

# FRUK REVIEW

## LOWRI EVANS & LEE MASON: A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING

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Lowri Evans & Lee Mason – A Little Bit of Everything  
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Since 2006, Welsh singer songwriter **Lowri Evans** has released six albums and four EPs that draw their lyrics from both Welsh and English, and their influences from both sides of the Atlantic. Lowri's musical partner throughout those albums has been guitarist, singer, studio engineer **Lee Mason**. This month the pair celebrate over a decade of exceptional music together with an album of favourite songs that goes far beyond the usual 'Greatest Hits' collection, as they return to the studio to re-visit some of their best work in *A Little Bit of Everything*.

Since Lowri's 2006 Welsh language début album, *Clyw Sibrydion*, Lowri and Lee have performed and recorded together as a duo, but the billing has always belonged to Lowri. Given her distinctive voice and exceptional ability as a songwriter this probably seemed natural, as Lowri embarked on her musical career after finishing her music degree in Newcastle. The release of *A Little Bit of Everything*, though, sees the pair forge ahead with seemingly renewed confidence, and seems a fitting time to emerge fully fledged as a duo. That confidence shines through in the album's opening track *Last Night*.

Taken from Lowri's third album, *One Way Ticket*, *Last Night* opens with a soft, soulful chant and electric guitar floating quietly over a strummed acoustic. Lowri's sweet, welcoming vocal tells a lover's story that starts in a dream-like bliss but soon takes on darker tones. As a woman waits, in vain, for her lover's return, the contrast of light, jazz tones and the hint of malicious reproach in Lowri's voice is hypnotic. The song introduces one of the most important aspects of this album – this is Lowri and Lee as their live audience enjoy them, as a vocal and guitar duet. The whole album was recorded live in the studio, with just the duo performing as they do on stage – without

guests, without overdubs. Judging by the sparkle throughout the album, it was also recorded without a care in the world. Those light, jazzy tones are equally effective in *Deep Inside*, as the song enjoys the rich texture of two acoustic guitars, and is enhanced by Lee's vocal harmonies. It's a joy to hear how well-matched the duo's voices are, producing a combined vocal performance that's reminiscent of Tracy Thorn and Ben Watt at their finest. *Deep Inside* originally came from the 2013 album **Corner of My Eye**, which featured guest appearances by, among others, **Martin Simpson** and **Andy Cutting**. Lowri and Lee have enjoyed a strong relationship with many artists on the UK folk scene, in recent years sharing the billing with **Cara Dillon**, **Blue Rose Code** and **Seth Lakeman**. The title track from *Corner of My Eye* also features on *A Little Bit of Everything*, taking a similar dual-acoustic approach, augmented by Lee's harmonies.

Lowri's first album though, *Clyw Sibrydion*, was entirely comprised of songs in Welsh; and it's from that album Lowri's brought *Cariad Mwyn*. Lowri's voice almost seems to take on a new persona when I hear her sing in Welsh for the first time. There's a fire and a passion in those perfectly enunciated consonants that are supplemented by a rich, bassy guitar. The passion is tempered, but still in evidence, for *Merch y myny* from the same album. This song about the changes Lowri has seen in her home town of Newport, Pembrokeshire, is filled with that soft intensity that's such an important aspect of Lowri's Welsh song.

*Merch y myny* closes the album, but one more Welsh language offering is also one of two cover versions featuring in Lowri's studio work for the first time. *Cân Walter* (*Walter's Song*) comes for the pen of Welsh singer songwriter **Meic Stevens**. Lowri and Lee together take the song on a gentle outing. They must have been almost tempted to fill the sound with a rich sweep of strings, but the understated bass notes and softly picked guitar do all that's needed to frame Lowri's rich but plaintive vocal. The album's other cover version is a complete contrast, as Lowri and Lee revel in a beautifully laid back rendition of the Jimmy Cox classic, *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out*.

The title track of Lowri's 2016 album, *Everyone Is From Somewhere Else*, provides one of the clearest helpings of Americana and, from the same album, *Piece of Me* (co-written with **Henry Priestman** and **Pete Riley**) makes more fine use of those wonderfully matched harmonies and a union of two picked acoustic guitars. *Seventeen* is one of the finest examples of Lowri's skill as a songwriter, as a gentle ballad combines electric and acoustic guitars for a beautiful portrait of young lives devastated by war. *Maria's* was originally recorded as *Not At Maria's* on Lowri's debut English language album, *Kick The Sand*. The rich sound of her semi-acoustic guitar brings heat to a lover's cool deception.

Being new to Lowri Evans' music and hearing these songs revisited, rather than in compilation form, is a joy. There's none of the disorientation involved in accessing samples of an artist's music over a decade all in one go. The approach brings a cohesiveness to the music – almost like starting out anew. This new approach to recording allows so much to shine – Lowri's voice, of course, but the strength of their combined guitar work, and the wide range of possibilities as a vocal duet. From what I've heard from the back catalogue, the last ten years has seen Lowri Evans mature as a songwriter and performer; develop a growing assurance and confidence. From what I've heard on *A Little Bit of Everything* – **Lowri Evans and Lee Mason** have a lot more to look forward to, and a lot more to discover, as a duet. An album that offers exceptional live performances and sheds new light on some highly accomplished songwriting.