



Band:[Hattie Briggs](#)
Title:[Red and Gold](#)
Reviewed By:[Malcolm Carter](#)
Date Published:21/05/2015

Label:[Wise Dog Records](#)
Format:CD
Release Year:0
Style:Label

Some albums, even though the artist in question is completely unknown to the listener, instantly feel like old friends. Like they've been part of your life forever even though you know you've never heard the songs before. That's not to say that the music sounds familiar. It just sounds...right, complete, and instantly becomes part of your daily listening.

That Hattie Briggs has so far passed unnoticed round these parts is not only frustrating ('Red & Gold' is so musically rewarding every day that passes where Hattie Briggs is missing from your life is a waste of a day), but with the attention this early-twenties singer/songwriter has been receiving it's surprising she hasn't come to our attention earlier. To recap then, Briggs was nominated for the 2014 BBC Radio 2 Young Folk award performing as part of the show at the Royal Albert Hall which was broadcast live on BBC radio. Briggs' songs have had over 10,000 plays on Spotify, more than 50,000 YouTube hits and all three of her singles have shown in the iTunes chart. That Briggs has achieved all this independently is an indication that it's the music that's getting the attention and not any hype.

Briggs quit Oxford University during the second year of her Russian degree at the beginning of 2014 to pursue a career in music, and let's be thankful that she did for otherwise this debut, released on Briggs own Wise Dog label, might never have seen the light of day and we would have missed out on what is so much more than the folk album that 'Red & Gold' is being promoted as.

While there is no disputing that the music Briggs creates on 'Red & Gold' should be, if we are going to put the music she makes into one specific genre, labelled 'folk' it must be frustrating for Briggs. Although she is the possessor of a classic folk voice (and in all honesty Briggs can hold her own against any of the female folk artists from the last five decades, that clarity and pureness shines through on every song here), she is one of the few young musicians associated with the genre who is capable and certainly will take this age-old genre and introduce it to a new generation by adding her own twist and vision to the music to keep it fresh and appealing. She, therefore, really doesn't deserve the restraints the folk tag can bring.

A song such as 'Happy in Your Arms' is far removed from what has come to be known as 'folk' music. Beautifully picked acoustic guitar opens the track which has to be heard on headphones to be fully appreciated; there are little vocal and percussion nuances that really play a large part in the overall sound and can only be appreciated fully when locked in your own little world as Briggs takes you on her journey with this song. It's a powerful piece of music showcasing a vocal style that belies Briggs' age. The song is almost chilling at times. When the chorus comes in the song, it doesn't just lift a level, it almost lifts the roof. If you're put off listening to Briggs because of the folk thing, then give this song a listen and be prepared to be mightily impressed.

'A Beautiful Mind' was inspired by the speech Peggy Seeger made at those BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards at the Royal Albert Hall and is about Pete Seeger. Even while singing a song inspired by the legendary folk artist, Briggs has the talent to lift the song out of the accepted folk genre. Although Briggs isn't the first young artist to dress what is music based in the folk field in new, exciting clothes, there is no denying that she is doing it not only in her own unique way, but with her exceptional vocals is doing so in a voice that will appeal to a much wider audience than this music would usually attract.

There's one cover on 'Red & Gold', a version of Sting's 'Fields of Gold'; Briggs strips back the song effectively, her pure vocals matching those of the version by Eva Cassidy which touched the hearts of so many. While the album is very much Briggs show, the other nine songs are all Briggs originals. She has a talent for creating story songs, and, while her undisputable flair for writing memorable melodies certainly adds to the appeal of 'Red & Gold' and those vocals really have to be heard, there's a unmistakable group feeling to this album. It's sympathetically produced by Peter Waterman (not that one, but a talented young producer who ran Joss Stone's home studio at the age of eighteen) and Dan Cassidy (Eva's brother) and, together with a handful of musicians who were obviously hand-picked for the contribution they could bring to Briggs' undeniable talent, they have created a sound that while rooted in folk really does have a vision all of its own.

Briggs paints pictures so vividly in her story/songs. In 'Old Eyes' she takes the listener back with her on a journey into the past, recalling warm days spent at the beach. Again the percussive and string additions that producer and backing musicians provide colour perfectly to the songs.

It's not often that an album is perfect, where not just every song but every sound is perfectly placed and executed. There's not a second on 'Red & Gold' that's wasted. The only worry is where Briggs will go from here. It appears that Waterman and everyone else involved in the making of this album are the perfect team to bring out the best in Briggs songs, so we can only hope that this isn't the last we hear from this team. It's certainly not the last we will hear from Hattie Briggs. A talent of this size will never go unnoticed.

I would love to say it's all in that voice, one of the purest in the UK surely, and one listen to the closing track 'Godspeed' confirms that Briggs really is an outstanding vocalist, but that would be to diminish just how talented a songwriter she is and take away some of the credit that should be afforded to everyone involved in 'Red & Gold'. Hattie Briggs has made a debut that she should be immensely proud of; it's going to be hailed as a classic of its kind in years to come.