

Na-Mara

In concert at Bolton Socialist Club, 29 September 2018.

A review by Simon Martinez



Na-Mara are an acoustic folk duo comprising Paul McNamara vocals and guitar (right), and Rob Garcia mandolin, mandola, guitar and vocals (left).

This Saturday night in Bolton they played their songs and music to a very appreciative audience which included members of the local Clarion Choir and friends of the IBMT.

The first half of the concert was very moving for me. The songs and music were about the 1930s, Spain and the Spanish Civil War. A time I have not experienced. A time my father and uncles did live through and which they rarely if ever talked about. They were children evacuated from Bilbao in 1937 who came to Britain on the *SS Habana* and who stayed in Britain as exiles. The song *Only for three months (Solo por tres meses)* evokes a time in my father's life too frightening for him to recall. A time when they had queued for registration, queued to go from Guecho to Santurce where the boat lay waiting for them, queued to go up onto the *Habana*, and then off into exile.

No wonder he, his brothers and the other children didn't talk about it. But not even to me?

The voices of Paul and Rob join together and complement each other. Weaving around each other their voices evoke the torment of the parting from family and country. The Spanish atmosphere is further developed by Rob's excellent playing of Galician and Asturian folk tunes transposed from pipes to mandola. Some light relief before the next song of the Basque Children *The silver duro*. A duro was worth 5 pesetas. On my first trip to Spain as a wide eyed 10 year old I was amazed at my grandmother's wealth. Hundreds and thousands of pesetas. And just to go to the shop for bread. Many will remember how little a peseta was worth! And the peseta is a long abandoned currency in the Spain of the euro. The song tells of the parting from parents on the dockside of Santurce. Children leaving parents, parents giving up their children to ensure their safety. 'The rain it did fall and the tears they did flow' are the lyrics of the chorus allowing me to live for a moment in his moment - the pain of my father. A pain he buried deep inside and did not talk about. Quite a moment for me to understand that parting and, as in the song, my dad's reunion with his mother in 1948 after eleven years apart. In 1948 he had been working for 6 years, had spent months at sea in the North Atlantic going to the USA and the USSR on convoy duty. No longer a boy when he last saw his mum and now a man. What times they lived through and what times current refugees live through even with mobile phones and email. And my father brought with him very very little. No one thing to treasure his love for family and home. Not even a silver duro. A duro in my ten year olds memory not even worth giving change for after bread had been paid for so a sweet was given instead.

Then with only a pause for a drink and a chat in the interval Na-Mara took me and the audience off into the world of radical English Folk Song. Like the voice of Paul and the bravura playing of Rob the two halves of the concert come together in a unity which made for a great evening. Catch them whilst they are singing these songs and live in the moment of the people and characters they sing of.

Details of Na-Mara's concerts will appear regularly here on the BCA'37UK website and can be found on their website www.na-mara.com.