

Jon Hicks is one of the finest flatpickers in traditional Irish music. He is a master of playing fiddle tunes on the guitar at lightning speed without forgetting that the music is first and foremost dance music and that it needs to keep its lilt. He also is one of the few players who can maintain both speed and clarity in playing Celtic fiddle tunes on the guitar.

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San Francisco has always had a reputation for being a haven for traditional Celtic musicians and also happens to be the home of the newly formed Tall Tree Records (PO Box 423328, San Francisco, Ca 94142-3328). **Jon Hicks** is a fine flatpicker whose talent is displayed on his Tall Tree debut entitled Chasing the Bear. Liner notes were written by Irish guitarist Arty McGlynn who thinks a lot of Hicks playing and for good reason he is one of the finest flatpickers on the scene today. The pairing of Hicks's guitar and Paddy Keenan's Uilleann pipes on a set of jigs nearly set my CD player ablaze. He is also joined by a bevy of talented musicians including percussionist Peter Maund, fiddler Athena Tergis and bassist Dee Moore.

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It's gig time again at The Bath Folk Club



This month, on Friday 15th, at the popular Bath Club, they have Jon Hicks visiting from Ireland. Chiefly inspired by the likes of Davey Graham and Bert Jansch, Jon has also dug very deeply into Celtic, Blues flamenco and Jazz to create a guitar style that is completely original, innovative, sometimes controversial but never at odds with the traditions he is playing in.

Not only is he widely regarded as one of the worlds greatest Irish flat picking stylists, he has, on his extensive travels around the world, collected traditional songs from Irish, Scottish, English and American traditions. This forms a launch pad for his own incredible song writing talent which won him huge acclaim from the Irish music magazine. So, expect incendiary jigs and reels at a level that is rarely equalled along with traditional and original songs.

Stages > Body&Soul Main Stage > Jon Hicks

Much traveled troubador, singer and guitarist par excellence, **Jon Hicks**, injects an eclectic mix of Irish, Spanish, and jazz influences into his work which has the effect of whisking you in moments from Galway to Galicia to the gator-infested swamps of Louisiana.

Jon Hicks is an innovative guitarist with a signature sound. Born in the 70's but now living in hope. He is a mutant with an Analogue past and an irrational fear of brown corduroy.

In 2010AD he declared himself an independent republic, after surprising himself by living longer than Judge Dredd, unfortunately he doesn't qualify for IMF assistance as he has no flag, nevertheless as he owns the head of the Head of State he may occasionally instruct himself to give a command performance.

JON HICKS

Formerly of Big Geraniums and Lia Luachra, Jon Hicks is one of the best folk guitarists and songwriters you will hear today. He injects an eclectic mix of Irish, Spanish, and jazz influences into his work which has the effect of whisking you in moments from Galway to Galicia to the 'gator-infested swamps of Louisiana.

"On course to become a bit of a guitar god." FolkRoots

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press service

City Canyons Records Tenth Showcase

City Canyons Records together with Black Dog Promotions and the New York City Guitar School presents a remarkable combination of talent at it's Tenth Showcase at Manhattan's famous Red Lion on Tuesday, February 28.

First up are the rollicking Randy Bandits. The Bandits' style swings from rock to country to bluegrass to jazz to soul to blues to gospel with lots of hybrids, a jillion instruments traded amongst them, and soaring vocal harmonies.

Next in line is Uncle Pumpkin -- featuring the Bomb Squad's Dan Grennes (bass and lead vocals) and his seasoned and spirited band playing cutting edge alternative rock that also offers some cool grooves from the sixties and seventies.

Following Uncle Pumpkin will be a very special treat -- the solo debut of the multi-talented Sarah Loveland playing her unique blend of folk influenced alternative pop including, performed for the very first time, a musical tribute to her beloved New Orleans.

Closing out the evening, will be brilliant guitarist Jon Hicks, already proclaimed by many as a major figure among folk and traditional guitarist, touted as one of the finest traditional guitarists of a new generation and even described by one critic as a guitar god in the making.

This monthly Showcase by City Canyons -- the exciting independent label based in downtown Manhattan -- has become one of New York's most popular and prestigious ongoing showcases for independent music featuring the top indie artists in New York and regionally.

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Jon Hicks hails from England, lives in Ireland, plays a Lowden and flatpicks. His album "Chasing The Bear" on the Talltree record label recently arrived. This player has all the ornaments of Irish music down cold. His right hand is solid and lyrical. He's also a very good singer. I thought his guitar sounded wonderfully rich on this CD. There's also guest appearances by Patty Keenan, Niamh Parsons and Athena Tergis among others.

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Jon Hicks is one of the finest young flatpickers to emerge from the British Isles in recent years. His style is crisp and driving, with lightning speed ornamentation that has earned him the title, "The King of Triplets." His music is firmly rooted in the traditional music of Ireland. John is an Englishman living in Galway. To date he has released one album, *Chasing the Bear*, with guest appearances by Paddy Keenan and Niamh Parsons. Another is on the way.

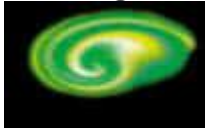
"Jon is destined to become one of the prominent names in the field of Irish traditional guitar." -Arty McGlynn

"Jon Hicks, the torch is passed!"- Eric Rowland, Irish Arts Foundation, San Francisco.

"This project is one of the great surprises of the year. Superb imaginative, driving, propulsive guitar playing. . . In other words, this is a great guitar album! - Dave Higgs WPLM Brentwood, Tennessee.

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Malgamú Music



Jon Hicks: Guitar, Vocals.

Jon is without doubt the musical troubadour of the band. Born near Newcastle in England, Jon arrived on the streets of Amsterdam as a teenager to busk and to learn to love the serendipity that such a lifestyle threw in his direction. Having repeated such an adventure in Italy, Jon first came to Ireland as a member of the well known raggle-taggle band "The Big Geraniums," who set up home in the busy music scene that was happening in Galway at that time.

When after some months the "Geraniums" left the City of the Tribes, Jon stayed on to perfect his exhilarating and flamboyant style on the DADGAD tuned Acoustic Guitar. During this time he was a member of the well known local band "Gan Ainm", whose members included Declan Corey, Derek O Shea and Frank Ryan and over four years they recorded and gigged as far afield as Iceland and Gort. He took a break from Ireland to go to San Francisco, where he recorded a solo guitar album for the American Record Label Tall Tree. The C.D., which features Paddy Keenan on pipes and has some very complementary liner notes written by none other than Arty McGlynn, has been successful in the States but is unfortunately not readily available on this side of the water. Back in Ireland, he set up shop in Dublin and immersed himself in the Trad. scene in the Capital. He is now once again based in Galway where when not touring with Lia Luachra he works the controls of his recording studio.

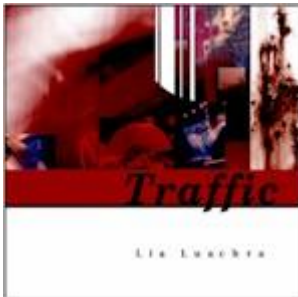
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Lia Luachra

This self-titled debut CD has stirred up plenty of excitement in the group's native Ireland and throughout Europe. Using traditional instrumentation, Lia Luachra (named after the Celtic cycle of Finn Mac Cumuli mythologies) serves up a solidly stylized expression of the band's origins. Guitarist Jon Hicks enhances his reputation as a leading D A D G A D exponent on this guitar-heavy outing. His harmonies frequently dance around the bouzouki and mandolin of Declan Corey. Fiddler Tricia Hutton and concertinist Shane Bracken fill out the group. Half of the tracks are traditional instrumentals given new life, two are vocal covers that show Hicks can also carry a song, and the rest are original tunes. The players are confident, lyrical, and cohesive. (Malgamu)

—Julie Bergman

Traffic (Malgamu MAGCD 114) by Lia Luachra



**Traffic (Malgamu MAGCD
114)**
By
Lia Luachra

Not since the days of Alistair Anderson's Steel Skies has there been a more magical coupling of mandolin and concertina. For those of you who like the delicate touch of these two instruments look no further for what promises to be the ultimate album. In the hands of Declan Corey (mandolin/bouzouki) and Shane Bracken (concertina/piano) joined by Tricia Hutton (fiddle/cello) and Jon Hicks (guitar/vocals) we can safely see the banner of 'folk' being talked about for generations. But possibly this would be to do the band a disservice, as there is far more to their arrangements, which includes a touch of classical and jazz including Hicks 'Roll Me In Clover' (very Bert Jansch in his Pentangle days) or the title tune 'Traffic'. It's not only his tune writing but also the beautifully crafted songs such as 'Sleeping At The Wheel' that set this band apart from others only caught in the slipstream. This is a real musician's album full of the intricacies that those searching for their own El Dorado could only hope to emulate. Well done once again to Malgamu Records for being adventurous enough in bringing to the world something fresh and above all exciting to a jaded journalists ears. Oh, by the way if there are any festival organisers out there reading this review, get your chequebooks ready and book Lia Luachra for next year's festival season. 'Nuff said!

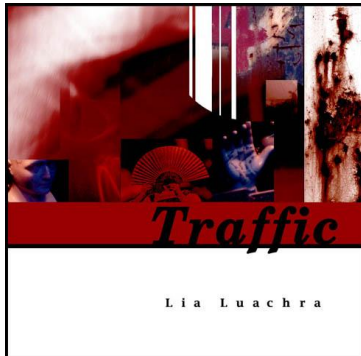
Written by: [Pete Fyfe](#)
On the 17-Oct-2001

LIA LUACHRA - "Traffic"

RATING: *****

Malgamu Music MALGCD114 (2000)

Reviewer: Ian Clarke



- [click on image to go to Malgamu Website](#)

With Lia Luachra's second release "Traffic" the band confirms its status as the most exciting and progressive of our new wave of trad bands. While each member has their own distinctive style, all four contribute their considerable creative talents so fully, and apparently intuitively, that they are like Siamese quadruplets, so harmonious is the result.

This album is different from their debut, featuring many original tunes (mainly by Shane Bracken, Declan Corey and some of their friends) and 4 songs (written by Jon Hicks) and the result is a more thoughtful, subtle musical direction. The reckless, flamboyant feel of the debut is gone, replaced by a more urgent, controlled sound which although dense and less immediately accessible, captivates you as it unfolds layer upon layer with successive listens.

That's not to say that the playing is too serious. There's plenty of exuberant fun. The first two sets of tunes, Changing Silver and Sprained Ankle are bright and breezy with Corey's mandolin and Bracken's concertina duetting and duelling through a variety of changing folk rhythms, Irish and European, Tricia Hutton's fiddle glides along in seamless harmonies before taking a lead in the final reel. All immaculately accompanied by Hicks' strong guitar strumming and picking.

The first song "Sleeping at the Wheel" has an airy, laid back quality and could be Nick Drake or early John Martyn with some lovely light jazzy sequences with guitar fingerpicking and box and nice vocal support from Naimh Parsons. The more you hear it the more you realise just how good it is.

"Traffic" is an almost surreal, jazz influenced piece which captures a mood rather like a soundtrack of a film set in a 1950's French cafe and once again demands and deserves many listens. Don't try to categorise this music - just let it sink in slowly.

A more conventional set of Bracken tunes follows in "Threads" to get the feet tapping again building slowly as only LL tracks can, lead by concertina and fluid tinkling mandolin. Paul Kelly adds some lovely mellow viola.

Hick's second song "Never the Home Life" is a powerful piece, rhythmic and string driven with a catchy refrain and about the best mandolin solo you'll ever hear. His style is very English folk - references to Martin Carthy et al here. Excellent stuff.

"Charlie's Car" is a great showcase set which leaps along at a great pace and shows off the dexterity of all of the players as individuals and as a unit. Faultless and mesmerising.

Bracken's "Borrowed Space", a slow piece with the gently sweeping rhythm of a formal dance, lacks the memorable melody of Mischief Anneal from the first album. It feels a little tentative and unfinished to me. However, it offers a pleasantly relaxing diversion.

"Roll Me in Clover" is another song in the Carthy / Martyn style with the slapping and picking guitar style perfectly matched by light strokes from fiddle and box. Another interesting and thoughtfully arranged song which is worth spending some time with.

"The Piper and the Pony" set is perhaps the most conventional set of tunes and includes Peter O'Hanlon's title tune once again played with spirit and style. Over 5 minutes long and it seems to pass in a flash. Corey's brilliant mandolin again to the fore and wonderful interplay between fiddle and concertina.

"The Older Lands" is another song stamped by Hick's idiosyncratic style with it's myriad stylistic influences. The rhythm shifts gear a few times and there are some nice instrumental tangents taken by fiddle and concertina. Niamh Parsons lends a hand again with vocals. Another grower but never, I think, a song to hum along to.

The quirky closing track "Morticia the Greek" is a wonderful live showcase for Corey but probably the weakest on the CD lacking the arrangement and depth of the other tunes but nevertheless a dramatic Greek style romp to sign off a super album.

Lia Luachra consolidate their reputation with this recording and deserve to achieve a much higher profile in Irish folk music. They'll probably never be

accepted by purists but then neither were Planxty. "Traffic" is not an immediate hit - buy The Corrs for that, but be assured that any effort you put into listening to it will be amply rewarded.

LIA LUACHRA

"Lia Luachra" 1998

Malgamu Music

MALGCD112



Lia Luachra is one of a new generation of young traditional groups which fuses musical influences from all kinds of folk traditions, mainly Irish, but also Breton and Eastern European. The members are Dubliner Shane Bracken (concertina) and Tricia Hutton from Carlow (fiddle) along with Tyrone man Declan Corey (mandolin) and Jon Hicks from the North of England (guitar and vocals). This is their remarkable debut album.

From the opening bars of the first tunes "Paddy Taylors", with the brilliant interplay between guitar and mandolin, you're hooked and by the time they are joined by box and bow your day has already brightened considerably. The band play with real verve and are a breath of fresh air (to the ear!).

The party continues with the "Curlicue" jigs and the band get into full swing with Bracken pumping away on lead concertina and Tricia matching him stride for stride. When the string section arrives the tunes really take flight and the track has a wonderful energy.

The arrangement of "End of the Day" reels is superb as it builds to a crescendo dramatically with the petite Tricia's flowing strokes to the fore and Hick's guitar providing subtle and sympathetic rhythm. Box and mandolin join the serpentine set which twists tantalisingly allowing each member to display their virtuosity.

Shane's exquisite slow air "Mischief Anneal" is one of the most memorable original pieces I've heard for years. Its melody haunts you for ages. It's one of the few slow tunes I want to just keep on going. Declan's mandolin playing is delicate and melodic throughout and guest Paul Kelly adds some beautiful viola. A masterpiece.

Freddie White fans will admire the version here of Hoyt Axton's "Gypsy Moth". Hicks' voice has a White-like richness and depth. The playing is again marvelous, the arrangement perfectly blends each instrument into a harmonious whole.

"B 4 C" is a great pair of jigs featuring duetting mandolin and guitar and shows just how tightly these guys play together, not simply the same notes, but harmonising sympathetically.

Shane then explores a delicate slow air learned from the late, great piper Seamus Ennis. Fine playing but I preferred Shane's own "Mischief" and would personally have liked another song here.

More jigs follow in "Noimead Ar Bith Anois" and Corey's mandolin is outstanding. Every note is clear as a bell and once again all of the instruments blend to perfection. The pace is lively and foot tappingly addictive.

Jon Hicks takes the lead on his second (and sadly last) song "See It Come Down", a Leon Rosselson ecology protest with great lyrics and powerful message. His voice has an aching tone which suits the theme and Bracken adds some lovely jazzy box runs but it is Hicks' guitar playing that steals the show.

Declan's own waltz tune "Two Black Russians" has a wonderful Zhivago-esque sweep with its lovely mix of fiddle and mandolin. Once again it makes you feel like getting up and doing a Cossack dance. Apparently however it was inspired, not by the Soviet Republic, but by Tricia's favourite alcoholic beverage.

The closing set "Ebb Tide/ Ladies 2nd Choice" is a hornpipe and barndance which starts off just mandolin and builds as box, fiddle and guitar finish off in elegant style.

One of the reasons that I play this CD so often is that it achieves a real clarity and balance between the players and yet captures the exciting live sound we know from the band's gigs at Downpatrick Folk Music Club. An amazing compromise between complete control and total abandonment. Credit must go to John Whelan and Paul Kelly for the superb production. Lia Luachra put a lot of thought into the arrangements. Too many traditional groups neglect this in the studio and end up sounding "flat" - more like a ceili or session. On Lia Luachra, the individual players all get a chance to play to their own strengths and the sound they create is unique and refreshing. More power to their collective elbows and fingers but a few more (extra) songs next time would be even better.

[CLICK ON THE PIC TO GO THERE AND SAMPLE SOME OF THEIR MUSIC AVAILABLE AS MP3 DOWNLOADS](#)

Rating * * * * *

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'Traffic' is generally good fun - here's my entry from The Rough Guide to Irish Music.

Lia Luachra

This perky young quartet have nothing to do with the Cork-Kerry polka-land of Sliabh Luachra, but take their name from Celtic mythology - Lia Luachra being Fionn Mac Cumhaill's foster mother. Their 1998 eponymous debut album was quickly recorded in the wake of their success at the Lorient festival that year, but it doesn't show on a grand selection of traditional and self-penned tunes and singer, and Ex-Big Geranium, Englishman Jon Hicks (guitar, vocals, shaker, keyboard) taps a leftfield vein of material including Hoyt Axton's The Gypsy Moth (popularised by Freddie White) and See It Come Down, associated with English socialist singer Roy Bailey. Rock bands always have problems with 'that difficult second album', but not Lia Luachra. Now defining themselves as an 'acoustic' rather than 'traditional' group, though still drawing strengths from the latter tradition, 2000's Traffic sees Hicks and Tyrone man Declan Corey (mandolin, bouzouki) lay down an intricate finely-picked sonic carpet for the flights of fancy navigated by the fiddler, Tricia Hutton (from Carlow), and the concertina of Dubliner Shane Bracken. This tight ensemble playing is the undoubted high point and Traffic opens with a stunning reel, Changing Silver, written by Declan. Elsewhere, Hicks supplies a moody instrumental, Traffic, and four of his own songs, including a guest spot for Niamh Parsons on Sleeping at the Wheel. The best of the other tunes is the reel, Francy Quinn's, while the juxtaposition of Scots and Greek melodies on Morticia and the Greek forms an eerie closing piece. Be warned, however, for this is possibly the first 'traditional' album to feature not just one hidden track - some wistful solo fiddling from Tricia - but a second in the form of a weird disco break-out!

° Traffic (2000, Malmagú Music). Sparky, pert and bright - don't miss them live!

Jon Hicks, born in North East England in 1971, is a musician, writer and traveller. He plays jigs and reels on acoustic guitar, utilizing various alternate tunings - particularly DADGAD. He is a notable flatpicker and fingerstyle guitarist, as well as being an interesting songwriter.

Jon had an unusually nomadic early childhood, living as he did in Cumbria, Africa and Portsmouth. He left home at age 15 and spent his teenage years busking throughout Europe in the company of musicians, clowns, street performers and travellers.

Jon was a member of the 'The Big Geraniums', a band that formed in Covent Garden, London in 1989, and that then set off on an impromptu tour of the Lake District before settling in Ireland in the early 90's. It was in the west of Ireland that Jon met up and recorded two albums with 'Gan Ainm' a Galway-based traditional Irish group featuring Derek O'Shea on flute, Declan Corey on mandolin and bouzouki and Frank Ryan on bodhran. The albums are called: 'Over the Boundary' (1992) and 'Wilds of the World' (1993) both of which feature his own songs.

Jon's first solo recording began in late 1993 with 'The Tales They Told' a Homegrown records production in Galway City, Ireland.

After being invited to record a solo album in San Francisco by record label TallTree Records he recorded 'Chasing the Bear' in 1995 featuring Paddy Keenan on uilleann pipes and Niamh Parsons on harmony vocals.

Jon moved back to Ireland in 1996 and became a member of 'Lia Luachra' the Dublin based quartet featuring Trisha Hutton on fiddle, Shane Bracken on concertina and Declan Corey on mandolin. Lia Luachra were a short lived but well received quartet who made two albums of traditional and original material: 'Lia Luachra' and 'Traffic'.

Jon Hicks is very much a part of the English lineage of folk guitarists that sprang from the 60's folk revival. He cites Davy Graham, Nic Jones, Nick Drake, Bert Jansch, Roy Harper, Richard Thompson and Martin Carthy as influences, as well as the closely knit folk music community to be found all around the world.*