

KARINE POLWART FULL BIOGRAPHY 2009

“a passionate, perceptive songwriter” Uncut 2008

“exceptionally subtle and melodic” Q 2008

“takes the heart to places few singers even know exist” WORD 2008

Scots songwriter Karine Polwart combines the economy and universality of the folk storytelling tradition with a probing intellect and compassionate lyricism. Twice winner of “Best Original Song” at the UK-wide BBC Folk Awards, she continues to wonder at the homes her many poignant songs find for themselves:

“The most beautiful thing about songs is how they can take on a life and a meaning of their own. I’m constantly moved and inspired by the deeply personal experiences people let me in on to me as a result of hearing them”.

A former children’s rights worker, Karine allows images, narratives, questions and wry comic asides to do much of her work. She tries never to say too much. And whether it’s the dilemmas of modern parenthood, the unsettling kindness of lies, or the resilience of hope, she admits most of her songs are an attempt to make sense of the fact that “there are people in this world who don’t think like you do” (as she herself sings in 2006 song “Daisy”). All of which is precisely the kind of sideways, allegorical approach to contemporary living that you might expect from someone with a Masters degree in philosophy.

Over the past few years, Karine has notched up a string of eclectic musical collaborations with alt folk balladeer King Creosote, Indo-Caledonian pop maestro Future Pilot AKA, the intellectual maverick of English folk song Chris Wood, Idlewild front man Roddy Woomble, bluegrass ace Tim O’Brien and even the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. She’s not quite as easy to pigeonhole as you might imagine.

Following the breakthrough of her debut album “Faultlines”, which won Best Album at the 2005 BBC Folk Awards, and its more lush and polished 2006 successor “Scribbled in Chalk”, Karine took time out to give birth to her son in 2007. In an extraordinarily creative and productive maternity leave, she recorded not one but two albums for release on her own micro label, hegri music. The first of these, “Fairest Floo’er”, is a stark, dark and intimate collection of Scottish traditional songs, which Karine herself describes as “late night dram music”. This return to her origins as a respected Scots traditional singer had a profound influence upon her current bittersweet collection of original songs “This Earthly Spell”. Indeed all four of her solo CD releases prove she’s a writer able to combine ancient traditions with sharp contemporary observations and an independent sensibility.

Meantime, the restlessly creative Polwart still finds time to collaborate with friends Annie Grace (vocals, whistle) and Corrina Hewat (vocals, harp) in an innovative and cheeky female vocal harmony project combining traditional and original songs. She’s also one eighth of new Scots-Canadian band collective The Burns Unit, which features erstwhile collaborators King Creosote and Future Pilot AKA, as well as dub artist and rapper MC Soom T and ex-Delgados front woman Emma Pollock.

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