

January 10, 2005

The Washington Post

FERINTOSH "Ferintosh" (Fesh Records)

Folk or baroque? The traditional Scottish music ensemble Ferintosh elegantly blurs the distinction on its debut CD, a self-titled release that celebrates dovetailing developments in Celtic culture centuries ago.

Named after a Scottish trifecta -- a town, a whisky and a dance tune -- the group is composed of three musicians, each highly regarded in Celtic music circles, who live on this side of the Atlantic: violinist David Greenberg, Celtic harpist Kim Robertson and cellist Abby Newton. All appeared on Newton's 2001 release, the wonderfully evocative "Castles, Kirks and Caves," a prelude of sorts for Ferintosh's similarly inspired native voyage.

Most of the music here, complete with revealing annotations, stems from the 18th century. The pieces are often arranged in sets or medleys. Some open jauntily with a dance tune, such as the infectious strathspey "Tullochgorum," while others begin with a haunting, cello-shaded reprise ("Tunes for the Birds"). The sets are punctuated here and there by melodies that have lost none of their charm or beauty over the years. Poets Robert Burns and Allan Ramsay are recalled by two of them -- "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonie Doon" and "The Wauking of the Fauld," respectively - before "The Languor of Love" brings everything to a soulful close with a slow air. *What's most striking, though, are the arrangements -- a series of beautifully crafted string weaves that are, no matter how swift or slow the tempo, consistently alluring.*

-- Mike Joyce

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