

April Verch - *Take Me Back*

by Roy Kasten, No Depression, January, 2006

There are infinite ways of modernizing tradition. You could say that every time a pick hits a string or a voice meets a microphone, tradition is altered. But for young musicians steeped in the past yet looking toward the future, the pressures are different. How far and in what direction do they take their inheritance?

At age 27, Canadian fiddle and stepdancing champ April Verch pushes tradition further than you might expect. With modest arrangements, she takes a deep, refreshing look at old-time songs and sounds on her third Rounder release, and finds the right balance between parlor and stage, between contest improvisation and studio professionalism.

Producer Dirk Powell lends a hand on every instrument in his arsenal, including some spry electric guitar and even organ, but mostly he lets Verch and her close friends stretch out and say exactly what they want to say - whether in strictly folksy style, a bit of down-home jazz or more radio-ready drum and piano-laced settlings. The song selection sticks to fairly safe and somewhat sentimental Americana boundaries, but the three finest numbers, all bearing Julie Miller's name - "Take Me Back", "I Still Cry" and "Cruel Moon" - open some revealing lyrical doors.

As a singer, Verch is a less masterful interpreter than she is a fiddler, though that's not by definition a deficit. The raspy edges of her vibrato sound sweetly sincere in the imperfections. but the main appeal here is the nonchalant, collaborative music, live easy-flowing conversation on a pleasant Sunday afternoon.