

CD REVIEW: April Verch's 'Bright Like Gold' is an acoustic joy

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There's a sweetness and energy when **April Verch** plays her fiddle and sings. It's a magical combination from an artist who melds her feelings with the instrument that has guided her through much of her life. Verch, from Canada's Ottawa Valley, may have grown up with the music of that region and its heritage, but the sound she delivers is so much more than that. Her ballads and songs range from the traditional to country to bluegrass to folk. But they are so much more than that.

I have watched her wow audiences with her step-dancing, adding tenderly affecting vocals and fiddle. Her ninth CD, "Bright Like Gold" (aprilverch.com), offers a richly adorned, delightful amalgam of the styles that have come to mark her work. And her musical guests – including the venerable Mac Wiseman, fiddler Bruce Molsky and banjoist Sammy Shelor (Lonesome River Band) – add just the right touches.

With her core band, Cody Walters and Hayes Griffin, rounding out the sound, "Bright Like Gold," is an acoustic joy.

The 20-song CD alternates instrumentals, mostly fast-paced traditional fiddle numbers, and mixes in a half-dozen original songs from Verch, Walters and Griffin. They perform several covers, including the Loretta Lynn country classic "Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (With Lovin' on your Mind), with pedal steel (Matthew Smith) and Griffin on electric guitar. Verch provides mournful vocals, set only to her fiddle, in the Ola Belle Reed classic "Six Feet of Earth Makes All of Us One Size."

Mac Wiseman, a first-generation bluegrass musician who has played with the likes of Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs, brings his silky baritone to two songs, the Sylvia Trace gospel-tinged sing-along "My Home in the Sky" and Verch's own song of devotion "The Only One."

Other notable originals include the trio sound (fiddle, banjo, guitar) in Verch's sweetly sung lead-off track, "Broken" and the swing of Griffin's "Foolish Heart." The upbeat swing works to provide contrast in a song about heartache.

This CD blends enough energy to satisfy fans of folk, bluegrass, country and acoustic music in general. But it's easy to see how Verch, who tours the world, has won over fans of every genre.