



all night north: songs to words by Philip Larkin

Paul Jackson of Hull's acclaimed New Adelphi Club reviews *all night north*, a CD of new songs using poems by Philip Larkin as lyrics.

£10.00 (plus shipping) from www.allnightnorth.com

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I've always filled with dread when confronted by the 'local band' compilation. Heartfelt and well intentioned, but never listened to: like the release of a thousand seeds into the River Hull. Every now and then we have a surprise.

Of the various excellent local tributes to Philip Larkin on the 25th anniversary of his death: *all night north* is as heartfelt and meticulously prepared as any. It's probably even the best, setting a very high standard of composition and arrangement, alongside a reverence and total commitment from the artists involved. There is no justice in these situations however.

Almost inevitably for Hull, this private, spontaneous and independent initiative has been shunned by both media and establishment. There have been criticisms too, ranging from 'don't mess with our traditional and sacred art', to aspersions against the attitudes and humanity of the man himself.

Let's get that one straight. Larkin's legacy is that of the words of his poems, and not the words of his private letters. The poems themselves betray a deep sensitivity and humanity and are fully worthy of their 'classic' status. Perhaps the great man led an isolated and slightly unreal existence and so be it. Great art can come from some very strange places. So what of the music?

Well! The music is great, and would probably improve the music collection of pretty much all of us. There is a reverence on the part of many of Hull's best songwriters and arrangers, some of whom have come close to creating their best work, and Hull has some great songwriters!

Many of those are represented here, in what is 'creator' Jim Orwin's personal selection, though there are omissions. Given that no two people would agree on the definitive selection, the choice is both excellent, and fully justified by the performances that result. Credit should also be accorded to John Spence and Fairview for some excellent recordings. This is a seriously good album.

So there is no Dave Rotheray (of The Beautiful South) who was asked, but declined. I guess he would have been required to sing, and (having known him for over 25 years) there is no-one less likely than Dave to suddenly burst into song, though he remains very much a master songwriter, musician and arranger. Similarly there is no Simon Stone (Fonda 500) or Lloyd Dobbs (Paddingtons) or Matt Hogg, or Joe Solo or Jody McKenna or Lewis Blofeld or John Copley or Cracktown, or more; but the contributors to *all night north* do us proud.

I really love the way that Jim's choices span both generations and genres. There are bright young things doing great things, such as Kingdom By The Sea ('Home is so Sad'), Black & White Tango ('Is it for now or for always'), MyOneManBand ('Annus Mirabilis'), James Orwin, ('Femmes Damnées') and The Cardboard Cutouts whose 'The School In August' works brilliantly and is the album floor-filler.

So the *all night north* collection gets under way. First up is the collision between Larkin and Terry Dunn (Man-made Noise) on 'Mr Bleaney'. It's understated and builds, and is reverential and . . . it's pretty good and grows . . .substantially!. Kristian comes next with his take on 'At Grass'. He's the main man in 'The Jokerz' and a great songwriter. The arrangement starts sublimely before losing it slightly on tempo in an ambitious arrangement. It works, as does Phill Wilson's live take on A. M. Perhaps it needed a bit more work there.

By track 4 we come across the often too polite Edwina Hayes who, nevertheless, cuts in with a brief but sublime take on 'This Be The Verse', after which *all night north* takes us onwards and upwards.

At track 5 Horse Guards Parade take their place. Fresh from their All Tomorrow's Parties appearance and tour support with the legendary Pavement, there can be no doubting the song-writing credentials of Mr James Waudby and his incredibly unlucky Jeepster past. (Any doubts concerning those credentials should be more than dispelled by listening to their superb new album *Ten Songs*.) Their take on 'Toads' is both imperious and fun.

Track 6 provides the cue for the arrival of Awash With AntleR, who would be among the more interesting bands in most cities, and Hull is no exception. There are real promoter problems with AWA in programming them as support, though who gives a pluck when Lu, Sal and Em are so attitude free. It's also lovely to have a Hull band who will go on stage without first getting completely trolleyed, though I'm sure they have their moments. Larkin's 'Far Out' and Awash with AntleR work magically together with swooping harmonies, keys and strings.

All of which brings us to Larkin's unfinished 'The Dance', which is left at the mercy of The Holy Orders. It's a huge, chugging bastard of an arrangement that builds to incendiary levels over the course of 13 minutes, and still somehow leaves you wanting more. The magical words become a huge and shattering song by Hull's most talented songwriter of his generation. OK Matt Thompson may at times in the past have struggled to bring his vision to realisation but this works wonderfully: both live and on record.

I'll make a final mention of the last track of this excellent collection. Rory Mansfield and Rich Marsham are the main songwriters of The Notebook and their take on 'Continuing to Live' makes for a stunning set closer. Over the course of a little over 5 minutes it

begins with Rory's deadpan narrative over Rich's shimmering piano, before launching into a huge, epic GYBEesque post classical finale. The result is very beautiful indeed.

There's more too, but I love *all night north* for the music and words! I love it for the single-minded, independent spirit that fuelled its creation, and that applies to both Philip Larkin and Jim Orwin (not to mention the musicians themselves) equally.

I love the way in which a bunch of principled, cosmopolitan, worldly, and predominantly left leaning musicians ignored advice that suggested the work of Philip Larkin was unworthy of their patronage, and made their own decision as to its validity. I love the sense of community amongst the musicians that has resulted from this, and I love the fact that Hull has produced something of which it can be proud, as opposed to a poor, pale pink imitation of something that has been done somewhere else.

Nothing is ever perfect but *all night north* is quite good. And I suspect that the great man would grudgingly approve of all this.

Paul Jackson took on Hull's New Adelphi Club on 1 October 1984, and has seen most of the major 'Indie' bands and artists – Radiohead, Oasis, The Happy Mondays, The Stone Roses, Jarvis Cocker, The Housemartins, and more – walk on to its stage. The club is famous for its hospitality and the diversity of its programming policy. After 26 years of championing new music, he still finds much of what goes on at the Adelphi to be very beautiful, and often inspirational