

Scandinavian Popsters fly a classic Celtic album as John O'Regan reports.

Celtic music and Sweden have a lot in common. Many Irish musicians have made the land of ABBA their home. Dervish have made Josefin's Waltz incredibly accessible, so much so that it has been used to advertise holidays in Ireland. There are parallel fiddle traditions, even some tunes share common roots, with a geographical connection that takes the music on a steeping stone path between Sweden, Shetland, Scotland and the North of Ireland. The shiny side of the coin is that Irish music has achieved a level of respect within the domestic musical community. The results are there in some of the bands that have come from Sweden playing Irish music including Gothenburg's finest Celtic Pop/Rock outfit—the wonderful West of Eden.

KITE HIGH

West of Eden was formed 1995 and has gradually developed into a hard working band, writing and producing self-penned material. The band has a unique sound, which combines the musical language of traditional Celtic music with the members' more pop oriented background. Electric guitars, keyboards, drums, and bass are mixed with traditional instruments like whistles, fiddle, accordion, and mandolin and on top of all that, the clear voice of the singer, Jenny Schaub. But there's more, they have a paired down acoustic set, which I'll get to after we look at their more mainstream background.

Their excellent first album 'West of Eden' had both pleased the taste buds and hit the curiosity button, an investigation was not just necessary but essential. It was in these same pages some 5 years ago in 1999 that I first brought your attention to the band that combined the musical nous of Fairport Convention, The Corrs and Capercaillie in one seriously explosive package.

Their second album 'Rollercoaster' issued in 2001 went straight up to number 36 in the Swedish sale charts. A bestseller for a once part-time band, that was good enough for them to go professional. So how as it I asked Martin Schaub. "Initially we had to struggle a bit to get into the papers and the media and to get on TV but we have done quite alright so far." The Swedish domestic

music scene is highly competitive and an 'indie' band such as West of Eden crashing the local charts is a big thing "yes that's right" Martin admits. We made 'Rollercoaster' in 2001 and it made a pretty good impact in Sweden and made the Top 40, which is unusual for a band with a traditional folk music feel to it. We made a lot of TV appearances and it's a bit catchier and a bit more pop than our first album."

The last album, 'A stupid thing to do' which we were proud of, is perhaps a bit more intimate. We play more together on it, everyone is in the studio at the same time and we tried to get more personal. It has a bit more Americana singer/songwriter style this time' Martin Schaub explained. West of Eden's third album, "A stupid thing to do" was produced by Martin Schaub together with Henrik Cederblom and is their most accomplished effort. Musically "A stupid thing to do" is rich and varied, containing everything from naked ballads to more

experimental keyboard sounds as well as richly textured acoustic instruments. The roots elements including the Celtic input is still there but is quieter more subtle than before.

Irish visits by West of Eden were confined to the Celtic Woman tour in 1999 playing in a packed "The Quays" in Galway as well as at the "HQ" in Dublin. Founders Martin and Jenny Schaub have also come to the Blás festival at the University of Limerick. Imagine then my surprise when at this year's Blás festival and following a chance remark from Garry O' Briain that he had some Swedish musicians playing in his class, he said they were from a pop band but loved Celtic music. That was enough in my mind. Swedish Celtic Pop for me meant only one thing West of Eden and next thing we met for the first time and ended up spending time together, and this interview face to face was inevitable. This time Martin and Jenny had brought most of the band drummer, Ola Karlevø, fiddler Tobias Edvardson, and guitarist David Ekh with them and a good time was had by all.

"Jenny and I went once before in 2001 for the two Blás weeks and were very inspired by what we learned and the result of those two weeks is our duo album 'Kite High'. We learned a lot from good tutors and we wanted to bring the whole band to get to know the Irish traditional scene."

