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April Verch - Bright Like Gold (Slab Town)

Though credited solo to the Canadian fiddler, step-dancer and singer-songwriter, this is really a band album with guitarist Hayes Griffin and Cody Walters on clawhammer banjo and bass as integral to the sound as she is.

A vibrant 20 strong collection of covers, traditional and self-penned material, the trio embrace both Canadian and American folk traditions with both instrumental and vocal numbers, Sandy River Belle even showcasing her award-winning step-dancing. Big Eared Mule and Canadian medley Dusty Miller, Fiddle Fingers and Grizzly Bear are testament to her fiddle skills (she holds several championship titles) and defy to your keep your toes and fingers from tapping. And if those and Jeff Sturgeon are traditional, the closing Morris & Boris shows she can write a tune as likely to endure as they.

Griffin takes his turn at the microphone to sing his own Western swing number Foolish Heart while Walters steps up to duet on the bluegrass swayer Before I Met You. They're fine, but listening to Verch on country heartbreaker Sorry, her take on Loretta Lynn's Don't Come Home A Drinkin' and, accompanying herself on fiddle, Ola Belle Read's bluegrass gospel Six Feet Of Earth Makes Us All Of One Size it's clear why she leads the band.

There's another voice here too, Bluegrass Hall of Fame veteran Mac Wiseman duets on Verch's jaunty country tune The Only One and sings lead on My Home In The Sky while, adding to the celebrity list, old-time fiddler Bruce Molsky who lends his bow to the instrumental Evening Star Waltz and both accompanies and harmonises with Walters on the fiery trad fiddle tune Big Eyed Rabbit and banjo icon Sammy Shelor picks his stuff on several numbers.

An album that more than lives up to its title, this is an absolute must for devotees of the genre and the fact that April also included the waltzing No Other Would Do, the only song her dad ever wrote (to court her mother) makes it an endearing one too.

Mike Davies
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