

[http://www.grandmarais-mn.com/newsherald/?section\\_id=28&story\\_id=235970](http://www.grandmarais-mn.com/newsherald/?section_id=28&story_id=235970)

## 'Wintersong' is quiet, beautiful homage to season

Jay Andersen / Editor

Last updated: Thursday, December 20th, 2007 02:01:30 PM



*Photo by David Brunet*

Michael Monroe released "Wintersong" at a concert at the Cedar Cultural Center in Minneapolis. He will be at Birchbark Books & Gifts from 2-4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 22.

It's easy to take local artists for granted because we see and hear their work so often. They live among us and familiarity can sometimes lead to forgetting just how special they are. For example, I think Michael Monroe is pretty ubiquitous around here; he's always playing some place in the county — what's more, he lives in my neighborhood.

It took sitting down the other night and purposely listening to his new CD, "Wintersong" to make me realize just how incredibly special he is.

This album is nothing short of amazing, and not in a flashy and glitzy way at all. This is a straight-ahead understated acoustic mix of vocals and instrumentals evocative of winter. This is not music to turn your crank, it's music to quiet your heart.

All too often music is a background soundtrack for what we happen to be doing at the moment. I can't recommend "Wintersong" for that. This is a sit-down, shut-up-and-listen piece of work. Anything less is not fair to the music or the artist.

Six of the 10 songs are vocals, the others are instrumentals. Michael includes a wonderful version of the Joni Mitchell song, "River" and the best treatment I've ever heard of Donovan's classic, "Catch the Wind."

His own songs have warm and beautiful lyrics, and the instrumental pairing with Marc Anderson's percussion on "Snow Leopard" is stunning. The instrumental "Melting" is like icicles dripping in the sun.

But for me, the traditional seasonal song, "Hey Ho Nobody Home" is the masterpiece of this collection. It takes me back to my days as a folk-music junkie, and I've heard it done many times and often badly. Michael's fugue-like treatment of this fine old chestnut is perfection.

"Wintersong" is mellow Michael and a good part of the feeling is derived from Dave Seaton's guitars. Their response and full sound provide a matchless blend to the whole mood of this album. There is no better showcase for these fine instruments than the playing they receive on "Wintersong."

I could go on, song by song, but I'd rather you listen for yourself. And, as I said, just listen. Listen to the words, the musical phrasing, even listen to the silence between the notes. Approach "Wintersong" carefully, respectfully — it's as unique