

# Beneath the Starry Sky

by Jo Philby

£12.99

Jo Philby's superb new album really shifts everything up a gear for the West Mainland singer.

Her highly distinctive vocals – a blend of Maddy Prior and Judy Collins with a twist – are no longer out on their own, but meshed into a lush mix of haunting harmonies and perfectly arranged guitars, piano and cello background.

The experience of it all is not just relaxing and pleasurable but, in places, truly uplifting.

Orkney-born Phil Anderson, now a record producer in Nashville, who was sound engineer on Jo's landmark 2009 debut album *Saltwater & Stone*, takes over the full production on *Beneath The Starry Sky*.

Such is technology these days that Jo was able to fly out to Storm Studios in Tennessee with Elaine Grieve and lay down all the vocals, harmonies and guitar work while the rest, which was recorded in Orkney, was later added into the mix.

The harmonies are quite extraordinary – most notably on the sweeping dark song *Blackfly*, Seth Lakeman's *The White Hare* and the more traditional *The Maid On The Shore*.

The opening track, *Winter Song*, is one

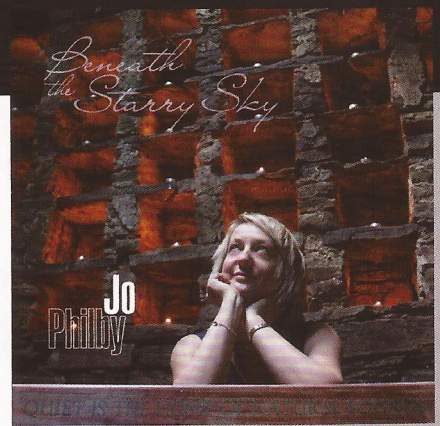
of the most memorable – you would definitely want to play it at Christmas or at the turn of the year; *The Shore Neath The Tide* is a mellow drinking song, with a Steeleye Span feel to it, and *In The Garden Of Heaven* – with its classical piano and nature inspired lyrics – could be snapped up for a film soundtrack.

Then there is the brave track *The Sleepless Sailor* – a duet with her seven-year-old niece, Holly – which, although charming, does not really seem to fit alongside the other songs.

A bonus track – I don't think we've had that on an Orkney CD before – *The Longer the Waiting (The Sweeter The Kiss)*, was recorded by Aidie Bolton in *The Reel* and unites Jo with top Orkney band Broken Strings. It is a rousing song with a clever bagpipe ending.

But one track – *Start It All Over Again* – powers above all the others, with its silken production, and delicate piano and cello arrangement, leaving perfect space and scope for Jo's gorgeous vocals to drift through. The song – written by Karine Polwart and John McCusker – is truly inspirational, and I doubt whether any other artists could inject so much emotion into it.

The musicianship throughout this special album is exceptional, so credit must go to Phil Anderson – just listen to his guitar



work on *The Maid On The Shore* – Kathie Touin, who played and arranged the piano; Linda Hamilton on cello; Elaine Grieve, for those special harmonies, and Derek Curtis on low whistle. There is also a guest appearance from Donal Murphy, accordionist with top Irish band Four Men And A Dog.

Jo told *Living Orkney*: "I feel the new album is a step up from my first one. I am really pleased with the sound that we've produced and I smile each time I listen to it. The first album reflected my traditional folk roots, whereas this one brings in more of my new influences of country and Americana songs.

"I love working with Phil Anderson. He is not only a brilliant musician, but also an outstanding sound engineer. There were options on where I could have recorded the album, but in the end it was Phil's touch I wanted, so I flew out to Nashville to record it."

The packaging of the album also deserves special mention, with impact photos by Tom O'Brien designed and shaped by Colin Keldie at K4 graphics.

*Beneath The Starry Sky* will be officially launched on in Kirkwall on Friday, 30th November, at the Firelounge in Fusion, when Jo will be accompanied by Aiden Moodie, Broken Strings, and Maggie and James Nicolson, then again on Saturday, 1st December – for the West Mainland – in Orkney Brewery, Quoyloo, with Aiden Moodie and Broken Strings. For more details, check out her website [www.jophilby.co.uk](http://www.jophilby.co.uk). ■