

The Scotsman
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(45)

MUSIC

**JAMES YORKSTON / LISA
KNAPP**
PERTH THEATRE
★★★★★

FENCE Collective stalwart James Yorkston and English nu-folk starlet Lisa Knapp first met two years ago, when the former was curating a BBC tribute to the legendary Lal Waterson. Their pairing on this Scottish Arts Council-sponsored Tune Up tour sees them sharing Yorkston's band, the Athletes, while showcasing their respective styles of contemporary balladry.

Knapp has won a torrent of plaudits from the London media – including Mojo's Folk Album of the Year – for her 2007 debut album, *Wild and Undaunted*, which mainly comprised reworkings of traditional songs, along with a few originals. Her wayward, wavy singing, with its distinctly tangential approach to melody and intonation, seems the product of intense inner communion with her

material, but here sounded merely off-key, or strained beyond its natural register, as often as it produced moments of otherworldly beauty. Her stripped-down, emphatically decelerated approach to such classics as *Salisbury Plain* and *A Beggar, A Beggar* tended to foreground ambient effect over authentic vocal craft.

As befitting a man from Fife, Yorkston's delivery is mostly understated to the point of laconic, albeit enriched by his subtly grained, quietly lambent timbre, but the iceberg-like emotional impact of his songs derives precisely from its combination with his vividly rendered, intimately evocative lyrics, fleshed out here by the Athletes' accompanying harmonic colours. Cheerfully admitting that 87 per cent of his output is classified on iTunes as "miserable", he nonetheless warmed the audience's cockles with a set drawn from across his five albums to date, steering a compelling course between brooding introspection and transcendent serenity.

SUE WILSON



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