

Emma Tricca □ – St. Peter (2018)

Written by bluelover

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1 *Winter, My Dear* 2 *Fire Ghost* 3 *Julian's Wings* 4 *Buildings In Millions* 5 *Salt* 6 *Green Box* 7 *Mars Is Asleep* 8 *The Servant's Room* 9 *Soloman Said* 10 *So Her It Goes* Bass – Pete Galub Drums, Percussion – Steve Shelley Guitar, Keyboards, Glockenspiel, Backing Vocals – Jason Victor Vocals, Guitar – Emma Tricca + Piano – Sean Read (1) Piano – Emanuel Ayvas (8) Shaker – Geoff Soule (1) Cello – Clara Kennedy (5) Violin – Dana Lyn (5) Voice – Howe Gelb (2) Voice – Judy Collins (9) Bass – Jason Victor (8) Backing Vocals – Cecilia Fage (1) Backing Vocals – Astrud Steehouder (2)

In August last year, Emma Tricca shared a sparse cover version of Graham Nash's cosy paean to domestic intimacy, 'Sleep Song'. It seemed a likely indication of the direction she was taking for her third album, and anyone enchanted by Tricca's first two, *Minor White* (2009) and *Relic* (2014), would have been reassured that she was taking no unexpected turns. Her shimmeringly delicate vocals, those gentle guitar strums and that effortless sense of timing in her performance: all present and correct.

But 'Sleep Song', both as a choice of cover and in its arrangement, turned out to be a false flag. (This despite the fact that Nash's contemporary and friend Judy Collins provides a dramatic spoken-word monologue on one of the album's highlights - more on that later.) Italian-born Tricca has turned away from the quasi-mythic historical periods in folk-rock that so heavily informed her first two records. The wistful, romantic, Laurel Canyon feeling has been toned down, as have the overt nods Fairport Convention and Trees.

Instead, Tricca has married her blissful acoustic songwriting with an array of electric, electronic and symphonic adornments, making *St Peter* easily her most experimental and ambitious statement yet. It's a record that can be favourably compared with the best of *My Brightest Diamond*, the more song-based output of *Espers* or indeed Tricca's mentor-of-sorts, the great

Jane Weaver (who released *Minor White* on her Finders Keepers label).

An indication of Tricca's intentions for *St Peter* can be found in the personnel she assembled, which include Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley and Jason Victor, guitarist with The Dream Syndicate. It is Victor who has perhaps had the biggest impact on *St Peter*'s aesthetic; his tremolo-infused overlapping lines have Dave Gilmour-like qualities on 'Fire Ghost' and, on 'Buildings In Millions', he assumes a drone that recalls Richard Thompson's post-Fairport work.

While Victor's contribution is crucial to the softly psychedelic mood of the album, its most profound resonance comes from Tricca's maturing songwriting. While *Minor White* presented an accomplished and skilful composer, *Relic*'s best tracks hinted at something more unique and idiosyncratic, such as on the compelling 'Distant Screen'. Tricca's authentic songwriting voice has developed further here. Her style ignores convention regarding pop structures (ie boring old verses, choruses, bridges and so on) and instead allows songs to follow their own individual momentum, just as longtime Tricca influences Laura Nyro and Tim Buckley might. 'Buildings In Millions' is one example, but the greater achievements are 'Mars Is Asleep' and 'The Servants Room', both of which are cascading and dynamic variations on 1970s singer-songwriter tropes. (It's worth noting here that on 'Mars Is Asleep' Tricca sounds a lot like Sandy Denny, despite the fact that, as alluded to, Tricca doesn't seem to worship at the altar of Fairport with quite the same zeal as in years gone by.)

Tricca has made adjustments to her vocals that further consolidate this fuller sound. Many tracks on *Relic* and *Minor White* featured a breathy lullaby-like delivery, strongly in the vein of Vashti Bunyan. On *St Peter*, Tricca is projecting with a newfound confidence, her voice a vibrant and sonorous instrument that has lost some of its melancholy. It is on 'Mars Is Asleep', with its Denny-isms, that Tricca's singing is at its most attractive and powerful.

Amid all this, Victor's imaginative guitar work underpins everything, occasionally making its presence felt more keenly with a discordant chord here or a jarring pedal effect there. By the time *St Peter* reaches its final two tracks, the most experimental, textured and noisy pieces, there is a definite sense of continuity. 'Solomon Said' features an elliptical, repeated guitar refrain that eventually gives way Judy Collins reading what sounds like a Symbolism-influenced poem, her voice sliding over and under the swelling guitars on a seven-minute track that is the album's sonic climax. Then *St Peter* ends on 'So Here It Goes', which after a light acoustic opening launches into a barrage of noise that is positively post-rock in proportions, concluding things on an unexpectedly cacophonous note.

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I've become very wary of the dubious idea of a 'coming of age' album or, even worse, a 'break-out' album. Every record is a self-contained document of a unique time period and needn't be regarded as a stepping-stone on the journey to some 'fully realised' future work. Tricca's two previous records are marvellous – indeed in some ways Relic is a more expressive, intimate and melodic album than this one – but St Peter does feel like the work of an artist who has found her voice in a most startling way. Her songwriting is of exquisite skill and she has surrounded herself with the perfect musicians to complement her expanding sensibilities. The result is an album that is less rooted in genre, nostalgia and introspection and more open to the possibilities of sound, the studio and her own ever-changing instincts. ---Barnaby Smith, thequietus.com

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