

## **April Verch - Bright Like Gold (Slab Town Records)**

In the space of a packed 62 minutes of music, the consummate Canadian singer, fiddle player, songwriter and step-dancer sets out her stall for the ninth time on record with a brilliantly balanced selection of vocal and instrumental items which possess all the authentic old-timey feel yet also sound confidently contemporary (in the sense of relevant to our own time rather than specifically radical in any purely musical sense).

The basic complement to April's unique voice and genuinely exciting fiddle playing consists of Cody Walters (banjo and bass) and Hayes Griffin (guitars), both contributing trusty harmony vocals as and when required. The style of playing is what one might call gently virtuosic, naturally accomplished yet entirely unshowy, with no sense of any individual contribution distracting or outstaying its welcome, even if once or twice (as on Raven In The Hemlock) it might perhaps seem a touch too relaxed. And then there's the icing on the cake provided by guest appearances from Bruce Molsky (fiddle on two of the disc's highlights including a matchless duet on Evening Star Waltz), Sammy Shelor (banjo), Josh Goforth (mandolin), Matthew Smith (dobro, pedal steel) and Mac Wiseman (providing a vocal foil for April on a couple of duets).

April's own compositions are so darned idiomatic you wonder immediately how you could've missed out on them all these years! (Check out The Only One and Sorry for starters...). She also clearly has a keen feel for latter-day country tradition, turning in a particularly convincing take on Loretta Lynn's Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' for instance, while she generously passes the pen (and microphone) over to Hayes for a playful Hot Club-cum-western-swing number Foolish Heart. Other highlights come with a plaintive Ola Belle Reed cover (Six Feet Of Earth...) and a heartfelt take on her father's one and only composition No Other Would Do.

April's singing style is also slightly unusual, initially erring on the side of quirky maybe, in that it encompasses both a girlish sweetness and a mature expressiveness, a chirpy warble and a firm command of line; some listeners will doubtless find her approach more akin to the rustic backporch charm of Iris Dement, say, than the purer tonality of Alison Krauss. But April's voice quickly imprints itself in your memory, and you'll just keep on wanting to hear more. As you will in the disc's closing tracks, an energetic Molsky-led Big Eyed Rabbit and the finale, her own tune Morris & Boris, on which her infectious, almost breathless waltzery truly does captivate "bright like gold".

April's on an all-too-brief 12-date UK tour from 4th October.

[www.aprilverch.com](http://www.aprilverch.com)

**David Kidman October 2013**