

Ron Jappy
Vincular
Bow Fiddle Records
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One dictionary definition of the word vincular is given as 'link / bind / connect', and it is difficult to think of a more apposite title for this, Ron Jappy's debut solo album.

Although now based in Glasgow, Ron hails from, and grew up in, the Scottish North-Eastern coastal town of Findochty, where he was regularly seen and heard on the fiddle competition circuit. Whilst studying at what is now the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland it appears that he underwent some sort of musical Road to Damascus experience whilst attending a concert at which the guitarist Innes Watson performed as an accompanist. This was a seminal moment in his realisation of the impact, role and importance of the accompaniment of music.

In a career lasting almost a decade, Ron initially toured throughout the world as a fiddler, but, more recently, has provided piano & guitar accompaniment, and musical arrangements for the likes of Joy Dunlop, Iona Fyfe, Ainsley Hamill, Claire Hastings, Hannah Rarity, Jamie Smith's Mabon and Manran, whilst also performing with The Scott Wood Band and Skerryvore. 2019 saw him release a wonderful CD Sparks with Rachel Hair, reviewed in Folk Radio here. As can be seen below, many of these artists have reciprocated by contributing to this album.

Whilst the album is indeed a solo album issued under his name, it is possibly unique in that the project is predicated on the fact that it has been created, coordinated, arranged and assembled from the viewpoint of an accompanist, a role which he sees as one of both enhancing and shaping the musical identity.

Recorded and mixed by Scott Wood at Oak Ridge Studios, and co-produced by him and Ron, the list of contributing artists is truly impressive. In addition to Ron himself on acoustic guitar, fiddle, organ, piano and Rhodes, the release also features a cornucopia of talent Alice Allen -cello, Joy Dunlop – step-dancing, Ainsley Hamill – vocals, James Lindsay – double bass, Grant McFarlane – accordion, Mhairi Mackinnon – fiddle, Euan Malloch – electric guitar, Alistair Iain Paterson – piano, Simon Phillips – bass guitar, Lissa Robertson – violin, Mark Scobbie – drums & percussion, Innes Watson – viola and Scott Wood – bagpipes, whistle, piano. Ron was also responsible for all string arrangements too.

Comprising a mixture of traditional, contemporary and self-written pieces, the musicianship throughout is exemplary. Different styles and genres permeate the release with a running order which has been carefully programmed, resulting in a most varied and enjoyable listening experience.

Opening track, Trouble, comprising three elements, Jig Trouble in Little Blaina, The Barbers' Night Out and The Central, is a contemporary take on jigs, kicking things off with fearsome rhythms before morphing into equally wild bagpipe melodies guaranteed to bring a smile to the face and a tap to the foot.

The following two instrumental tracks comprise firstly a set of strathspeys and reels entitled From The East, (Mrs Ramsay of Barnton, Marj & Grant Bremner of Everley, Miss Paul and Lord Francis Russell). Inspired by music of the North East of Scotland, whilst paying due deference to traditional roots, there is also clear evidence that the

arrangements are simultaneously taking influence from how the tradition has not remained staid and static, but has moved forward and evolved. Further embellished with Joy Dunlop's step dancing, this lively set moves into Ashley Park, a Ron Jappy composition. Inspired by a love of 3/4 retreat pipe marches, to these ears this sounds a very modern tune, a thought perhaps influenced partly by the style of the percussion and, at times, almost ethereal segments.

The first song on the album, Mairead Nan Cuiread, is a thing of great beauty. Setting out the story of a young girl, exasperated, distressed and angered by callous rumours being spread by Tricky Margaret, including tales of her being pregnant, the gossamer-like introductory notes, overlaid with crystal-clear lyrics, rapidly develops in intensity, building to a tremendous crescendo of an ending.

A change in mood and tempo follows with a deliciously calm and comforting piano led A Day To Remember, a waltz written as a wedding gift to two friends, the addition of Scott Wood's whistle here providing a melodic charm that gives ample scope for the imagination to ruminate on such pleasures as a celebratory tumbler of Laphraig.

With electric guitar and keyboards initially to the fore, Northburn Creek, once more a Jappy-penned contribution, was composed in early 2020 after a 5 week tour of New Zealand with Rachel Hair. Another mellifluous and relaxed affair, perhaps reflecting the culture and mood of New Zealanders, this tune is an elaborate and labyrinthine listen, as the variety of instruments ebb and flow in layers with a beguiling complexity that warrants several listens.

The refined and graceful Shalom, a slow air named after a Jappy family home, is an entrancing melody which features a string section comprising of Alice Allen, James Lindsay, Lissa Robertson & Innes Watson as well as Alistair Iain Paterson on piano, is followed by a brief acoustic guitar 'Interlude', which, whilst its place here is as Ron explains, "A short breath. Take time to appreciate the simplicity and beauty of music.", hopefully, might eventually re-emerge as a full-blown track in its own right.

The spirited and energetic bagpipe driven set of reels, entitled Tactical Penguin, the final set of tunes on the CD, incorporates Tactical Nuclear Penguin, Kirsty's and Miss Meghan Harrington, and sees a return of the 'big band' led by Mhairi Mackinnon & Scott Wood and features a blistering electric guitar solo from Euan Malloch. This is truly a magnificent slice of dynamic Celtic rock, up there with the very best, the likes of Wolfstone, Runrig and Dan Ar Bras initially springing to mind.

The album closes with A Place Called Home. Co-written with award nominated, indeed award winning, Ainsley Hamill, this song describes the feelings of leaving home to head to the city. In stark contrast to what has come before, this is certainly the most cross-genre track in the collection; in purely commercial, mainstream airplay terms, this could prove to be a winner.

A brief shout-out too, to Craig Espie for his fine artwork and design, which certainly enhances the package.

Vincular, the culmination of Ron Jappy's musical journey so far, is a mightily impressive debut from this talented and much sought-after multi-instrumentalist.

David Pratt - Folk Radio

