



IRISH GAZETTE



April 2007

Gan Bua

"Live at Martyrs"

Own Label

This is a pretty nifty live set recorded at Martyrs' Restaurant & Pub (on the north side of Chicago), the kind of place that's just as comfortable presenting such national acts as Todd Snider, Shelby Lynn and the Rebirth Brass Band as they are lesser known lights like these guys. A quick glance at the list of people who've played there reveals such big Irish acts as Donal Lunny and Coolfin, Lawrence Nugent, and Liz Carroll too. Pretty heady company, and Gan Bua holds their own on that stage.

This is Gan Bua's second CD – with a largely new lineup, including St. Paulite Brian Miller (5 Mile Chase, Doon Ceili Band) – and it's as accomplished as some efforts by groups that have been together a lot longer. The instrumental interplay is tight and the vocal harmonies, sparse as they are, are nearly angelic. All of which is to say that the band's name – which roughly translates as "without talent" – should be taken with the tongue planted firmly in cheek.

The Chicago-based quintet – which also includes Christy Bain, Sean Gavin, Brian Hart and Jackie Moran – offers a fairly conventional set of hornpipes, reels, jigs, and story songs (some in Gaelic) to an attentive and appreciative audience. But don't be put off by my description of the performance as "fairly conventional"; by that I mean there are no great surprises in the set list. Some more established bands might do well to aspire to be as talented and entertaining as these guys.

Review by Jim Tarbox