

DUET playing is a treacherous business. Personalities and playing styles must be book-matched; individuality must be pared back. When the players are siblings, the hazards must surely be magnified.

But Liz and Yvonne Kane, the fiddle-playing sisters from Letterfrack in the north western corner of County Galway, are musical proof of the maxim that the whole can really be greater than the sum of its parts.

With a stunning debut under their belts, there was always a fear that The Kane Sisters' follow-up album would be a disappointment. Sublime playing, great tunes, subtle accompaniment, *The Well Tempered Bow* had it all. The second installment would have a lot to live up to. And there were choices to be made. Would Liz and Yvonne go for more of the same? Or would they push out in new directions? The first few bars on *Under the Diamond* dispel all doubts.

Mike Cooney's *Fancy*, the opening jig, has the twin fiddles bouncing off each other; the same controlled energy is flowing between. There's a new maturity evident, but the spark remains.

The East Galway fiddle player and composer, Paddy Fahey, was the source of many of the tunes on *The Well Tempered Bow*. Liz and Yvonne have returned to the

After a strong debut, *The Well Tempered Bow*, The Kane Sisters return with an equally impressive second record, writes **Pat Ahern**

well for this collection. Other composers — Paddy O'Brien, Martin Mulvihill, Ed Reavy, Finbarr O'Dwyer, Martin Hayes and Junior Crehan among them — provide material for the Kane repertoire, but Paddy Fahey retains that special place. No less than five reels, plus one hornpipe, bear the simple title "Fahey's". He's submitted some wondrous tunes to a tradition that's famous for its love of bizarre titles, but each one is named "Paddy Fahey's". No matter, it's the tunes that count.

Each sounds as if it was crafted specifically to match the talents of The Kane Sisters. Each is resolutely traditional but Paddy inserts a characteristic twist as a musical autograph.

The Kanes' other great muse, their fiddle playing grandfather,



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Stunning sisters

Jimmy Mullen, passed away in the summer of 2003. He is commemorated here, not in a slow air or lament, but in a lively jig, *Jig for Jimmy*, paired with one for their grandmother, *Betsy*,

both written by Liz. The accompaniment, so often the ruination of otherwise fine traditional albums, is again a vital element on *Under the Diamond*. Supportive rather than intrusive, it is used

neither as a smokescreen nor a safety net.

Guitar player John Blake returns for a second outing with The Kanes. Throughout, he picks out an expert path along the borderline between drive and restraint. Mick Conneely — a fine fiddle player in his own right — provides some tasty bouzouki settings, while James Blennerhassett adds just a touch of double bass to an old time waltz.

If the Kane fiddle style retains the familiar mixture of taste and intelligence, their arrangement style remains refreshingly simple. No cheap tricks (if you discount the appropriately titled hornpipe, *The Acrobat*, where a certain level of unrestrained virtuosity is called for), no flashiness, no sugaring of the traditional pill. This music can talk for itself. The sound is as natural as you could wish for, the closest thing to having The Kane Sisters in your living room. Hats off to Paul Gurney of LG Studios in Longford.

More of the same, then? In some senses, yes. But why change a winning team?

The Kanes' musical journey moves, like the tradition itself, in incremental steps. And The Kanes have an assuredness that ensures that the journey is heading somewhere special.

The Kane Sisters play the Frank McGann Festival in Strokestown, Co Roscommon, on October 10.