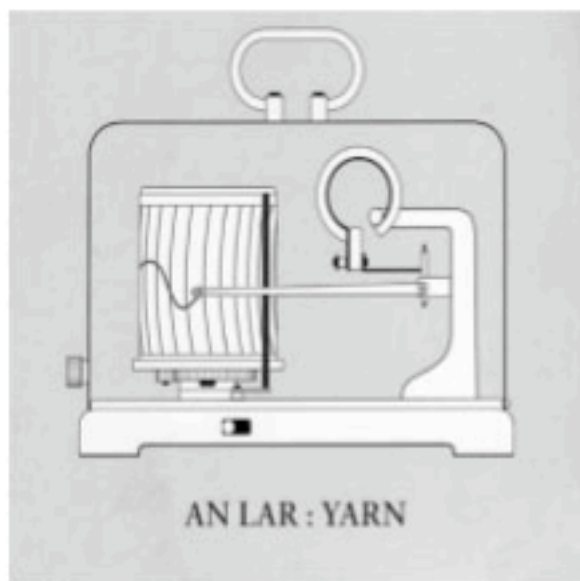


An Lar, "Yarn"

Are the Celts reconquering Europe? A fair question, perhaps, given the incidence of Irish/Scots/other Celtic-related music popping up on the Continent in recent years: Spain's Milladoiro, drawing on the Galician tradition; techno-driven Fiamma Fumana of Italy; Germany's Cara, a highlight of the 2007 ICONS Festival; and, from Switzerland, An Lar (Irish for "the center").

"Yarn" is An Lar's fourth album, showcasing a repertoire of music of Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, and Asturia, as well as their own material. The band has a local-regional connection of sorts via fiddle player Stefanie Aeschlimann, who some years back stayed briefly in the area during a visit to North America and made the acquaintance of Maine native and former Bostonian Lissa Schneckenburger (here the band covers her tune "Melissa Without the 'Me'").



There's a lot to like here: An Lar clearly has some familiar influences from the Irish and Scots folk revival but at the same time don't try to be a "Swiss version" of, say, Planxty or Silly Wizard. Lead vocalist and bodhran player David Brühlmann has a voice redolent of a good Glasgow pub singer: a little

rough around the edges but more than capable of carrying a tune. Multi-instrumentalists Jurg Frey and Matteo Hofer muster guitar, mandola, mandolin, flute, whistle and concertina, and along with Aeschlimann display fine musicianship.

The songs range from originals by Brühlmann and Frey, "Launching the Boat" and "The Three Mermaids" (unlikely nautical songs for a band from a landlocked alpine country), to Bobby Nicholson's "The Silent March," the traditional "John Barleycorn," Ewan MacColl's nearly forgotten "Tunnel Tigers" and that epic Irish tragedy "The Night Before Larry Was Stretched," the latter three particularly well-suited for Brühlmann. Most of the tunes on "Yarn" are band compositions, with Frey's "Handtrucking" set and "Funny Weather" as well as Hofer's "Tea Tom's Kajak" among the stand-outs.