

This remarkable debut record from singer songwriter Christina Kulukundis gives you the sensation of a crowded room falling quiet. In a matter of moments the clear but soft intensity of her voice draws you in. There is something bright and new here. Old-fashioned for sure, but untarnished and beautifully simple. Almost as if she'd just discovered that afternoon that she had a real gift for this and felt like sharing it with you.

It's so fresh that it almost seems like a surprise to learn that she's been singing from an early age - either on the porch of her grandmother's house in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State or in London. She started writing her own songs from the very beginning, describing the process as a kind of refuge and then later as a stab at alchemy, "to make things as clear and whole and good as they could be, for even just a few moments." And there are plenty of those moments on this record.

Brought up between London and the United States, Christina's Anglo-American style has left her with a combination of rural vigour, honesty and a more urban kind of wisdom. She cut her teeth in college bands in Rhode Island, covering classic country and folk tunes, Christina's affair with the acoustic roots of that music that has yet to end. There then followed a blue grass outfit called the Hi-Los, sporting a traditional country sound, but in the background of which Christina's writing began to breathe. She assembled a line-up of great musicians, perfect for the job, include Robin Clayton on double bass, Harbans Srih on drums and Carmen Phelan on fiddle. Regular performing refined her style, and Christina found the path that brought her to create this album.

Producer David Ogilvy, himself a respected artist, has outdone himself, layering the instrumentation on each song with the light touch he is famous for. There is a refreshing texture and earthiness to the tracks. The songs don't try to confront or change the acoustic tradition they come from. They accept and build on it, adding a little magic something of Christina. Although some of the songs are undoubtedly melancholy, they're sung with the same openness and energy that characterise her live performances. It's great to look around at the faces of people at her gigs, stunned by her, like a bright light has suddenly been trained on them. With many more songs up her sleeve and plenty still to write, we can only assume this record is only the beginning for Christina Kulukundis.