

Kerry on fire

SIOBHÁN LONG

CD OF THE WEEK: Brendan Begley and Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, *Le Gealaigh/A Moment of Madness* IrishMusic.Net Records ****



Freewheeling and head-spinningly audacious, *Le Gealaigh* is precisely what it says on the tin. Brendan Begley's and Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh's debut as a duo is characterised by manic energy crossed with a finely tuned sense of the absurd (that seems the sole provenance of the bilingual).

West Kerry box player Begley has discovered a new zest in his playing since making the acquaintance of Dublin fiddler Ó Raghallaigh (a recent west Kerry resident himself), who engages with all manner of music with unprecedented freshness and lateral thinking. The pair's approach to this collection of polkas, slides, marches and slippery jig (a variation on a tune borrowed from the great Paddy Cronin) would put fire in the belly of a corpse. It's a picaresque expedition into the unknown, with feet, fingers and the wily spirit of two passionate players lighting the way ahead.

Ó Raghallaigh's hardanger fiddle finds remarkable solace in Begley's bellows-deep box, their revelry palpable in the pithy and pun-intended *An Buachaill Caol Dubh/Quail Dove* set. Begley contributes a tune of his own in *Tonn Clíodhna*, an epic journey bathed in the perils and adrenalin surges of the wide Atlantic. The accordion wails and blows like a whale while Ó Raghallaigh's fiddle darts and dives, propelled by the sheer force of Begley's fiery rhythms.

Another bonus is the three dimensional nature of the album: with a mischievous cover designed by Caoimhín and salty sleevenotes provided by both musicians, one can't help but feel the force of this music seep deep beneath the skin. Ó Raghallaigh describes the experience of playing with Begley as being akin to "sliding down the snow-covered slopes of Mount Brandon, mid-winter, on the threadbare seat of your pants" – and the listener will most likely want to be part of that steep trajectory as well.

Occasionally *Le Gealaigh* threatens to run away with itself, so best thing is to turn the amp to 11 and let it rip. See irishmusic.net