaunting-car romance of Eileen O'Grady, ranges through folk songs such as The Cobbler's Daughter and a particularly lovely version of The Dark-Eyed Gypsy, as well as Tin Pan Alley's Twilight Time and the contemporary Dublin Diner. There was a perky whistle break from McConnell, while Kenny's trombone, fitting deftly into the folk line-up, came out with some spectacular interjections, not least during "Aunty Peggy's party piece".

As a show, it's unique. Sing along, just don't drop any stitches.

### **Celtic Music Radio. Review: Step into my Parlour featuring Michelle Burke, Tron Theatre, Tuesday 28th January 2014**

**This concert at The Tron Theatre, just off the Trongate, Glasgow, proved that I should not make claims about my gig of the festival too early. Having attended 'Far, Far from the Ypres' on Celtic Connections second day, I have been telling everyone that nothing else would equalise it. Boy was I wrong!**

On entering the Tron Theatre, the audience were given the opportunity to study the stage which was laid out as the kind of parlour reminiscent of those of yesteryear.

A carpet, occasional tables, old paintings, table cloths, candle, and, to play on important part, glasses and sherry.

When County Cork colleen, **Michelle Burke**, a very talented lady with a magnificent voice, appeared on stage, she picked up her knitting and got a member of the audience to continue it during the gig.

Already she had set the mood of music and Irish blarney which would be the ongoing style of the concert.

Having poured a wee glass of sherry, she introduced James Ross on the piano, and sang a song of potential courting and a jaunting car.

The idea for concert was inspired when her sister had moved into her grandmother's house and, while rifling through the attic, had found old documents and newspaper clippings collected by her great grandmother.

Next on stage was our own *Anna Massie* on guitar and mandolin and bodhran player *Martin O'Neil*. Michelle's grandfather had been a cobbler and 'A kiss In The Morning Early' followed before Michelle decided to give some of the old household tips which used to appear in an Irish Times supplement. Improving busts, treating ringworm and how to use a bar of soap to cure overnight jumpy legs were humourously covered.

Michelle's sister Catherine joined on the accordion and Michelle's beautiful voice sang again of cruel wars and husbands being imprisoned. John Kenny on trombone joined for 'Bill O'.

Soon the stage became even busier with a couple of songs from John Spillane. Michelle gave the tale of her confirmation present, a calf, from her father before he himself appeared for some Tom Paxton and Hank Williams.

The interval passed with a real buzz in the audience about how great the gig was. Cathal McConnell was introduced, and, if anyone thought that the Irish gift o' the gab had been flowing already, he was the grand master.

A song of lovely lassies was followed by the tale of Dan O'Hare, an Irishman who fled to America to die penniless. Flute and whistle tunes followed before *John Spillane* returned for a couple more numbers.

Then Michelle returned with a song of two potential lovers who whooped and died, the woman going to heaven and the man, the other place. *Gypsy Lady* followed with Cathal McConnell before the last number and a standing ovation, so richly deserved.

Michelle Burke and John Spillane came back on stage for a great song about *The Lobby Bar* before the entire ensemble for 'The Parting Glass', a different song from the one many of us will know.

This was a simple concept executed with sublime excellence.

**Bill Morris**

<http://www.celticmusicradio.net/review-step-into-my-parlour-featuring-michelle-burke-tron-theatre-tuesday-28-january-2014/>