

BackWest



BACK
WEST
MUSIC

REVIEWS



PJ McDONALD | BRENDAN BROWNE | MAUREEN BROWNE | PETER VICKERS

NEW CD



A vibrant articulation of play from instrumental, to vocal, to step, is what you get from The Long Walk. This debut's on fire!

*Eileen McCabe-
Irish Music Magazine*

THE LONG WALK

CD available from:

backwestmusic.com



The Long Walk, BackWest Music Debut album from Galway 'supergroup' featuring Maureen Browne (fiddles), Brendan Browne (button accordion), Peter Vickers (bodhrán, percussion) and County Tyrone's PJ McDonald (vocal, guitars). They perform traditional Irish reels, jigs, polkas, marches, hornpipes, with virtuoso pace, excitement and razor-sharp precision. There's some truly breathtaking fiddle and accordion playing here. And a couple of cracking songs too. The slow air *Amhrán Na Leabhair* segues thrillingly into a vibrant, purposeful arrangement of the Northern Irish ballad *Flowers Of Sweet Strabane*, sung with absorbing conviction by PJ McDonald.

BackWest's state-of-the-art performance of Irish traditional music and song would be enough for most bands and most albums. But these guys ice the cake and blow the lid off with an exquisite set of poignant, skiprhythm Breton dance tunes and a surging rendition of the famous Anxo Pintos Galician tune *Cancro Cru*, beautifully spliced together with *Julia Delaney's Reel*.

www.backwestmusic.com

Paul Mathewan - *FRoots Magazine*

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The Long Walk

Backwest Music 12 Tracks, 40 minutes.

On the cusp of their first anniversary as a group and BackWest are already making waves on the live circuit for their diversity in performance and synergy of style. This isn't surprising as the instrumental, vocal and dance performance capacity is vast as the band is comprised of Arcady Alumni; fiddle player Maureen Browne, her dextrous box playing brother Brendan, Peter Vickers of the *Lord of the Dance* line-up and the extraordinary vocal and whistle of Donaghmore's PJ McDonald.

The vocal might be from a steeped Tyrone legacy, however the music emulates the name as there's more than a nuance of Galway gizmo at play in their debut album; *The Long Walk*. They fire into *The Galavantin' Reel* set with a tornado twist of phrasing that ably showcases their individual flair. The frenetic pace, although fascinating, would wear the ear out if the whole album was driven this way but no, the group show a mighty respect for each tune which is showcased in the stark, drawn notes of the hauntingly emotive slow air, *Amhrán na Lebhair*, which Maureen learnt from the legendary playing of Matt Cranitch.

Her fiddle adapts deftly to the sentiment of note throughout the album and dances with definition over the earthy bass tones of the box. The box combines intricacy of note with the percussive underlay, none more so than in the opening bars of *Making Tracks* where defined pace gives way to a deftness of play before the band provide a lifting backdrop to the percussive steps of Vickers.

There's a trademark authenticity to the vocal of McDonald and this resounds in the two songs chosen for the debut. *The Flower of Sweet Starbane* is set to a superlative instrumental backdrop, which entwines with the passion in the delivery of the tale and the second is the much-loved *Nancy's Whiskey* (or some might say *The Calton Weaver*) which, no matter the version or the name, draws you in and keeps you there right to the end. A vibrant articulation of play from instrumental to vocal to step is what you get from *The Long Walk*. This debut's on fire.

www.backwestmusic.com

Eileen McCabe - *Irish Music Magazine*

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BACK WEST

The Long Walk

Private Label BWMCD001

A quiet, rainy winter's day; the postie delivers a CD which I put on to play, and suddenly, immediately, every brain cell tells me to stop whatever else I might have been thinking about and listen closer. Right from the off, Back West's inaugural release grabs the attention with their clarity and drive, and the realisation sets in that this is going to be one group that are going to make a great impact.

Siblings Brendan and Maureen Browne play button box and fiddles respectively; PJ McDonald gives us guitars and vocals; and completing the line-up is Peter Vickers on bodhrán, percussion and dancing. To list their individual musical pedigrees would take this review way beyond the prescribed length guidelines, so let's just say they are all very impressive indeed.

PJ's voice is strong and mellifluous, with a good timbre and clear diction, and he tells the stories of the songs very well indeed. The instrumental playing of the group is outstandingly fine, with some particularly incisive fiddling from Maureen. The engine-room power of the bodhrán is exceedingly crisp and helps drive along the tune sets. There are a fair number of reels – well, they are Galway-based – along with jigs, polkas and a graceful slow air, and Breton and Galician pieces too. Never mind the source, everything that Back West tackles comes across with verve and panache, with a mix that ensures every note is crystal clear.

Definitely one of the top albums of this or any year, from a group that's surely going places.

www.backwestmusic.com

Gordon Potter - *The Living Tradition*