

# A STRONG BOW FROM KIÉRAH RAYMOND

British Columbia's Kíerah Raymond is out with her fourth album, *Strong Bow* and an impressive outing it is, indeed. In many ways, Kíerah is perfectly positioned at what is an ever-changing Celtic music scene, which finds itself at a crossroads, writes Bill Margeson.



There are more and more CD's released daily, as Kíerah herself notes. "There are a million fiddle CD's out there, so the challenge is to do something different while still remaining completely true to the music." She is right, of course. But, there is something else going on here. Traditionally Irish music, the real Irish music, has been passed on from musician to musician, in countless sessions and get togethers. It still is. But, there is also a brand new breed of musicians, such as Kíerah, who have been formally trained in music, all music.

"With 13 years of classical training, Kíerah received one of the highest marks ever given by the Royal Conservatory of Music on her A.R.C.T. exam." While she was raised in a home filled with music (a familiar pattern in the music) she is also formally trained in both fiddle and piano.

The result? We could name many results, but here is the gist. These musicians, representing the future, are rapidly adding to and expanding the music. Oh, yes. This is still Irish music, but it is arranged and played on a broader palette. Kíerah is a woman who remembers idols of hers

music and always will be. But, it is a wonderful base to explore from."

This is highly informed, creative playing. Interesting arrangements and wonderful musicianship keep you listening, all right. Kíerah's playing is confident. Bold, with a real sense of direction on each tune—and her sense of rhythm is perfect. *Zephyr: Bellefield House* is a lovely slow waltz. Airs and waltzes expose a musician. Don't enter if you can't play. Kíerah can play. And compose.

The purists should love this album, too. The tradition has only grown by expanding over the years. And, that tradition seems in safe hands with young musicians like Kíerah. She wins. We win.

To add to anything artistically, you must first respect it and love it. A listen to *Strong Bow* reveals a sure hand at the helm, and a VERY traditional album. And, more. *Strong Bow* is a compass. It is pointing to where it is going. Rest assured, these albums, like always, are being heard by other Irish musicians all over the world. And, they are hearing it. They are getting it. There will always be massive room for the

"I love Irish trad and it is at the centre of my music...it is a wonderful base to explore from"

like Martin Hayes in Seattle, "being the soundtrack of my childhood."

On *Strong Bow*, for the first time, she has added a drum kit, albeit gently recorded and mixed, to broaden the sound, offering many different moods. There are a total of 42 tunes on *Strong Bow*, with 15 penned by Kíerah, herself. There are guests aplenty led by Michael McGoldrick on flute and Harold Birston on cello, among others.

Variety there is, indeed. A 100-year-old Polish mazurka is joined to a Kíerah composition, and the result is a lovely blended performance on *Catch Me If You Can*. There is also a featured turn by Kíerah on the album's only song, *Fair Maiden*.

It is difficult to describe this. Do not think for a moment *Strong Bow* is not traditional. It is. The trad purists will love her confident and creative playing. But, it adds up to more than another trad album. "Don't get me wrong!" Kíerah enthuses, "I love Irish trad and it is at the centre of my

thumpin' session tunes we all love. But, when an artist like Kíerah comes along, we get even more.

So, there she stands. At the fork in that musical road. Kíerah is pointing her direction. It would seem a very good idea to follow. The tradition lives as long as it evolves—slowly and with great care. This album will show the way, for sure. This *Strong Bow* points a sure path—both for the music and the emerging career of what should be a major musical star in the future. This all sounds a bit like a p.r. piece instead of an analysis/review doesn't it? The reason is we are listening to *Strong Bow* as we write about it. And, here's the truth—it makes no difference what anyone thinks. Artists will create, and we will listen. We are all tradheads, or we wouldn't read this magazine. This album is for all of us. All of us!

Find out more at Kíerah's website [www.irishmadness.com](http://www.irishmadness.com)