

Ceili review: Abby Green 'Fig for a Kiss'

By Chuck Bloom

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When listening to Texas native Abby Green, one must always keep in mind that she IS from the Lone Star State and not from Ireland. Because of her acquired proficiency in the Gaelic language, and her fiery red hair, she sounds, and looks, like a natural Irish native.

Her considerable talents with the language, and in music, are on ample display with the release of her excellent second album, "Fig for a Kiss," a follow-up to her initial effort, "Einini." Her strong, often soaring, vocals dominate most of the tracks, as she makes her way through several Gaelic numbers – many of which would sound difficult to sing in Texas' native tongue (English).

"I've been studying since 2006 and I teach workshops for non-speakers, giving tips on where to find resources and how not to destroy the language," she said with a grin. "I started learning with a group in Austin (the Gaelic League of Austin), and since then "I've worked with teachers and resources online and in person. It's very difficult (to learn) at first, but not so tough now."

And when Green, born and raised in Amarillo and educated in Huntsville, sings in Gaelic, it sounds lovelier than anything heard in English – even if the songs are about girls singing among the cattle and sheep herds about faraway, or lost, lovers. It is quite acceptable to enjoy music with words in a language totally foreign to you; I do it all the time when enjoying the works of The Gipsy Kings. Love the sounds; have no clue what they're saying.

Green expertly handles Irish and Scottish Gaelic, moving from songs like "Is Trua Gan Peata (It's a Pity)" to performing a Robert Burns poem, "Ae Fond Kiss" in the purest, clearest of voice. The title track is actually two slip jigs, sung in Gaelic, with a definite degree of difficulty around 9.0.

She even enters to the world of Hollywood, with a lovely cover of "If I Had Words" from the Oscar-nominated movie, "Babe."

On the album, Green is backed by some fine musicians, including the incomparable EJ Jones on the pipes and flutes. She stands out particularly on "Wild Mountain Thyme," with some tight, luscious harmonies with Cayla Cardiff and Ceridwyn Mizera and fiddle work by Michelle Levy. Green, herself, is also an excellent performer on the Irish bouzouki.

According to Green, it was not an easy task to trim her recordings to the final 10 tracks.

"A lot of these songs were actually requested or introduced to me by other musicians over the last couple of years," noted Green, who had some 17 tracks recorded early in the process. "One by one, things fall into place as to which ones worked the best."

Her future plans would like to include another return visit to the North Texas Irish Festival plus, in her words, "traveling, learning, growing, playing, singing and eating cheese enchiladas."

She might sing, and play, Gaelic, but she remains all Texan ...to everyone's enjoyment.