



(LYRCD 7444)

THE CELTIC FIDDLE OF LIZ KNOWLES

FIDDLER EXTRAORDINAIRE
BY EARLE HITCHNER

The Celtic music boom of the 1990s has given many performers an international platform on which to display their talents. But well before Riverdance caught the eyes and ears of the public and mainstream media, Liz had established a reputation as one of the most gifted and versatile violinists to be found anywhere. Originally from Kentucky, where bluegrass and country sounds seeped naturally into her evolving musical psyche, Liz was trained in classical music as a child and started playing it proficiently at age eight. Later, she earned a bachelor's degree in music at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where she also won a concerto competition with the Stony Brook Orchestra.

Her academic stay at SUNY-Stony Brook culminated in a year spent in England, where she began to explore other genres of music, including jazz, rock, and Irish. When she returned to the United States, Liz studied Irish traditional music with seven-time All-Ireland fiddling champion Brian Connolly and Eileen Ivers, for whom she would frequently substitute as a soloist years later in Riverdance. Liz also linked up with Colleen Donahue, a guitar, mandolin, cittern, and percussion player who shared her growing passion for Irish and other Celtic traditional music. Calling themselves Tir na n'Og, an Irish-Gaelic phrase for a mythical land of eternal youth, the duo recorded *The Black Rose*, an album featuring Irish, Shetland, old-timey, and original compositions.

Keeping pace with her unflagging interest in Celtic music is Liz's abiding passion for classical and new music in such groups as the Sirius String Quartet; American Virtuosi, a baroque ensemble known for their playing of original instruments; Bang on a Can's SPIT Orchestra; and Joe Gallant's Illuminati. Liz also tours extensively with Ensemble Galilei, a group combining two of her enthusiasms, Celtic and early music.

Her eclectic musical tastes and flawless fiddling technique have not gone unnoticed by artists outside the Celtic and classical realm, either. Liz toured with jazz pianist Marcus Roberts, and performed in a segment of PBS-TV's "Great Performances" series, and she played violin behind the singing of Peter Gabriel and Paula Cole on "Hush, Hush, Hush," a song from Cole's multi-platinum album *This Fire*.

Other recordings on which Liz appears include *Eight Lines* by Avant-garde classical composer Steve Reich and the soundtrack composed by Elliot Goldenthal for the movie *Michael Collins*, starring Liam Neeson. On this latter album she's featured as a soloist during "Train to Granard." On her own and with Sirius String Quartet, Liz also contributed to *Celtic Crossroads* and *Flirting with the Edge*, two solo albums made by composer and seven-time All-Ireland button accordion champion John Whelan.

Since the autumn of 1997, Liz has been a member of the John Whelan Band, one of the most exciting and innovative Celtic music groups to emerge from America in recent years. "She has terrific chops," John says of his band mate, "as well as a love for the music and the ability to express that passion." He returns the favor of Liz's guesting on his last two solo albums by appearing on her *Lyrichord* solo debut here. Among the other Irish music luminaries joining her on this recording are Cherish the Ladies' flutist Joanie Madden, Reeltime's button accordionist Eilis Egan, Bronx-born fiddler Brian Conway, and Manhattan-born uilleann piper Jerry O'Sullivan.

Those guest musicians, plus a dozen more, have helped Liz create a solo release of exceptional depth and breadth. It's a deft, delightful blend of Irish traditional, classical, world, and original music performed with style and substance. And at its center is the superb fiddling of Liz Knowles, whose fame will undoubtedly spread further because of this remarkable recording.

EARLE HITCHNER

The best-known and most influential American journalist writing on Celtic music today, EARLE HITCHNER has won awards for both his articles and radio broadcasting. He writes frequently for *The Wall Street Journal* and is a regular contributor to the *Irish Echo* newspaper. Earle has written the liner notes for over 30 albums and has consulted on four documentaries about Irish music that have aired on PBS-TV.

THE TRACKS:

1) The Kinyons - 3:10

LK, fiddle; Chris Cunningham, guitar; Randy Crafton, dun-dun, riqq & jembe.

Liz Knowles (arrangement by LK & Chris Cunningham). I wrote these two tunes in the "wee hours" of the morning in Japan, having still not gotten over the jet lag. I named them after my Grandmother, whose maiden name is Kinyon, and who continues to support and encourage me through everything.

2) The Gift of Falling - 3:22

LK, fiddle; Des Moore, guitar; Joanie Madden, whistles; Michelle Kinney, cello.

Liz Knowles (arrangement LK & Des Moore).

Last summer, I broke my collarbone in a horseback riding accident. It was the first time in my life that I couldn't play the violin, yet as painful as it was physically and emotionally, it turned out to be a gift in many ways. (At least I got a tune out of it!) Special thanks to Des Moore, a musician of the highest caliber.

3) The Crooked Road - 3:00

LK, fiddle; Todd Reynolds, rhythm fiddles; Chris Cunningham, guitar; Randy Crafton, shaker, udu drum.

Traditional (arrangement by LK & Todd Reynolds).

The Crooked Road and Lord MacDonaldis are two of those great seisiun tunes of which I never tire. Todd Reynolds and I have spent many years playing together in all kinds of settings. In teaching him The Crooked Road, we started jamming and came up with this take on the tune. Todd has always been able to breathe new life into any kind of music and I am thrilled to have him on this track.

4) A Night at O'Neills - 3:09

LK, fiddle; Brian Conway, fiddle; Joanie Madden, flute; Chris Cunningham, guitar; Randy Crafton, drums.

Traditional (arrangement by Brian Conway).

Brian Conway has been an incredible mentor and friend to me in learning the tunes. I have the utmost respect for his style and his knowledge. I asked him to come up with some tunes he would like to play and we put together this set: Lad O'Beirnes, and The Humors of Scariff.

5) Hardiman the Fiddler - 5:02

LK, fiddle; Chris Cunningham, guitar; Steve Gorn, bansuri (Indian bamboo flute); Jerry O'Sullivan, penny whistle & Uilleann pipes; Randy Crafton, frame drum & shaker.

Traditional (arrangement by LK, Chris Cunningham & Randy Crafton).

Hardiman the Fiddler is usually played in D major but I preferred it as a minor tune. I follow up with a beautifully simple slip jig called The Disused Railway (there must be another name!) and the powerful reel, The Man of Aran.

6) Jigs for John - 3:14

LK, fiddle; John Whelan, box; Lindsey Horner, bass; Randy Crafton, dun-dun, shakers, sticks & congas.

Liz Knowles

I have had the pleasure of working with John Whelan for the last year and it has been a year of great tunes and many laughs. To me, he embodies the musician that plays from his soul. It was great fun to finally make him learn some tunes of mine!

7) Castle Kelly - 6:02

LK, fiddle; Colleen Donahue, Cittern; Chris Layer, flute.

Traditional (arrangement by LK & Colleen Donahue). I believe that it is part of our responsibility as musicians to find out what each tune means to us and to make them our own. In exploring these tunes, Colleen Donahue and I found a lot of freedom in Castle Kelly as a slow reel in contrast to the Cup of Tea, which stays at reel speed. I tried these out at a gig with Chris Layer and his improvisation impressed me so much, I had to have him on the record.

8) Julia - 3:53

LK, fiddle; Chris Cunningham, guitar, slide guitar, E-bow slide guitar & harmonium; Randy Crafton, djembouka.

Traditional (arrangement; LK, Chris Cunningham & Randy Crafton).

Julia Delaney is one of the first tunes I learned and still remains one of my favorites. With the talents of Randy and Chris, we gave it a new twist. This one is for Eileen Ivers, whose playing continues to inspire me.

9) Laz - 3:34

LK, fiddles; Omar Faruk Tekbelick, ney; Jerry O'Sullivan, Uilleann pipes; Chris Cunningham, guitar; Lindsey Horner, bass; Randy Crafton, darbuka, riqq & shaker

Traditional (arrangement by LK & Randy Crafton).

This is a traditional tune for folk dancing, but not from Ireland. Randy introduced this tune to me as a possibility for the recording. Although it is in seven, we turned parts of it into a jig (in 6). Omar Faruk Tekbelick lends credibility to the cross-over through his beautiful playing of the ney (Turkish flute). Special thanks to Jerry for braving the quarter tones! The session was a real cross cultural coming together of spirits.

10) My Darling Asleep - 6:13

LK, fiddle; Sue Richards, harp.

Turlough O'Carolan, traditional (arrangement by LK & Sue Richards).

Dr. John Hart is a tune written by Turlough O'Carolan and was given to me by Sue Richards.

She, ironically, got it from my good friend and band-mate Robin Bullock. Yes, Robin, she finally recorded it! We follow it up with two jigs, Knocknagow (the first part) and My Darling Asleep.

11) The Blacksmith - 5:13

LK, fiddle; Eilis Egan, boxes; Tony Davoren, bouzouki; Chris Cunningham, guitar;
Randy
Crafton, drums.

Traditional (arrangement LK & Eilis Egan).

I got these three tunes from Eilis Egan, a tremendous box player and person. After much searching, we finally found the names. Special thanks to Tony Davoren for his bouzouki playing and the seisiuns on the road.

Total Running Time: 46:28

THANK YOU FROM LIZ KNOWLES

My deepest thanks go to Randy Crafton who wore many hats in this project. Thank you for the gift of your time and talent. Also, thanks to Nick (and Gudrun), and Lyrichord Discs. Recording an album should always be this easy and fun. Thanks for making it happen. The core of this recording lies in the hands of Randy Crafton and Chris Cunningham. I could not have created this album without these two inventive minds. It is an incredible gift to have had such talented musicians willing to give their time and energy. You are the best. I must again thank all the musicians, some of which I have not already mentioned, for all the hours and great music they contributed. Each of you has taught me so much. I would like to think that in an artistic field, especially music, people would naturally be very giving when it comes to their work and creative abilities. It is just nice to see that it is really true.

Thank you: Eilis Egan, Des Moore, Tony Davoren and Dave Tobias (The Riverdance lads), Brian Conway, Colleen Donahue (thanks for all the "extras" too), Omar Faruk and Steve Gorn (thanks for your uniquely beautiful voices), Lindsey Horner, Michelle Kinney (if your child is half as talented...), Chris Layer, Joanie Madden (what can I say? you are the best), Jerry O'Sullivan, Todd Reynolds, and Sue Richards (here's to last minute magic).

Many thanks to Earle Hitchner, The John Whelan Band, Ensemble Galilei, Amy Platt and Paul and Sue Crafton for all the late night dinners and a general invasion of their home, Debbie Nuse (where would I be without your friendship!), Don Meade (the last minute savior), Walter Parks, John Lott, The Cook House Studio, Vivian Stoll, and last but certainly not least, my family for their continued support.

- Liz Knowles

PRODUCER'S NOTE

It has been my pleasure to bring Liz's first solo recording to fruition. The jobs of a producer are many, but with Liz, the only truly difficult one was scheduling. When I had to call very busy musicians to say, "Liz is only free during rush hour on Friday, or 9 in the morning on Tuesday," they groaned and said, "only for Liz." The ends of sessions were often spontaneous jams, or late night hangs obsessing about, well, mostly music. I hope this recording succeeds in capturing the outpouring of talent and passion which every artist on it put forth, and that you enjoy it as much as I have.

Randy Crafton - Producer

CREDITS

Chris Cunningham appears courtesy of Lunchbox Recordings

Jerry O'Sullivan appears courtesy of Shanachie Entertainment

John Whelan appears courtesy of Narada Records

Joanie Madden appears courtesy of RCA Victor

Liz uses D'Addario Strings

Randy's frame drums are made by Cooperman Fife & Drum, VT

Randy uses Paiste Cymbals

Executive Producer - Nick Fritsch

Produced by Randy Crafton

Recorded by Randy Crafton at Crafty Productions except basic tracks on The Blacksmith and Gift of Falling recorded by David Tobias at the Cook House in Minneapolis, MO

Mixed by Randy Crafton except The Blacksmith mixed by Chris Cunningham

Digital Mastering by Vivian Stoll

Photography by Adam Reid

Cover Design by G.S. Cram-Drach



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