

Off the Beaten Track

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JODY STECHER
Oh The Wind And Rain
Appleseed 1030

It takes only a few minutes to completely fall under the spell of the music Jody Stecher has created on his latest release, *Oh The Wind And Rain*. He is a phenomenal musician and folk music scholar and these eleven ancient and precious ballads could hardly have landed in better hands.

Jody combines his own vocals, banjo, mandolin and oud talents with the bass vocals of Larry Hanks, Hank Bradley's fiddle and the old-time banjo of Kate Brislin. The instruments are arranged in a way that is at the same time simple and stunningly compelling. Stecher's respect for tradition, reverence to the singers who came before him, and commitment to leaving something of himself in every song are equally important elements in the mix.

A perfect example of this is his treatment of "Edmund And Emily." Not only does he skillfully piece together this ballad from a variety of Irish and American sources, he does it mostly *a capella* with short, stark guitar interludes. Ten minutes later the listener is completely transported to the world of the story and is hypnotized by the poetry. The spell is then wonderfully broken by an old-timey treatment of "Little Johnny Sailed From London," complete with mountain fiddle and banjo. Once your toe is tapping, Jody pulls you back into a state of meditation on the title cut. This version of "Oh The Wind And Rain" begins with what seems like an improvised tone poem complete with delta blues-like moaning combined with the exotic sound of the oud and mandolin. Before you know it, the dreamscape changes again and the ballad, as most of us know it, begins. It is a bril-

liant interpretation but only someone with Jody's skill and knowledge could pull it off.

The CD continues in this fashion, going in and out of dream with versions of songs like "Rhinordine," "Lord Leitrim," and perhaps the most well known of all ballads, "Barbary Ellen."

To use this recording as background music would be a mistake. I suggest you sit down in a quiet place, put on the headphones and let these old songs and this skilled artist work their magic. And don't forget to fall into the intriguing, ballad inspired paintings by Martha Lewis that were thankfully included, in full color, throughout the CD booklet. — MW

**MALCOLM DALGLISH
AND THE OOLITES**
Pleasure
Ooolitic Music 1112

The concept of making folk music "legitimate" for the concert stage has been the death knell for many would-be traditional music enthusiasts. Upon hearing the sugar-coated renditions of orchestrated and vocal arrangements of folk tunes and songs, the uninitiated listener is much less likely to be interested in the more authentic performances by source musicians. A possible reason for this is that while classically trained composers have made the arrangements with sincere intent, they just aren't up to the task.

How long has it been since you attended a high school choral concert? Try it sometime. My son's high school choir director has eschewed these traditional makeovers. The kids really enjoy hearing the real thing. Guess what, their enthusiasm is contagious! Nathan's director even had the foresight to have him play mandolin during a Celtic piece at a recent concert. As the crowd filed out that was the tune they were all talking about.

Malcolm Dalglish has approached the subject of traditional music for the concert stage by viewing it from his standpoint as a traditional musician. However, he is

not your typical backwoods folk musician, as he studied at both Oberlin and the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. He was smitten with the hammered dulcimer in the early '70s and his virtuosity has inspired many players since his early days performing with Grey Larsen. Those wonderful June Appal recordings are treasured by many of us who were hearing the hammered dulcimer for the first time. *Metamora* was the next step, with crooked self-composed tunes and modal harmonies. More recordings followed, placing the hammered dulcimer in different combinations through his association with Windham Hill records.

In 1990, Malcolm recorded a Ceremony of Songs for Choir called *Hymnody Of The Earth*, a song cycle featuring the American Boychoir (of which he was a member in his youth) under the direction of James Litton, the percussion of Glen Valez and settings of the poetry of Wendell Berry. It was very much a warm-up for his new recording *Pleasure*.

Pleasure is a song cycle of original and arranged traditional tunes featuring the Ooolites, a choir made up of young singers age 12 to 20. Some recognizable names are members of the Ooolites. Suzannah and Georgia Rose Armstrong-Park from the Northern Harmony Singers and the grandchildren of George and Jenny Armstrong, the first family of folk music in Chicago, are perhaps the best known, but a number of Dalglish siblings and other children of various backing musicians are members. Perhaps the reason these arrangements work so well is that these young people know what these tunes should sound like. As young people in the '90s, besides having a strong background in the tradition they also bring more modern influences such as snippets of Bobby McFerrin's Voicestra, the vocal styling of Clannad and even some Lambert, Hendricks and Ross to their vocal timbre.

What a great time they must have had recording these tunes! Malcolm has managed to be mostly accompanist to the choir.

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His hammered dulcimer is as pianistic as I have heard and the recording is so well made you can picture the group watching for his direction as the dulcimer weaves in and out within the arrangements. The additional backing of fiddle, the occasional keyboard, guitar and pipes are ever so subtle and are used very economically. The vocal ensemble is broken down into sections to offer variety to this highly tuneful collection.

Perhaps the most successful tune on the recording is the title track "Pleasure." It is sung much as a mouth music piece with jazz overtones. True to the mouth music tradition, "Pleasure" is sung unaccompanied. It turns out to be a mini-lesson in world music vocal styling. Other tunes feature a strong Zulu influence and even some Tuvan throat singing tossed in for good measure. None of these are thrust at you, just added to the roux to make a perfect combination of flavors.

From the opening track "Swifts," to the finale – a great re-write of the fiddle tune "Sail Away," this is a joyous recording. It is perhaps best listened to in its entirety, as a classical song cycle would be in the concert setting. Pick a sunny afternoon with the cold winds howling outside and prepare to be transported to new and exciting places. The delicacy and quality of the arrangement on *Pleasure* make it just that, a pleasure to listen to over and over again. Here's a hint: get one for your high school or church choir director. Remember, enthusiasm is contagious! — TD



NEW YORK CITY LABOR CHORUS
On The March!
Songs Of Struggle And Inspiration
New York City Labor Chorus 3

The New York City Labor Chorus has been performing everywhere from picket lines to concert halls since 1991, and not just in the Big Apple. Their itinerary in the last few years has included Washington, Philadelphia and Sweden (not necessarily in that order). The more than 100 members of the Chorus are drawn from the rank and file of more than 20 locals in New York City, and are led by choral director

Geoffrey Fairweather, with accompanist Eustace Johnson. The 17 performances on this disc, covering more than 50 minutes, were recorded live on Sunday, June 1, 1997 at the Martin Luther King, Jr. High School. Joining the Chorus as special guests were Pete Seeger, who offers a short narration, and bluesman Guy Davis, who sings and plays his own song, "If You Love Somebody." The selection of songs reflects the multi-ethnic, nondenominational makeup of the Chorus, as well as their approach to the music: "Go Down, Moses," "We Shall Overcome," "Step By Step," "Viva La Quince Brigada," "Freiheit!" and "The House I Live In," to name a few. As the title of the disc suggests, though, this is music that is making no-bones-about-it political and social statements. If you're not the sort of person who "looks for the union label," *On The March!* may not quite be your cup of tea. It's good music, though, well performed, directed and recorded. Particularly, soloists Dorothy Duncan, Manny Brown, Percy McRae and Jeffrey Vogel deserve special mention for their efforts. — JL

FRANK HAMILTON
Long Lonesome Home
Indian Trail 609

For more than 40 years, Frank Hamilton has been one of the unsung heroes of the folk revival. Among his many accomplishments, he helped found Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, helped to adapt "We Shall Overcome" and held Pete Seeger's slot in the Weavers for a year. However, Hamilton has been severely under recorded in his career, which helps make this collection of mostly-traditional American folk songs a very welcome release.

There's a familiarity to this recording that seems to recall old times spent singing songs in kitchens, on porches and around campfires with old friends. And indeed, these songs are mostly old friends to anyone who grew up in the folk revival. Hamilton mixes cowboy songs like "Utah Carroll" and "Buffalo Skinners" with blues like "Michigan Water," hobo train songs like "Jay Gould's Daughter," and Woody Guthrie classics like "Do Re Mi" and "Pastures Of Plenty." A nice added touch are the spoken-intros to three of the songs that gives us some insight into Hamilton's days with the Weavers, and also to Woody Guthrie, who Hamilton knew in the years before Guthrie's hospitalization in the 1950s.

Most of the songs are engaging solo performances. Hamilton is joined on a couple of songs by his wife, Mary

Hamilton, and on one song by Roger McGuinn, a one-time Hamilton student from the Old Town School. — MR

JAY UNGAR AND MOLLY MASON
Harvest Home
Angel 56720

In the liner notes of Jay & Molly's latest, there are two stated purposes for the music presented. One is to celebrate seasons, farming and a simpler time. The other is to show how folk music and orchestral music can and have worked together. Missions accomplished.

For a complete picture of the achievements of these two music makers, and for a taste of their warm and extraordinary lives, I would refer you to the feature article in an earlier issue of *Sing Out!* (SO! v.42#2). For a little taste of this exquisite musical offering ... read on.

The recording begins appropriately with a song from Molly called "Bound For Another Harvest Home." Dedicated to her grandparents who were farmers in the northwest, this song celebrates the earth and the people who farm it. Because music and dance are so important to the communities in which farms are centered, they follow this with a set of dance tunes that remind us why Jay continues to be one of the best fiddlers in world. The tunes are warmly familiar and all relate to the theme of the seasons and working the land. "Haymaker's Hoedown" is an Ungar original that features Dirk Powell on banjo and frolics along in the mountain string band tradition. *Harvest Home* continues along while changing moods like the season. There are waltzes, a meditative hymn, and even a lively Cajun number that features Christine Balfa on vocals.

There is, of course, a long tradition of classical music composers borrowing melodies from the folk music repertoire. The most notable example in this country is the popular works of Aaron Copeland. "Hoedown," perhaps the most memorable dance from his *Rodeo*, used the melody of the old fiddle tune "Bonaparte's Retreat." Here, with the help of the Nashville Chamber Orchestra, Jay and Molly begin the orchestral portion of this recording with an arrangement of the two pieces that blends the styles so cleverly you'll have trouble telling where one ends and the other begins. It's delightful. They follow this with an orchestral arrangement of Jay's most popular tune, "Ashokan Farewell."

All of this leads to "The Harvest Home Suite," where all the themes and musical forms blend together in one swirling har-

monic mix. This suite for orchestra, fiddle and guitar will move you from harvest to harvest, with lush passages and familiar melodies from earlier in the recording. The result is ... well ... something that needs to be heard. — MW



VARIOUS

*Traditional Fiddle Music Of The Ozarks,
Vol 1: Along The Eastern Crescent*
Rounder 0435

SNAKE CHAPMAN

Walnut Gap
Rounder 0418

DWIGHT LAMB

Joseph Won A Coated Fiddle
Rounder 0429

These collections in Rounders' new "North American Traditions" series document varied but related old-time fiddle styles and abound with uncommon tunes and strong playing, and series editor Mark Wilson contributed notes with genuine feeling for the music and musicians. A self-proclaimed "propagandist of true [traditional] fiddle style," Wilson dismisses much contemporary fiddling as "watered down in pungency by extraneous classical and pop influences." This may be true. Yet traditional music in America has always been exposed to, and affected (sometimes even favorably) by, "extraneous" influences. In fact, several of the fiddlers on these collections, most notably Kentuckian Owen "Snake" Chapman and Iowan Dwight Lamb speak, in the liner notes, of learning tunes from the radio. Lamb's "Dickson County Blues" would have been impossible without the influence of ragtime, and many of Chapman's tunes cite 1930s and '40s radio sources. "Hickory Leaf," for example, learned by Chapman from Arthur Smith broadcasts, was based on the commercial version of "Bonaparte's Retreat" popularized by Pee Wee King and Kaye Starr. Ozark fiddler Howe Teague's "Everything" clearly reflects 1930s popular music, and Teague cites a cowboy movie as the source for "Cluckin' Hen." Clearly the line between traditional and popular culture is a fine one.

Still, Wilson's dedication to old-time fiddling and players is admirable, and these

collections contain many obscure and localized tunes. Lamb, who learned a lot of his repertoire from Iowa-Nebraska fiddlers and much of his technique from radio fiddler Uncle Bob Walters, plays in a generally unadorned, angular style reminiscent of New England Yankee fiddling. He also occasionally embellishes the melody with quick grace notes ("Bells Of America"), typical, according to Wilson, of the region's 19th century fiddling. Other Lamb tunes, while clearly rooted in the past century, also suggest a broad range of influences – Appalachian ("A Bob Walters Tune In G"), Irish ("Jimmy In The Swamps"), Franco-Canadian ("Jake's Best Reel"), Scandinavian ("Danish Galop"), and even Cajun ("The Thrasher's Tune"). In addition to fiddle tunes backed by Lynn Holsclaw's guitar, Lamb delivers a few button accordion pieces and some examples of unaccompanied fiddling. The latter are particularly effective and serve as reminders of the fiddle's leading role in the evolution of American stringband music.

Chapman, a retired coal miner; who started as a banjo player and who first learned tunes from his father before turning to the radio, also supplies several evocative solo pieces ("Boatin' Up Sandy"). His fiddling is full of bluesy slides ("Humphrey's Country Blues") and minor shadings ("Cat Tracks") that give it its characteristic Appalachian melancholy. Yet Chapman also displays rhythmic bowing ("Mad As A Hornet") and deft fingering ("Nubbin Ridge") that, abetted by Paul Smith's contrapuntal 3-finger banjo playing, lean towards bluegrass. On ("Supertime Frolic Waltz") the fiddle-banjo combination evokes 19th century parlor music.

Like Chapman's, many of the Ozark fiddlers' tunes have minstrel show (a form of popular entertainment) ancestors sources. The players on this first of three projected Ozark collections represent approaches found along the eastern crescent of Missouri and across northern Arkansas into Oklahoma. Some of the tunes have clear Appalachian cousins (Stan Jackson's "Big 'Taters In The Sandy Land"), while others, like Lamb's tunes, point to the impact of French-Canadian music (Gene Goforth's "Ragged Bill"), ragtime (Howe Teague's "Wabash Foxtrot") and the blues (Audrey Handle's "Drowning Creek"). As an added bonus, Violet Hensley's "Uncle Henry" and "Wang, Wang, Blues" display the collection's most unusual accompanying instrument – the African-American derived jawbone, perhaps making its only recorded appearance here.

The booklets with the Lamb and Chapman collections (and the series' Web site, www.rounder.com/rounder/nat) also

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contain extensive autobiographical notes by the fiddlers, allowing them to tell their own stories. Fuller discussions of the styles would have been useful as well. Nevertheless, these collections bode well for the North American Tradition Series as they help broaden our knowledge of what was once America's perhaps most ubiquitous folk instrument. — MG



BENNY THOMASSON

Say Old Man Can You Play The Fiddle
Voyager 345

Ever since Eck Robertson recorded "Sally Gooden" in 1922, Texas has been recognized as the home of many great fiddlers. Major and Lewis Franklin, Norman Solomon and Bartow Riley come immediately to mind. These were players descended from the tradition established by Robertson, but no single descendant was as influential as Benny Thomasson.

Benny was born in Rannels County and raised in Gatesville, Texas. His dad and uncle were well-known local fiddlers and the family was acquainted with many of the finest, including Eck Robertson.

Contest fiddling is a big part of the Texas tradition and Benny entered his first contest at the age of 19, confident to be among the top finishers among the 200 contestants. He played his three tunes and to his surprise, no one noticed. He was disappointed with the results but vowed to work on his style until he would receive the recognition he felt he deserved. Benny states in the liner notes, "And that made me work harder, so I worked on those things for years and years." This dedication paid off handsomely as Benny would go on to win countless fiddle contests, including the Texas state fiddling contest 15 times, the World Championship in Crockett, Texas three times and the National Fiddle Championship at Weiser, Idaho. In the process, a style of fiddling known as Texas Contest Fiddling was born. A network of disciples was created, including Byron Berline, Barbara Lamb and, of course, Mark O'Connor.

This style takes a standard tune and adds variation after variation until the fiddler's personality finally becomes apparent. Sometimes these variations make

the tune unrecognizable by the final ground, but not so the fiddler's individual style. You may not know what he's playing by the end, but you know it's Benny playing it! This remains the standard by which many fiddlers are judged in the various contests throughout the US.

The first 20 tunes on this generous 32-tune collection were recorded in Vivian and Phil Williams' living room in Seattle with the informality of friends getting together for a session. There's even the sound of a crackling fire in the fireplace and the glitches and missed chords are left in for all to hear. Benny is relaxed and obviously having a wonderful time.

The next set of four tunes was recorded in Weiser, Idaho at the 1972 fiddle contest, with Benny at his competitive best. Variation after variation of "Dusty Miller," "Shucking The Bush," "Tugboat" and "Tom And Jerry" seem to come effortlessly from Benny's fiddle. This contest set is followed by two jam session selections, "Bonnie Kate" and "Mother's Reel." The recording is completed with a selection of tunes recorded in concert, including the classics "Midnight On The Water" and "Lime Rock."

This is a recording especially suited to fiddlers, but special notice must be given to the fine backup by Benny's son, Jerry, on the tenor guitar, and the various sock rhythm players on the six string, including Vivian Williams, David Johns and Dudley Hill. These players are no less virtuosic than Benny as they follow his every variation with a vast collection of chord inversions.

I need to emphasize the casual nature of these recordings. Nothing polished here, in fact it's very much like sitting adjacent to a wonderful jam at a festival and allowing the flow to transport you to a place beyond the simple and mundane. Sometimes you just want it to go on forever. — TD

MARSHALL WILBORN

Root 5

Pinecastle 1094

As the jacket's back cover notes explain, "In music, 'root' refers to the first note of the scale. 'Five' refers to the fifth note of the scale. These notes are the fundamentals of bass accompaniment." And in Wilborn's hands, the bass goes far beyond its traditional role as a backup instrument.

The CD showcases a baker's dozen bass and banjo numbers, employing the talents of a virtual who's who of banjo players, including Wilborn himself (overdubbed of course) on the timeless "Careless Love."

Wilborn is the bass player for the Lynn Morris Band and the bluegrass supergroup Longview. He also worked with the legendary Johnson Mountain Boys. Here he tastefully plays his way through a variety of styles. His exquisite, understated slap bass technique, swing plucking and straight-ahead bluegrass attack are all demonstrated in a clean, fluid style. For those accustomed to hearing Wilborn with the above-mentioned three groups, there's very little traditional bluegrass here, yet this straying from the bluegrass fold should not turn off purists, as the diverse styles are certainly complementary. Among the players Wilborn calls upon are Pete Wernick, Tom Adams, Tony Furtado and Lynn Morris, who offers the album's only clawhammer backing on Wilborn's self-penned "Benny's Revenge." Tenor banjo takes the spotlight on two Stephen Foster classics, "The Old Folks At Home," and "Oh, Susanna." The one vocal offering is "I've Been All Around This World," performed with a swingly bass jaunt to Ron Stewart's five-string bluegrass banjo.

The entire release is a snappy, well-chosen, thoughtfully-paced compilation. This is no "dueling bass-banjo" recording; and Wilborn's bass and his array of banjo partners provide a full band sound. Take a trip on *Root 5* and you'll hear some of the best music playing around these parts. — SPL

DIRK POWELL

Hand Me Down

Rounder 0444

On his second solo release, versatile multi-instrumentalist Dirk Powell pays musical homage to his family's eastern Kentucky roots and particularly to the memory of his grandfather, fiddle and banjo player James Clarence Hay. Powell's parents relocated the family to Ohio, and Powell has since settled in southwestern Louisiana where he helps serve up Cajun music in Balfa Toujours. But he has certainly not strayed far from his Appalachian heritage. Powell has a sure touch on both fiddle and banjo, whether leading a group of energetic pickers through a romping "Cumberland Gap" or finding the banjo's warm, inner voice on "Been All Around This World, Baby Mine." On the latter, Powell demonstrates his clean, drop-thumb frailing on his grandfather's old Sears Harmony banjo, proving that you don't need a million dollar instrument to make great-sounding music. Powell favors the deep shades of the banjo's tone palette. He draws remarkable sustain from his fretless, wood-faced banjo on "Hop High, My Lulu Gal" and plumbs the 5-string's other-worldly depths on the introduction to

“Ride With The Devil” as he returns a tune composed for the movies to the Appalachian tradition that inspired it. Powell also allows his fiddle to show its soulful side, supplying a reedy, droning accompaniment to three songs that showcase Ginny Hawker’s compelling, West Virginia vocals and that provide the collection’s starkest and oldest sounds – a ballad (“The Silk Merchant’s Daughter”), a gospel song (“Keys To The Kingdom”), and a lament (“Poor Soldier”). Hawker shares the vocal spotlight with Jim Miller, also an effective singer, whether on “Western Country,” driven by Powell’s prancing fiddle, or on the mournful “Lulu Gal.” “The Cradle, The Coffin, The Cross On The Hill,” written by Powell, receives a soulful reading from Tracy Schwarz, with Hawker adding a lonesome harmony and Powell a third voice and Carter Family-style lead guitar. Powell also contributes several original tunes; each could easily be mistaken for traditional. On “Leaning On A Wall” Powell’s sinuous fiddling intertwines with John Hermann’s plunky frailing, while on “Near And Far” his banjo dances solo, again reveling in its lower registers. This wonderful album’s only flaw is that there’s too much rhythm guitar in some of the mixes, making such full band songs as “Little Maggie” and “Going Back To Fielden” a bit heavy-handed. Still, Powell’s hand-me-downs are a gift to old-time music lovers. His grandfather must be proud. — MG



DOLLY PARTON
The Grass Is Blue
Sugar Hill 3900

Joining the ranks of other country and pop artists who have acknowledged their roots by producing a “traditional” recording, Dolly Parton declares *The Grass Is Blue* in this, her first bluegrass recording. Recognized as an “American original” with an unmistakable voice, Parton brings back a certain edge here reminiscent of recordings from her early years. The combination of the drive, the instrumentation, and the song selection all revive a feeling lost when country and bluegrass went their separate ways.

Backed up by a stellar selection of musicians, Parton compellingly belts out such classics as “I Still Miss Someone” and “I Wonder Where You Are Tonight.” Her

own “Steady As The Rain” is a standout – dynamic, great lyrics and the potential to become a bluegrass standard. Among those lending their talents to this impeccable production are Rhonda Vincent, Alison Krauss, Claire Lynch, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas and Jim Mills, to name only a few.

With the Hazel Dickens song, “A Few Old Memories,” Parton displays her genuine rootsy side, with her slow, emotive vocals, a sad Dobro behind her, and harmonies provided by Rhonda Vincent and Patty Loveless. There’s really no “down time” here, but Parton’s originals hold a special place in their superb representation of the continuity as well as the contemporaneity of her traditional-style writing. Listen to “Endless Stream Of Tears,” “Will He Be Waiting For Me,” or the title cut, a bluesy bluegrass lament of getting over a lost love.

While the album opens with a rousing, sock-it-to-me bluegrass rendition of Billy Joel’s “Travelin’ Prayer,” the final cut brings it all home again with the intense, four-part *a capella* gospel number, “I Am Ready.” Dolly Parton delivers high energy bluegrass from beginning to end. — SPL

IIIRD TYME OUT
John & Mary
Rounder 0463

“Powerful” describes the opening, title cut of *John & Mary*, the latest release from IBMA’s Vocal Group of the Year IIIRD Tyme Out. Featuring Russell Moore’s crystal voice backed solely by mandola for the first minute, proceeding with only spare, subtle instrumentation, “John And Mary” is a compelling example of the innovative blending of traditional and contemporary bluegrass that places this group at the top of its craft. One of two songs penned by band members, the number puts a modern soul spin to an old-timey sound.

The second original, “Lovin’ You Goin’ Blind,” is a rock-solid bluegrass contribution to the album’s well of excellent material. “Snow Angel,” written by brothers Billy and Terry Smith, continues the Monroe tradition with outstanding lyrics. Loretta Lynn’s and Teddy Wilburn’s “I Pray My Way Out Of Trouble” provides yet another superb platform for Moore’s rich tenor voice, while “Bobby And Millie” as well as Hugh Moffatt’s “Rose Of My Heart” are engagingly beautiful. The high-speed “Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind” demonstrates adeptly the band’s exacting vocal phrasing as does the gospel harmony singing on “Just Call On Him.”

Mike Hartgrove’s playful fiddle work is a delight on the never-old “Milk Cow Blues” (catch the doo-wop backup vocals!). Expressive Dobro work by guest musician Rob Ickes adds a complementary touch throughout the recording.

Masterfully recorded at Doobie Shea Studios, *John & Mary* is dynamic in every aspect. A must have for bluegrass and any acoustic music enthusiast. — SPL

PAM WEEKS
Waiting For The Perseids
Outer Green 8939

Hooray for the teachers! Can you recall an instructor who really inspired you? Perhaps it was a coach or even an economics teacher. Often it’s a music teacher. It takes a special breed of musician to teach young players. A certain amount of it is the ability to bring out the very best in another person. Sometimes it takes a good long while to develop talent in another person but a real teacher never gives up.

In reading the biographical information about fiddler/dulcimer player Pam Weeks, a profile can be drawn. She’s been a street musician, plays with two ensembles PB&J and Scrod Pudding, but even more important she teaches young players of all ages. She has taught at Pinewoods Folk Music Camp and the Blue Mountain Lake Dulcimer Symposium, as well as many adult education classes. She has organized the L/A (Lewiston/Auburn Maine) Youth Folk Ensemble, a group comprised of young musicians aged 10-18 who are interested in studying traditional music. She is also director of a newly created community folk chorus. One busy teacher!

Waiting For The Perseids is an all instrumental recording featuring a mixture of traditional and newly composed dance tunes. Members of Scrod Pudding and PB&J contribute their multi-instrumental talents to the recording. This is mostly Northern music, that is, dance music with a decided Celtic or contra-dance base. Most of the tunes are arranged in medleys. An obvious difference when first listening to *Waiting For The Perseids* is the speed with which most of these tunes are played. They are stately in their moderate tempo, allowing the simplicity of the melody to shine through. At first I felt that this was a sign of a less than assured player, but with subsequent listening the beauty and the variety of the tunes and the arrangements become clear.

Pam is a fine fiddler with a delicate touch that indicates a classical background. Her Appalachian dulcimer playing is lively

and has harpsichord flavor to its intricate sound. I found myself checking the credits during the medley of “Dan The Clobber/Brandy’s Trip To Tumbledown/The Merry-Go-Round” to check if it wasn’t a keyboard instrument taking the lead. The title tune, written about the Perseid meteor shower, which occurs each August 12th and 13th, is a tune that belies its roots in Maine. It sounds much more middle-European, and the traditional Scandinavian hambo “Trollspolka” transports us to the land of the midnight sun, with dancing feet all ablaze.

As any great teacher should, Pam describes the circumstances under which she learned or was inspired to write each of the tunes in the liner notes. She describes a visit with Bill and Libby Hicks on Okracoke Island in North Carolina as the source of the tune “Cattle In The Cane,” a part of one of the few Southern medleys on the recording. She has learned other tunes from sources such as The Usual Suspects and Alan Block as well as fellow members of Scrod Pudding.

It’s on her own compositions where Pam’s fiddling is the strongest. “Sebec Lake Waltz,” a lovely and delicate tune, is dedicated to a fellow Scrod whose cabin has contributed much-needed solace through the years. “Tumbledown Switchback” is as crooked and foreboding as the hiking trail it’s named after.

The recording offers interesting twists in accompaniment. Percussion here, hammered dulcimer there, even some harmony fiddle, piano and mandolin for variety. No element is overused and this recording was most obviously a labor of love for all of the players. The listener is offered a tune cycle with a wonderful, airy quality.

Pam has described *Waiting For The Perseids* as music inspired by the beautiful mountains and lakes of inland Maine. The listener is transported to lands far away from home. After all, isn’t that what a great teacher is supposed to do? — TD

LOST HIGHWAY

Headin’ Down That Lost Highway
Hay Holler 1345

The iconic image of the “Lost Highway” has been a staple of the country music industry for the last half-century, from the moment in 1949 that Hank Williams turned Leon Payne’s song of the same name into a standard in the repertoires of honky tonk and bluegrass bands in every corner of North America. There could well be hundreds of bands that have called themselves Lost Highway over the years,

but these guys are no latecomers with pretensions – this is a band with a history. In the Southern California bluegrass scene of the 1970s, guitarist Ken Orrick and mandolinist Ken Harvey were the mainstays of a lineup that at one time featured a young Stuart Duncan on fiddle. That version of the band broke up during the ’80s, but as the ’90s drew to a close Orrick and Harvey reformed the group, adding Dick Brown on banjo, Paul Shelasky on fiddle and Marshall Andrews on bass. After making a big splash at the annual International Bluegrass Music Association trade show in 1998, they signed on with Virginia-based Hay Holler Records, and *Headin’ Down That Lost Highway* is their first effort for that label – and a good one at that.

Liner notes can generally be expected to contain more than a little hyperbole, but Chris Stuart (himself a well-known bluegrass singer and songwriter) is on the mark when he invokes the memory of Carter Stanley in his comments. It’s not that Orrick and Harvey sound exactly like Carter and Ralph – this is most definitely not a Stanley clone band – it’s more that their writing and singing evokes the same kind of feeling and imagery that distinguished the Stanleys’ music from that of Bill Monroe, Reno and Smiley, and the rest of the first-generation bluegrass greats. The thought that will likely come to mind among many listeners is apt to be that they don’t *sound* like a California band, but then, Orrick is a transplanted Tennessean. Most of the tunes on *Headin’ Down That Lost Highway* are originals by either Orrick or Harvey, though Shelasky contributes a fine effort, “Your Heart And A Promise,” and they do a good job with “Willow Creek Dam” (written by the great bluegrass songwriters Pete Goble and Leroy Drumm), Stephen Foster’s “Little Annie,” and the album’s only instrumental, “Bantry Bay.” Oddly enough, it’s the latter cut that may be the most representative of the band’s sound. The contrast between Smith’s banjo and Shelasky’s gives the tune an eerie feeling that’s part rocky Irish shore and part Appalachian hollow.

The continuing curse among bluegrass bands is that, all too often, there’s an uneven balance between the instrumentals and the vocals, and it seems to be the case that, more often than not, it’s the latter that suffers most. The woods are full of bands that can pick the daylight out of whatever they take a crack at, but it’s unusual to find bands that know what bluegrass singing is all about, and even more unusual to find bands as well-balanced as Lost Highway. All five are good instrumentalists, both Orrick and Harvey are solid lead vocalists,

the trios are nicely done, and the gospel quartet “Forever In Glory” is a treat as well. In addition to the above named cuts, the opening “Roll On River” is likely to be a favorite as well. All in all, it seems that the band’s name matches their sound pretty well. — JL



TOP DRAWER STRING BAND

Top Drawer String Band

Fossil 1199

With the increased popularity of traditional dance and the necessity for music especially designed for those communities, many musicians have begun to play dance music. This could be square, contra, ethnic or any combination of styles. Few organizations are as talented and bouncy as Michigan’s Top Drawer String Band.

The band has been playing square and contradances since 1978 with a floating membership. As in the case of many dance bands, Top Drawer started out as a house band for local community dances. The present configuration includes master violin maker Brian Bishop on fiddle, Laura Stein on piano and the multi-talented Joel Mabus on banjo, guitar and fiddle. The recording features about an equal number of traditional and newly composed tunes by members Bishop and Mabus. The sign of a good new tune is that it is unrecognizable beside the traditional repertoire. In that regard this recording succeeds in all areas.

Did I mention that these are top-notch players? Bishop is as comfortable with traditional American tunes like “The Falls Of Richmond” as he is with the more Celtic-flavored contradance tunes. His is an authoritative and driving fiddle style as he leads his fellow players through medley after medley. “The Big Medley,” a collection of no less than eight tunes strung together, is a perfect example. It is much simpler to keep a two or three tune set on track, but keeping the drive going after the sixth or seventh tune is the sign of a true master.

The rhythm is in great hands with Laura on piano and Joel on guitar and banjo. Joel Mabus is well known in folk circles for his many recordings of traditional and original tunes as well as flatpick guitar and clawhammer banjo. Laura is a transplanted Boston dance pianist and her rhythm is al-

ways steady with just a hint of bombast. For exceptional rhythm playing sample the Brian Bishop original medley of "Big Nick's Rolling Reel" into "Sean Rio's." The rhythm is absolutely fantastic. It's so close to the edge that you feel the musicians will self-destruct at any moment. Mabus' sliding guitar chords and the piano swooping in and out of the tunes makes for a truly exhilarating listen and must be a sure-fire winner at the local dance.

The beautiful waltz "Lasses Of Janiveer," a Mabus original, features Joel on fiddle and Laura on piano. It follows "Big Nick's ..." and its loveliness serves almost as a sorbet between courses of tasty fiddling as it's followed by "The Big Medley."

The true test of a dance band for me is if they are persuasive enough in rhythm and musical talent as well as diverse enough to sustain an evening of dancing as well as listening. Top Drawer is that and much more. The band was named after a comment made by a caller about Laura's piano playing. It's a fitting description for a truly Top Drawer String Band. — TD

JOE THOMPSON
Family Tradition
Rounder 2161

Once a thriving part of community social life in the southern Appalachians, black stringband music, like its white counterpart, arose from pre-Civil War fiddle and banjo tunes drawn from both black and white sources. The music continued to flow freely between both groups well into the 20th century, intermingling in a way that transcended political, social, and economic segregation, until it fell victim to the intrusion of mass media and especially rock-and-roll following World War II. North Carolina fiddler Joe Thompson is one of the few contemporary survivors of the black stringband tradition, having been coaxed out of musical retirement, along with his banjo-playing cousin, the late Odell Thompson, in 1970 by folklorist Christopher Lornell. This collection is the first recording to focus on Joe Thompson's fiddling.

Accompanied on most tracks by banjo (played by producer Bob Carlin), guitar, and bass, Thompson's fiddling is rough-edged with lots of slides and double stops. His singing is strong and expressive, whether on dance tunes or religious songs. On the live "Oil In My Vessel," tastefully abetted by Scott Ainslie's slide guitar, Thompson joins "Keep Your Lamp Trimmed And Burning" and "Amazing Grace," while he sets the fiddle aside for an elegiac treatment

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It's a guitar of
FREEDOM ...

of "I Shall Not Be Moved." Interestingly, Thompson learned the latter hymn, long associated with African-American tradition, from a white neighbor. Other tracks reflect inter-cultural borrowing as well: the calls Thompson provides for "Old Corn Liquor" would have been used for either black or white dances; the blues-ballad "Careless Love" clearly straddles the racial border; and the fiddle chestnuts "Old Joe Clark" and "Soldier's Joy" are wide-spread old-time and bluegrass staples. "Black Eyed Daisy" and "Cindy Gal," with Thompson's fiddle joined only by Odell's banjo, represent the roots of all of these. Thompson's brief introductions to some of the tunes add a personal touch and a reminder that this music was essentially home-based. It is a great loss that it does not seem to be inspiring the next generation to keep it alive, making this recording – along with other recent collections of contemporary African American stringband music (Smithsonian Folkways' *Black Banjo Songsters* and Rounder's *The North Carolina Banjo Collection* [SO! v.43#1]) that much more valuable. — MG



VARIOUS

The Louisiana Recordings: Cajun & Creole Music 1934-1937
Rounder 1842

VARIOUS

The Louisiana Recordings: Cajun & Creole Music II 1934-1937
Rounder 1843

I originally purchased these recordings when they were issued on the Swallow record label in 1988, I was as intrigued by the cover photos as with the music. The front cover of the two-LP set pictured a dance hall in Louisiana with all of the patrons minding their own business save for one fellow in a fedora cautiously watching the picture being made. The back cover features two nattily dressed creole musicians in the back of a car. One is holding a buttonbox accordion and the other a rubboard. The photo seems to catch these musicians in performance for the photographer.

I think these photos aptly describe the travels of John and Alan Lomax into the bayous and prairies of Louisiana in 1934. Some musicians were anxious to open up

for the folksong collectors and others were more hesitant to give away their traditions.

The purpose of this trip to Louisiana was to capture the more archaic, unaccompanied Cajun vocal and instrumental styles. The new music coming out of Louisiana in the mid-1930s was a commercial mixture of French and old-time styles and was widely recorded and heard in the dancehalls throughout the area.

In the first volume, we are introduced to the Hoffpauir family of New Iberia. Their unaccompanied vocal style is reminiscent of the balladeers of their homeland in France. The family patriarch, Julien Hoffpauir, carefully passed the tradition on to his daughters Ella, Mary and teenaged Elita. Elita proved to be the most talented of the three, offering three solo performances and three others in combination with her sisters. In her voice you hear the piercing, unadorned emotional quality found in the best traditional Cajun singers. Included on this set from Rounder are four previously unreleased performances from the Hoffpauir family.

The second half of the first volume is devoted to fiddles and accordions. The style of Wayne Perry demonstrates the older song form with regular rhythms and a much more lyrical European style and sound. It features classic embellishments and ornamentation. Wayne Perry was a wonderfully gifted fiddler and no other recordings exist of his distinctive solo style. The Segura Brothers were obviously influenced by Delta blues. Their style is typified by extended instrumental lines, shouting vocals and a driving rhythm. The creole accordion of Oakdale Carriere and the harmonica and vocals of Paul Junius Malveaux and Ernest Lafitte close Volume I with even more energy. The influence of the Delta is once again heard in the fine vocals and the addition of the harmonica is a real surprise. The little brother to the accordion is well suited as an accompaniment instrument.

Volume two features a collection of a capella songs performed by a variety of male singers. These are deeply personal testaments to the many aspects of life and they display a variety of states of mind. Included are serious ballads, comic songs and inebriated howls. It is rather curious to hear barroom chorus vocals sung by duets of male voices. Bonding and the casting off of inhibition are much easier with the addition of alcohol.

In the second half of volume two, subtitled Zydeco, Juré and the Blues, we are introduced to the African-Caribbean components in the development of Zydeco. This is raw rhythmic singing with an irre-

sistible pulse. The recordings featuring Jimmy Peters and the ring dancer singers have a sound that is simply mesmerizing. It is obvious that the listener is witnessing a special ritual. It almost feels like eavesdropping.

"Blues De La Prison," sung by Joseph James, is perhaps the selection that most resembles the Delta blues on this collection. Translate his vocal swoops and cries into English and it closely resembles the artistry of Blind Willie Johnson. Barry Jean Ancelet, in his detailed song notes, suggests that it is not known how early recorded music influenced singers such as Mr. Jones. Questioning the source of the style and inspiration of Mr. Jones takes nothing away from his performance. It is a highlight on a recording filled with revelations.

In his introductory notes, Alan Lomax mentions that today he has second thoughts about not including more professional dancehall performers in this project. Today these artists are represented in various collections and their music survives. Not so the artists included on this collection. Lomax describes his travels in a Model A Ford with "moveable" rather than "portable" recording equipment. The equipment included batteries, an amplifier, speaker and disc recorder and weighed in at around three hundred pounds. The recordings were cut directly to aluminum disc and he reminds us "when tape and plastic recordings have turned to dust, the originals of the Cajun discs will be as good as ever, for aluminum is almost as time tested as gold." I beg to differ, for these aluminum disc recordings are even more valuable than gold. — TD

DAVID DOUCET

1957: Solo Cajun Guitar
Rounder 6088

On his 1985 *Quand j'ai parti* (Rounder #6040), Beausoleil guitarist David Doucet introduced the flat-picked acoustic guitar as a solo Cajun instrument. Now, after far too long, he's back with a second solo album. This time, however, Doucet emphasizes the finger-picking side of his unique approach to Cajun guitar playing. He also sings on most of the tracks. Like his guitar playing, Doucet's singing is forceful and rock-steady. It's a wonderful combination.

This recording is also a true solo effort. Doucet performs without any sidemen, giving the guitar both a new voice and a new role in Cajun music. Although he adeptly captures the bowing inflections of the fiddle on "Port Arthur Stomp," and

achieves the staccato eighth-note drive of the accordion on “Bayou Sorrel,” Doucet doesn’t use the guitar to imitate these other instruments. Moreover, unlike the typical Cajun band with its crying fiddle and wheezing accordion, Doucet’s guitar delivers a wall of full, bright sound, with resonant bass notes and ringing chords supplying an almost orchestral accompaniment to the dancing melody lines. His use of a variety of open tunings allows him to maintain a steady bass and to utilize the entire neck to pick the melody. The result is, first and foremost, guitar music, clearly influenced by such fingerpicking masters as Doc Watson and Mississippi John Hurt, but also quite new and original. On Amédée Ardoin’s “Midland Two-Step,” Doucet evokes African guitar styles, while his own “Les Blues des Routes” moodily conjures up the southwestern Louisiana mist. Doucet is particularly skillful at picking in waltz-time, a technique rarely heard from most fingerpickers. “Port Arthur Waltz,” for example, combines an embellished melody with bluesy touches that compliment Doucet’s crying vocal. His one flat-picked offering, “Baiolle” is also in 3/4 time and is notable for Doucet’s ability to tastefully state and subtly embellish the melody as well as to provide a rich yet simple setting for his mournful vocal.

Once again, David Doucet has broken new ground within Cajun tradition. Lovers of both the acoustic guitar and Cajun music should be delighted. — MG

HOW’S BAYOU
Pardon My French
Artdeco 102

Tradition crops up in the strangest places. In 1978, after meeting Dewey Balfa and Marc Savoy at the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend Washington, bassist Mike Bristow, fiddler Karen England and accordionist Dave Lang formed How’s Bayou. They were the first Cajun band in the Northwest and have been performing for over 20 years. *Pardon My French* is their second recording.

Pardon My French, produced by Al Berard of the Basin Brothers, is a fine mix of Cajun, zydeco and swamp music from the plains and bayous of Louisiana. Rounding out the band are Paul Mooney on guitar and Jay Weaver on the drums. Berard guests on fiddle and electric guitar on a number of selections and former drummer Ben Lang contributes electric guitar to a driving “Chere Bebe.”

The instrumental sound is pure ’90s Cajun with the addition of electric bass and

a full trap set. The band’s instrumental sound is very much like Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, but the vocal sound is a different story. The lead vocals are much more traditional, with the plaintive cry so characteristic of the best traditional Cajun music. Perhaps this is due to the song selection, with the most successful being the traditional based material. The lead on “Bo Sparkle Waltz” is sung in a voice so high that you easily find yourself understanding the emotion of the song without speaking a word of Cajun French. “Hip Et Tieaux” the Cajun mouth music classic is joyous in its spirited rendition. On the flip side, Floyd Guilbeau’s “Take A City Bride,” and “Travelin’ Light” by Bob Neuwirth and Peter Case, are light and surefire performance favorites, but perhaps should have not been included in a collection of such strong traditional material. That said, “Louisiana,” a contemporary tune by Percy Mayfield, works very well as a slinky swamp boogie with muted toms and modal-like harmonies.

The highlights of this recording for me are the first and last selections, each a fiddle duet featuring Karen England and producer Al Berard. The tunes “Madame Etienne/Rosalie” and “Courville-McGee Waltz” are recreations of the wonderful duets of Dennis McGee and Sady Courville recorded in the 1920s that remain classics to this day. The arrangement of lead fiddle with fiddle chordal backing is seldom heard on modern recordings and is a welcome nod to a tradition worth reviving.

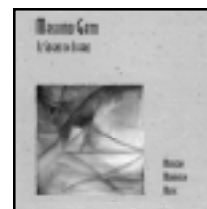
We are living in a wonderful time when many styles of traditional-based music exist side by side in our record collections. There is a thriving Cajun dance scene in as remote an area as you can imagine in Seattle, Washington. We need to thank those contemporary pioneers and feel good that Cajun music in the next century is in very good hands with bands as dedicated and talented as How’s Bayou. — TD

DAVID GRISMAN AND FRIENDS
Dawg Duos
Acoustic Disc 38

David “Dawg” Grisman has long been among the most eclectic musicians on the scene, always willing and eager to seek out new sounds and take chances that others might not. *Dawg Duos* highlights this side of the mandolin virtuoso, while at the same time, almost paradoxically, demonstrating how beautifully simple music can be when stripped down to the bare essentials – in this case, a dozen instrumental tracks featuring only Grisman’s mandolin

(or mandola, in a couple of instances) with one other instrument, played by one of the cast of fellow virtuosos he’s recruited for the project. It’s a cast that deserves full mention here, ranging from seventy-something bluegrass fiddler Vassar Clements to eleven-year old jazz guitar prodigy Julian Lage. In between are two banjo wizards, Béla Fleck and Mike Seeger; bass player Edgar Meyer; the incomparable Mark O’Connor on violin; jazz/swing drummer Hal Blaine; Indian Raga percussionist Zakir Hussain; pianist Denny Zeitlin; autoharp master Bryan Bowers; National steel guitar legend Bob Brozman, and the late accordion great Jim Boggio, who passed away in 1996.

Time and space will not permit a full description of each of the tracks here, but in each case Grisman and his partner show just how much can be achieved with only two instruments, even if they’re as disparate as Grisman’s mandolin and Blaine’s full drum set. In fact, the two cuts featuring percussion (“Buttons And Bows,” with Blaine, and “New Deli Duo,” with Hussain) are among the more interesting pieces. Speaking only for myself, I found both Zeitlin’s piano work on “Anouman” (A Django Reinhardt piece) and Seeger’s clawhammer banjo on “John Johanna” especially haunting, but to repeat, this is a very eclectic assortment of music, all of it exquisitely done, and there’s plenty of it (more than 61 minutes). Another listener might come up with an entirely different set of favorites, and there’s not a thing wrong with that. — JL



MASSIMO GATTI
Il Sogno Di Icaro
Arcipelago 9801

Italy’s Massimo Gatti is one of Europe’s top mandolinists. This consummate musician’s resume includes numerous collaborations and credits within classical, bluegrass, Celtic and other acoustic music genres. On this side of the Atlantic, you might recognize his name as composer of “Frangenti,” recorded by Butch Baldassari and the Nashville Mandolin Ensemble, and most recently by jazz great George Winston on his *Plains* CD. He was also a member of the European bluegrass supergroup, Euro Grass.

Gatti's latest is a highly imaginative CD, the majority of which contains original compositions. Gatti's many influences are evident, from the Celtic "A Place In The Heart" to the gypsy strains of "Tzigani Mood," to the slow-swing, jazzgrass-tinged "Swanbach Farm," a Gatti original on which 1999 IBMA Fiddle Player of the Year, (the late) Randy Howard, guests. "Duo For One Mandolin" demonstrates keenly Gatti's exacting and emotionally expressive touch.

For the opening/title cut and for the recording's final tune, "The Two Daddies Dance Again," Gatti is joined on banjo and guitar respectively by Swiss bluegrass sensation Jens Krüger (the Krüger Brothers), who also wrote the latter. Other supporting musicians include Aldo Navazio, Ugo Binda and Andrea Cerati on a variety of acoustic, classical and flamenco guitars, cellist Claudio Frigerio, Stefano Bonvini on violin and viola and Paolino Dalla Porta playing double bass. Gatti performs not only on mandolin but also on mandola and mandocello.

This recording is masterfully paced and produced, with exceptional material and unmatched clarity. The liner notes are poetic, written in both Italian and English, and each composition is accompanied by its own watercolor painting in miniature. The straightforward melodic style of *Il Sogno Di Icaro* will treat the listener to join in Massimo Gatti's gentle and peaceful "sogno." — SPL

DIX BRUCE
My Folk Heart
Musix 101

If Dix Bruce's name seems familiar, but you just can't quite place it, over the last couple of decades he has authored a number of mandolin instruction books in the Mel Bay series, not to mention the numerous cover designs and liner notes he's done for Arhoolie, Sugar Hill and other record companies. As he says in the notes for his own disc, *My Folk Heart*, he's also performed in just about every setting over the years: blues, jazz, swing, bluegrass, country, you name it, but when he's alone, he just seems to find himself going back to the old songs, fourteen of which he recorded in 1989 (a fifteenth, a self-composed waltz tune, was recorded in 1990). The track list for *My Folk Heart* includes such well-worn standards as "Gold Watch And Chain," "Railroading On The Great Divide," "The Coo-Coo" and "Grandfather's Clock," but there are some relatively unknown gems on the disc as well, like "I Wish I'd Bought Me A Half Pint And Stayed In The Wagon Yard," a wry tune that

Bruce says he got from the great Georgia fiddler Lowe Stokes. Helping out with backup vocals and instrumentals are John Reischmann, Jim Nunnally and Tom Rozum, but for the most part, it's just Bruce's pleasant, comfortable voice backed by his own mandolin and finger- and flatpick guitar work. Bruce's own description of *My Folk Heart* is "vocal and instrumental Americana," and that's a pretty straightforward and honest assessment. — JL



HOWIE MacDONALD
Why2Kelidh
Howie MacDonald (no catalog #)

With sets and tunes sporting names like "Ten-Pound Tumour," "Herman Munster's Reel," "Kilts On Fire," and "Old Scotty Stuff," you know you're in for a dose of irreverence. Cape Breton's Howie MacDonald has his tongue firmly in check and his fiddle bow loosely in his supple hand on a project that is simultaneously hilarious and impressive. The "hook" is to imagine a Cape Breton version of Times Square on New Year's Eve of the Millennium. In that spirit, live tracks contain laughter, snide remarks, horseplay, and drunken revelry. "Scotch Music" is a hip hop reel whose parody of Cape Breton parallels what the Coen Brothers did to Minnesota in the film "Fargo." In this case, MacDonald highlights the clash between island accents, traditional music, and kitchen parties on one hand, and the commercial world of TV, Wal-Mart, and tourism on the other. It's the same wide open perspective that allows MacDonald to appropriate themes from "The Beverly Hillbillies" or "The Adams Family" in one measure, and move into a well-executed Cape Breton jig or reel in the next. This is by no means just an exercise in self-indulgent wit. In the midst of the jollity lie fiddle sets that are precise, exciting, and masterful. This is especially obvious in "Smooth Eddy." It opens with a no-nonsense reel and evolves into a sort of Celtic hand jive bridge. But MacDonald pulls out, and into a wonderful cover of Tommy Peoples' demanding "The Green Fields Of Glen Town," thereby proving that he can cut a rug, as well as cut up. MacDonald also dazzles on classical compositions from

Neil Gow and Scott Skinner, and impresses with his own. This mix of poignancy and inspired silliness reminds me of what Firesign Theater would do if they ever made a fiddle album. — RWeir

CELTIBILLIES
Come Dance & Sing
Zygoat 1001

The Celtibillies are a quintet of traditional musicians from Virginia. *Come Dance & Sing* is a fusion of Celtic and Appalachian songs and dance tunes. This generous CD is chock full of good music. The centerpiece of the band is the hammered dulcimer and piano of Becky Barlow. Along with fiddler Jack Hinshelwood, the Celtibillies take us on a trip through the traditions of the southern mountains into Ireland and Scotland. Exposing a little-known geologic fact, they explain in the liner notes to *Come Dance & Sing* how the subterranean vein of a green material known as serpentine follows the Appalachian Trail into Nova Scotia. That same vein is traced to the mountains of western Ireland into Cornwall, Wales and eventually the Orkney Islands. Perhaps there's more to this fusion of musical culture than just immigration.

Come Dance & Sing is full of recognizable tunes from both sides of the water. The dance tunes are the most successful and are mostly arranged into medleys. The hammered dulcimer takes the lead on about half of these and Becky's style is bouncy and very danceable. Jack's fiddling is very assured and no less rhythmic and driving. The rest of the ensemble, including Tim Sauls on banjo, bouzouki and guitar, Bob Thomas on bass and bodhran and Patrick Turner on bass provide solid backup on the various selections. All members except for Patrick contribute vocally.

Two standout medleys feature Jack on fiddle. I have never thought of the "28th Of January" as a West Virginia tune as suggested in the notes, but in the Celtibillies hands it becomes one. Paired with "Shakin' Down The Acorns," the Hammons family classic, it certainly works. The trio of two Irish tunes, "Sally Gardens" and "Rakish Paddy," and "Jack Broke Down Da Prison Door" from the Shetland Islands, must be sure-fire dance favorites wherever the band plays. Becky's piano accompaniment is perfect for the playful fiddle and banjo conversation.

While the instrumental tunes are very consistent in their quality, some of the songs seem to veer away from the apparent premise of this recording. Here we find

many different traditions existing side by side. Being from Virginia and not County Clare will cause the vocals on the Irish tunes to take on an Americanized style that is not as apparent in the dance tunes. Here familiarity can be a problem and perhaps a bit more editing would have been called for. Do we really need another version of “Little Beggarman” or “Wind And Rain?” The arrangements seem more performance oriented and are probably standouts in concert. I understand that audiences would probably clamor for their favorites but is that really a reason to record them? That’s a question all ensembles have to wrestle with.

Those concerns aside, *Come Dance & Sing* is a strong effort with fine musicianship and a lively dance beat. Next time I’m hiking on the Appalachian Trail I’m going to look for that vein of serpentine. — TD

GAELIC STORM
Herding Cats
Omtown 48091

While everyone else was ooohing over Leonardo DiCaprio and ahhing over Kate Winslett, my favorite parts of the movie *Titanic* were the below deck party scenes in which “Irish” musicians played

spirited reels and dancers flung themselves across the boards. That “Irish” ensemble is actually two Americans, two Englishmen, and one actual son of Erin, cumulatively known as Gaelic Storm. If you enjoyed their scene from *Titanic* as much as I, you can hear it on their latest CD.

Gaelic Storm is a one part Celtic, one part maritime, and several parts party band. Their irreverence, sea shanty-like vocals, hoppy beats, and Irish-style instrumentation evoke comparisons to Newfoundland’s beloved Great Big Sea and Maine’s lusty Schooner Fare. The album opens with the infectious “Drink The Night Away,” a paean to the glories of alcohol and camaraderie that leaves you humming its tune long after you quenched your thirst. The same themes are explored instrumentally in “After Hours At McGann’s,” a set inspired by the famed eponymous Doolin pub. Sea songs get a workout on the rollicking “South Australia” and the bitter-sweet “Heart Of The Ocean.” Patrick Murphy, who sets the musical table on accordion and harmonica, handles lead vocals with aplomb. Steve Twigger’s guitar and mandolin establish strong frameworks from which Samantha Hunt’s fiddle depart, while the ensemble’s driving percussion is anchored by Steve Wehmeyer on bodhran,

and Shep Lonsdale on djembe and doumbek. Okay, so this isn’t exactly vintage Irish music from when the Titanic went down in 1912 – a time when young Michael Coleman practiced fiddle licks not djembe beats – but for once, Hollywood’s illusion improves on history. — RWeir

EQUATION
Hazy Daze
Putumayo 155

It’s hard to beat the British press when it comes to hyperbole. It has compared Equation to The Cranberries, Indigo Girls, Fleetwood Mac, Pentangle, and Fairport Convention. Remember the Sesame Street teaching jingle “One of these things is not like the other?” None of these five is remotely similar, so here’s the straight info: Equation – formerly The Lakeman Brothers – is a fairly standard pop band playing true to the expected formulae. This album would not be worth your time were it not for two important cracks in the pop veneer. Crack number one is the occasional – and in my view, too rare – fiddle interlude from Seth Lakeman. On “Sister” he echoes a catchy guitar lick to give it a unique edge. Lakeman’s faintly Irish licks provide the

only serious departures from pop musical clichés. He makes the fiddle cry on “Myself,” and frames the mix of passion, confusion, and apprehension about which Kathryn Roberts sings.

She’s crack number two and the real reason to buy the album. If ever there was a case of a single individual elevating material beyond its natural level, it’s Roberts here. Kathryn Roberts is extraordinary, exuding more emotion in a single sigh than most divas can manage in an aria. On “Strange Love,” the album’s best track, Roberts uses ever-so-subtle voice shifts to tell the story of a doomed relationship from meeting to parting and captures its varying moods in just three and a half minutes. Roberts graces every track of this album. I’d like to hear the rest of Equation spread its musical wings to match her. — RWeir



LAL AND NORMA WATERSON
A True Hearted Girl
Topic 507

MIKE WATERSON
Mike Waterson
Topic 516

Aside from the occasional misstep into pop music, there are few Waterson family recordings that are not considered “classics.” Thanks to compact disc technology, scratchy and out-of-print vinyl increasingly re-emerges in a cleaner format.

Mike Waterson’s 1977 solo effort – supplemented with two tracks from 1966’s *A Yorkshire Garland* – is again available. With a voice I’ve always (affectionately) called “Ewan MacColl underwater,” Mike Waterson reduces now – standard renditions of songs like “The Brisk Lad,” “The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter,” and “Seven Yellow Gypsies.” Whether leading the entire Waterson clan as in a sporting song like “The Light Dragoon,” a bit of music hall fluff like “Bye, Bye, Skipper,” or going it alone with the pathos-laden “Sorry The Day I Was Married,” his resonant voice is simply one of the most distinctive in the history of folk music. It’s as if he was a one-man soundtrack for Yorkshire.

Also in 1977, sisters Norma and Lal released *A True Hearted Girl*. Like Mike’s album, this one features little backing in-

strumentation beyond an occasional flute, concertina, or fiddle, because it showcases preservationists mining old songs and singing them with the simplicity and gusto of villagers from another time. Even a quick listen to “The Pretty Drummer Boy” reveals that the only instruments needed are a pair of lusty voices. Tracks including Lal’s daughter, Maria, only increase our simple pleasures. — RWeir

BRIAN MCNEILL
To Answer The Peacock
Greentax 170

Brian McNeill’s latest musical venture ties directly with his other passion: the written word. Both the title of the album and his new novel, *To Answer The Peacock* is a celebration of the unique lives of and bonds between traveling musicians. McNeill, the fiddler and author, describes his chance meeting of an old friend who is home visiting former haunts. Called by McNeill “the best Scottish fiddler of his generation,” this aged but still charismatic enigma has lived out McNeill’s dream of both traveling the world busking, and of playing the ultimate violin. Friendship overrules an unwonted envy, and stories, tunes, and drams fill the evening. The album contains the tunes described as being played for his friend that night. These are mostly new originals, many paying tribute to fellow musicians and friends, while some were composed after being inspired by the tales that were told that night.

As with most of his work since leaving Battlefield Band, this is a Brian McNeill solo album in the strictest of terms. With the exception of guitar on four tracks played by Jed Grimes (who figures in the story as well), every bowed, plucked and strummed instrument is played by McNeill himself. A lively spirit and well of emotion is found in every tune. The final selection on the album is a 17 1/2 minute reading of the entire first chapter of the novel. McNeill’s voice has an earnestness and intimacy that both satisfies and leaves you longing to read the full book. — AN

THE PRODIGALS
Go On
West Side 1102

The Prodigals are cut from the same rock-and-reel cloth as The Pogues, Black 47, and the Saw Doctors. What distinguishes them from a host of other electric Celtic bands is the extraordinary manner in which The Prodigals use percussion.

Working from a full drum kit, percussionist Brian Tracey does more than merely establish a beat; his driving pulse structures each song and he uses complex cross-rhythms that bounce off Ray Kelly’s guitars and Gregory Grene’s accordion with such precision that they sound like a lead instrument. He does for this band much as Liam Genockey did for Steeleye Span. Time signature framing is left to bass player Andrew Harkin, though he tosses off quite a few wonderful riffs of his own.

Aside from a guest turn from Marie Reilly, there’s none of the expected fiddle that so defines contemporary Irish music. Lead vocals are shared by Kelly and Grene, who are the ying and yang of singers. Kelly’s voice is rough and gravelly, perfect for the band’s more punk-influenced productions in which buzzy guitar slices through minimalist arrangements. These make a nice change of pace, but the music comes alive when Grene sings a smooth original like “Alchemy,” or use his accordion to set a traditional pace from which to depart on “The Open Reel.” The contrast in approach is especially stark between Kelly’s cover of The Dubliners’ “Weile Waile,” and Grene’s of Tommy Makem’s “Ballybay.” Both are driven by Tracey’s percussion, but the first sounds whiskey-soaked and aggressive while the latter is silky and whimsical. The Prodigals seek to breathe life into Irish music by infusing it with electric energy. Ironically, though, they are at their best when they don’t venture as far afield. — RWeir

CHRIS FOSTER
Traces
Green Man 001

Singer and guitarist Chris Foster suddenly appeared on the English Folk scene in 1978 with a debut album that belied his tender years. While clearly influenced by the likes of Nic Jones (who guested on fiddle) and Martin Carthy, there was a maturity and highly distinctive quality to his voice and playing, and a knack for uncovering and reinterpreting some tremendous traditional songs. His follow up the next year, *All Things In Common*, did more than live up to the promise of the first: it was a masterpiece. It ranged from the serious to the sardonic in a brilliant mix of traditional and contemporary songs. Its centerpiece was one of the earlier (and still one of the best) covers of Leon Rosselson’s epic “The World Turned Upside Down.” Countless gigs and a memorable US tour followed, but suddenly Foster completely dropped out of musical sight. Apparently fed up with the business end of it, he

devoted his time to his other love, the visual arts (he designed the covers of both albums).

Fast forward: Chris Foster is back, and somehow manages to sound as if the decades had never passed. Everything that made those first two albums so moving and memorable is here in full force. The percussively melodic guitar accompaniments, the nasal yet warm and commanding voice, the exquisite selection of songs. “The Bold Princess Royal,” “Arthur McBride,” “Jack Barleycorn” and other traditional songs are given fresh new treatments. Four other choice ballads are reprised from his debut release, emphasizing the continuity of his musical path, while the Rosselson connection from *All Things In Common* is furthered with two more of his compositions. I’ve always thought Foster’s version of the traditional “When A Man’s In Love” was one of the best and most sensual on record, and this new rendition only serves to reconfirm that. “The Ranter,” one of his signature songs, a delicious tune wedded to a humorous tale of a lecherous preacher, “The Coast Of Peru” and the awesome ballad “The Flower Of Serving Men” are all sung with as much or more feeling and finesse as they were the first time around. And once again Foster excels at his interpretive skills in the Leon Rosselson songbag. He manages to get even more out both the story and the tune of “Barney’s Epic Homer” (about a misfit artist’s conflicts with conformity) than the author’s original – no mean feat! “Flying High, Flying Free” (see page 122) is a little known Rosselson gem, a gentle song of time passages full of longing and hope, gorgeously performed.

It is a pure delight to have Chris Foster back again. — AN

TARRAS
Rising
Rouder 7029

By the late '80s and early '90s it seemed Celtic bands might become an endangered species, as one mainstay after another dissolved. Thankfully, the late '90s brought a renaissance in the form of exciting new lineups like Solas, Lúnasa, Nomos, Old Blind Dogs, and Kila. To this list add Tarras, whose debut album *Rising* is aptly titled. The quintet hails from both sides of the Scottish/English borders region, has an average age of 21, and spotlights a fiddler who’s only 17. Youthful exuberance abounds, but this album’s instrumental prowess is as polished as that of seasoned vets. Equally surprising is the band’s command of the traditional idiom. Of the album’s thirteen tracks, only three are from the public domain, though all

of the instrumentals sound as if they could be. Typical of Tarras’ approach is the “Da Fields O’Foula” set. Jon Redfern’s gentle guitar opens the piece, but quickly gives way to the edgy accordion melodies of Ben Murray, whose work evokes the Penguin Café Orchestra. Joss Clapp’s bass and Rob Armstrong’s cittern fill out the sound and allow Emma Hancock’s fiddle to slice across the mix and take it to melodic heights. Hancock is a true marvel. She’s classically trained and it shows. Her command of her instrument’s upper register would be impressive in any context, but from one so young it’s simply astounding. By the time Redfern puts down the guitar and adds percussion and Murray switches to penny whistle, the piece hops to as well as glides. Where Tarras most departs from tradition is in its original songs. “So Tired” has the unhurried, bluesy feel of an old Crosby, Stills, and Nash song. By contrast, “Whisky Town” could be a pop song if its backing instrumentation weren’t so superior to Top 40 fare. Tarras takes it name from a glen in the Cheviot Hills separating Scotland and England. But if they keep making albums like this, fans will associate them with the peaks, not the valley. — RWeir



KILT
Four In The Crib
Kilt Music Group 50798

With a name like Kilt and a pedigree rooted in the Celtic music mecca of Cape Breton Island, the uninitiated would expect wall-to-wall jigs, reels, skirling bagpipes, and some industrial strength rowdiness. You get a few of the first two, but there’s not a pipe to be heard, and Kilt is more a gentle breeze than a force-ten storm. Kilt is grounded in Cape Breton’s folk/country traditions – think J. P. Cormier or John Allan Cameron – and offers a fine mix of energetic vocals and lilting instrumentation that compares favorably to a band like Acoustic Junction. For example, “Dylan’s Ghost” features Tony Ronalds’ throaty, gravely vocals and Bonny Jean MacDonald’s bluegrass-like fiddles in lively combo. But after building to an a capella chorus, Kilt cutaway to a quiet cover of Jay Ungar’s “Ashokan Farewell.” One of the nice things about this young band is its ability to be simultaneously gritty and

smooth, as demonstrated on “Shift,” where Ronalds’ poignant vocals and Brian Buckle’s steady drums are softened by MacDonald’s cross-cutting fiddle runs, Brennan MacDonald’s ringing acoustic guitar, and lovely vocal harmonies.

Fans of Cape Breton Celtic sounds need not despair; there are several sharp sets of jigs and reels, albeit stamped with their own identity. The “De Jigs” set, for instance, sometimes feels more like the mountains than the moors. It, like the reels in the “Snappy Jack” set, features guest piano rolls from Hilda Chiasson-Cormier, and give the pieces more bounce than lilt. A great thwacking bass-dominated drinking song, “Lift Up Your Glasses” is a live party song in which only the musicians are in control. Like the album’s opening track, “Island Kitchen,” it’s a reminder that in places where live music thrives, genres and expectations take a back seat to celebration and community. — RWeir

OLD BLIND DOGS
The World’s Room
Green Linnet 1201

Old Blind Dogs enjoy a small, but loyal following in North America, but have been one of Scotland’s favorite celidh bands for over a decade. Only fiddler Jonny [sic] Hardie and cittern/bass artist Buzzby McMillan remain from the original lineup, but Old Blind Dogs remains faithful to the sound that built its fan base. OBD was one of the first Scottish bands to make heavy use of African and Caribbean percussion, and North American audiences may remember Davy Cattanach bopping all over the stage. His place has been taken by teen phenom Paul Jennings and OBD literally hasn’t skipped a beat. In addition, the band has expanded to a quintet with the addition of small-pipe wizard Rory Campbell, who works particularly well with Hardie. Hardie is one of the more lyrical Scottish fiddlers, and the sweeter small pipes gives an edge to OBD’s music without overpowering Hardie. Campbell also blends well with the harmonica departures of Jim Malcolm. Their collaboration turns “Soup Of The Day” into a Scottish blues composition.

Old Blind Dogs are best known for their spirited let’s-party fare, but this album has lighter touches. Hardie’s melancholy fiddle combines with Campbell’s whistles and Malcolm’s guitar on the medieval-like air “Roslin Castle.” The lads are equally subdued on the muckle ballad “Mill o’ Tifty.” This, like most of Malcolm’s vocals, will remind many listeners of Ged

Foley. Only “The Branlee” contains the strong dance tempos for which OBD is famed, and even those are grounded in the 16th century! Whether this album is a one-time departure or – like The Tannahill Weavers a decade ago – signals new directions remains to be seen, but *The World’s Room* can stand on its own legs no matter where it ultimately fits in the OBD catalogue.

One criticism: this is not a clean recording; several passages are as muddy as anything I’ve heard since the days of vinyl. It’s not bad enough to sabotage this worthy project, but I’m surprised the engineer didn’t correct this. So don’t touch those dials, the problem is not in your set. — RWeir



ODETTA
Blues Everywhere I Go
M.C. 0038

Odetta, certainly one of the most influential of all African-American folk singers, has at 68, and in her fiftieth year as a performer, made one of the best albums of her long and distinguished career, and also one of the best albums of classic blues ever. Throughout these 15 songs, Odetta, in glorious voice and her interpretive abilities – which have always been substantial – has never been better.

Through most of the album, Odetta is backed by small groups featuring pianist Seth Farber and guitarist Jimmy Vivino. On medleys that combine Sippie Wallace’s “Trouble Everywhere” with Brownie McGhee’s “I’ve Been Living With The Blues,” and Lead Belly’s version of “Careless Love” with W.C. Handy’s classic “St. Louis Blues,” Odetta’s voice is both powerful and flexible and she gives her musicians a lot of room to improvise creatively.

As Odetta demonstrates, there’s much more to the blues than bitter complaints of lost love as she revives such topical blues commentaries as “W.P.A. Blues,” “Unemployment Blues” and “Homeless Blues” in fabulous arrangements. And in numbers like “You Gotta Know How,” Odetta proves she can deliver sexually suggestive numbers as well as anyone.

As good as everything else on this album is, the two best cuts feature Odetta in the lone company of pianist Dr. John. “Oh

Papa,” a reprise from her previous all-blues album (recorded in 1962), is absolutely gorgeous and the version of Percy Mayfield’s “Please Send Me Someone To Love,” featuring a duet vocal with the good doctor, will send shivers up and down your spine.

Blues Everywhere I Go is an essential recording. — MR

FRED NEIL
The Many Sides Of Fred Neil
Collector’s Choice 070

This two-disc set collects all three albums Fred Neil recorded for Capitol: the seminal *Fred Neil* which includes his two best known songs “Everybody’s Talkin’” and “The Dolphins,” the loose, often scary, *Sessions* and the mostly live *Other Side Of This Life*, which remains Neil’s final album. Eight bonus cuts are included, too. The rarities include both sides of an overly popish 1963 single and six apparent outtakes from the *Sessions* sessions.

For years I’ve postulated that in the *Sessions* master tapes there should be some treasures. While Richie Unterberger’s notes confirm the existence of unreleased tapes, he adds that the bulk is overly loose performances that probably were a lot more fun to tape than to listen back to. John Sebastian and David Crosby also contribute appreciations and memoirs about Fred. In the end, we’re left with the legacy of Fred Neil’s all too few recordings, all of which remain essential, soul-piercing work. Fred’s incredibly deep voice could make the earth rumble, and his 12-string guitar style was quite innovative at the time, integrating jazz rhythms into his blues. His way with a song was indelibly personal. I still get goose bumps every time I hear his voice enter following the string bass solo that opens his killer version of Percy Mayfield’s “Please Send Me Somebody To Love.”

The unavailability of Fred Neil’s music on CD has bordered on criminal as it has kept him shrouded in obscurity even while he still lives quietly in Coconut Grove, Florida. While such CD reissues have made Tim Buckley and Nick Drake cult heroes, Fred Neil is almost forgotten. This Collector’s Choice release of the Capitol recordings should help change that. (His other work, two albums for Elektra, are available but only as pricey Japanese imports.)

The music, the singing, the songs on this collection are bedrock. It sure would be a kick if this release could goose Fred into cutting a new album after a nearly 30 year gap. — MT

KRISTINA OLSEN
The Truth Of A Woman
Take A Break 2008

This release explores a number of truths related to being a woman. They range from aching passions to poetic description of the soul to the erotic and combinations thereof. These are a woman’s songs, but they are meant to be heard and felt by both women and men. Men can certainly learn something from Olsen’s insights, and there are a few that will enlighten women as well.

The opening “Spend The Whole Night With You” comes straight from the gut, or somewhere slightly below. The title song “The Truth Of A Woman,” which follows, provides some qualification. It’s an intensely sexual song, as it reminds the listener “It isn’t how her heart beats. It’s the way it pulls her skin.” The song easily sends shivers down the spine (and elsewhere). “The Yellow Piper” is a masterpiece that alone justifies buying this CD. In less than six minutes it traces the life of a woman from a young girl who traded her body for flying lessons, became an unwed mother, suffered from small town scandal, found a man who accepted her and her child as well as fathered another one. All the time the woman still reaches for the sky and finally proves herself. I’ll leave the denouement for Olsen’s telling, but this is a brilliant, well-crafted song. “Between This Woman And This Man” poetically X-rays a relationship. Her well-crafted similes, metaphors and images portray a stark reality. Olsen closes the recording with “Big O” a tongue-in-cheek send-up of sex, clean enough to play on a family radio program, thanks to clever use of language.

A particular pleasure is the simple production of the release. Olsen recorded it live while on a tour of Australia and New Zealand, and her voice and guitar work have never sounded better. Another attribute is Peter Grayling, her superb accompanist, mostly on cello, but also mandocello, mandolin and occasional harmony vocals. In the end, Olsen’s latest is all truth and no consequences. — RWar

THE WESTERLEYS
A Blessing And A Curse
1-800-Prime-CD 67

Based in Mill Valley, California, the Westerleys would seem to be one of those bands that are difficult to pigeonhole, with a mixture that features roughly equal parts of folk, pop, blues and country-rock demonstrated over the course of the eleven tracks that make up *A Blessing And A*

Curse. Led by guitarist and vocalist Doug E. Blumer and lead vocalist Nancy Terzian, the band also includes David Phillips on pedal steel guitar, Doug Brandon Adams on fiddle, Rob McCloskey on bass and Adam Berkowitz on drums, and whatever mode they're in, the result is a tight, driving sound that maintains a good level of energy and intensity throughout. It's probably a little closer to pop/rock than to what most people would call "folk" music, but it is well done. Blumer and Terzian make a good vocal combination, but the real strength here is Terzian's voice, powerful yet capable of delicacy when needed. With strong hints of more famous singers like Linda Ronstadt and Mary Chapin Carpenter, Nancy Terzian is probably one of the better singers you've never heard of. Most of the songs on *A Blessing And A Curse* were written or co-written by Blumer and Terzian as well, and even though nine of the eleven cuts are love songs in one form or another, they manage to keep the level of interest up without turning to all the usual clichés. Possibly the standout cut in this regard is the album's closer, Terzian's "Powder Blue Polyester Nightgown," with slightly surreal lyrics on which she delivers an aching, country-tinged vocal over an arrangement that is decidedly not in the Nashville mold. The one track on the album which is not an original composition is their cover of Gillian Welch's "Tear My Stillhouse Down," and this is done nicely as well. Other standouts include "Devil's Got Your Name," "Graduation Day" and "Dying On The Vine," but the quality is pretty consistent from front to back. A good disc to take a chance on. — JL

CATIE CURTIS

A Crash Course In Roses

Rykodisc 10478

Catie Curtis' writing manages mature women's topics without losing a youthful touch. That mix allows Catie's unique voice plenty of room. She is one of those singers that can work a pleasing slide of a fifth or even an octave with an ease that doesn't jar.

Amid the drum and guitar centered tracks it is a pleasure to detect the banjo ... and though the harmonies contributed by Jennifer Kimball and Mary Chapin Carpenter are nice, it is the mandolin work by Jimmy Ryan that is especially fitting to Catie's voice.

The songs mostly focus on unconditional or unexpected love, on the sheer pleasure of accepting that love and even the inability to adequately be thankful for it.



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SHASKEEN, Eamonn Cotter, Tommy People's Quiet Glen, L.E. McCullough's St. Patrick was a Cajun, Calico, Seamus Creagh, Frank Harte, Matt Cranitch, Kevin Griffin, Terry Bingham, Jimmy Crowley, Joe Burke, Pat Cloonan, McNamara Family



On "What's The Matter," Catie expects acceptance of difference. She paints a town that shows approval unless your "difference" is unacceptable – revealing sample scapegoats such as Blacks, Jews, gays or bikers. She innocently asks, "What's The Matter?" She then modulates a step, increases the volume and asks again, "What's The Matter?" This emphasis makes her disbelief obvious, and with this approach of the innocent question, she makes answering difficult. A clever trap.

The title cut, "Roses" is about the isolation and confusion of war. Other topics include talking a friend out of suicide and celebration of recovery. "Wise To The Ways" addresses the overuse and abuse of our sympathies. With constant media shock and gore, "First in color, now in stereo" we are growing numb. Unlike this media practice, it is not like Catie Curtis to be in your face. She gently brings you to her points with tunes that grow on you with each listen ... a sign that this is a lasting work. — AP

DAVID MALLETT

Ambition
Flying Fish 674

David Mallett serves up eleven very recent compositions on his latest. (They're all copyright 1999, although he notes one was started in 1981.) It seems a strange title for an artist who has never been alienatingly ambitious ... until you listen to the title song and hear Mallett's painful ambivalence about ambition. If there's a personal lament on this CD, this is it.

Mallett co-produced *Ambition* with Rich Adler, and it sounds like they achieved exactly what Mallett desired. It's as comfortable as an old shoe, but this shoe has spikes that grab. The production is deliciously varied, the ten supporting musicians never crowding Mallett's first rate lyrics or eclipsing his expressive voice. (Though, I would have preferred less percussion.) Mallett returned to Nashville to record this one, but he avoided corrupting it with an overtly Nashville sound.

His songwriting remains consistently high caliber, reflecting on times gone by, in songs such as "Wild In The Sixties," "You Can't Go Home Again," and "Sportin' Days." Most of the songs savor the past, there are more goings than comings. "Greenin' Up" is a worthy sequel to his famous "Garden Song." It perks, breaking the melancholy of his memories. "Whiskey Talkin'" makes a powerful statement about alcoholism, kind of "I Am A Rock" as long as I have whiskey.

Mallett is one of those songwriters that always has something worthwhile to say, and always says it in a poetic way. He comes up with marvelous line after marvelous line. Unlike many songwriters, his personal songs stretch to a universality ... and though he has practiced his trade for about 30 years, Mallett's songs and performance remains fresh and compelling. — RWarr



NIGHT SUN
One Moment Of Grace
Borealis 121

Though their musical genre may be hard to pin down, one thing is clear: these are talented musicians, equally at home entertaining at a *bar mitzvah*, playnig a Celtic air, or winning a songwriting competition.

Lead vocalist Ellen Hamilton is delightful. With a slight quiver in her voice, she connects with the soul, rather than aiming for a contrived polished sound. The title cut opens the release richly with many of the band's instrumental talents on display. Their sound is best defined by the interweaving of the clarinet and accordion, played by Chris Coleman and Bonnie Dawson respectively. Multi-instrumentalist Coleman also adds mandolin, banjo, tin whistle, Irish flute and guitar work. Adam Hodge's bass and Les Casson's percussion wrap around each tune never stepping on the thoughtful lyrics, attributed to Bonnie Dawson and Hamilton.

On Dawson's tune "Didn't I Try," Night Sun highlights the group's solid *capella* sound. And another of Dawson's tunes, "Parrish Waltz," can hold its own against "Ashoken Farewell." It's a delightful instrumental that bears repeated listening.

Drawing on her experiences living extensively in the Arctic, Hamilton reproduces, on one cut, the sound of the narwhales by using the bellows of the accordion. Against this, guest Jane Siberry lays distant harmonies and Chris Coleman adds some tasteful classical guitar. We are placed by the waves listening, "was that you breathing?" This tune will be a welcomed addition to the growing pool of folk songs addressing environmental concerns.

Ellen Hamilton has won songwriting competitions in Ontario. Between the danceable and the slow airs you can be

pleasantly riveted by one of her lines delivered by her unmistakable vocals. On "Babe", written for one of her children, Hamilton sings, "I'm the one who mends the broken pieces cutting myself on jagged bits of pain". Here, rather emotionally, is a portrayal of a parent's natural tendency to protect, pitted against the natural need and inevitability of the child leaving.

Her writing includes covering themes of wasted time, faith, ecology, the old, the abused, and mothering. The issue of the death penalty is addressed in the haunting "I'll Hold On," inspired by Canadian Stanley Faulder's agonizing death row wait and ultimate execution in Texas. On "Summer Songs," we are placed by an evening campfire with traditional and familiar favorites slipping in and out of the tune. It is easy to picture this band enjoying music in this way.

You get great writing, musicianship and variety from this versatile band. *One Moment Of Grace* is a fun package that breaks through the constraints of labeling. Celtic, Klezmer, Polish, Middle Eastern? Contemporary folk? Give up trying to label this band and just fall in with the music. Though radio stations may have trouble placing it into a single musical category, copies in two sections would not be a wasted use of space. — AP

STAN ROGERS

From Coffee House To Concert Hall
Fogarty's Cove 12

Stan Rogers was already the preeminent singer-songwriter of his generation when his life was tragically ended, at only 33, in a 1983 airplane fire. His body of work remains profoundly influential in contemporary folk-rooted music.

For years, it's been known that his widow, Ariel Rogers, and producer, Paul Mills, have been at work assembling and restoring a collection of previously unreleased Rogers recordings. Finally released in late-1999, the 70-minute collection includes 15 of Stan's originals, four versions of songs from other contemporary writers, and one traditional sea chantey. Drawn from diverse sources including work tapes, CBC broadcast recordings, album outtakes and coffeehouse, club and concert performances, they cover a 10 year period ranging from a CBC recording session in 1973 to a Los Angeles concert recorded just five days before his death.

Almost by definition, the collection is uneven. Technically, because the source material varies from home cassette recordings to songs done in state-of-the art recording studios, and artistically as the de-

cade it documents was one of tremendous growth for the artist. Also, missing by definition, is the conceptual, and often thematic, vision that Rogers brought to the albums that he put together in his lifetime. However, the quality of the sound restoration is exceptionally good and even Stan's earliest material was finely crafted, revealing the immense potential of his artistry. Also importantly, the collection provides a decade-long overview of his development from a promising young singer-songwriter into the major artist he became.

Speaking as a friend who knew Rogers for almost all of the years represented by these recordings, it is thrilling and somewhat eerie to hear these performances of sometimes-forgotten and sometimes never-heard songs like "Pharisee," which captures the spirit of community that drew many of us to the folk music scene in the 1960s and early-'70s or "The Puddler's Tale," based on his own father's years of working in the Hamilton, Ontario steel mills. Stan's version of Mary McCaslin's "Down The Road," brings back the very personal memory of Stan telling me he wanted to meet Mary, another friend of mine, at a folk festival we were all going to be at. There was a song of Mary's that Stan said he wanted to learn. And, indeed,

it became part of his concert repertoire in the last year or so of his life.

Stan would have been 50 years old now. Without doubt, there have been too many songs left unwritten and unsung by his death. This collection adds much to his legacy. — MR

ANNE HILLS AND MICHAEL SMITH
Paradise Lost & Found
 Redwing 5406

Combining the talents of one of the contemporary folk genre's best songwriters with the superb voice of an outstanding singer in the genre results in a bit over 54 minutes of music pleasing to brain and ear. Michael Smith authored (or co-authored) six of the 13 songs on *Paradise Lost & Found*, Anne Hills penned two, and they collaborated on a pair, and for good measure they include a song each by Steve Goodman (written with Smith), Mike Jordan, and Lennon and McCartney. You'll search a long time for a single disc with better songs. Smith understands the essence of poetry and coaxes words to do his bidding, evoking broad and subtle meanings from each word. Hills is also a solid songwriter.

The duo recorded this self-produced CD live, singing to each other, which adds to the intimacy and immediacy. But their voices sound thin and compressed, reducing the warmth and glow. The poor recording quality, which sounds almost out-of-phase in places, is worst on the tracks with overdubs. When both guitars and harmonica are playing full tilt, the instruments dwarf the voices. Hills, in particular, possesses a much fuller, richer voice than is evident here.

There's little new material on this CD, Smith and Hills have recorded most of the songs solo, or with others. Yet, they do provide fresh interpretations of every song so the material does not seem rehashed. Smith's remarkable "Painted Horse" is new to my ears, along with the haunting coauthored title song "Paradise Lost & Found." That's probably the most melancholy song on this otherwise generally ebullient recording.

Hills and Smith share an obvious excitement for playing together, and this upbeat treatment works wonderfully on songs such as "Stranded In The Moonlight" and "Disappearing Heart." They also capture the soul of Smith's classic, "The Dutchman," in a movingly tender rendition. At other times they sound detached from the



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song, as if they are more concerned with the arrangement than the meaning, as with Hills' "Silken Dreams," and Smith's "We Become Birds." Hills recording of "Silken Dreams" with Cindy Mangsen and Priscilla Herdman is far better, as is Smith's own solo recording of "We Become Birds." They conclude the recording with a charming version of "I Will" by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. — RWarr



BRUCE COCKBURN
Breakfast In New Orleans,
Dinner In Timbuktu
 Ryko 10407

The opening track of Cockburn's latest release (his 25th in 29 years), "When You Give It Away," starts with a plaintiff narrative that sets the scene for the rest of the album. The surrealism of his predawn dream mixes with the very real sights and sounds of an early morning in New Orleans — "the city of saints and fools."

This musical journey through space and time crosses several continents and spans the entire epoch of human existence (from "The Last Day Of The World" to "The Embers Of Eden" — though one cannot be certain here which is the beginning or the end).

Cockburn's writing is constantly aware of the dichotomies of reality — good and evil, rich and poor, beginnings and endings, strong and weak, as he reminds us that we must find our own place. His stand has always been to work for good or you are essentially working against it. His place in this album's journey says "I've got this thing in my heart I must give it away, it only lives when you give it away."

It is unmistakable from the kora introduction and the mosaic of photos accompanying the lyrics (not to mention the lyrics themselves), that the tune "Use Me If You Can" is set in the sweltering desert of Africa. The spoken introduction, full of stark details of strangely colored animals and jagged boulders (a Cockburn favorite) is sharply contrasted by the ethereal celestial images of the sun as a steel ball and the moon as a pearl in black fingers. Classic Cockburn!

The laid back guitar in "Isn't That What Friends Are For?" doesn't display the full

range of Cockburn's expertise, but like Mozart, the simplicity and clarity of the execution does. Here, Cockburn lays down the mood similar to a dozen other love songs he's penned. Lucinda Williams is featured in the chorus.

Sensual images in the lyrically simple "Mango" provide a vehicle for the first of many musical jams featuring the slippery fretless bass of George Koller, the exotic kora of Daniel Janke, the fluid beat of Ben Riley on drums and Rick Lazar on percussion. Cowboy Junky Margo Timmons reinforces the melody.

The two strictly instrumental numbers, "Down To The Delta" and "Deep Lake," though very different in tempo and texture, are more showpieces for Cockburn's mastery of guitar and arrangement.

The album packaging leans toward the artistic side and less on the practical, appearing much like a difficult to read scrabble board. Missing from the lyric sheet is Cockburn's practice of inscribing each tune with the date and city of composition, which is sometimes helpful to understand the inspiration of the piece.

Cockburn has been to just about every political hot spot on this planet over the last 20 years, living his credence "Use me while you can." Efforts have included work with OxFam, fighting land mines, cleanup of oil spills, maintaining rain forests, and most recently the raising of awareness of desertification by narrating a documentary on location in Mali. Never afraid to grapple with politics or "of being subversive," Cockburn moans about judicial corruption and "traitors in high places" in the jazzy rap, "Open Up The Window, Let The Bad Air Out."

The message of "Last Night Of The World" recognizes that everyone will eventually "be pried loose" from our earthly burdens in the end and that the only thing he'd do different that night would be to have "champagne with you." Having been so involved in humane relief efforts, this would be all he'd have left to do.

Many fans align in political solidarity with his activism, but his following doesn't stop there. Few musicians can boast Cockburn's large and long-lived internet following. There are those inspired by his lyrics, those appreciating his masterful ease with a guitar, those listening through the religious sieve.

With 13 gold and 3 platinum records to his name, Bruce Cockburn needs no nod of U.S. approval. Where there is human drama, he is there reacting and helping the cause musically. The release of *Breakfast In New Orleans, Dinner In Timbuktu* is just a stop along the way. — AP

GORDON LIGHTFOOT

Songbook
 Rhino 75082

Gordon Lightfoot was the dominant Canadian singer-songwriter of the 1960s folk revival and has continued his recording and concert career through to the present. This immaculate 4-CD boxed set, with 88 songs dating from 1962 to 1998, is an exhaustive examination of his long career and includes a couple of rare country-pop songs that the young Lightfoot recorded in Nashville in 1962, 14 previously unreleased tracks recorded over the decades, and many of the most significant songs from each of the albums he's recorded over the years. There is also a hard-covered, 60-page booklet that provides good biographical information and Lightfoot's own commentaries on each track. And the digital remastering is excellent, these songs have never sounded better.

I've always felt that Lightfoot was at his creative best from the mid-1960s through the mid-'70s, the years documented on the first two CDs and well into the third. Songs like "Early Morning Rain," "Canadian Railroad Trilogy," and "Sit Down Young Stranger" remind me that Lightfoot was one of the best contemporary folk artists of that era. Most of the material from those years that's included on these discs holds up very well.

However, since the late-'70s, Lightfoot has been less consistent. While he's never less than competent, and often very good, much of his later work does not measure up to the earlier songs, making the fourth CD pale in comparison to the first. But this is an excellent collection for anyone wanting a strong, historical overview of an important and influential singer-songwriter. — MR

DAVE CARTER AND TRACY GRAMMER

When I Go
 Carter and Grammer (no cat. #)

It's been a long time since I've been so taken by a release of all original songs. The formula is simple; just incredibly hard to achieve: Take ten well crafted songs. Keep the vocal delivery clear and unassuming. Add just the right amount of musical arrangement to highlight the lyrics and bring out the inventive melodies, and then put them together in a way that surprises the listener at almost every turn. This is what Dave Carter and Tracey Grammer accomplish on *When I Go*.

In addition to vocals, Carter plays guitar, banjo and bass. He is joined by Grammer on violin, mandolin and vocal

with help from Eric Park on harmonica and accordion. With the exception of the title cut, a co-write with Grammer, Carter writes the songs. The result is deceptively simple. The entire CD was recorded in Tracy's kitchen ... except for the one recorded in Donny's garage. Intrigued? Well you should be.

The themes here run the gamut from ancient mythology to modern icons. The feel of the recording is contemporary and traditional all at the same time. Some highlights include the opening title cut, which grabbed me immediately, "Grand Prairie TX Homesick Blues," an obvious homage to an obvious influence, Bob Dylan, and "Lancelot," an infectious melody with a stunning chorus.

When I Go came out of nowhere and took me by complete surprise. It's a record I will continue to play and it makes me anticipate the next one from this talented duo, which I'm told will be out soon. — MW



VARIOUS
Bleecker Street:
Greenwich Village In The '60s
Astor Place 4012

The concept of this album is to salute the brilliant songwriting that exploded out of the exciting Greenwich Village folk scene of the '60s. The album contains 16 songs from 1964-71 performed by artists who grew up with these songs in their lives.

It opens with "Bleecker Street" as sung by Jonatha Brooke. (Here it is credited to Jerry Landis. However, on the original Simon & Garfunkel 1964 recording it is listed as "Bleeker Street," and is credited to Paul Simon.) It is a vivid and evocative portrait of the street, and Jonatha sings it beautifully.

Throughout, Stewart Lerman and Steuart Smith's production, the casting of singers to songs, and the performances, are inspired. Just a few of the very best are Chrissie Hynde on Tim Buckley's aching "Morning Glory," the one time only duo of Loudon Wainwright III and Iris DeMent on Richard Farina's "Pack Up Your Sorrows," Patty Larkin's take on Fred Neil's "Everybody's Talkin'" and the spirited arrangement Larry Kirwan and Black 47 have whipped up for Phil Ochs' "I Ain't

Marchin' Anymore." Marshall Crenshaw serves up the obligatory Bob Dylan song in "My Back Pages," with the arrangement the Byrds rode to a monster hit. Ron Sexsmith's take on Tim Hardin's "Reason To Believe" is especially eerie as Ron's gentle voice takes on an uncanny resemblance to the late songwriter.

The packaging is gorgeous, and Anthony DeCurtis' notes are excellent. My only gripe is that this wonderful valentine of an album is over much too soon, even with a 54 minute length. May we hope for a Volume 2? — MT

CHUCK SUCHY
Different Line Of Time
Little Bluestem 102

Most farmers sit around the café when their farming's finished for the season. North Dakota farmer Chuck Suchy spends his free time writing and singing. Like the admonition to "write what you know" all of Suchy's songs connect with the earth and the simple joys of life. You might expect a farmer to be flat-out country and sing at the roadhouse on Saturday nights. Suchy is as folksy and gentle as you'll find anywhere.

This is Suchy's third recording in the past 15 years, and it's his best. Exquisitely produced by Peter Ostroushko, Suchy's voice sounds a little like Bill Staines, a tender, full voice that's a pleasure to the ear. Similarly, his songs are so gosh darn honest ... poetic without affectation. Suchy writes great lyrics and tunes that you hum after the CD stops spinning.

The opening "Molly's Field" invites you into the recording, something like the aural equivalent of Wyeth's "Christina's Meadow." "Dancin' In The Kitchen" and "The Way You're Looking" are lively love songs that start your toes tapping and your face grinning. "Before The Class Reunion" stands out as far more than a "where are they now" romp in nostalgia. Suchy captures us as we were, and as we are. You'll feel like you went to school with him, and a tear will form as he sings of people with whom you suddenly feel a kinship. The closer, "Simply Fly," invokes a play on words, as Suchy repeats: "Simplify, simplify. Spread you wings. Simply fly." He gently twists those words into a mantra in the song.

You may never have heard of Chuck Suchy, but your life will be better when you hear him. He doesn't plan to market this CD commercially, so go the extra mile and order it directly from his farm. Considering commodity prices, he can probably use your support. — RWarr

DAVID BROMBERG
My Own House /
You Should See The Rest Of The Band
Fantasy 24752

A Fantasy two-fer reissue. My favorite David Bromberg album has always been his intimate, all acoustic and mostly solo *My Own House* from 1978. This intimate and eclectic set ranges from the gorgeous "Sheebag And Sheemore" to "To Know Her Is To Love Her" to Rev. Gary Davis' "Black And Tan." "Spanish Johnny," Paul Siebel's recasting of a Willa Cather poem into song, has always felt magical to me. The set shows just how rich music can be when stripped to the barest bones.

By contrast, *You Should See The Rest Of The Band* from 1979 captures the '70s vintage Bromberg Band at its most raucous and wildest. Peter Ecklund's cornet and trumpet always stood out for me both in their live shows and on record. The record is even better than I remembered it being. The set list here, too, is highly eclectic and full of surprises. Great fun. Its Gahan Wilson drawn cover is shown, too, and as a huge Wilson fan I am delighted.

David Bromberg in the '70s was as fine an entertainer as there was in the land. That he was also a master musician who cut his teeth accompanying Jerry Jeff Walker in Walker's breakthrough years and learned reams just by paying attention added immeasurably to his work. This is another fantabulous reissue from fantasy and its seemingly bottomless vaults. A must for anyone who was there at Bromberg shows in the '70s and subsequent band reunion tours, and for anyone who wasn't and wants to know what it was like. Coupling *My Own House* with *YSSSTROTB* gives a remarkably full portrait of the breadth and depth of David Bromberg's world. — MT

DARRYL PURPOSE
Traveler's Code
Tangible 56815

This release is aptly named as many of the songs included revolve around the inability of a man to stay put. But the themes vary from presenting the vagabond unable to commit ("For The Story") to the ultimate settled, dream husband suggested ("There's A Ring On My Hand").

The opener is a wonderful example of the romantic man. Mr. Schwinn has a gift for fixing a bike. He is keeping a pair that he continuously shines and cares for until he can do the same with a mate of his own. He says, "One of these bikes is more than a twin, as he pumped up the tires and polished the

rim, I'm saving it for my Mrs. Schwinn." When death greets him before he finds a wife, the bikes, "perfectly matched like a groom and a bride," are given away. (We can almost hear the group sigh.)

In "Child Of Hearts," as the surprised father is confronted by his own four-year-old and declares "a little girl was never in my plans, you see, I make my way with a serenade." Though a fragile subject, the delivery is not. Ellis Paul adds harmony to the chorus. Sporting lines such as "I'm not the kind to have and hold" leads me to believe that musical accompaniment, so reminiscent of Springsteen's "Born to Run," is intentional.

In the very next tune, in utter and complete opposition of musical mood and lyrical sentiment, we hear a romantic duet with Lucy Kaplansky. Here, Purpose convincingly and lovingly expresses his adoration for "the loveliest person that I've ever known" as he wakes on "the first day of living" with a ring on his hand. This beautiful duet had arrangement help from Dave Carter and Tracy Grammer. This song is destined to make the rounds in many a wedding, and deservedly so.

The title cut, "Traveler's Code," ends the release with young children's voices on the final chorus. Even before then, though, the melody is a sticker. In fact, many of Purpose's melodies have quiet little hooks of beauty. The rising "Follow the light, when the woods become thick, follow the light, when your eyes show you tricks ..." will hang in your hum bank along with the "this ring surrounds our doubt" bridge in "Ring On My Hand."

"Smoke And Mirrors," shows Purpose is not only lyrically impressive, but entertaining as composer and performer of the instrumental.

The "Last Great Kiss Of The 20th Century" cleverly takes advantage of the millennium. Since within the song itself they debate over when the millennium actually begins, it is a tune that can be aired next year. This song blends both the turn of the century with the turn of the vagabond into the true lover. Early in the song, the former tells the woman "I don't often know what I'm doing next month." A year later he has his arm 'round her shoulder. Together they are pushing their infant in a carriage to the place where they were "part of some fireworks" the year before.

Looking at Darryl's photo on the CD, I imagine that the "Child Of Hearts" line from a four-year old about a daddy "big and scary" could be about him, yet his more poetic and romantic pieces on the CD outweigh this image and suggest more of a large teddy bear. — AP

DEIRDRE FLINT *The Shuffleboard Queens*

Fadia 1001

Deirdre Flint took the Northeast Regional Folk Alliance Showcase by storm this year. She was a unanimous choice of the judges, who rarely agreed on anything initially. And then Deirdre wowed the audience. Deirdre Flint is a funny lady.

What Deirdre has going for her is a sprightly voice and a set of very funny songs. Her sense of humor is suitable for family listening, and she pokes fun at life as it is lived. Moreover, the songs are so loaded with words that multiple listenings are required, which is no problem because the songs are strong enough to be worth listening to repeatedly.

The 13 cuts are all humorous, and are all worth hearing. However, as Christine Lavin's career demonstrates, it takes a mix of straight and funny songs to hold an audience for a couple of hours at a time. It will be interesting to see if Deirdre can develop a balanced repertoire.

In the meantime, enjoy what Deirdre has to offer – funny songs well delivered. Recommended. — VKH



ROBBIE FULKS
The Very Best Of Robbie Fulks
Bloodshot 059

Robbie Fulks has a hard earned rep as a wickedly irreverent, occasionally scabrous writer and singer of country songs. The Chicago native is probably best known for his "love song" to the Nashville music community inspired by his treatment there, "F*** This Town." But there is a whole lot more to Robbie Fulks than that deliciously poisoned pen note would have you think. He really is very much a thinking man's songwriter.

His new *Very Best Of Robbie Fulks* album, like Robbie himself, is not what it seems. This is no career retrospective. It does collate some excellent odds and ends from disparate sources, and there is some fine new stuff here, too. Be very skeptical of the sources Fulks cites in his song by song notes. Most of these are very convincing lies. So convincing it is real hard to

tell the true ones from the lies. His songs run a wide gamut. "Jean Arthur" is an easy shuffling paean to the delightful film star of yore. "May The Best Man Win" would be perfect for George Jones while "Sleepin' On The Job Of Love" sounds like a classic Buck Owens hit that never was. "Roots Rock Weirdoes" is a menacing rocker with rockabilly underpinning. "Parallel Bars" is in a classic country boy/girl duet with the sultry Kelly Willis. "Hamilton County Breakdown" is a pure, hot, lightning fast bluegrass instrumental. The dangerous side of Fulks surfaces on the hilarious "White Man's Bourbon" and "That Bangle Girl," his tribute to popster Susannah Hoffs. The final track, a hidden one, is a bizarre, minor-keyed loungey take on John Denver's "Leavin' On A Jet Plane" that just oozes insincerity.

Robbie Fulks is one of the most audacious writers out there, a master songwriting technician in diverse styles. The performances are solid, sturdy and super confident. All joking aside, this album really does contain a lot of Robbie's very best. — MT

TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA

Closer To The Truth

Trout 14

Yeah! Another Trout Fishing in America release. What other duo does a better job of allowing an adult the freedom to be childish? A song like "But I Do" on this new release goes beyond merely allowing, it almost shames you into behaving childish. And why not? They sound like they are having so much fun.

With "After You've Gone" they allow themselves adult temper tantrums. Who hasn't wanted to throw their socks all over, avoid mowing the lawn or behave generally irresponsibly? When the lover in this song leaves, she takes her perfectness and potpourri to boot. We don't need any such motivation to experience, through song, the possibilities of such freedom.

When they are not directly addressing children's habits of "making faces in the mirror" or "acting like a fool" they are the tired adults taking breaks from coping with this behavior. Sometimes it is difficult to tell the adult behavior from the child's as many behaviors are universal, like the need for someone to make everything all right and the need for dreaming.

There is nothing childish, however, about their clever lyrics or the perfect blending of sound that results from partners so comfortably aware of each other's abilities. When finely crafted adult talents are com-

bined with childish appeal they can't help but be a hit. They are the Rocky and Bullwinkle of folk music, pleasing on various intellectual and humorous levels. So, go ahead, there's no need to pretend you have children ... pick up a copy. — AP



TOM RUSH
The Very Best Of Tom Rush:
No Regrets
Columbia/Legacy 65860

This is the very first Tom Rush retrospective that reviews his entire career. "San Francisco Bay Blues" dates from his very first recording, the very rare '62 vintage *Live At The Unicorn*, recorded at that legendary Boston club of yore. "Mobile-Texas Line" is from his Prestige period. "Panama Limited," "On The Road Again," "Galveston Flood" and "Joshua Gone Barbados" from Tom's first two Elektra albums together beg the question of why these excellent albums have never been reissued on CD. "Urge For Going" represents the landmark *Circle Game* album.

There are 7 from Tom's Columbia period. One of these is the remake of Tom's brilliant "No Regrets," featuring a harmony vocal by Carly Simon. I'd have preferred the *Circle Game* original, but I am certain that the licensing fee dictated the choice. "Kids These Days" is another questionable choice. It is cute to be sure, but its joke wears thin, and better choices were available. "The Dreamer" and "Jamaica Say You Will" are from Tom's early '80s self-published releases, and "The River Song" is a new Rush composition recorded specially for this release.

Nice overview, but it does whet the palate for a more complete dose of Tom Rush, one of the finest folk interpreters to have emerged from the '60s. — MT

VARIOUS
White Mansions / Jesse James
Mercury 314-540 791

The two concept albums here were originally released on A&M in 1978 and 1980. They were the first recorded work of the gifted British songwriter Paul Kennerley. Since then Kennerley has gone

on to a fruitful career in Nashville as a writer of hit songs with both strong melody and lyrics. Those gifts were evident from the very start, which was right here.

Getting the attention and aegis of the successful producer Glyn Johns provided the entry to get the albums made. Waylon Jennings, Jessie Colter and Ozark Mountain Daredevils John Dillon and Steve Cash were recruited to sing the leads of *White Mansions*, a story set in the American Civil War. Rodena Preston's Voices of Deliverance sang the role of the slaves. Dillon, Cash, Jennings, Bernie Leadon, Henry Spinetti and Dave Markee were the project's core band with an Eric Clapton cameo on one track. The London Symphony Orchestra was also employed.

Kennerley's next salvo was *The Legend Of Jesse James*. Johns again acted as champion by circulating rough tapes of the songs. The tape that got to guitarist Albert Lee knocked him out and he in turn played it for Emmylou Harris, who fell in love with Kennerley's songs. (A bit later she fell in love with Kennerley himself, and from 1983 to '93 they were married.) Emmylou brought in Rodney Crowell, Rosanne Cash and Johnny Cash to sing roles, and Levon Helm, Jody Payne, Albert Lee, Donivan and Martin Cowart, Charlie Daniels and Kennerley each sung parts, too. This time the band included Lee, Kennerley and Jesse Ed Davis on guitars, Tim Gorman on piano, Emory Gordy on bass, Helm on drums and Daniels on fiddle.

Both albums are still memorable efforts. Even at the start, Kennerley's songwriting was informed and smartly executed. The crack teams of singers and players insured that the material would be given its best showing. There is a bonus cut, "A Train Robbery," appended to *Jesse James*. Kennerley started the song back then, but only completed it recently at the urging of Marty Stuart. Nashville scribe Robert K. Oermann offers a fine essay about the genesis of the two albums. A rewarding release. — MT

JIM HENRY
The Wayback
Signature Sounds 1254

It will come as a surprise (and possibly a disappointment) to those of us who were born before, say, 1960 or so, that Jim Henry's *The Wayback* has nothing whatsoever to do with Sherman and Peabody. As revealed in the disc's opening track, "Drive-In Movie Picture Show," it's a fond remembrance of the bygone times when an evening's worth of entertainment for the

whole family could be had for "two-fifty for the carload." (Show of hands here – who *hasn't* ever hid in the trunk to sneak in?) With this tune and nine more original songs (there are two additional listed songs, one each from the catalogs of Doc Watson and Carl Perkins), Henry demonstrates not only an adept talent for writing songs that tell good stories, but also the ability to present them in a number of evocative settings. "Eddie And Pearl," for example, is a blues-rocker about a young pair of Bonnie-and-Clyde-type misfits that highlights Henry's ability to turn a neat lyric – she had looks to kill for/ And Eddie had a gun." "Last Call" is a country-flavored ballad with a keen-eyed view for what goes on inside the doors of a Texas honky-tonk joint that, on the outside, looks pretty much like any other. "Restless" (the Perkins tune) is a high-energy salute to rockabilly, and "1967" takes the "talking blues" style and lays it over an acid rock instrumental backing – sort of a "Woody Guthrie meets Jefferson Airplane" approach. Whatever the subject or treatment, each cut seems to fit in with the "Wayback" theme, not only in the story being told, but the arrangements are something of a time capsule themselves. And, as Henry shows on the three instrumental tracks (one is an unlisted "bonus" track at the end), he's an excellent guitarist as well. Backing Henry up is a cast that includes Kevin Barry (guitar), Bob Fishman (percussion), Richard Gates (bass) and Doug Plavin (drums) along with guest appearances by Annie and Jeannie Burns of the Burns Sisters Band. As a vocalist, Henry has a warm, slightly craggy baritone that he fits to his material well, and as his own producer, he has put together an album that varies moods and tempos, never becoming cliched or uninteresting. — JL

JOHN McCUTCHEON
Storied Ground
Rounder 0467

With the release of his 24th recording in about as many years, John McCutcheon is back with yet another reminder of what it means to be a well rounded troubadour. When pressed for the perfect example of a modern folk musician, it's his name that comes to mind. If we ever needed an ambassador of folk music to represent this country in far off places, I'd call John. His live performances are always fresh and exciting. His music and philosophy is well grounded and consistent and he has got to be one of the most prolific artists recording music today.

In the studio he is known to push the envelope when it comes to instrumentation and arrangement, but whether you like the more experimental stuff or not, you have to admit that the playing is always solid and the production is always top notch. This comes from working with the same core of musicians and producers recording after recording.

On *Storied Ground*, McCutcheon mixes it up with songs that range from solo acoustic to full band sound. But what remains steady is his reverence for history and his ongoing fight for social justice. What also remains steady is his ability to use stories to both enlighten and entertain. The themes go back as far as the Flint sit down strike of the 1930s and continue on to the day the color barrier was broken in major league baseball to the returning of the Names Quilt and the threat to independent retail stores by mega chain stores. It's all quintessential McCutcheon and may his creative juices continue to flow. — MW



RICK FIELDING
This One's The Dreamer
Borealis 119

In medicine, there are specialists and there are general practitioners. And while the specialist will have highly honed skills in a respective area of expertise, a good GP will generally be more versatile. And so it is in folk-oriented music, with specialists zeroing in on styles or genres like blues, ballads, old-time or contemporary songwriting, etc. while generalists are comfortable and credible among a number, or many, different styles. Rick Fielding is an accomplished folk music generalist playing a parking lot version of “Salty Dog” one moment, or a traditional ballad like “The Wind And Rain” the next.

As a songwriter, both solo and in collaboration, Fielding's original material varies from songs like “Come To Lower Canada,” which sounds like an old historical ballad to “Those Gin Mill Syncopaters,” a swinging tribute to early blues and jazz inspirations.

Other highlights include a lovely version of the Beatles' “In My Life,” featuring Grit Laskin's concertina, and Tom Paxton's “Deep Fork,” done like an old mountain song.

From cut to cut, Fielding moves around from guitar to banjo, mandolin and Autoharp with a collaborating musician or two on each song. In addition to Laskin, they include fiddlers Zeke Mazurek and Don Reed, guitarists Bill Garrett, Curly Boy Stubbs and Tony Quarrington, and Chris Whiteley on harmonica. — MR

JENNIE AVILA
Child Of My Child
Jennie Avila Music 99

For seven years Jennie Avila and Amy Torchia played as a duo in the Philadelphia area. They were noted for their excellent harmonies and interesting song choices. Then Amy left the partnership for motherhood and moved to Vermont. Jennie has now released her first solo album, notable for excellent harmonies and interesting song choices.

This is an album full of songs about love, heat lightning, fairies, and tofu. A frothy mix of basically light textured songs, almost all written by Jennie. The album is for grownups, although many would have an appeal to children.

The supporting cast is superb. Jay Ansill joins Jennie on most cuts, playing mandolins, violins, the octave violin, and the Celtic harp. Kevin MacConnell is on upright bass. Jennie does her own backing vocals. Sean McClintock co-produced the album with Jennie.

Overall, this is an appealing album, especially to old Jenamy fans. It looks like Jenny will be able to pretty much continue the old sound by herself. — VKH

BUDDY MILLER
Cruel Moon
HighTone 8111

In a fairer world Buddy Miller would be a major star. His albums, and those he has produced for his wife Julie Miller, are all outstanding, startlingly clearheaded works. This new release is another triumph.

The sound is crisp, with notable clarity and presence (another product of the Millers' home-based Dogtown Studio). Buddy has a terrific grasp on how to make great sounding, economical records. That crisp sound and performance is a trademark of everything Buddy Miller works on.

Cruel Moon's eleven selections include four Buddy and Julie co-writes, two more collaborations with their close friend and colleague Jim Lauderdale, and one Julie wrote herself. The four covers include Paul Kennerley's “Love Match” which features

an appropriately nasty Steve Earle duet vocal, Earle's “I'm Not Getting Any Better At Goodbye” and the Barry Mann/Cynthia Weil ballad “I'm Gonna Be Strong” both of which sport fabulous Joy Lynn White vocals, and Roebuck Staples' “It's Been A Change” which closes the set.

Emmylou Harris, who Buddy worked with in the great band Spyboy, joins Buddy for the stark and lovely title song, another Buddy and Julie heartbreak that brought real tears to my eyes. Joy Lynn also graces the equally desolate “Sometimes I Cry.” Lauderdale appears on his snappy co-write, “Looking For A Heartache Like You,” and the sweet/sad “I'm Too Used To Lovin' You.” Julie's distinctively appealing girlish voice sparks her sassy “Somewhere Trouble Don't Go,” the Millers' gentle “In Memory Of My Heart” and the closing Staples song.

Unquestionably there is a lot of heartbreak in the Millers' songs, but do not conclude that they are mopey people. In an interview on NPR's *Fresh Air* Julie said that the sadness of the songs is inspired by the repertoires of the Louvin and the Stanley Brothers.

Killer harmonists and superb pickers notwithstanding, Buddy carries the show. I have come to appreciate him as one of the most expressive country singers anywhere. And he is an astonishing on guitar, banjo, mandolin and bass. And, even though he doesn't do it here he is a fine drummer, too. His musical ideas will stop you cold in your tracks. The Byron House/John Gardner and Alison Prestwood/Bryan Owings rhythm sections by turns rate steady and subtle. Tammy Rogers adds striking fiddle and mandolin on six tracks while Al Perkins' steel guitar is on three.

The trick Buddy Miler keeps pulling off is just adding enough to make a song work on record. He has a canny sense of placement. Even more important, he instinctively knows what to leave out. Buddy never ever overloads a track. And he works with musical friends who appreciate and share his vision. Add yet another batch of super songs and you have all the ingredients that make *Cruel Moon* the excellent album it is. — MT

JAMES GORDON
Pipe Street Dreams
Wind River 4008

James Gordon works weekly as a hired pen for the CBC, has hosted his own radio show, has recorded several children's folk operas and was a founding member of the trio Tamarack. This release reveals

Gordon's musical tastes when he is free of assignment, and it is amazing that after meeting all these musical demands, that there are any melodies left. There are some beautiful ones here.

Many of the songs here are gentle lullabies, mixed beautifully with lyrics that blend geographical visions with emotional needs. They call for the quiet calmness of nature after or during the continuous call of life's necessities.

Gordon is so against a direct reference to a self-centered emotional statement, that he constantly compares his mood to Canadian landscape. In "Too Canadian These Days," he is "empty in the middle" and as "far away as Hudson Bay." Perhaps residents in a town in Alberta may feel offended by the flat or empty references, but it not meant as a statement on the people living there, only as a description for his mood.

On his more political tune "Coke Oven Brook," the realities of life again cloud desired outcomes. The families living around this town equate the factory smoke rising with the ability to buy dinner, and then the chorus shifts the sentiment. One generation realizes the price that the next will be paying and imagines revenge. This song does an excellent job pitting the very need for a livelihood against the need for life itself. A thoughtful approach to toxic waste not unlike Patty Larkin's "Metal Drums" and Cosy Sheridan's "Don't Go In The Water."

Several songs carry different moods. "My Insomnia," though short on lyrics, has a featured trumpet solo and probably did take all night to record since Gordon plays all of the more than 15 instruments on this track. He harmonizes with himself often on the recording, and begins many a tune with a beautiful piano introduction.

Though he has several other solo albums to date, this one is released as he embarks on a solo career, leaving Tamarack after two dozen years. It's perhaps a musical reflection of the course the artist's own life is taking, and the tunes suggest that pipe dreams of a slower paced life are attainable if you take the time to refocus. In these beautiful melodies, you'll reassess your own use of time. — AP

KENN KWEDER
Indre Sessions
Pandemonium 6941

Kweder has been a sort of guerilla troubadour around Philadelphia for over 25 years. His performances both solo and with any of his on-going succession of oddly named but powerful bands are the

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stuff of legend thereabouts as they range erratically from amazing to awful. But throughout this sweep of time Kweder's songwriting has always been audacious, often brilliant.

Over the years he has made a number of records. *Indre Sessions*, his latest, may well be his very finest. As always he has some of the area's very best players, especially in his guitar corps of Jim Fogerty, Alan James and Kevin Karg. His songs aspire to epic stature the way Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* songs did. Like some of those touchstones, "Diablo" and "Pandemonium And The Scene" make it hard to relate exactly what is going on, but Kenn's gift for both memorable turns of phrase and strong melodies make them work. His songs are something like the classic Chinese box puzzle in that as you unlock one riddle you immediately are faced with another.

In an alternate earth Kenn Kweder would have become a breakout major artist. He has been poised for great things several times, but invariably he would find a way to screw it up. Here he sounds like a man who has grown comfortable with himself at last, and this has allowed him to relax enough to deliver some excellent work. — MT



DEBORAH HOLLAND
The Book Of Survival
Gadfly 257

Warning. This album contains "Hard To Be A Human In The Universe," one of those songs with the elusive songwriter's hook that grabs onto your neurons and sets up residency in your cerebrum for days after hearing it. This is usually a sign that good words and the right melody have mated to form the songwriter's Nirvana — a tune you can't get out of your head. But this one song is no fluke, and *The Book Of Survival* has so much more than just one catchy song. Deborah Holland has a lovely, thoughtful voice — pitch perfect and expressive — just right for these personal words. She sings with wit and a subtle sly twinkle in her eye. Like Christine Lavin's songs, the songs seem to fit the author like a glove. Unlike Lavin's, there are songs that might be successful on a broader range of set lists, sung by lots of folks. In fact, it has been a long time since I so liked everything I heard on an album.

The truth is, in the Andy Warhol department Deborah Holland has already savored her allotted fifteen minutes of fame. As the lead singer of Animal Logic, the trio formed by ex-Police drummer Stewart Copeland and jazz bassist Stanley Clarke, Holland made quite a splash. Animal Logic recorded two super albums and brought cutting-edge, eclectic music to major stages around the world. Holland even appeared on David Letterman, the Tonight Show, VH-1 and MTV. But the most revealing sign of Holland's inner soul was evident on a little folk album she recorded in 1997 with Gadfly after Animal Logic disbanded, *The Panic Is On: Songs From The Great Depression*. A rock singer interested in political songs from the 1930s? What gives?

First the rock singer versus folk singer thing. The boundaries have been somewhat blurred since Dylan plugged in at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 and all the rock stars started unplugging again in the last few years on MTV. *The Book Of Survival* contains singer-songwriter material as well-penned, and well-portrayed as anything contemporary folk or rock performers are now serving up. And in a retro way, the songs are a lot less "me, me, me" and a tad more "us, us, us" than the usual fare. Maybe that's because Holland has already been "there, there, there" and has the luxury of exploring topics she feels passionate about. I also like the fact that the album has a professional feel to it, a host of great acoustic sounds, produced with a light touch, lots of air and not overdone.

The songs? If Holland's contemporary "Faded Red Car" had been written about a horse instead of an automobile — it would be "Stewball." Few of us muck out stables nowadays, but we do have to muck out our personal and societal metaphoric stables — and that's what Deborah Holland does so well. It is a danger to write topical songs (remember those?). When taking on current events it is easy to sound preachy or trite. Not here. "Kids With Guns" is not trite but right, current affairs sung with pace and humanity. Even a song with a title "Pinochet And Margaret Thatcher" works and elicits a smile, as does "Happy Birthday, You're Turning 40." These are titles that would activate a "trite alert" warning if observed on another album. They work here because Holland possesses the heart and objectivity and talent to make even current events ache like a wry love song. It reminds me that good songs and a knowing voice have more than the power to entertain; these elements have the power to move a listener to a better place. Isn't that what contemporary folk used to do? — RDeitz

MARK WEIGLE
The Truth Is
Mark Weigle 656863-3066-21

Weigle is really good at placing bridges between the struggles of gays and "straights."

In the current movie, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Matt Damon plays a man who would rather be a fake someone than the real himself. Give a thought to the agony of that need and Mark Weigle lays out this same struggle in "Do You Go." This is the daily life of a gay man living as he puts it "someone else's lie" in a marriage. As his wife begins living his truth the ache is transferred. As we contemplate her adjustments in the song, we get something of a feeling for all the past agony of the man whose only chance to free himself was to disappoint someone else.

Weigle sings with the emotion of a Garth Brooks delivery. Beautifully moving love lyrics flow with clarity and passion. He has some great lines and paints great moments. In "I Confess," the sister of a man he is watching catches his eye and says, "I know, I love him too."

Love is love, just as the grief and loss have no gender. When his lover is dying of AIDS in "If It Wasn't Love," he states bluntly, "It was not sex, I wanted you as much when you barely had a body left." In another song about loss, "One Less Dancer," he advises to take your partner tightly in your arms, as the tears swell, remembering the man who "never left early 'til he left us for good," he watches the others on the dance floor. When asked if he'd like to dance, he says "I'm just watching," and the chorus changes to "two less dancers."

Not all the songs involve gay issues as the theme. "See You Say I Love You" is about signing your love for someone, evidently done in sign language when he performs live. "From Your Kid" is about reaching the age when we become aware of the sacrifices made by our parents. With this song he sings his appreciation of what he once criticized. He also has tunes about traveling and about living far from the town where you grew up. "Take Your Shoulder From The Wheel" is a beautiful sentiment and melody to match. The request is accompanied by a need to feel the strength and have a place to lean. It could be anyone, any age, with this need.

But most of his love songs leave no doubt about his sexuality. Eight of thirteen works on the album definitely do not court ambiguity. Teenage confusion about sexuality, coping with hatred, coping with loss, intense passion and coming to terms with a true inner self are central themes.

In "Oz," Weigle compares past lovers with the famous threesome; men with great chests but no heart, no brain, afraid of commitment, you get it. He is looking to fly like bluebirds to the end of the rainbow with a man that comes "without a curtain." He often visits the theme of the freedom to be and show who you are.

Weigle's strongest songs are the ones that go beyond the single relationship and address the acceptance of gay culture into society. Hopefully this album will play a part in the need for the fulfillment of that reality. Weigle's music is a way to help us place all love and loss in focus. We sure need more help to accept love in all forms into the world rather than analyze or judge it. Political statements aside, Weigle is an excellent writer with an emotional delivery. — AP

MARK STUART

Songs From A Corner Stage
Gearle 2802

Mark Stuart first came to my attention playing guitar for his wife, Stacey Earle, both on Stacey's record and out on the road. He is a marvelously friendly chap and a terrific guitarist who can nail a good number of styles.

As his album shows, Stuart is also a very fine songwriter and singer. His best songs are character portraits and narrations that recall the South of William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. "Old Money" tells of a doomed romance between a poor boy and a rich girl whose daddy would not allow it to blossom. "Girl From Louisiana" is an ode to a Southern belle livened by Mark's dandy Travis-style picking. "Small Photograph" is a slow blues about how a traveler gets by. "It's Not Me" begs forgiveness of a lover through a fresh approach of saying how he has mended his ways. Last in the set and most impressive is "When Kathy Sings," a murder ballad of how a man's unbalanced wife poisoned his father and the awful aftermath.

The album has a nice homemade feel. Stuart is very likable as a picker, singer and guitarist. As a performer he is refreshingly low on irony, adding to the ripped from life feel of his songs. — MT

GUY CLARK

Cold Dog Soup
Sugar Hill 1063

I've been a big fan of Guy Clark's Texas songs ever since I heard his first LP back in 1975. Clark was a great young songwriter then and has matured into one of the

true masters of the craft. True to the form of his recent albums, Clark is recording his songs in spare acoustic settings that are beautifully suited to his conversational singing voice and great songs.

There is not a song here that I don't like. Some of my favorites, though, include "Water Under A Bridge," a memory and fantasy growing out of a baptism that's set to the tune of "Shady Grove," "Cold Dog Soup," in which Clark recalls a long-closed California music club frequented by characters like Tom Waits, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Townes Van Zandt and Rosalie Sorrels, and "Red River," in which Clark sings about a Southwestern river and the people who have populated its banks.

In addition to his nine originals, Clark also offers great interpretations of three other songs, including Steve Earle's very beautiful "Fort Worth Blues," written in tribute to the memory of Clark's close friend Townes Van Zandt. — MR

KATHERINE WHEATLEY

Habits And Heroes
Hoot 001

The first two tracks here throw teenage girls into the exciting and scary male world that is suddenly paying a lot of attention to them. They are both flattered and annoyed by the demands. Typical teenage concerns surface, about looking thin or needy and generally pretending to be who they are not. I can see playing these cuts between reading passages from *Reviving Ophelia*. These songs foreshadow troubles experienced by some of the woman whose stories follow.

Wheatley has an ability to throw her voice up the scale in whispering tones. This quality is especially effective on songs that present these women justifying and coping. In some songs it as if she uses this tone to ask for help between the very words that assure us that she doesn't need it. That is not the only voice Wheatley uses though. She alternates voices and songs of these coping women with the comments on the patterns of society that place them in these situations.

Poor "Mrs. McIvor" is tormented by children who take their lead by the examples of the judgmental neighborhood filled with gossip and rumor. The chorus focuses on the game "Nikki Nikki Nine Doors" where children ring bells and run away, as do the adults with their hit and run gossip.

The occasional naughty phrase, like warning boys that their "wieners would fall off," or people yelling "get your hair cut you asshole" may make controversy for radio airplay, but show a tough side. She

shows her sense of humor too. In "He Keeps Calling Me Baby," a rather forward teenager is asking a young girl something. In her confusion over what she heard, she naively answers that her brother plays hockey and maybe he would like a puck. This tune rocks with Wheatley's strong vocals against innocent lines.

Stephen Fearing, on acoustic guitar, is only one of the Canadian stalwarts adding their talents here. Also on board is Colin Linden, David Woodhead and Wendell Ferguson. When using her lower register, Wheatley sounds similar to Mary Chapin Carpenter, but she doesn't stay with any particular vocal sound long. This variety in her vocals is one of her strengths. Here is a singer who can handle pop, Broadway or a country sound equally convincingly. — AP



TOWNES VAN ZANDT
A Far Cry From Dead
Arista Austin, 07822-18888

This new Townes Van Zandt release has a story behind its genesis. In the late '80s and early '90s Townes recorded a batch of voice and guitar demos on DAT. Eventually he gave the tapes to his wife Jeanene saying "Hang on to these, babe, I think there's some good stuff on here." She promptly put them away and forgot about them. Some time after Townes died on New Year's Day 1997, the tapes resurfaced. When she was able to deal with listening to them she told family friend Eric Paul about them at Thanksgiving dinner. On finally listening to the DATs for the first time both Jeanene and Eric were stunned. Townes had rarely sounded better.

After funds were in place for the project, Eric assembled a superb team of musicians to flesh out the guitar/voice demos: Michael Spriggs on various acoustic guitars, Richard Bennett on the electrics, Larry Knechtel on keys, Bob Wray on bass, Craig Kamph and Kenny Malone on drums, Russ Hicks on steel guitar, Charlie McCoy on harmonica, Jim Calver on banjo and Susie Monick on accordion.

Thirteen songs appear on the album. Eleven are Townes classics and two are new songs. Eric and Jeanene were right about the tapes. Townes' performances are wonderful as he sounds focused and strong, his

work definitive. Though he had recorded the eleven old songs included here, some several times, they have never sounded better or more convincing or more touching.

The new ones are "Squash," which is a blackly humorous bit about roadkill, and "Sanitarium Blues." Townes only recorded "Sanitarium" in spoken form humming his proposed melody afterward as a guide. For the recording his words have been broken down to phrases and placed within the newly recorded backing tracks. It is a frightening piece in which a man still in control of his mental faculties is shipped off to the living hell of a sanitarium. There he feels like the sanest one there among either patients or staff. In time he is released as incurable and put back into a world that couldn't care less. It is one of Townes' most bitter works, even among the darkness he wrote about so vividly and so often.

A Far Cry From Dead is a treasure and an heirloom, a gift from beyond from a poet who looked far into the beyond and saw all too well. The love of the participants radiates in the music. Even the photos chosen for the booklet are revealing. The stark and wrinkled visages ravaged by time and hard living shown on the front and back covers stand in starkest contrast to the two shots of a much younger Townes, with radiant, beaming smiles. The young and old Townes Van Zandt barely look like the same man, yet undeniably they are. The Townes we hear in this album sounds amazingly like that vibrant young Texas bard in the snaps.

This really is a brilliant album, and it may well be Townes Van Zandt's very best. The good news is that Arista has an option for a sequel. — MT

WAYNE HANCOCK
Wild, Free & Reckless
Ark21 186-801-043

Wayne Hancock's retro country music hearkens straight back to Ernest Tubb. But Hancock is no young poseur, he's the real deal. This, his third album, is another spot on set of honky tonk music, made clear from the very first notes of the opener, a terrific cover of Tubb's "Kansas City Blues."

Hancock storms through the 15-song set calling out the names of his soloists as he goes Bob Wills style. There are a dozen originals, and two rockabilly classics served up honkytonk style: Bill Mack's "It's Saturday Night" and a Blue Suede Shoes" that owes it all to Carl Perkins' own version of his classic. Hancock's approach fits comfortably with the covers he

chooses, and his own songs sound like forgotten Tubb compositions from 50 years back. He is a gem.

His band is superb, too. Johnny Wakefield's steel guitar has that vintage sound and style. Guitarists Dave "Leroy" Biller, Sean Mincher, Paul Skelton and Jim Shelton plus piano man T Jarrod Banta all shine. Ric Ramirez's slap bass is the perfect touch. Great chops abound!

As I said Wayne "The Train" Hancock is the real deal. His honky tonk music is as pure as it gets. For added fun, check out the multimedia extras on the disc. — MT

IRENE KELLY
Simple Path
Irk 1002

What a sweet album. It's a pleasure to be able to assure a listener that every one of the songs on this release are excellent. Irene Kelly is a tiny woman with a big voice who knows how to write a country hit. She has already been discovered and covered by Trisha Yearwood, Ricky Skaggs, and Loretta Lynn. Here you can hear her own renditions of 11 tunes co-written with Darryl Scott, Kim Richey, Claire Lynch, Kim Patton-Johnston, Terry Smith, Billy Smith, Mark Irwin, Michael Joyce, Jeff Hughes, and Dave Gillon. She doesn't focus entirely on the ache and despair brought on by love's pains, but when she does, she takes you there completely.

"A Little Bluer Than That" sets us up with all the examples of the saddest of moments that we have all experienced, and then once the listener has grabbed that emotional memory, Kelly goes even even lower. The smooth, clear vocals have just the right amount of Southern dialect and emotion to carry us to these depths without being sappy.

"It Wasn't Me" denies responsibility for patterns established with a former partner. The beat pulses with strokes of the mandolin in a minor key, driving home the message "don't let a ghost of yesterday, scare you away from me." The mandolin along with violin, lead guitar and Dobro share breaks and supply fills.

This production is a good example of what Nashville's musical talents can do when combined with producers unwilling to sacrifice the core of the song. If you love to sing along, it is guaranteed that these songs will have you doubling a harmony.

Simple Path is a wealthy collection for the giants of country to grab, but most will be more than pleased with Irene Kelly herself, as writer and performer of her own works. — AP

KARLA BONOFF
All My Life
Columbia 65765

Karla Bonoff has a gorgeous voice and a set of songs in her 30-odd-years of writing that rival any other singer-songwriter on the stage today. *All My Life* is a collection of 16 of her best. Leading with "Someone To Lay Down Beside Me," written at 23, and concluding with the version of "The Water Is Wide" borrowed from the Weavers that she recorded 20 years ago with James Taylor, this is indeed a superb historical review.

Karla learned guitar at 15 from Frank Hamilton of the Weavers. She was part of the original Bryndle band, members of which later worked with Linda Ronstadt. They in turn introduced Karla to Linda, who went on to record three of Karla's best songs. Linda helped Karla get her record contract with Columbia. She recorded four LPs for Columbia in the '70s and '80s. In 1990, Karla wrote three more songs that were recorded by Linda Ronstadt, and Bryndle came together again, releasing a fine album in 1995.

Besides "Someone ...", Karla's magic is especially apparent in "Goodbye My Friend," "Isn't It Always Love," and "All My Life." Well-written and moderately produced, these are songs that can be listened to through a dozen repeats, drums and all.

Karla Bonoff is pop with a folk background. For those readers who like their folk with a pop leaning, this is a must buy. Gorgeous from start to finish. I love it. — VKH

HAL KETCHUM
Awaiting Redemption
Curb 77948

The latest from Ketchum, *Awaiting Redemption*, was originally supposed to have appeared in 1998 under the much less apt title *Hal Yes*, but the label shelved it due to the darkness of the album's songs. It is quite a departure for an artist who had an impressive run of country hits in the first half of the '90s.

Save the finale "Lonely Old Me," written with Marcus Hummon, Hal's songs here date from 1995-97, which was a tough time for Hal. He was very ill, and his marriage fell apart, and the writing reflects these two roadblocks. However, since then he has recovered and has found a new wife, and his life has been righted anew.

This is a strong, often compelling album. Stephen Bruton's production is spare and refreshingly glitz and sugar free. He has cast the songs in tart settings that re-

flect their emotions, and Hal is singing from his heart and commands your attention. As Jimmie Dale Gilmore's fine liner essay notes, this is an album of "courage and dignity" that "respectfully acknowledge[s] both our fragility and our limitlessness." — MT

KATY MOFFATT

Loose Diamond

HighTone 8109

Katy Moffatt's singing seems effortless, but at the same time there are intense passion and control ... qualities that are usually mutually exclusive. The producer this time out is Dave Alvin, a terrific singer, songwriter and guitarist in his own right, and he has done a swell job of creating settings where Katy can relax and shine.

Loose Diamond is a diverse set. There are great old country hits in "I Walk Alone" and "Waitin' For The Sun To Shine," which bookend the album. There are three strong new Moffatt originals co-written with Rosie Flores, Jeff Rymes and long-time compadre Tom Russell. "Whiskey, Money & Time" comes from the pen of Katy's brother, Hugh. She does the traditional "The Cuckoo" as a duet with Alvin and covers Dave's old Blasters rave-up "Goodbye Baby So Long," transformed to a slow weeper. Jo Carol Pierce's title song is, excuse the expression, an absolute gem. But the showstopper has to be Katy's playful take on the Lieber & Stoller classic "Fools Fall In Love," sparked by Dick Fegy's sweet lead guitar and mandolin.

Loose Diamond is a gentle yet compelling album of end to end excellence. It is played and sung exquisitely, and it keeps elbowing back onto my sound systems both at home and in the car. — MT

JON RANDALL

Willin'

Eminent 25020

Jon Randall served his apprenticeship with Emmylou Harris' bluegrass oriented Nash Ramblers band for several years before stepping out on his own with albums on RCA and then Asylum. They were nice albums that never connected with an audience. Landing at the independent Eminent, he has recorded his best work yet.

Jon's songwriting just keeps getting stronger. "Can't Find The Words" and "Baby Make The Sun Go Down" are fresh takes on familiar themes. "Can't Cry Anymore" is the lone stripped down acoustic

track. Here joining Jon's voice and guitar are Jerry Douglas on Dobro and Emmylou for a wonderful harmony part. Throughout, Jon's songs have the ring of life and truth. The lone cover is the Lowell George title song.

Musicianship is stellar as performed by many of Nashville's most empathetic artists. Other guest harmonists include Kim Richey, John Cowan, Tim O'Brien, Sam Bush, Harry Stinson and Jon's ex-wife Lorrie Morgan. Randall's *Willin'* may not be a groundbreaker, but it sure is a solid, sturdy, rewarding work. — MT

FRED'S MOBILE HOMES

Homes Sweet Homes

Beth Mead, no cat #

Given the current state of the "folk" music landscape, a band with a moniker like Fred's Mobile Homes might be purveying anything from Delta blues to contemporary singer-songwriter introspection, and even an inspection of the track list on *Homes Sweet Homes* might not be all that enlightening as to what this Philadelphia-area band is about. The fourteen cuts feature cover versions of an eclectic assortment of music by writers ranging

from Lucinda Williams ("I Just Want To See You So Bad"), to Bob Dylan ("Fare Thee Well"), to Jimmie Rodgers ("Peach Picking Time In Georgia"), to Richard Fariña ("Pack Up Your Sorrows"), to Bill Monroe ("Shenandoah Valley Breakdown") — all done in an airy bluegrass style that's probably closer to Peter, Paul and Mary than to Flatt and Scruggs ... but, as Utah Phillips might say, "good, though ..."

Fred's Mobile Homes is a quartet of veterans of the Philly folk scene — Peter Lorch (guitar), Beth Mead Sullivan (banjo), George Abramson (mandolin) and Larry Cohen (bass). Of the four, Cohen is probably best known, having been a frequent sideman for Tony Trischka. All four contribute vocals on the album, but it's Lorch's warm baritone that stands out most on songs like "I Just Want To See You So Bad" and Larry Stone's "Aces And Eights." If Loudon Wainwright had turned out to be a bluegrass singer, he might have sounded a lot like Lorch. As mentioned previously, this is not hard-edged bluegrass, the vocals have much more of a "folkie" feel to them, but *Homes Sweet Homes* is more than competently done, all the way around. Sullivan, in particular, is a surprisingly effective and tasteful banjo player, with a talent for playing lines that

attract attention without becoming distracting. On the whole, Fred's Mobile Homes seems to have a pretty good feel for how to approach the material in their own way. Most of these tunes are pretty well-known, yet each of the arrangements here is distinctive, fresh, and interestingly done. Perhaps the best evidence of this is their treatments of a pair of songs that have become bluegrass standards in the '90s – Louisa Branscomb's "Steel Rails" (one of Alison Krauss's early hits) and Kate Long's "Who Will Watch The Home Place" (an award winning record for Laurie Lewis). In both cases, they don't try to sound like anyone else but themselves. *Homes Sweet Homes* is also well-produced, but in the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that the Mark Moss who produced the album is not the same person whose smiling face graces the pages of this magazine as the editor. All in all, a very pleasant listen. — JL

LEFTOVER SALMON
The Nashville Sessions
Hollywood 62142

Leftover Salmon is one schizophrenic band. They perform here as both a pretty darn good bluegrass band with some very potent friends and co-conspirators, and as a full throttle rock band. At the top of the recording are two crackling good songs. "Midnight Blues" features Del McCoury's vocals mixing with the band's Drew Emmitt, with Ronnie McCoury's mandolin on board, too. "Lovin' In My Baby's Eyes" is a Taj Mahal song with Taj singing lead and on National steel guitar. But the next one, the jazzy "Dance On Your Head," a Latin carnival song with Béla Fleck on banjo and Reese Wynans on piano, feels relatively contrived. Waylon Jennings appears on the cover of his "Are You Sure Hank Done It That Way" with Sam Bush on fiddle, producer Randy Scruggs on guitar and Sally Van Meter on lap steel guitar, and the feel is electric. Scruggs sticks around for the hot grass instrumental "Five Alive," and his daddy Earl shows up to add his patented banjo sound. Lucinda Williams sings a tough version of her "Lines Around Your Eyes," which is spiced by Jo-El Sonnier's Cajun accordion. But from there on the latter part of the album veers back to some pretty generic straight-ahead rock. While the extended "Troubled Times," with Bush back on fiddle and Jerry Douglas' Dobro, and the Allman Brother-ish "Another Way To Turn" do have some cool textures, their rocking take of John Hartford's "Up On The Hill Where They Do The Boogie" is

an annoying, overlaid and overamped mess. A nice run through Nina Simone's "Nobody's Fault But Mine" is the closer.

The bluegrass-oriented material here works well, the rockers less so. *The Nashville Sessions* is a mixed bag with highs and lows ... but the highs are enough to be worth looking into. — MT



DAVID AMRAM
Southern Stories
Chrome 4202

David Amram's place in the music world – and, for that matter, in world music – is absolutely unique. In any given week he might be found conducting a symphony orchestra one night, leading a quintet in an upscale jazz club the next, and animating a folk festival on the weekend. Amram breaks down all the walls separating styles of music, musicians and audiences from each other. In most of his recent recordings, Amram has concentrated on his jazz and symphonic music, making this release, his first album of contemporary songs since the 1970s, especially welcome for those of us who have grooved on Amram's folk festival flights of musical fantasy.

Amram was one of the original hipsters and there's much fun to be had listening to jivey story-songs like "Alfred The Hog" and "Texas Mongoose" that are chock full of witty wordplay and infectious arrangements featuring Amram's various drums, flutes and piano, and such stellar sidemen as fiddler Vassar Clements and harmonicist Mickey Raphael. There are also pretty and vivid travelogue songs like "Deep South Evening Light," memories of Amram's early southern experiences in "Passagrille, Florida 1936" and reflections of his humanistic concerns in "For Our Family Farmers."

As can be assumed from the album title, most of the songs are rooted in southern sounds and, as anyone who has experienced Amram in concert would expect, he is forever mixing and matching musical strains in quite wonderful ways. Cajun, bluegrass, jazz, blues and other styles all come together, sometimes in the same song.

Amram is a very special musician. On this disc he provides much to smile at, to tap a toe to, and to learn. — MR

LOS TIGRES DEL NORTE
Herencia De Familia
Fonovisa 80761

Los Tigres del Norte are one of the most enduringly popular bands in the United States. The San Jose, California-based sextet are the biggest stars in norteño music; they have been packing large halls and stadiums for 25 years, and have sold millions of records in the United States alone. Which makes it kind of bizarre that most Anglos are more familiar with the work of Flaco Jimenez, or even Steve Jordan. Not to slight Jimenez and Jordan, but this is like having heard of Koerner, Ray and Glover and never having heard of the Rolling Stones.

The Tigres' latest album is not their best (that would be 1997's *Jefe De Jefes*), but it is a fine addition to their voluminous catalogue. A double-CD set, it mixes tried-and-true formulas with some quirky innovations. The Tigres' trademark sound is the modern corrido, or ballad. While in other cultures the ballad is a historical artifact, corridos remain one of the most popular Mexican forms, with literally thousands of new ones released every year. The Tigres started the modern corrido boom in the early 1970s with their cinematic ballads of border drug shoot-outs, and such "narcocorridos" remain staples of their repertoire, but they long ago expanded into songs of the Mexican migrant worker experience, and in the last few years have started singing openly about Mexican politics as well. *Herencia De Familia* opens with "La Liebre," a song about poverty, government corruption, and the national debt. It also includes a few narcocorridos, full of mayhem in the best badman ballad tradition, then ends up, unusually for the Tigres, with a medley of two old-time Mexican classics, "Alla En El Rancho Grande" and "La Valentina."

The album's first single is "Lágrimas," a lachrymose ballad that is not their finest work, but in general this is an excellent example of the band's range and taste. The main departure here, aside from the nice *a capella* opening of "Rancho Grande," is that the Tigres sing two bilingual numbers, the fairly forgettable "My Promise/Mi Promesa" and the perky "spanglish" comic number "Vamos A Las Vegas." Throughout, the accordion keeps the rhythm pumping, often doubled by saxophone, and Hernán Hernandez's loping basslines are as distinctive as ever. The real trademark though, is the gritty, nasal, Sinaloa vocals, immediately recognizable to any fan of contemporary Mexican music. Chances are, if you live in a large American city, that the

Tigres come through every couple of years and draw several thousand people to their show. It is about time that some non-Spanish-speakers joined the party. — EW

RIZWAN-MUAZZAM QAWWALI

Sacrifice To Love

RealWorld 47707

Sometimes the sounds put forth under the world music rubric really do require the right mood to be appreciated. Others seem more capable of changing mood. The qawwali devotional song on *Sacrifice To Love* is clearly in the latter category. The energetic attitude of Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali is a worthy tribute to the heritage of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and his family's 500-year musical legacy. Qawwali (Arabic for "utterance") is Islamic devotional music of the mystic Sufis. The repertoire of sung poetry uses rhythmic hand-clapping, percussion, harmonium and a lead and choral response incorporating repetition and virtuoso flourishes for the music's ultimate transcendent purposes. Here's the deal. If you don't know qawwali music at all, you're missing out. For my money, qawwali is one of the most exciting sounds on the planet. If this is new for you, skip this album and go to the master's catalog and check out Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. If you've experienced Nusrat, then get yourself a copy of this release. Perhaps it's the youth of some of the band members (some still in their teens), or perhaps the influence of the global 'nineties, but these compositions kick in with a furious rhythmic intensity that'll show you why they were hits at WOMAD/Reading ('98) and WOMAD/Redmond ('99). *Sacrifice To Love* is outstanding. — RDor

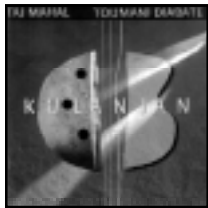
MARA! WITH MARTENITSA CHOIR

Sezoni

RealWorld 47573

Mid-winter's gray sets the mood for "Call From The South," the opening track here. The Mara! Ensemble offers bouzouki, sax, recorder, clarinet and bass as instrumental balance to the robust choral voices of the 30 member Australia-based Martenitsa Choir. Ah, but winter gives way, and *Sezoni* portrays the other seasons with the "hot sun" ("Harvest All Summer"), "heavy wheat" ("Hey Harvesters"), and migrating birds getting ready to fly again toward the south ("Travelling Light"). Rich and distinctive, fluctuations between the big sounds of the choir and the sparse poetry of the bard make for a satisfying variety of song and music. The mood of each composition

will strike you, and yet the transitions between the moods are as effective as they are dramatic. This, then, is what may set *Sezoni* apart from other choral albums, Bulgarian or otherwise. Forty-five minutes of straight up choir singing, I have to admit, wears on my ears. Here, the ensemble works the spaces between the vocal wall of sound to provide an interesting as well as accomplished work. The flow of the seasonal theme lets each set the stage for the next. — RDor



TAJ MAHAL AND TOUMANI DIABATE

Kulanjan

Hannibal 1444

Taj Mahal has recorded many diverse projects over the years, but this new duet album with Toumani Diabate, master of the kora, stands as one of the most unusual as well as one of the most intense and rewarding. The album starts with a sunny reinterpretation of Taj's own "Queen Bee," and follows it with Toumani's "Tunkaranke." For the rest of the twelve-song set they continue to alternate American songs with African songs as they explore the African roots of American blues with the fascinating rhythms and sounds of Diabate's Kulanjan ensemble. These sounds include kona, kamalengoni, balafan and bolon as well as two vocalists and Taj on guitar and piano.

This music is a heady, intoxicating brew that will keep ringing in your ears long after the record has finished playing. It is very cool to hear well loved blues like "Catfish Blues" and "Take This Hammer" with an entirely new slant. Strong recommendation. — MT

TAMA

Nostalgie

RealWorld 47738

For anyone with even a cursory interest in the music of Africa, the last decade has seen Mali emerge from obscurity to the forefront of the African musical landscape. Timbuktu used to epitomize remoteness; today, tours frequent the city and artists such as Ali Farke Toure, Salif Kieta and Oumou Sangare have made the country and its various styles more familiar than ever

before. The writings of Lucy Duran and others have helped explain the region and its music, and Alex Haley's *Roots* introduced the hereditary bards known as griots to the western mind. The appeal of Malian music results, I believe, from its melodic crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa (particularly the coastal countries) with the desert sensibilities of North Africa. The kora, calabash, and simple "desert blues" are particularly resonant with many American audiences.

Tama ("a Bambara word meaning 'to walk'") is the trio of Malian Tom Diakite (vocals, donzo n'goni [hunter's harp], kora, sanza calegasse, percussion), percussionist Djanuno Dabo and Londoner Sam Mills (guitar). These original compositions put a bit of distance between the contemporary and the traditional. Still, Diakite's vocals and donzo n'goni/kora roll you into each track as if they were centuries old. Stating up front what these songs are not allows subtle infusions of keyboards, Hammond organ, oud, violin, distortion guitar, flute and cello. The songs, "Nostalgie," "Idjo (The Truth)," "Dambe (Merit)," are about love and longing, friendship, Africa and each person's place in the larger scheme of things. More generally tilted towards Mali's southern influences, *Nostalgie* follows a widening path forged by musicians from this inland African nation. — RDor

BASHIR ABDEL AL

The Art Of The Arabian Flute

Arc Music 1482

DURSAN ACAR

Traditional & Contemporary Music Of

Kurdistan

Arc Music 1529

The Arabic word nay (ney) refers to the "breathy" end-blown flute traditionally made from a reed. Although originally Persian, the nay is now played throughout the Middle East. It has a multi-octave range, six finger-holes on its top side and one on the bottom side, and comes in varying lengths (32-81 cm). An ancient instrument, the nay retains its place at the "art music" end of the spectrum among the variations of Arabian flutes. In urban ensembles the nay is frequently the ideal solo instrument.

On *The Art Of The Arabian Flute*, Bashir Abdel Al displays his prodigious skills on the cane flute. He allows the melodies to run to their natural length and subtly provides texture with the keyboard accompaniment. This really is the best kind of nay recording.

The Kurds have their own connections to ancient Persia. There's a bit of nay on *Traditional & Contemporary Music Of Kurdistan*, but the emphasis is on other in-

struments. Dursan Acar, a refugee now living in Australia, is featured on the baglama (a long-necked lute). Other instruments such as the zurna and mey stand out, both being versions of what in western parlance are called "oboes." Either instrument can wake up a melody that would otherwise remain lackluster by infusing it with a mood of "wild abandon." The longing of the dispossessed comes through the music, and rightfully so. Kurdish music and culture is distinct from that of the countries that today have their borders running through Kurdistan, yet another all-too-frequent example that shows the staying power of culture despite temporal domination by other governments. — RDor

VARIOUS

Voices Of The South Seas

Arc Music 1532

The Pacific Ocean covers about a third of the earth's surface. Its vastness includes some 30 million people who speak hundreds of dialects and languages. *Voices Of The South Seas* selects chants from the Marquesas Islands to present but one example of Oceania's diverse musical variations. The Marquesas are a dozen volcanic islands located about 1,500 miles northeast of Tahiti. "Grand and wild, with ragged mountains and steep cliffs over the ocean," these are not the stereotypical idyllic isles pictured in many mainland imaginations. Musically, the Marquesas reflect the intersect of their location with the wide-ranging exploration of the 15th through 19th centuries. Though the collection offers a sampling of mea kakiu ("ancient things") in its festival songs and songs of welcome, newer mea hou ("imported things") strongly influence this collection. Most obvious are the effects of the Roman Catholic Church in the Christian themes of many of these songs. — RDor

SHORTCUTS

DISSIDENTEN, *Live In Europe*, (Blue Jackel 5034). Drummer Marlon Klein has given this latest incarnation of his German jazz/world/fusion band Dissidenten a pronounced vocal bent, with long scat solos from singers Izaline Calister, Manickam Yogeswaram, and Noujoum Ouazza over simple, repetitive funk grooves. It's pretty bland, all in all. Even with two percussionists augmenting Klein's trap-drums the grooves rarely catch fire, and instrumental solos (with the exception of guest artist Charlie Mariano on alto sax) are equally static and uninspiring. — PS

VARIOUS, *Folksongs & Sacred Music From Nepal*, (Arc Music 1517). With *Folksongs & Sacred Music From Nepal*, ethnomusicological field recordings capture the Himalayan sensibilities of this Hindu kingdom. As one would expect, the music reflects the agricultural basis of the Nepalese economy and the spiritual context that can only arise from living in the grand presence of those highest of the world's great mountain peaks. Seasonal songs of harvest and the agricultural cycle predominate, but sufficient examples of temple recordings provide balance to the album. A variety of vocals and instruments – percussion (drum, bells, cymbals), flutes, and stringed – are captured on these 15 recordings. — RDor

ANA HOSSU and FRIENDS, *Songs & Dances From Transylvania*, (Arc Music 1511). Ana Hossu, the popular and prolific performer of Transylvanian folklore, is from the Maramures region of Romania, a place "where traditional customs are alive, where music accompanies people through all their lives." *Songs And Dances From Transylvania* offers twenty-five tracks of traditional songs that emphasize dance – love songs for dance, wedding songs for dance, and party songs for dance ("My Mother Taught Me How To Dance"). — RDor

ENRIQUE MORENTE, *Lorca*, (Narada World Select 72438-47729). This is an idea so good one is surprised it hasn't been done before – setting poems by the great Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca to flamenco music. But the celebrated singer Enrique Morente is not content with simple flamenco, but factors in hearty funk drumming, solid guitar from Pepe Habichuela and others, It's a tour de force. Flamenco pop has been on the doldrums lately, at least the variety widely available on this side of the Atlantic. This album brings a needed spark to keep flamenco's flame burning brightly. — PS

TONY MARTINEZ & THE CUBAN POWER, *Maferefun*, (Blue Jackel 5033). Hot Afro-Cuban jazz bands may have a hard time getting into this country to tour and record. But there are other countries. This smoking batch of instrumentals was recorded in Switzerland and is well worth finding, especially for young drummers and arrangers. Martinez's solos on alto saxophone are wild and high, from Charlie Parker out of Arthur Blythe, but it is his arrangements that are the real star turns. The thirteen-minute "Gracias Chucho" moves from a drums-only rhumba to hot merengue to a vocal section that sounds like someone is slowing down the tape, then back

through all again. Other standout soloists include trumpeter Julio Padron and pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba, whose solos reach outer limits that return his instrument to its roots as a percussion instrument. — PS

PACO DE LUCIA, *Luzia*, (Blue Thumb 165). Guitarist Paco De Lucia here returns to his flamenco roots after a long period playing jazz, showing that his chops have not been eroded. Most tracks are solo gut-string guitar whose only accompaniment is the fast, rhythmic handclapping called *palmas*. A few busier tunes use second guitar, voices, and tasteful percussion but the effect is the same, a great gypsy guitarist with just a few friends along for the ride. — PS

ALE MÖLLER, *The Horse And The Crane*, (Northside 6038). The songs on this album come from a play of the same name that ran for two years in Stockholm, chronicling the northward expansion of the Swedish railroad system. Fleshed out with atmospheric instrumentals, it makes for one of the year's best Euro-folk albums. Möller plays flute, octave-mandolin, hammered dulcimer, lute, harp, and percussion, but for all his skill at crafting resonant acoustic textures, it is the singing that makes the biggest impression. Vocalist Lena Willemark combines Linda Ronstadt's clarion upper register with the barking enthusiasm of Varttina's Kaasinen sisters and Frankie Armstrong's husky passion. The instrumentals alone would make this a fine, but she makes it a great one. — PS

WILLIAM PINT and FELICIA DALE, *Hartwell Horn*, (Waterbug 0048). William Pint and Felicia Dale return to the land and spiral back in history with their newest release. Most of the tunes and songs come from England and the Celtic lands with delightful nods to the Copper Family, the Waterasons, Martin Carthy and even William Shakespeare. Spirited vocals, hurdy Gurdy, whistles, and bodhrans combined with excellent taste for song make this one worth hearing. — MW

GEORGE JONES, *Live With The Possum*, (Asylum 62480). George Jones and his band the Jones Boys are in great form in this 12 song, 41 minute live set. After Alan Jackson does the intro he sticks around for the opener "No Show Jones." The program is mostly hits and favorites. "Orange Blossom Special" gives the band a chance to shine. Two drawbacks mar the album. First, the audience is even more hyper than those teens in A Hard Day's Night, and they get to be pretty distracting. Second, there is virtually no annotation. If Jones didn't mention that he was in

Knoxville there would be no way of knowing. There is no listing of band members or date of the show either. But the Possum is super. — MT

ROD MacDONALD, *Into The Blue*, (Gadfly 256). Love, marriage and the Florida weather seem to have brought a lot of contentment to Rod MacDonald. The songs on this disc are all engaging and a pleasure to listen to as MacDonald celebrates a more laid-back lifestyle than the one he led on Greenwich Village's MacDougal Street. Some songs, like "Into The Blue," or "It's A Tough Life," could be hits for the parrot-heads. The focussed anger-at-injustice that motivated many of his best songs in the past is more subtle here, but it does come through on songs like "Deep Down In The Everglades," about the Valujet crash and "Fear," about living as a citizen of a great military power seen as satanic by much of the world. — MR

PATTY LARKIN, *à gogo*, (Vanguard 79547). In effect Patty Larkin's first recording for Vanguard is a retrospective of her best songs recorded live in solo performance over the last couple of years. Throughout the 14 song album she is in peak, charismatic form. The editing creates a seamless and excellent live concert. The recording is vibrant and pulsing with life. If you have never experienced Patty Larkin's very personal songs, her thrilling singing and guitar playing, *à gogo* is the perfect place to start. If you are already a fan, the album is a must have. — MT

RICK WHITELAW, *Polishing The Stone*, (Rick Whitelaw 1). Toronto-based Rick Whitelaw has long been one of those guitarists-of-choice used by a variety of other artists to make their music sound better. Finally, on this instrumental CD, Whitelaw himself steps into the spotlight. Over the course of a dozen tunes, Whitelaw explores the necks of his nylon- and steel-stringed guitars covering styles ranging from deft Travis-style fingerpicking and Watson-style flatpicking and on to bouncy swing, quiet jazz and reflective musical meditations. Whitelaw's guitars – either solo or multi-tracked – provide the only sounds on the disc and no matter the style, his playing is always a blend of taste and virtuosity. — MR

RAMBLIN' JACK ELLIOTT, *Country Style/Live*, (Fantasy 24754). This reissue two-fer contains a pair of certified classic Jack Elliott albums from his Prestige years: *Country Style* and *At The Second Fret*, both recorded in the spring of '62. The former is all country songs Jack loved then and still

performs to this day, including his first recording of Jimmie Driftwood's "Tennessee Stu," "The Soldier's Last Letter," "Detour," "Lovesick Blues" and "The Wreck Of The Old '97." Great album. The live set recorded at the fabled Philadelphia folk club captures Jack at his best. It doesn't get much better than it does on these two albums of the young and rakish and irreplaceable Ramblin' Jack Elliott. A must have reissue. — MT

VARIOUS, *Before Their Time: Memorial Songs And Music Volume 1*, (Before Their Time 01). This benefit album for the Hospice Vermont New Hampshire and the NH Youth Suicide Prevention Association compiles 14 songs and instrumentals – mostly taken from previously released albums – meant to bring comfort in times of loss and mourning. Indeed, the well-chosen selections from artists including Tom Paxton, Anne Hills, Gordon Bok, Sweet Honey In the Rock and Priscilla Herdman do just that. Some of these songs deal with death from disease, others from war; all are inherently comforting. — MR

GREG TROOPER with the FLAT-IRONS, *Everywhere*, (Koch 8011). Greg Trooper is from New Jersey, spent many years in New York City, and now lives in Nashville. His music leans to the rock side of folk, although he has worked hard in the country field. He is supported here by his band (Abel Domingues, Kenneth Blevins and Greg Shirley) as well as a small core of additional guests including Roseanne Cash and Clare Mullally. This is a pleasant album. Fans of Trooper will enjoy it, particularly the inclusion of "Ireland," which Maura O'Connell made popular. — VKH

VARIOUS, *The FolkScene Collection, Volume Two*, (Red House 137). For this disc, Los Angeles folk radio legends Howard and Roz Larmon have raided their FolkScene archives of live radio performances by some of the most prominent folk, country and pop performers on the scene to create a second great compilation from their KPFC broadcasts. There are lots of gems among the 13 songs collected here, including great performances by the likes of Nanci Griffith, Tom Waits, Lucinda Williams, Eliza Gilkyson and Tom Russell. One of the most haunting is certainly Stan Rogers' "Song Of The Candle," recorded less than a week before his 1983 death. — MR

RECHELLE MALIN, *Famous Girl Detective*, (Flying By The Seat Of My Pants, no cat. #). This self-released debut of very personal compositions reflect an idiosyn-

cratic concept of songwriting. She mentions on stage, with a bit of pride, that she doesn't have a lot of musical sophistication. It's that not knowing any better, so to speak, that allows her to explore unusual melodic and rhythmic possibilities which make her songs anything but run of the mill. "Ray's Cafe" tells about the enduring charm of a mom and pop. Rechelle calls it a remaining "taste of my childhood days." "Whatever Happened To Nancy Drew" is charming. "Martin County" is a perceptive chronicle of emigres from played out coal mines. Fiddler Pat Ireland, electric guitarist Robert Robeck, pianist B.J. Brown, drummer Ian Byrne and bassist Todd Wiseman are Rechelle's key support troops in this modest yet very ingratiating album. — MT

JAIME MICHAELS, *Jaime Michaels*, (Frumdheart 2). Michaels has been around since the '60s, though his voice and style reflect a far younger man. Now based in Santa Fe, he spent a lot of time in the Boston folk scene. A former baker, car wash technician, roofer and rock and roll lead singer, this is his return to acoustic music. There are a dozen very good songs on this album, dealing with drug addiction, lying ("god don't listen if you're lying when you're praying, something everybody knows"), and good and bad relationships. A little more variety would have been welcome. That said, the supporting musicians are excellent, especially Sara K on vocals, Mark Clark on percussion and Michael Kott on cello. The strength of the album is Jaime's very listenable voice and interesting songs. — VKH

BOB HILLMAN, *Playing God*, (Sliced Bread 72110). Gruff voiced Bob Hillman's self-published debut album has been picked up by Sliced Bread for wider release. It has received a remastering makeover and has gotten a spiffy, punchy sound in the process. Bob's songs run toward the ironic. None more so than "Everyone's An Actor In New York" (or in subsequent verses an artist or writer). "When I Wrote The Book" is a knock at those writers who pump out all those unauthorized, trashy celebrity biographies. "Playing God" is sung from the point of view of a poor simp who is stuck on his own powerlessness. The opener "Little Things" is about a loner and his dream of past and better lives. The project is smartly executed, and producer Tommy West, a veteran pop songwriter, brings crispness and focus to the songs' settings. This is one of those albums that makes me like it better each time I play it. — MT

LUKA BLOOM, *Salty Heaven*, (Shanachie 5739). After three albums for Reprise, Luka Bloom – the stage name of Christy Moore’s youngest brother Barry – has made a Shanachie release that’s actually more lush than his Reprise recordings. Both the opening track, “Blackberry Time,” and the finale, “Forgiveness,” are superb. The first is a pop folk tune that grooves, while the latter is soaked in ancient Irish traditions. In between there is a nice tribute to Frankie Kennedy, “Cool Breeze.” There is also dross, like “Water Ballerina,” which evokes some of Gordon Lightfoot’s string-drenched excesses of the early 70s, and some poetic interludes that come off as Bruce Cockburn Lite. The end product is good, but rocky, with songs that aren’t always worthy of Bloom’s smooth, warm voice. — RWeir

VARIOUS, *Northumberland Rant*, (Smithsonian Folkways 40473). Thanks to Kathryn Tickell, the world is rediscovering Northumbrian music. Appropriately, one of her new studio recordings closes this superb collection of studio and field recordings collected in England’s northeast corner between 1954 and 1998. Of the many talented performers of yore, only The High Level Ranters enjoyed much success outside the region, though Billy Pigg gained posthumous fame. Pigg was a master of the Northumbrian small pipes, a bellows-blown pipe with a cylindrical bore that produces a sweeter, reedier sound than the Irish uilleann pipes. Other masters of this splendid instrument included on this album include Chris Ormston, Jack Armstrong, Anthony Robb, Colin Ross, and Pauline Cato. Fiddle, accordion, and ensemble pieces round out this wondrous collection. — RWeir

PAUL BRADY, *Nobody Knows: The Best Of Paul Brady*, (Ryko 10491). Among Irish pop stars, perhaps only Van Morrison comes close to Paul Brady in the ability to cross the rock/traditional music divide. This one-time member of Planxty and former touring partner of Andy Irvine has also penned songs for Cher, Tina Turner, and Bonnie Raitt. This collection captures the eclectic Brady in numerous moods: the rockabilly/skiffle king working through “The World is What You Make It;” a Van Morrison-like soul man on “Crazy Dreams;” a sensitive social critic on “The Island;” and an Irish balladeer crooning still definitive versions of “The Lakes of Ponchatrain” and “Arthur McBride.” Several tracks feature new versions of vintage Brady, and there’s even a duo with Bonnie Raitt. — RWeir

VARIOUS, *Gaelic Voices*, (Green Linnet 1202). As a sequel to *Celtic Voices*, a collection devoted to the brightest and best Scottish and Irish singers, Green Linnet now offers a similar collection of Gaelic song. Michel Domhnaill and his sister Triona show up on tracks by The Bothy Band and Relativity. Other artists include Altan, Capercaillie, Kila, and Niamh Parsons. The collection is limited to Green Linnet artists, which means Gaelic masters like Arthur Cormack, Christine Primrose, and Eilidh Mackenzie are missing, but this is a fine introduction to the tongue-twisting splendors of Gaelic song. — RWeir

GRAHAM AND EILEEN PRATT, *Early Birds*, (Grail 2). After a twelve-year hiatus, the English duo Graham and Eileen Pratt recorded *Borders Of The Ocean* in 1997 and resumed touring. *Early Birds* samples recordings from rare vinyl offerings released in 1980 and 1985, and encapsulates what makes the Pratts special. Eileen’s voice moves easily from soprano to alto. She has the vibrato of early Joan Baez and the tones of a young Gay Woods. Graham backs with superb harmonies and the occasional lead that reminds one immediately of Tim Hart. He’s also a skilled songwriter, as demonstrated by tracks like “The Black Fox” and “The Minstrel” that stand side-by-side with traditional material and never seems out of place. — RWeir

DAVE SWARBRICK, *Rags, Reels & Airs*, (Topic 517). Before Dave Swarbrick joined Fairport Convention he had already made his mark on the traditional music scene. Few were as indelible as his 1967 *Rags, Reels & Airs*, on which he wowed critics with his fiddle and mandolin prowess. This collector’s item has long been out of print but is now available on CD. Even back then all the elements of Swarbrick’s magic were in place: his trademark gypsy-style fiddling, his ability to move between old-time Appalachian music to an ancient Irish air and cover all the bases in between, and the sizzling mandolin runs that add color and texture to his repertoire. — RWeir

JAMES KEANE, *Sweeter As The Years Roll By*, (Shanachie 78031). Accordionist James Keane first attracted public attention with The Irish Tradition in the 70s and has since been considered one of the masters of the double-row button box. His latest release continues his streak of excellence, whether ripping through a reel like “The Land of Sunshine,” or subduing the energy level to play in tandem with Michael Rooney’s harp on the title track. In fact, it’s his deftness and subtlety that

set him apart from run-of-the mill box players. — RWeir

SCARLETT, WASHINGTON, WHITELEY, *We’ll Meet Again*, (Borealis 120). At 80, Jackie Washington is a master of old swing and blues tunes and has been an inspiration to generations of Canadian musicians, including Mose Scarlett and Ken Whiteley who have both been forces on the Toronto music scene for 30-plus years. Here, the three old friends team up for a lively live album of old vaudeville songs, early jazz and blues tunes and a Whiteley original. Washington is still an amazing musician and singer whose voice and swinging guitar-playing always suggest the twinkle that’s probably in his eye as he plays songs like “Nobody” and “Your Feet’s Too Big.” Scarlett shines on raggy blues numbers like “Diddy Wah Diddy” and I’m delighted to hear Whiteley’s rerecording of “I Just Want To Be Horizontal,” a tongue-in-cheek sleeper he did almost three decades ago as a member of the Original Sloth Band. — MR

SONNY TERRY, *Sonny Terry And His Mouth-Harp*, (Riverside/Original Blues Classics 589). Sonny Terry, the great traditional blues harmonica master and singer, was in good form for this 1953 session of mostly-familiar numbers like “The Fox Chase,” “John Henry” and “Changed The Lock On My Door.” In the absence of long time partner Brownie McGhee, Terry’s sole support is guitarist Alec Seward whose able but subtle playing allows all of the attention to focus on Terry’s harp and vocals. The most touching song is “Goodbye Leadbelly,” an emotional farewell to the great folk and blues singer who was a close friend of Terry’s. — MR

PINK ANDERSON, *Vol. 2: Medicine Show Man*, (Prestige 587). Pink Anderson spent much of the first half of the 20th century entertaining crowds at traveling medicine shows with his infectious blend of blues, ragtime and minstrel show tunes. In 1961, at the age of 61, he recorded this wonderful collection of ten songs, including the great version of “Travelin’ Man” that would inspire revival musicians like Roy Bookbinder and Paul Geremia. Anderson was one of those great entertainers who’d take their songs from anywhere. One moment it’s a novelty song, the next it’s an early Ray Charles hit. This is irresistible good-time, front-porch music. — MR

