A Cause for Celebration

*I Said to Love*, Martyn Bates (Ambivalent Scale)

A new CD from any member of Eyeless in Gaza, or indeed the band themselves, is always a cause for celebration, and *I Said to Love* is no exception.

Whatever Martyn Bates may say about his song tendencies having always been present within Eyeless, this beautiful CD of songs is a million miles away from the raw and sometimes abstract post-punk music that Eyeless in Gaza were producing in the Midlands in the first half of the 1980s, and nearly as distant from the collages and experimental pop songs of later work.

Somewhere along the way Martyn Bates either got interested in or reasserted an interest in the voice as a lead instrument, perhaps drawing on traditional and folk musics. His collaborative releases included a fantastic trilogy of extended and reinterpreted murder ballads made with Mick Harris, as well as reinterpretations of James Joyce poems, as well as more straightforward solo releases, from the glorious 10" LP *Letters Written* onwards.

On the surface, *I Said to Love* is an album of songs, sung by Martyn accompanying himself on guitar, but listening reveals a sonic depth: layers of sound such as cymbals, string feathers and ghost feathers [don't ask!] provided by producer Alan Trench, and a variety of instruments and another voice provided by the enigmatic Elizabeth S. This isn't just singer-songwriting, this is not busker material.

This carefully layered music allows these songs of despair, love, hallucination, anger and loss to shine. Bates isn't afraid to emote or wail, celebrate or mourn. In 'riches, crying moon' he notes that 'everything yr seeing/everything yr doing/you want it all for yrs' is only 'another damned thing – that you can add to what you've got'. Elsewhere there is 'shimmering' and 'ruined flowers' and 'soft spoken lies' where the narrator declares 'I was blithely charmed to say [...] my heart will be your home/how wrong could I be...'.

But it's not all despair and misery. 'i am bound' is a declaration of love where 'everything's taken/n shaken/n made new once again...' and the song 'fight' sees the singer battling storms and weeping songs to find resolution as he looks 'wildly upon the song'. It is this trust in the song itself that makes Bates special and unique. He is a musical shaman, a word magician, who knows how to enchant and seduce his audience.

One of the joys of listening to Eyeless in Gaza is that their original indie album releases continue to be reissued and readily available, alongside the new work they still produce together and solo. I'd never have believed that 35 years on from their first LP I would still be listening, but here I am. Come and join us, bask in Martyn Bates' melodic strength and way with words.

 Rupert Loydell

More information at http://www.eyelessingaza.com/mb.html#1

to a child dancing in the wind, youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\_continue=136&v=wsGO33pCxWk