



Review of Lindisfarne – At the BBC – The Charisma Years (1971 – 1973)

by Craig Johnson

Before writing this review, I read the marvellous sleeve notes by *Jim Henderson* once more. Whilst I love all of Lindisfarne's music, from the Downtown Faction/Brethren days right upto the last gig, I must admit a favouritism towards the final line up of the band following Hully's death, probably because they were the first line up I'd properly heard, having not become a fan of the band until recently. So when I heard of this release, I saw this as an opportunity to realise what the early Lindisfarne were all about, and what turned them into such a phenomenon over the North East and beyond for years to come!

Starting off proceedings is a truly haunting **Lady Eleanor**, with a fantastic version of the chorus that sends shivers down the spine. I must have 30 odd versions of this song now, and this version ranks up there with the best of them. Hully takes the next one again, with **City Song**, a song from the **Fog on the Tyne** album, followed next by a Jacka vocal with Rod's **Train in G Major**. I was especially keen to take note of Ray Jackson, since he was probably the member of the band I'd take least note of since I'd started listening to the band. His version of **Train in G Major**, accompanied of course by some top notch harmonica, is one that I'll never tire of.

To end the first show, we have **Fog on the Tyne** and **Scotch Mist**. **Fog on the Tyne**, a song that when done with Gazza was reviewed by James "Don Revie" Brown as '*the most cynical, callous and cold-hearted record I've ever come across*', took some stick over the years, but the song and the album were what made the band what it was, and it's great hearing the song as it should be played here than its 1990 counterpart! **Scotch Mist** closes as a superb instrumental from the same album.

For the rest of the first disc, we are treated both to two Lindisfarne shows, as well as the warming voice of John Peel, who is sadly no longer with us. Following **City Song** and **Train in G Major**, we have storming versions yet again of **Lady Eleanor** and **Fog on the Tyne**, before probably my favourite recording from the whole release: **Knackers Yard Blues**. Originally the B-side to the single **Clear White Light** in 1970, this song was reworked for the "**Blues from the Bothy**" EP, the first recorded output from the post-Alan Hull line-up, featuring Billy Mitchell and Marty Craggs. This version however, is by far my favourite, simply for the energy put in by Hully, Jacka, Rod and Si on vocals and Jacka with some simply breathtaking harmonica.

The show ends with **We Can Swing Together**, with Jacka on form again with his party piece harmonica tunes!

The last show of the first disc begins with the Rab Noakes cover **Together Forever**, which appeared on his solo LP **Do You See the Light**, and Lindisfarne's **Fog on the Tyne**. Following this is the B-side to **Meet Me on the Corner**, **No Time to Lose**, and **January Song**. **No Time to Lose** didn't appear on the **Fog on the Tyne** album originally but has always been a live hit, and it's good to see it appear on CD reissues of the classic LP. After three tracks from **Fog on the Tyne**, we're treated once again to **Lady Eleanor**. I simply can't think of a version of this song by the band that I don't like. Following **Lady Eleanor** are three more tracks from **Fog on the Tyne**. Firstly, **Meet Me on the Corner**, surprisingly, this is the only version of this song on the whole album.

Then we have more great versions of **Train in G Major** and **Fog on the Tyne**, before finishing with the classic **Jackhammer Blues**. Like **Knackers Yard Blues**, and many of Lindisfarne's other tracks, this is so much better for me performed live, simply for the energy of the players.

Disc One featured shows from 1970 and 1971, where all songs were from the **Nicely Out of Tune** and **Fog on the Tyne** albums. Disc Two begins with eight tracks from shows in 1972, meaning it also features two tracks from the great, and incredibly underrated, **Dingly Dell** album, which open the show. **Poor Old Ireland** never appealed to me until I heard this version, with a great mandolin accompaniment to the Hully vocal, followed by the only appearance on the album of **Road to Kingdom Come**, and, yet again, **Lady Eleanor**.

Onto the next mini show, with two songs which would go on to appear on Hully's solo album **Pipedream**: **Drug Song** and **Country Gentleman's Wife**. **Drug Song**, which Alan, at the time, regarded as one of best, is simply suits his voice perfectly. Following on, we have **Passing Ghosts** and another Rab Noakes cover, **Turn a Deaf Ear**. **Passing Ghosts** is one of the lesser talked about songs from the **Fog on the Tyne** album, but emerged once again when Billy Mitchell joined the band in the 1990s, and can be heard on the Untapped live album and on the Acoustic band's self titled second album. **Turn a Deaf Ear** also appeared on the Rab Noakes albums **Never Too Late** and **Lights Back On**, albeit with a different verse to the one sung by Si Cowe!

The final concert on the album is another John Peel one, this time featuring the MkII band in 1973. In all honesty, I admit to a slight indifference to the MkII band. Whilst doing new material, recording the albums **Roll on Ruby** and **Happy Daze**, since they retained the famous name, they had to play songs done by the original line up to satisfy the crowd. Therefore this show, featuring songs from Roll on Ruby as well as Mk1 songs **Lady Eleanor** and **No Time to Lose**, appears to me to be a bit of a mis-match of material. However, **Steppenwolf**, the opening track of the show, is one that I never tire of hearing, with Jacka on top form on vocals. Other highlights are **Lady Eleanor**, **Tow the Line**, and the typical Hully track, **When the War Is Over**.

I said at the beginning that I hoped this CD would allow me to find out what the early Lindisfarne were all about. I found out that, and more! A simply brilliant album that flowed effortlessly from track to track. In addition, the little anecdotes from John Peel and the band between some of the tracks provided a perfect chance to take a breath between each song. I would recommend most Lindisfarne live albums to people, but I would put this one the very top of the list. 10/10!

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Craig Johnson

tracklist:

http://www.lindisfarne.de/discography/x_bbc_charisma-years.pdf