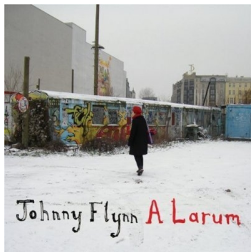


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Meet Johnny Flynn, Renaissance Man



Johnny Flynn

A Larum

Lost Highway Records



By **Kevin C. Madigan**

He may be only in his mid-twenties, but **Johnny Flynn** is an old soul, an anomaly. The voice doesn't match the face. The voice is rough, lived-in, of a different time, but his face is young, hopeful, a bit too handsome. You take one look at this guy and it's obvious he's an actor. What's less obvious is his multi-dimensional talent, as a poet, songwriter, guitar picker and singer. Hearing the record for the first time, I thought he must be covering old folk songs, but no, he wrote everything himself. In fact, the writing on the album began as poetry, and morphed in songs over time.

This young Brit has crammed a lot into his scant years, and the influences of **Shakespeare** and **Thoreau** seep into his work. So do **Bert Jansch** and **Martin Carthy**. Flynn has done his homework. Dissonant cello, a brass band, spoons, whistling, organ and shouted backing vocals are just some of the things you get to hear in the process. A certain wisdom is apparent, as are the musings of a mournful romantic: "The letters that you left behind/I shall no longer read/The blood's between the pages/And I can't stand to see you bleed," he sings at one point. A more pragmatic side emerges in a song called Leftovers, an exercise in song-writing in which Flynn and his friends tasked one another with a single word and were required to come up with a song based on that topic.

The title of the album is a play on words and refers to backstage commotion during a theatre performance. Indeed, his experience as a stage actor (at London's **Old Vic**, no less) can be heard in his approach to music, which combines not just a sensitivity to traditional folk but adds a dash of the blues mixed with **music hall**, in itself a long lost art.

His clever band carries an equally clever moniker, The Sussex Wit, though the US record label decided to omit the name from this release, probably for marketing reasons. Too complicated for the fragile American ear, was it? Fools.

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