



Review by Jerry Clark - May 2013

April Verch,
Bright Like Gold
(Slab Town, 2013)



Nobody is going to improve on Loretta Lynn's recording of her own "Don't Come Home a-Drinkin'," and April Verch is no exception. It's certainly entertaining enough, inspired no doubt by Lynn's fractious relationship with her boozing husband, the late Mooney Lynn, whose rough and rowdy ways provided her with endless material. Verch clearly loves the song, and it's only one of 20. If it seems modestly out of place, listeners who fall in love with **Bright Like Gold** -- just about all of them, I expect -- will be inclined to forgive her.

A classically trained violinist, Verch grew up in rural Ontario, an area with its own homegrown fiddle tradition, and has taken her place among the finest Canadian roots musicians of her generation. As one hears her fiddling, adjectives such as "rich" and "expressive" leap to a reviewer's mind and typing fingers. One has actually to hear her, however, to do her justice. **Bright** is a generous hour's worth of mostly a kind of old-soul old-time music and song, with a sensibility that usually feels a hundred years ago, even as one knows rationally that Verch is putting a whole lot of her own artful imagination into its creation.

Sometimes instrumentals feel like filler, but definitely not so here. Verch has an ear attuned, almost eerily so, to melodies that tug on the heart and the tear ducts. "Evening Star Waltz," almost scarily beautiful, is far from the only fiddle tune that feels that way. In addition, most are not the usual trad standards but the sorts of pieces that fall into a fiddler's repertoire if she actively seeks them out or happens to be in a lot of places, sometimes exactly the right ones.

The songs are an appealing lot, too, starting with the album's opener, Verch's own "Broken," which has all the resonance of an august parlor ballad. Traditional or original or cover, they encompass a range of rooted styles, even straying into Western swing at one point, but focused mostly on waltz-tempo heart songs of another era. Verch handles a good share of the vocals herself, joined here and there by estimable others. Sammy Shelor of the Lonesome River Band sings with her on the old country number "Before I Met You." Bluegrass pioneer Mac Wiseman, now in his late 80s, shows up on two cuts. The genre has never produced a purer baritone than Wiseman's, and if after all these years it isn't what it used to be, it is still a joy to hear it. In short: **Bright** shines brightly indeed.

