

Press & Reviews for “Current Affairs”

Irish Music Awards 2014: Nominated for “Best New Irish CD”

Roots Music Report – Folk Charts for 2014: #87

Folk DJ Charts for 2014: Ranked #18

Folk DJ Charts for July 2014: Ranked #1

Best of 2014:

Cover Lay Down: Best Traditional Folk Album - "Current Affairs"

<http://coverlaydown.com/.../the-years-best-coverfolk-vol-1-t.../>

The [Telegraph Folk Music](#): Martin Chilton’s Best Country Music Albums of 2014

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/.../The-best-country-music-albums-.../>

Marc Gunn's [Irish & Celtic Music Podcast](#): Best of Celtic Folk Music 2014

<http://celticmusicpodcast.com/.../marc-picks-the-best-celtic.../>

[Paddy Londonceltpunk](#): Top Trad Album - "Current Affairs"

<http://londoncelticpunks.wordpress.com/.../london-celtic-pun.../>

WFUV "Ceol Na Gael": Top Albums & Top Songs of 2014

<http://www.wfuv.org/music/best-2014-staff-picks>

[Rambles.net](#): Jerome Clark's Best of 2014

http://www.rambles.net/jclarks_best14.html

Grinning Beggar's Paddy Rock Podcastr: Top Trad Album - "Current Affairs"

<http://www.paddyrock.com/home/beggars-best-of-2014/>

Begonias & Dead Horses: Best Folk & Classical Music of 2014

<http://iowapublicradio.org/.../begonias-dead-horses-best-folk.../>

Music Life & Times: Best of 2014

<http://members.jazzjournalists.org/2014-JJA-Best-of.../3179009>

WDCB: Folk Festival Lilli Kuzma ‘s Folk Festival Fav’s of 2014

<http://wdcb.org/programming/program.php?id=17>

The Living Tradition – Dave Beeby

Award winning band, Runa, show on Current Affairs just why they are that. Top group at IMA, with Shannon Lambert-Ryan best female vocalist, as well as other nominations, they have come up with something which just oozes class and says “Press the repeat button!” In addition to Shannon, the band comprises Fionan de Barra on guitar, Dave Curley on mandolin and banjo, fairly new recruit Maggie Estes White on fiddle and mandolin, with some wonderful imaginative percussion from Cheryl Prashker. As you would imagine from a band hailing from Ireland, Canada and America, the music reveals a variety of influences but is all held together by their obvious love of things Celtic - as well as from their combined experiences ranging from playing in, or with, Clannad, Riverdance, Slide, Solas and Hazel O’Conner, to name just a few.

There's a mixture of traditional familiar material such as The Wife Of Usher's Well and The False Knight On The Road, self penned songs and tunes written in the traditional style, as well as covers. Of these, the inclusion of Kate Rusby's Who Will Sing Me Lullabies was the most surprising, although I am not complaining as Runa have done it more than justice. The Last Trip Home, Davy Steele's reminder of the inevitability of progress, is a real highlight to Current Affairs and a fitting climax to this CD which is Runa's fourth in something like six years of existence.

The Ruthless Wife, written by Fionan and Shannon, tells the true story of her skeleton in the cupboard, but in a traditional style - a proper murder ballad!

Throughout, there are high spots - the fiddle on The Hunter Set; the percussion on Who Will Sing Me Lullabies; the twin vocals on Black River; as well as a set of tunes comprising both Irish Gaelic and Scots Gaelic to great effect – the list goes on.

Current Affairs is an accomplished work that seems to flow seamlessly from one track to another - obviously a lot of effort went into choosing the right material as well as the right guest musicians. Jeff Taylor provides some great accordion, whilst the harmonica and banjo of Buddy Greene and Ron Block respectively is used to good effect.

There is just one question - when can Runa be seen live over here? Surely a tour to promote Current Affairs is a must. I know I'd be there.

fRoots Magazine – John O'Regan

Irish American band Runa has moved on considerably since their last release I reviewed here, Stretched On Your Grave. There have been line-up changes and most obviously a radical rethink on their approach to their material and its presentation. With across-pollination of Celtic / European and Americana styles and idioms, their sound has a strong powerful and distinctive kick that immediately commands attention. The opener Banks Are Made Of Marble echoes US Irish / American aggregations like Touchstone, and the traditional Wife Of Ushers Well finds singer Shannon Lambert-Ryan turning in a quietly powerful performance amid a crackly rhythmic backing. Fiddler Maggie Estes White adds ebullient buoyancy to The Hunter Set, a quirky instrumental set that careers into Irish / Bluegrass crossovers while Black River and Aoidh Na Dean Cadal Idir / A Chomaraigh Aoibhinn O are deliciously languid and laid back slices of American balladry and Scots / Irish Gaelic crossovers. The arrangements are punchy yet spacious and a disciplined approach avoids falling over the crossover ledge. RUNA has found its style, face and personality and Current Affairs bubbles with ingenuity and creative flair.

Celtic Music Magazine – Stephen McSweeney

RUNA's fourth studio album entitled "Current Affairs" is a delightful musical treat. One to savor and enjoy, like a nice beer or wine. As you let it sit and take it in nice and slow

listening to the tracks again and again, exploring all that the album has to offer, it continuously unfolds, revealing more and more of its wondrous, complex layers. “Current Affairs” is aptly titled as it does a magnificent job of maintaining its Celtic backbone while branching out into many other styles – folk, bluegrass, gospel, old and modern – that make it more current to the music scene.

Nevertheless, RUNA does so in such a fashion that the songs do not clash or stand apart from each other. Instead, they each accent what the other has to offer. Although each song stands splendidly on its own it is when they are all put together that they become something else entirely. Each time one listens to this album they are constantly finding something new and delightful to enjoy.

For example, the album starts with *The Banks are Made of Marble* written by apple farmer Les Rice in the 1930’s. The song stresses the issues of equality that one faces even today. In this arrangement, the rhythmic picking at the beginning helps to create the setting of the song while the fiddle, cutting through, establishes the conflict between the classes; the miners, the farmers, the seaman. This song was a favorite of Pete Seeger’s because it is a great piece of Americana that manages to artfully capture a time period and a constant struggle. RUNA’s arrangement of this song certainly does it justice and gladly continues that tradition.

Another gem on this album, *Black River*, was penned by fellow Philadelphia musician Amos Lee. *Black River* is an amazing song that has a strong sense of spirituality to do it. In a simple but poetic fashion, it captures the incredible persistence of the human spirit. While RUNA starts out the song with a melancholy tone it slowly builds to one of hope. Bit by bit you can hear the past and the struggle fall off until the singer belts the line “Set me free” with a confidence and joy that was previously missing in the song. With that, there is the release that has long been waited.

Aoidh, Na Dean Cadal Idir / A Chomaraigh Aoibhinn Ó and *The Hunters Set*, however, establish us solidly in the Celtic world. The first song is a haunting Scottish lullaby. Fionan de Barre uses constant ringing of the guitar to set the pace while Shannon Lambert-Ryan’s voice gently rocks you. However, the fiddle continues to cut through and give the song a bit of that haunting edge. This fits perfectly because while the words may sound soothing in traditional Scotch Gaelic in English the chorus translates to: “*Aoidh, don’t sleep at all, Aoidh, don’t sleep deeply, Aoidh, don’t sleep at all, Take to the hills immediately.*” This then seamlessly blends into *A Chomaraigh Aoibhinn Ó*, a song about loss and longing for *Omeragh in Ireland*.

Moreover, *Ain’t No Grave* and *A False Knight Upon the Road* are some of my favorite. The energy from these songs are just absolutely infectious. All in all, I cannot get enough. This is an album I have put into rotation several months ago and it still stands. If you have not heard of them before they are a must see. The talent this group possesses is just immense.

Irish American News – Bill Margeson

"A great album from RUNA. Entitled, Current Affairs, it shows the band at its current best. And, that best is mighty good. The band's personnel is an international gumbo of an Irish group. It's a quintet, and it's terrific, blending wonderful vocals with really exciting instrumentals. This is their fourth album, and it includes a full variety of tempos, timings and fresh approaches to the auld' music. Runa is young, fresh and exciting. Extremely high level of creativity meets a really high level of musicianship and understanding of the tradition. We love Runa. Get this CD!!"

The Irish American News – Jack Baker

"The Michigan Irish Music Festival in Muskegon Michigan has been on of the best places to hear new music for me. They never disappoint me. One of the bands I saw there and fell in love with is RUNA (www.runamusic.com). Out of the Philadelphia area, they have a tremendously talented vocalist , Shannon Lambert-Ryan who is just a joy to watch and listen to, plus they have Cheryl Prashker, the most talented percussionist I've ever seen, another joy to watch and listen to. Before I get lost in the talents of those two band members, let me talk a bit about the rest of the band who are no less stellar in their respective talents. Fionán de Barra, of the famously talented de Barra family, shows that the fruit doesn't fall too far from the tree with fantastic guitar work and outstanding vocals. Dave Curley, who also plays with supergroup Slide, works his magic on mandolin, banjo, bodhrán and supplies more excellent vocals. The band has a new fiddler, Maggie Estes White, who I haven't seen yet but whose work on their new CD is outstanding. And the new CD? "Current Affairs" is the title and a finer crafted piece of work you couldn't ask for. The band has three previous CDs, all of which were delightful, but this is their best work yet. The songs are well chosen to fit the band's talents and are done in their own distinctive style. There is one original piece, "The Ruthless Wife" by Fionán and Shannon that is worth the price of admission by itself. A finer piece of ballad writing you couldn't ask for. They also did a version of one of my favorite songs, "The Last Trip Home" by Davy Steele. It's a very different version than any I've heard but it brings out new facets of this great song that I've never heard before. A tremendous performance. I hope you all get a chance to see and hear this band of outstanding young performers soon, they are a joy and a pleasure to see and hear. In the meantime get their CD."

Folk Alley – Gideon Thomas

"Runa is a band whose five members hail from three different countries – the US, Canada and Ireland. The band won Top Group and Top Traditional Group in the Irish Music Awards this year, and their love of the (often shared) traditions they find in music are ties that bind the members together, and their new album, *Current Affairs* draws from a range

of musical forms and song types.

From the singing of Pete Seeger to Gaelic ballads to traditional British songs to modern singer-songwriter-penned pieces, the collection has an interesting mix and blend of pieces which have entered the bands' repertoire. I discuss this and more with Shannon Lambert-Ryan from the band below, but first, let's take a dip into the album and see how it feels.

Opener "The Banks Are Made Of Marble" reveals a musicianship that is immediately both Irish and American. Almost as a statement of intent, Maggie Estes White's fiddle reaches across the oceans. The sometimes-sombre "Wife Of Usher's Well" is then treated to quite a jaunty, accordion-led arrangement, and, as the tale spills out, you realise how fitting the vocal actually is. It is so great to see new blood taking on the various song and tune traditions as contained on the album, and treating them as well as RUNA do.

"The Hunter Set" shows clarity and drive, highlighting the adaptability of the musicians – and their ease with playing away from their 'home' styles. Estes White's fiddle leads things off, followed by an especially effective use of a bluesharp /banjo combination. Next up is an interesting take on "Henry Lee," with a pumping, driving feel, which it shares with a lot of its compatriots on *Current Affairs*. Again, Lambert-Ryan's voice fits the choice of songs well, backed with a chopping fiddle and well-placed percussion. Songs like this, indeed *Current Affairs* as a whole, take the traditions in different directions, with the band's selection of instruments adding to the story.

A gorgeous version of Amos Lee's "Black River" is fabulously sung, with some very neat harmonies bringing it up and down. The Gaelic song set, "Aoidh, Na Dean Cadal Idir / A Chomaraigh Aoibhinn Á," is well tempered between voice and a simple but effective backing, where the beauty of the songs is to the fore, never encumbered – the band have that ineffable quality, understanding, which is not always obvious with other groups.

"The False Knight Upon The Road" is both bright and exuberant, with the band taking the decision to treat it thus. The tune really flows, bringing out different parts of the song in different ways. The harmonies have a rushing quality to them, with guitar and some deft mandolin underpinning everything. "Ain't No Grave" is the only moment where the album falls down slightly for me. The version is a little 'lacking', amid the desire for a little more grit. Still, there are effective, multi-layered harmonies, and an interesting, vibrant arrangement. The sliding fiddle and coda works very well.

Inclusions from the pens of Kate Rusby and Davy Steele show that the net which Runa cast spreads far and wide, and will no doubt bring more listeners to the original writers.

"The Ruthless Wife" has a lovely bouncing banjo courtesy of Ron Block, and the song stands out as a fascinating story, continuing traditions in different ways, those of family stories and stories of families. The musical journey visits more new and different places on the "Land Of Sunshine" set, which proves that instrumental music can and does actually tell a story, on a piece which feels new and contemporary. Bright, breezy, elegant, and very well put together.

"Rarie's Hill" is a fitting summation of the project – full of personal input, and wanting to take the traditions forward by working out new ways for its songs.

Current Affairs will draw favourable comparison with bands like Bodega, and listening to it makes you glad that Runa exist and are making the music which they are. I hope that

the album brings as much joy to as many other people as it has to me. It is a bold statement, one which blends Irish music (in the instrumentation, and especially in the tune sets), with an American sensibility in its influences and execution.”

Irish Music Magazine – Gwen Orel

For me this CD kicks in on the fourth track, Henry Lee. The three tracks that precede it in Runa’s latest CD, Current Affairs, are lovely: an American labor song titled The Banks Are Made of Marble, the Child Ballad The Wife of Usher’s Well, and a selection of tunes they’ve titled The Hunter Set, played well and traditionally. All very nice, and singer Shannon Lambert–Ryan has a distinctive soprano that enunciates each word. It’s nice.

Then you get to Henry Lee. And Maggie Estes White adds jazz riffs, scales and frills on the fiddle in between the verses, backed by what can only be called wailing jazz trad from Dave Curley on mandolin and Fionán de Barra on guitar. Suddenly you know this is something special. The band say they make “roots music” because it looks at trad, bluegrass, American roots. That’s easy to say but... They pull it off. Dave Curley of Galway sings a gorgeous main vocal on Black River by young American songwriter Amos Lee, which has an irresistible groove to its spirituality. Lambert-Ryan sings backup on it.

Other standouts on the CD include their heart–rending cover of Kate Rusby’s Who Will Sing Me Lullabies, and of Davy Steele’s sad The Last Trip Home. The band have also dipped into original songwriting with The Ruthless Wife, by husband and wife team de Barra and Lambert–Ryan, based on the death of Shannon’s great–great grandfather in Philadelphia. It blends in perfectly with the Child Ballads.

For purists, I’ll let you know that the instrumentalists here are top rate. Throughout, Canadian Cheryl Prashker’s percussion heightens the drive of the songs. Kentuckian Estes White should inspire fiddlers everywhere to pick up some jazz riffs. Seriously, that’s inspiring.

Why resist? Pick up Runa’s latest and settle in for a treat: something fresh but grounded. It’s roots music with a dash of jazz.

The Irish Edition – Jamie O’Brien

“This is RUNA’s fourth album, as far as I can see, and each one represents another step forward. The band has selected 13 tracks in a variety of styles: Irish, old timey, gospel, modern, old, traditional — a fine mix. The quintet’s sound revolves around strong vocals and full instrumental work.

Shannon Lambert-Ryan has a flute like voice – rich, warm, and versatile — and performs flawless vocals on nine of the songs. These range from the soft gentle “A Chomaraigh

Aoibhinn O,” sung in Irish, to the up-tempo, tragic “Henry Lee.” With one of those voices that is hard to ignore, she draws you into the lyrics and makes the stories come alive.

Instrumentally, the band features Fionan de Barra, Cheryl Prashker, David Curley and Maggie Estes. Dubliner de Barra is an intriguing guitarist; on the “Hunter Set”, one of two sets of tunes, fiddle, mandolin and banjo take you through the melodies, but his sense of rhythm, chord progressions and phrasing makes the accompaniment almost more fun to listen to than the leads.

Estes is the fiddler and she has a strong sense of drive and melody, moving into other realms (jazz, folk, and more) as each track progresses. At times, she brings out her Kentucky background, though has a tremendous approach to Irish style playing. Canadian Prashker first came to my attention with Full Frontal Folk, where she showed herself to be a versatile percussionist — she brings those talents to this recording. Curley is a multi-instrumentalist, singer and dancer from Galway – along with strong mandolin playing, he seems to add sounds that complete the band’s music.

RUNA has chosen the music well, with a lovely flow, some unexpected songs (a lovely version of “The False Knight Upon The Road”, a song I’ve not heard for years) and great playing.”

– Jamie O’Brien – *The Irish Edition*

Anything Phonographic – Steve Ramm

The 21st Century Celtic band’s fourth album shows them at their best.

“The Philadelphia-based Celtic band Runa continues to make great music – live and on CD – and has been getting well-deserved nation attention during the last year (with performances on the syndicated Woodsongs Radio Hour) and a main stage performance at last year’s Philadelphia Folk Festival (sort of a “home coming for them). Runa takes the music of Celtic bands like Clannad, and the Chieftains into the 21st century by tweaking the traditional sound just a “wee bit” – like adding a banjo prominent on at least three tracks on this, their latest, album. The 12 tracks on this 59-minute CD are a mixture of instrumental medleys and vocals (with the glorious voice of Shannon Lambert-Ryan providing leads on these tracks). There are 7 “traditional” songs, one by singer-songwriter Amos Lee (another Philly artist who has gone “national” and one composed by Runa’s members. Everyone will have a favorite track but mine is the “spiritual” “Ain’t No Grave (that will hold my body down)”. The unique fiddle work here (by Maggie Estes While) is great. Providing the “beat” on all the tracks is the amazing Cheryl Prashker (who has been the “go to” percussionist for folks like Jonathan Edwards and Tracy Grammer) .

The tri-fold digipak has easy-to-read , and helpful, track essays plus photos of the band. If you’ve not heard of Runa, and love Celtic music, you should. And see them live if you

can. (I've had the opportunity a few times and they are always great. I hope you found this review both informative and helpful."

Albion and Beyond – Len Holton

“RUNA - 4th album from this award winning multi-national Philadelphia-based quintet of highly accomplished individual musicians who have combined to present an enjoyable live performance honed through live performance at festivals and venues across the US and embellished by excellent step-dancing from singer/bodhrán player Shannon Lambert-Ryan and multi-instrumentalist, Dave Curley.

In 2014, RUNA won top group and top traditional group in the Irish Music Awards and an Independent Music Award for Best Song in the World Traditional Category for “Amhrán Mhuighinse” from their last CD, “Somewhere Along the Road.” On their latest album they are joined by three Grammy award-winning guest artists: accordion player Jeff Taylor (Paul Simon, Elvis Costello); multi-instrumentalist Ron Block (Alison Krauss & Union Station), and guitarist, harmonica player Buddy Greene (Kentucky Thunder). Drawing from the music wells on both sides of the Atlantic, songs from Kate Rusby and the late Davey Steele sit nicely alongside band member compositions and Americana such as "The Banks Are Made Of Marble" a song championed by the late Pete Seeger, and tune sets combining Irish trad, bluegrass, Appalachian and jazz elements. "Current Affairs" is a fine addition to their catalogue and sure to bring them new admirers.”

Cover Lay Down

On their new covers-and-traditionals album Current Affairs, Irish-Americana Roots band **RUNA** offers a powerful ethno-musical journey through the songs of Kate Rusby, The Child Ballads, the American labor movement, the gospel hymnal, traditional Gaelic reels and lullabies, and other hotspots in the evolution of the contrapuntal UK-American roots tradition.

Two 2013 Irish Music Awards, including one in the traditional category, prove their mettle, I suppose. But theirs is no mere retelling: the album is fresh and vibrant, a perfect-pitch collection that falls smack dab between comfortable folkpop and high-energy Celtic while transcending easy cataloguing – a nod to the diverse heritage of a Philadelphia-based five-piece band that features Dublin-born guitarist/vocalist Fionán de Barra, young Texas-style fiddler Maggie Estes White, Philly bandleader/vocalist Shannon Lambert-Ryan, and two percussionists (Galway mandolin/banjo and bodhran player Dave Curley and Montreal-based folk percussionist and current Northeast Regional Folk Alliance chair Cheryl Prashker). There's nary a low point here, but RUNA's gorgeous cover of Amos

Lee's *Black River* is the catchiest song I've heard in months; stay tuned for an Amos Lee feature in the coming weeks, too.

Pittsburgh In Tune – Jeffrey Sisk

Philly Celtic Roots Quintet Seeing Green on “Current Affairs”

Celtic roots quintet Runa hail from Philadelphia, but a love for the Emerald Isle and its music courses through their veins. Fourth full-length “Current Affairs” is a nice blend of traditional folk tunes, Gaelic ballads, gospel tunes and even a well-chosen cover of modern singer/songwriter Amos Lee. Shannon Lambert-Ryan handles most of the vocals, but it's the fiddle work of Maggie Estes and Dave Curley's mandolin/banjo that hold Runa together. Among the highlights of the 13-track release are “The Banks Are Made of Marble,” Lee's “Black River,” “Ain't No Grave,” first-rate original “The Ruthless Wife” and “The Last Trip Home.”

Stephen Malarick

I've been following this band now for several years. From the first tune at the first gig I knew I was hearing something remarkable, unique, fresh and singular. Each of the five musicians that comprise RUNA are hugely talented in their role, but what's really outstanding is how they blend into a seamless, distinctive sound. A sound that will appeal to the fans of a traditional Celtic sound, as well as those looking for something that, while solidly rooted in tradition, moves beyond in exciting new directions. Current Affairs is simply their finest effort to date. Shannon Lambert-Ryan is one of the truly great voices, expressive and warm. All the instrumentals and backing play to the music, and from the heart. I'll give a special shout out to three cuts. First, Ain't No Grave's droning fiddle introduction places this halfway between the Celtic countries and the Southern Highlands, and skillfully so. A great cut. Shannon Lambert-Ryan's version of Kate Rusby's Who Will Sing Me Lullabies is the definitive version, in my book. Lastly, the cut I replay and replay without tiring is Amos Lee's Black River. Hear, multi-instrumentalist Dave Curley pulls a surprise and sings and plays this so soulfully. Memorable, but then again, the entire CD is captivating. We'll be hearing more about this band, I promise you that.

Irish Philadelphia – Denise Foley

When someone Irish-born describes something as “class,” they mean it's brilliant, well done, magnificent and all of the other Thesaurus synonyms for “great.” I explain this so

you know what I mean when I say that “Current Affairs,” the latest release from the Philadelphia-based Celtic band, RUNA, is class.

It’s the cap of an amazing year for this group, made up of vocalist Shannon Lambert-Ryan, her husband, Dublin-born guitarist Fionan de Barra, Canadian percussionist Cheryl Prashker, Galway native and multi-instrumentalist Dave Curley, and Kentucky-born fiddler, Maggie Estes White. In 2014, RUNA won top group and top traditional group in the Irish Music Awards and an Independent Music Award for Best Song in the World Traditional Category for “Amhrán Mhuighinse” from their last CD, “Somewhere Along the Road.”

They’re also booked at Celtic festivals from coast to coast and Canada, though with this CD, they could certainly diversify. Never afraid to color outside Celtic lines, RUNA could book folk and bluegrass festivals—maybe even the occasional jazz gathering—thanks to their artful blending of these seemingly contrasting musical influences on “Current Affairs.”

For an eclectic music lover like me, this is heaven. “Current Affairs” is like a warm, delicious stone soup, made with a little luscious bit of this and that from the group’s musical DNA. De Barra comes from a musical family and honed his skills busking in Dublin, later making his professional debut in “Riverdance,” the show that ushered in a renewed interest in Irish folk music. Lambert-Ryan learned to step dance at Philadelphia’s Irish Center, but is as at home with folk, classical, and musical theater as she is with Celtic music. Cheryl Prashker studied classical percussion at McGill University but she’s equally adept at everything from rock and roll to klezmer and jazz. Dave Curley is a traditionalist who also plays with the trad band, Slide Ireland. And RUNA’s latest killer fiddler—they appear to have a direct line to “killer fiddler” central—is Maggie Estes White, who brings her Kentucky bluegrass roots to the mix, which serves as a reminder that those roots also reach back to Celtic lands.

Also on “Current Affairs,” three Grammy award-winning guest artists: accordion player Jeff Taylor (Paul Simon, Elvis Costello) who has been a friend for years; Ron Block (Alison Krauss & Union Station), a multi-instrumentalist who plays alternative country, bluegrass, and writes gospel music; and Buddy Greene (Kentucky Thunder), who plays guitar, harmonica and, like Block, has his roots in gospel.

But you’ll also hear the spirit of Pete Seeger who died the night that RUNA recorded one of the songs he often sang, “The Banks Are Made of Marble,” by New York State apple farmer Les Rice who wrote the tune and lyrics in 1948, though it could serve as the theme song for the Occupy movement. There’s also a song, “Black River,” from Amos Lee, another Philadelphia musician, that has a touch of Negro spiritual about it, and one from English folk singer Kate Rusby, known as “the first lady of folkies” in the British Isles. Her lilting, lyrical song, “Who Will Sing Me Lullabies” seems to have been custom written for Lambert-Ryan’s classic folk soprano voice.

Lambert-Ryan and de Barra contribute an original song to the mix, “The Ruthless Wife,” loosely based on the story of Lambert-Ryan’s great-great grandfather, a Philadelphia cop

who was killed in the line of duty just outside his beat near the Northern Liberties neighborhood. “We’ve taken liberties and poetic license with the story because there are too many details and it would go on forever,” said Lambert-Ryan when I spoke to her this week.

The basic story: Her great-great grandfather, James Allen Lambert, who was known as a ladies’ man, was separated from his wife and living with a young woman half his age named Rosie Gallagher. When Rosie found out he’d been killed, she was so distraught that she took poison, then thought better of it, and hired a cab to take her to Hahnemann Hospital where her lover’s body was taken. It was, alas, too late—for the both of them.

“When the city went to give me great-great grandmother his pension, she told them, ‘I don’t want that man’s pension,’” said Lambert-Ryan. “It’s a crazy story and we laughed about it for years. When Fionan and I decided to write a song for the CD, we were trying to come up with something and we looked at each other and said, ‘This is a really good story. We don’t have to look any further.’”

One of the things I’ve always loved about RUNA is their fearless reinterpretation of traditional tunes, like “The Hunter Set” on “Current Affairs,” which bursts with the step-lively influence of both Celtic and bluegrass, and “Henry Lee,” a traditional song in Ireland, Scotland, and Appalachia, which they’ve imbued with jazz and rock undertones. It’s a fresh, exciting collection that sounds like nothing else you hear in the world of Celtic music. They’re real originals. They’re a class act and this is a class CD.

RUNA will be debuting “Current Affairs” on Friday, June 20, at the Sellersville Theatre, 24 W Temple Ave, Sellersville. Tickets are available.

The Celtic Crier – Marcene Bronson

The very talented band, **RUNA**, will be releasing their newest CD, "Current Affairs", on June 20, 2014! This is one album I am glad I didn't have to wait to be released because it is sensational! Folks, you definitely have something magnificent to look forward to!

Their previous CD, "**Somewhere Along the Road**", won several awards and I have no doubts that "Current Affairs" will win just as many, if not more. The vocals, both female and male, are outstanding, and the instrumentals have to be the best I have heard in some time. All 13 tracks are executed with such quality and spirit...a true love for their music is clearly heard throughout this entire CD.

Also performing with RUNA in "Current Affairs" are three Grammy award-winning artists, Jeff Taylor, Ron Block and Buddy Greene.

Be sure to mark June 20th on your calendar! Not only will "Current Affairs" be going on sale, RUNA is also hosting an album launch at the Sellersville Theater in Sellersville, PA

on Friday, at 8.00 p.m. You can purchase this incredible masterpiece via the band [website](#), CDBaby or iTunes !!!

Current Affairs" by RUNA--a Leap Beyond the Borders – Travis Rogers, Jr.

It has been two years since RUNA's landmark 2012 album "Somewhere Along the Road." The intervening months have been with the expected tours and special appearances and writing and arranging. Along the way, they have racked up many well-deserved awards.

At last, RUNA has released "Current Affairs." It has been worth the wait. This is their fourth album and it shows a growth and expansion that was unanticipated in its breadth and depth. Especially since "Somewhere Along the Road" was such a very fine album. "Current Affairs" is so well-developed that it is bound to break the barriers that are created by a limited-genre listing.

Indeed, RUNA cannot any longer be simply categorized as solely Celtic, any longer. "Current Affairs" propels RUNA into untraveled provinces that await them with open arms. Some of the material on "Current Affairs" is rightly called bluegrass, as might be expected with the likes of guest musicians such as Bon Block, Buddy Greene and Jeff Taylor—Grammy nominees all—in addition to Patrick D'Arcy.

RUNA remains almost the same in its personnel with one sole exception, Maggie Estes White has replaced the irreplaceable Tomoko Omura on violin. White brings a raw approach and, for this album, it suits the material very well. After all, Kentucky-based White has bluegrass in her blood.

RUNA

The album opens with "The Banks are Made of Marble," written by Les Rice who composed it during the Depression. The song became a staple of Pete Seeger's repertoire. In the ravaged and savaged economy of 2014, "The Banks are Made of Marble" retains the power of its origin and is executed brilliantly with the plaintive violin of White and the aggressive guitar of Fionán de Barra. As always, Shannon Lambert-Ryan's vocals are clear, distinctive and emotional. Her diction is flawless and her intonations subtle. She is truly one-of-a-kind, as it RUNA corporately.

"The Wife of Usher's Well" is a traditional ballad with a history threaded throughout Britain and America. The story tells of a woman who has sent her three sons overseas for schooling only to discover that they have perished along the way. The mother is visited by the shades of the lost lads when they come to bid her a final farewell.

Jeff Taylor (from Elvis Costello's band) adds his brilliant accordion playing to White's violin. All the while, Cheryl Prashker punctuates the arrangement with her rapid-fire percussion. Prashker is always a bright spot with a great sense of the propulsion required for each piece. She is not simply a time-keeper, she pushes the music.

Maggie Estes White and Shannon Lambert-Ryan

On the other hand, "The Hunter's Set" is more loosely performed and timed by de Barra and White in the introductory piece of the set entitled "Brilliancy." "Squirrel Hunter," "Chinaquapin Hunting" and "Dunbar" comprise the rest of the set. Traditional pieces one and all, they are riotously fun and performed with equal liveliness and humor. Jeff Taylor, Buddy Greene and Ron Block all contribute to the sound of these instrumental arrangements and the results are delightful.

"Henry Lee" is an aggressively told tale of the universal Lothario male who, in this telling, gets his just desserts in the end. The performance is counter-pointed between White's flighty violin and de Barra's menacing bass. Prashker's drumming is the inexorable march to Henry Lee's comeuppance. A well-told episode engagingly narrated by both vocals and instrumentation.

Amos Lee (no relation to Henry Lee) penned the fifth track "Black River" and it is sung soulfully by Dave Curley. The song is an appeal to various forces—"savior", "whiskey" and "river"—to "carry my cares away." It is a touching performance.

Two pieces—"Aoidh, Na Déan Cadal Idir" and "A Chomarigh Aoibhinn Ó"—were woven together with a superb segue from lullaby to ballad. Again, the vocals carry the strength of the pieces while the guitar and violin add the sweet melancholy to the track.

Dave Curley and Fionán de Barra

"The False Knight on the Road" is introduced by mandolin and guitar followed by Shannon's singing the ballad of a clever boy on his way to school. The boy meets the false knight (the devil) who tries to trick the youngster with riddles. The boy's victory lay in remaining fast and avoiding the devil's traps and tricks. The boy defeats the devil with wit, much like the Gospel account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness which many music historians believe to be the basis of this morality piece. RUNA offers the quick delivery of the song in corollary to the Gatling-gun pace of the devil's trickery. Fun stuff.

One of the most fascinating pieces of the whole album is "Ain't No Grave" by Claude Ely. This is an Appalachian gem—a précis of Ely's sermons regarding the exchange of a life of hardship and disappointment for a life free of troubles.

Ely's influence has been attributed to many influential musicians. Johnny Cash even recorded a cover of the song. RUNA, however, has taken the song—with its emphasis on

drive and rhythm—and turned it into a RUNA masterpiece of arrangement and performance.

The agonized violin backdrop to the vocal anguish is transformed into a powerful piece of hope and determination. Fionán de Barra's strident guitar with Curley's mandolin and White's skittering bow on violin is inspiring and invigorating. The mourning of the beginning surrenders to the thrill and energy of the conclusion. There is a hard groove here that is unforgettable. That groove almost turns this into a Gospel-Jazz piece—perhaps the most memorable on the album.

Cheryl Prashker

Kate Rusby's "Who Will Sing Me Lullabies?" is a sweet and sad lament. This is a beautiful unison effort by vocalists and musicians in accord with one another. The crossing vocals and instruments are absolutely charming.

"The Ruthless Wife" is the only track on this album written by Shannon Lambert-Ryan and Fionán de Barra. It is centered on the death of Shannon's great-great-grandfather in 1922. Again, Shannon's crystal-clean enunciation in her singing makes the tale completely understandable and entertaining. The chord changes are stellar and Cheryl's percussion is riveting. This is a classic-in-the-making.

The second "set" of the album is "The Land of Sunshine" and includes "Land of Sunshine," "Paddy Lynn's Delight," "Gan Ainm" and "Donald Blue." The set was compiled and arranged by Dave Curley. The play between violin, mandolin, banjo and guitar is intoxicating. This is a set that begs a dance and is pure joy.

Shannon Lambert-Ryan

The twelfth track is another couplet piece entitled "Rarie's Hill/Norah's Kitchen." Both of these are traditional songs. They are also reminiscent of certain moments on Jethro Tull's "Songs from the Wood" and I mean that as a compliment. The strong strum patterns and precise picking is intriguing. And Shannon's vocals...

Those vocals get their finest moment on "The Last Trip Home" by Davey Steele. Shannon's vocals soar and catch the wind as Fionán anchors the piece with delicate guitar and bass. It may very well be my favorite vocal piece for Shannon. It is warm and memorable and completely enthralling.

Celtic, Folk, Bluegrass, Gospel—even a brush of Jazz—and Blues, RUNA has developed an encompassing sound that will most certainly expand their fan base. Their arrangements are better than ever. Their musicianship is exciting, thrilling, warm and fun without ever losing their great skill at telling familiar tales.

While “Somewhere Along the Road” was indeed a landmark album, “Current Affairs” has shown RUNA pass by that landmark and moving on to new frontiers.

Visit RUNA's web site here: <http://www.runamusic.com/wordpress/>

and on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/RUNACelticmusic>

Purchase RUNA's "Current Affairs" at CD Baby here: <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/runa14>