

COVER THE BUCKLE

Cover the Buckle is a collection of Irish Set Dances for listening and dancing. Deirdre Cronin uncovers musical links, connections and crossings with dance artist Kieran Jordan.

Kieran Jordan



Photo: Ariel Mandeville

A clear-eyed musical concept in a natural collaborative flow, all beautifully articulated in the music and dance across *Cover the Buckle*. Acclaimed dance artist Kieran Jordan describes *Cover the Buckle* as set dance music designed for dance teachers and students, tune learners and tune listeners. It's that, and more.

Dancing at the crossroads is one thing, but this luminous CD offers a more interesting radical slant, stepping across the crucial intersections of music and dance in a unique melodic connection between Kieran Jordan, button–accordion player Sean McComiskey, and fiddle–player Seán Clohessy, all distinguished artists in peak musical form.

The beauty of this music gleams with a very precise acoustic quality, elegant and refined, but in all the tonal depth of Jordan's dance, and an artistic sensibility rooted in tradition; this album is also spirited, original and free. That wonderfully loose quality is there from the first track, *Mount Phoebus Hunt / The Hunted* essentially the same tune. Jordan tells me there was never a preconceived plan to have the hornpipe set dance evolve into a faster reel; that happened at the first rehearsal in her

“The music was so good in the studio, I was tempted to dance to everything!”

house. Having already choreographed her own steps for the set–dance, she now improvised sean nós style for the faster reel. The spontaneity is retained, the music rich and lovely as a result; all of it underpinned by the astonishing sounds in Kieran's original dance steps, subtle, strong, and nuanced footwork with a deeply satisfying timbre and tone. Across the CD, the accompaniment is full of life and sensitivity in Matt Mulqueen's piano and Josh Duke's guitar.

“I'm trying to walk a line between honouring my traditions and continuing to probe them, finding a place where I can contribute my own creative voice to the beauty of the Irish dance tradition that informs and inspires me,” she says candidly. The dancer is well–placed to do just that, poised in her Boston–based career as world–class teacher and performer, moving between her sean nós and old–style step dance expertise, and original choreography, innovation made possible by the immersion in competitive Irish dance from age five. The CD is also linked to her younger self. Philadelphia–born Jordan shares with Clohessy and McComiskey an enduring admiration for the elegant fiddle music of Eugene O'Donnell and Sean Maguire, echoes on *Cover the Buckle* of Eugene's seminal CD with Mick Moloney: *Slow Airs & Set Dances*.

A practical seam thematically is how *Cover The Buckle* works as a steady and useful album for dancers, students and teachers. The CD includes brief intros, and full AABB parts of tunes, so that dancers can perform both right and left foot of the complete dances. But equally important is a pleasing musicality, a quality fresh and slightly unpredictable, “set dances unleashed”, as Kieran puts it. This is where the music soars; Kieran Jordan happily alludes to wild card elements in her choice of tunes to dance to. *The Hunted*, *O'Carolan's Draught*, *Three Ducks and a Goose*, all featuring original choreography. “I opted for less conventional tunes as performance pieces. The music was so good in the studio, I was tempted to dance to everything!” But mindful of dance students, Jordan leaves the dance steps out of more commonly–danced tunes like *The Garden of Daisies* so that dancers can hear their own feet.

Trust and musical chemistry ruled the studio rather than micro–management. Seán, Sean, Matt and Josh shared musical narratives adding so much, and happenstance elements like Josh Duke's multi–tasking as recording–engineer capturing the rich mellow tone in Jordan's feet,

avoiding the pitfalls of tippy–tappy sounds. The music was given space to develop rather than scripting everything, artistry unfolding naturally.

Crossroads, intersections, on *Cover The Buckle*, Kieran Jordan also steps across a musical paradox where only an artist steeped in tradition can rattle the boundaries with assurance; freedom and freshness in tempo and rhythm, while showcasing how set dance music survives intact with choreography of the early dance masters. Elegant, gorgeous music for listener, learner, and dance professional, a CD that deserves an enduring legacy.



Seán Clohessy and Sean McComiskey