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## **BBC Radio Folk on Two: UK- September 2004**

### **'Doolally'**

*Tantobie Records TTRCD 105*

(Photo by Keith Kitson)

Emerging, solo and stripey-shirted from his native north-east in 1980, it was only five years later that The Bad Pennies first roll call announced itself. Jez still gigs on his own of course, but the latest band line-up to complement his frets and harmonica is the most impressive to date. An elegant outfit featuring Kate Bramley's violin, Andy May on smallpipes (amongst other things) and Sean Taylor's bass, theirs is an immediately inviting, likeable and lush sound. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than on the title cut where the sheer imagination and individuality combined with the musical facility reveals Lowe as a peerless melodist and a songwriter of panoramic originality.

The tale of Dennis Donnini, the youngest British soldier to be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross in WW2, has more lyrical twists than the ears can initially take in. A phrase such as "he thought he'd be safer selling gelato wafer" is worthy of Paul McCartney's finer moments and as a writer, Jez has never been less than intriguing - here he reveals himself as a lyricist of depth and ambition. Donnini's family still lives, incidentally, in Jez's hometown of Easington and though he's often been seen as a mirror of Co. Durham's people and concerns, it's been apparent for a good while that Lowe's observations have been far from insular. Throughout this superbly realised album, a basic humanity and wisdom (oh, and modesty too) shine through and these are cogent statements that will stand the test of time.

Whether humorous, (Vikings) trenchant, (Bloodstained) affectionate, (Sugar Water Sunday) or stigmatic (Keep Them Bairns Away) these delicately-handled but straightforward songs never mask feeling with irony.

A good few years ago, I wrote that if the solo Bad Penny was Jez Lowe's Rubber Soul, I couldn't wait for his Revolver. Doolally might well surpass his own private Sgt. Pepper and let's hope that Abbey Road is a long time coming!

Clive Pownceby - September 2004

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