

Off the Beaten Track

To have your recording considered for review in *Sing Out!*, please submit two copies (one for one of our reviewers and one for in-house editorial work, song selection for the magazine and eventual inclusion in the *Sing Out!* Resource Center). All recordings received are included in "Publication Noted" (which follows "Off the Beaten Track"). Send two copies of your recording, and the appropriate background material, to *Sing Out!*, P.O. Box 5460 (for shipping: 512 E. Fourth St.), Bethlehem, PA 18015, Attention "Off The Beaten Track." Sincere thanks to this issue's panel of musical experts: **Richard Dorsett, Tom Druckenmiller, Mark Greenberg, Victor K. Heyman, Stephanie P. Ledgin, John Lupton, Angela Page, Mike Regenstreif, Seth Rogovoy, Ken Roseman, Peter Spencer, Michael Tearson, Theodoros Toskos, Rich Warren, Matt Watroba, Rob Weir and Sule Greg Wilson.**



VARIOUS

Let Zion Move: Music Of The Shakers
Rounder 471/472

It has been a commonly held belief that sacred music in America is solemn and stoic in character. We revisit images and stories about all-day Sabbath services held in stark sanctuaries with hours spent on hard pews. The concept of dance and the inclusion of various musical instruments within the service are perhaps even more foreign in our view of early American sacred music. The concept of Joy is always bridled with the fear of consequence.

The story of the Shakers is well documented. Their utopian views of industry, self-sufficient and practical nature are models for many latter-day sects. Their belief in celibacy, ever controversial, has proven to be their undoing. Scarcely a handful of believers remain.

A much more complete investigation of the music of the United Society of Believers, the Shakers, was published in *Sing Out!* v.43 #1 and will not be reprised here in this review. But a short discussion of how the music contained in *Let Zion Move* was created will hopefully whet the reader's interest to investigate this wonderful collection of vocal and instrumental hymns.

To fully understand the music contained in *Let Zion Move* and the unusual nature of these recordings, it is important to trace their origin. In his loving notes to the recording Darryl Thompson tells the story of his father, Charles "Bud" Thompson, who in his early years found himself relocating frequently due to his own father's occupation as a sales executive. By the age of sixteen he had become a radio personality in Boston as a singing cowboy. He went on to formal voice lessons

that led to a career traveling across country as "The Singing Troubadour." He performed in a variety of settings with a repertoire that ranged from opera to traditional songs. He also began an investigation of the music of various utopian societies in America.

With his investigation of the music of the Shakers he found a sect which both composed their own music and borrowed from other sources. He was also surprised to discover that they had devised their own notational system. Through correspondence with the sisters at Canterbury, New Hampshire he developed a strong relationship. As this special relationship grew "Bud" became a trusted employee of the community and founded a Shaker museum in 1959.

In that same year "Bud" Thompson encouraged the sisters to conduct a series of lectures on various aspects of the United Society of Believers. It was hoped that these lectures could have been recorded but they were not, due to a variety of reasons and all that remained were a series of pamphlets on the subjects covered.

In 1961, Thompson met Bill Randall, a radio broadcaster, who suggested that the lectures be recreated in order to record them. This was done and a 10-record set of lectures, interviews and music was released in a limited edition. Due to the limited run of these recordings and the way they were guarded by the various institutions and organizations that purchased them, they were unavailable to the casual listener investigating this music for the first time. This Rounder set finally allows for selections from the 10 record box to be available to all. We truly are living in the most wonderful of times!

The music on disc one of this two-CD set is comprised of vocal and instrumental selections. Each is introduced with the origin of the tune. Sometimes a curious anecdote is offered and sometimes a more formal description of the music is provided. The instrumentation is somewhat typical with organ and piano backing as well as the occasional instrumental duet of

the two keyboard instruments. How I would have loved to hear some of the more unusual groupings of instruments as pictured in the notes. The sound of saxophones, trumpets, violins and cellos must have been glorious! The singing is strong and sincere with nary a hint of sophistication, as of course it should be, as the Shakers were hardly ostentatious. I was reminded of sitting in church as a child and hearing the elder sisters of our congregation with their craggy but strong tone.

The real surprise of this two-CD set is on the second CD. It includes various narrations and interviews recorded during the original sessions in 1960 and more recently recorded selections from 1972 and 1980. A rendition of "May I Softly Walk And Wisely Speak" by Charles "Bud" Thompson is included in this set. It's fascinating to hear his beautiful voice along with the gentle lecture given by the Canterbury sisters. The 1972 and 1980 narratives were recorded by Roger L. Hall and the latter set was recorded at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. These lectures explain the characteristic dancing and "exercise" motions of Shaker worshipers and answer questions about this most unique demonstration of praise. Seldom has a sect considered its own history and passed that tradition on to its believers so well as the Shakers.

Perhaps *Let Zion Move: Music Of The Shakers* will not become part of your everyday listening, however its merit lies in the investigation of one of the most fascinating utopian societies in American history. These sisters are gone now but their love and sincere beliefs live on in *Let Zion Move*. — TD

SIMPLE GIFTS

Time And Again

Purple Finch 312

Simple Gifts is a trio of talented women who specialize in presenting a variety of music from around the world. They are comprised of Linda Littleton on fiddle,

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hammered dulcimer, recorders, bowed psaltery and limberjack, Rachel Hall on English concertina and piano and Karen Hirshon on fiddle, mandolin, banjo-mandolin, guitar, doumbek, spoons and vocals. Guest artists feature Celia Millington-Wyckoff on backing vocals and bass as well as producer Seth Austin on mandolin, bouzouki, doumbek and riq (an Egyptian tambourine).

The 16 selections on *Time And Again* include melodies from Romania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Scotland, the Klezmer tradition as well as American traditional and 3 original compositions by members of the trio. The band is quite comfortable with the odd meter of most of these traditional tunes and their arrangements are quite original and inventive. What a diverse trio of tunes as well as talented players!

This is not to say that these artists sometimes reach beyond their understanding of certain musical styles. It is odd that the two selections I find the most uncomfortable to listen to are tunes which I think would be the most easy for this talented trio to master. The medley "Waynesboro / Shenandoah Falls" is arranged as a contradance duet in a style described in the liner notes as "dowop." Neither tune ever really gets off the ground rhythmically and in fact the emphasis is placed on the wrong notes in the melody and the band just doesn't seem to me as one. Again this is curious because they play a great rendition of the tunes "Little Moses / Grand Picnic" with just the right rhythmic punch so lacking in "Waynesboro / Shenandoah Falls." In the same fashion The Irish Polka medley of "Peg Ryan / Toormore Polkas" lacks the cohesive drive so necessary in these complex dance tunes. The rhythm seems to surge forward only to retreat and recollect itself. Perhaps these two selections should have been reviewed and perhaps rearranged for the recording. They may work very well in performance.

Other highlights on *Time And Again* are the original compositions "Rebas's Waltz" written by Linda Littleton for her mother, an Eastern European Jewish immigrant. The tune is simple and lovely with the characteristic emphasis on the minor. Karen Hirshon's "Fifth Brew" is a ragtime inspired tune featuring mandolin, piano and violin dedicated to The Acoustic Brew Coffeehouse in Lemont, PA. Simple Gifts home base.

Simple Gifts are to be congratulated for producing, with the help of Seth Austin, a wonderfully eclectic recording featuring a staggering array of tunes from a variety of traditions. If they misstep here and there let's not fault them for their vision extending beyond their reach. — TD



RHONDA VINCENT
Back Home Again
Rounder 0460

One of the more dramatic (and welcome) aspects of the bluegrass scene in the 1990s was the emergence of an increasing number of outstanding female talents in what, historically, has been a genre of American music overwhelmingly dominated by men. Alison Krauss, Laurie Lewis, Lynn Morris, Kate MacKenzie, Kathy Chiavola, all of these women and many others have had noticeable influence in broadening the appeal of bluegrass, while maintaining the respect of the hard-core Monroviens and Stanleyites. Ironically, one of the names overlooked by many in talking about this "new wave" of women 'grassers was that of Missouri native Rhonda Vincent, who has been playing and performing at the highest levels of bluegrass since her childhood days during the '70s with her family's gospel band, the Sally Mountain Show. Striking out on her own in the '80s, she recorded a number of solo projects, including at least one on the Rebel label (*Timeless And True Love*) with a mixture of bluegrass and straight country that won her a loyal following. In the '90s, though, she dropped out of the bluegrass circuit to take a stab at mainstream Nashville stardom, and although the two discs she made for Giant Records (*Written In The Stars* [1993] and *Trouble Free* [1996]) were well-received among critics and reviewers (this reviewer included), the critical praise did not translate into Shania-type sales figures, and Vincent parted company with Giant. After forming her own band, the Rage, she returned to the bluegrass circuit, and the aptly titled *Back Home Again* marks her as a force to be reckoned with as the new millennium (whenever it actually starts) gets under way.

With regard to vocal styles, some of the women mentioned above have been criticized by bluegrass purists as having "no edge," "no guts" or neither (Alison Krauss in particular has been accused of softening up her more recent albums). Whether or not such criticism is valid is an argument for another place and time, but Rhonda Vincent stands clearly apart from it — the dozen tracks on *Back Home Again* have "guts" and "edge" enough to satisfy

the purists, yet her bell-clear tone and delivery should appeal to the bluegrass-phobic as well. The woman can flat-out sing. Opening with a driving, upbeat version of Wayne Raney's "Lonesome Wind Blues," Vincent works her way through an assortment that includes the works of the famous, like Jimmy Martin and Paul Williams ("Pretending I Don't Care"), the Louvin Brothers ("Out Of Hand") and Dolly Parton ("Jolene"), as well as less well-known writers like Jim Rushing and Gene Nelson ("Passing Of The Train") and Irl Hees ("Keep Your Feet On The Ground"). And, Vincent herself teams up with Lina Richard, Janice Clare and Ronny Light to write "Little Angels," a sorrowful tale of child molestation (not exactly a recurring theme in the bluegrass canon) highlighted by her duet work with brother Darrin Vincent. She is, in fact, as capable at harmony singing as she is in the lead ("Out Of Hand" features her again with Darrin, along with dad Johnny Vincent), and the mandolin she carries is no stage prop — she's a more than competent picker. Speaking of pickers, her full supporting cast on *Back Home Again* is too large to mention in full, but names like Glen Duncan, Ron Stewart, Jerry Douglas and Bryan Sutton should be recognizable enough to erase any doubt as to the overall quality. Musicians of this caliber don't play for just anybody. From beginning to end, *Back Home Again* is consistently good, at times great (her "Jolene" is a killer version that rivals Parton's original), and never less than thoroughly entertaining. Rhonda Vincent never really left, but welcome back anyway. — JL

JOSHUA BELL AND EDGAR MEYER
Short Trip Home
Sony Classical 60864

Short Trip Home was nominated for a Grammy as "Best Classical Crossover Album," and in the interest of full disclosure, it will be noted that this is being written post-Awards, with the knowledge that Bell and Meyer were somehow beaten out by P. D. Q. Bach's alter ego, Peter Schickele (a recount would seem to be in order). But despite it being a Sony Classical release nominated in a classical category, there is good reason for a review in what is, at least nominally, a folk music publication. Although Bell, a former violin prodigy, has spent his career up to this point performing and recording with most of the world's major orchestras and conductors, Meyer has frequently crossed over into the realm of folk, hooking up frequently with the progressive bluegrass

wing that includes Jerry Douglas, Béla Fleck, Russ Barenberg and their collaborators on *Short Trip Home*, multi-instrumentalists Sam Bush and Mike Marshall.

Meyer, classically trained but renowned for charting new frontiers on the acoustic bass, is the driving force behind the album. Of the thirteen tracks, eleven were solely composed by him, and the remaining two were written with Bush and Marshall. Mixing classical themes with jazz, folk and bluegrass, the album works not only because of the sheer virtuosity of all four musicians, but also because of their willingness to step across the boundaries onto each other's turf: Bell learns about the freeform, driving rhythm of bluegrass; Bush and Marshall deal with the complexities and discipline of classical music. The album's crescendo probably comes with "Death By Triple Fiddle," a sort of Space Age bluegrass anthem that's slightly mistitled – considering Meyer's bass qualifies as a fiddle, "Quadruple" might be more accurate. Three or four, it's a high octane romp, but there's plenty more of interest. Listeners expecting familiar tunes, or adherence to well-defined genres will likely not find *Short Trip Home* to be a comfortable experience – almost by definition, it is experimental music, and it takes musi-

cians of this caliber to pull it off. For those with a yen for musical adventure and exploration, or at least with an open mind, *Short Trip Home* will be consistently interesting, and at times exhilarating. — JL

TOM RIGNEY AND FLAMBEAU
Red Boots And Rice
Parhelion 50005

Though now based in the Los Angeles area, fiddler Tom Rigney's previous release, the all-instrumental *Chasing The Devil* (Parhelion 50002) seemed to draw as much from Beale Street in Memphis and the Louisiana bayous as from the swing (Western and otherwise) tradition of California. With *Red Boots And Rice*, he and his band Flambeau (Joe Paquin, accordion; Danny Caron, guitar; Jimmy Sanchez, percussion; Steve Evans, bass) serve up another helping – make that an even dozen helpings – of the same spicy mix of Cajun, blues, swing and rock, with just a hint of bluegrass thrown in for good measure in the form of guest musicians Vassar Clements and Mike Marshall.

With the exception of the traditional "Oh Pauline," all of the tracks are Rigney compositions, and they range from the all-

out bayou boogie of "Les Mystères" and "Swamp Feet," to "Ponchatoula Two-Step," and even a couple of waltzes, "The Eyes Of Love" and "Rainy Day Waltz." And unlike the previous album, *Red Boots And Rice* features a vocal track, the charming "Moonlight On The Bayou," a laid-back duet between Rigney and Peggy Lagomarsino that's dedicated to Rigney's late mother. Alas, there's only one other vocal track, "Le Bon Vin Doux (The Good Sweet Wine)" – Rigney shows that he can sing a little bit. His fiddle duets with longtime friend Clements ("Swamp Feet," "Fessin' Up") are more than worthwhile, and also worth noting is "Cat To The Moon," with Marshall, which whether by coincidence or not sounds a whole lot like a Cajun version of the often-heard bluegrass fiddle tune "Cherokee Shuffle."

Rigney also produced the album, and he deserves praise for that as well. He gets a tight, driving (occasionally haunting), well-mixed sound out of his band and onto the disc, and the level of energy and intensity remains consistently high from track to track. Aside from the mild criticism that a couple of more vocals would have been welcome, *Red Boots And Rice* is not only listenable from beginning to end, it's downright entertaining. — JL



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Robert Corwin brilliantly captures Folk, Blues, Cajun, Bluegrass, Jazz, Rock, and other roots musicians in classic and historic imagery...Perhaps best known as the most gifted documentarian of the spirit, personality and ethos of the folk music scene and the performers who give it its vitality...he manages to portray essence in gesture, in the "decisive moments", in the description of color and space (or its deliberate absence) so that the layers of history, joy, love, passion and concern are revealed. Please do spend some time to familiarize yourself with his work. It will be a rewarding experience.

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Nickel Creek
Sugar Hill 3909

Without a doubt, Nickel Creek is the leader of the pack of young superpickers on the acoustic music scene today. Band members are Chris Thile (mandolin, banjo, bouzouki) and Scott Thile (acoustic and electric upright bass), son and father, respectively, and Watkins siblings Sara (violin) and Sean (guitar and mandolin). Grammy Award winning Alison Krauss is at the production helm on this, their first release.

The stable of tunes on this self-titled first release ranges from rollicking new acoustic instrumentals to lilting, pop-oriented, British Isles-flavored ballads; the foursome handles smoothly this excellent selection of eclectic numbers. The all-acoustic format is well-suited for commercial crossover into light pop, AAA or Americana formats. With three-fourths of the group not even a quarter century of age, the confidence that is conveyed on this recording is unsurpassed in comparison to not only peer groups but also to older, long-established bands.

Arrangements are intricately full, displaying dynamic instrumental virtuosity in companion to splendid lyric writing. Two non-originals, "When You Come Back Down" penned by Tim O'Brien and Danny O'Keefe, and the simplistically brief love-dream sequence "Out Of The Woods" from Sinead Lohan, blend well with the album's mostly original songs.

Sean Watkins wrote or co-wrote four numbers for this CD, two of which are instrumentals ("Robin and Marian" and "Pastures New"). The latter has an orchestral, quasi-classical approach. Exceptionally deep is "The Hand Song," about a mother losing her son to war.

The younger Thile is no slacker in the composition realm either. Included are two original instrumentals plus a co-authored song. But the clincher of the album is "Sweet Afton." Chris Thile has taken the words of "Caledonia's Bard" Robert Burns and applied his own take on the traditional melody. The result is a graceful, yet powerfully gentle ride down the river Afton.

A rollicking rendering of the traditional "The Fox" calls up phrasing and mandolin

chops reminiscent of New Grass Revival's style. A sprightly version of "Cuckoo's Nest" also appears here.

Nickel Creek captures brilliantly on record its youth, talent, broad marketability and appeal. Put this one in your "play often" section! — SPL

LYNWOOD LUNSFORD
Pick Along
Hay Holler 1349

Whatever else can be (and is) said about him, one of the hallmarks of the sound that made a bluegrass legend out of Jimmy Martin and his band, the Sunny Mountain Boys, is Martin's insistence on adhering to a distinctive, driving, rock-solid banjo style that requires a special sort of talent. The list of banjo pickers who have cut their teeth as Sunny Mountain Boys is topped by masters like J. D. Crowe and Bill Emerson, but Lynwood Lunsford's résumé includes a stint with Martin as well, along with later associations with popular bands like Lost & Found and, most recently, the Sand Mountain Boys. The Martin style is heard throughout this new solo instrumental album, and Lunsford describes himself as an Emerson disciple.

Pick Along, it should be made clear up front, is an entirely instrumental release, and the idea of thirteen bluegrass banjo instrumentals can be more than some people care to contemplate. More to the point, when done without careful production and selection of material, banjo albums can be anywhere from tedious to downright abysmal. Fortunately, Lunsford and his producer, Hay Holler head man Kerry Hay, avoid this "death by banjo" pitfall nicely by paying close attention to a few major details. First, the musicians invited to back up Lunsford are all top-notch pickers themselves: Billy Hawks on fiddle, Scott Hancock on guitar, Spider Gilliam on bass and Herschel Sizemore on mandolin. Second, while most of the tunes on *Pick Along* are pretty familiar ("Sally Ann," "John Henry"), they're either not that often heard in bluegrass ("Kansas City Railroad Blues," "Red River Valley," and, yes, "The Star Spangled Banner"), or not among those that have been done to death. They're also tunes that lend themselves well to Lunsford's style, and that's really where the album works. The album's title suggests an invitation to sit down and play along, and Lunsford lays down a pretty strong jam groove. Regardless of how well you play, or whether you play at all, *Pick Along* is refreshing, easy to listen to, and not at all dangerous to your health. — JL

RADIM ZENKL
Restless Joy
Ventana 3401

Restless Joy is the latest recording by mandolin innovator Radim Zenkl, whose expertise is actually on any number of mandolin-family instruments, including mandola, slide mandola as well as on Irish bouzouki, which he introduces to his repertoire here on four cuts. Over the past ten-plus years in this country after escaping from then-Communist Czechoslovakia, Zenkl has aggressively developed his unique agenda for solo mandolin in concert and on record. He continues to "grow" his own niche; each of his previous and current CDs demonstrates a vast knowledge and incredible insight into the potential of the mandolin.

On this new, nearly all-original release, Zenkl employs subtle, minimal backup. Hear Suzanne Teng on pennywhistle and piccolo flute on "Once Upon A Time" and "Firewood," respectively, very nicely matching the spirit of the tunes. Bassist Michael Manring also appears on "Firewood" as well as on the title cut and on "Revival," a tune with which New Grass Revival fans will readily identify perhaps Zenkl's strongest influence, Sam Bush. Bush's characteristic driving mandolin style can be felt here as well as on "Twin Peaks." Bush himself provides an accurate quoted endorsement on the album's back cover: "precision, passion and sense of daring."

Many of the tunes are light and airy; listen to "Ventana Breeze." It conjures up dream-like images with its flowing melody begging for lyrics and it could readily work as theme music for a film. "Pegasus' Descent" showcases Zenkl's intricate trademark "duo" style on solo mandola. One pretty much has to see Zenkl live in concert to believe it is really only one musician getting simultaneous dual sounds from one instrument.

All the cuts on *Restless Joy* are bright and involved. While a body of solo mandolin work could easily be caught in the trappings of sameness, this one stands out for its challenging, engaging creativity matched with thoughtful pacing. The ride is gentle throughout this recording, not overbearing...but it ends all too quickly. Let's hear more! — SPL

TONY ELLIS
Sounds Like Bluegrass To Me
Copper Creek 0174

In the early 1990s a tour dubbed "Masters Of The Banjo" made its way across the United States, a show that highlighted

the variety of banjo styles that have come to be such an integral part of American folk music. One of the artists on that tour whose music came as a revelation to many was North Carolina native Tony Ellis, whose strongly melodic bluegrass style opened a lot of ears to the delicacy of which the much-maligned banjo is capable.

Longtime bluegrass fans, of course, were familiar with Ellis from his stint in the early 1960s as the banjo player in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys. Now in his sixties, he was raised like many of his time and place, hearing the older two-finger, drop-thumb and frailing banjo styles, and like many, he was captivated by the emergence of Monroe's bluegrass sound in the late 1940s, especially the "fancy banjo" of Earl Scruggs (another Carolina native). His family was living in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1954 when Monroe and his band visited a local radio station. Watching through the glass was a teenaged Tony Ellis, his gaze fixed on Monroe's banjo player, Roger Smith (Scruggs had departed, with Lester Flatt, a few years before). In 1959, he auditioned for Monroe and was hired, on the condition that he not "play like Don Reno." Combining his knowledge of the older, mountain banjos with the more current Scruggs and Reno licks, he became one of the more distinctive players to hold down that spot for Monroe. Eventually, his family and job took him to Ohio, where he still lives, and where he worked with singer and guitarist Tom Ewing in the All American Boys. (To complete the circle, Ewing was the longtime lead singer and guitarist for the Blue Grass Boys at the time of Monroe's passing in 1996).

Sounds Like Bluegrass To Me brings Ellis together with a trio of sidemen who have long histories in bluegrass as well. Fiddler Lester Woodie, yet another North Carolinian, was barely out of high school when he signed on to play with the version of the Stanley Brothers band that recorded a series of sides for Columbia that are widely viewed as being among the best of the Stanley discography. Bassist Tom Gray was a high-profile figure in the "Second Generation" of bluegrass as a member of the "classic" Country Gentlemen, and later was a founding member of the Seldom Scene. The youngest member of the foursome, singer and guitarist Dudley Connell, co-founded the Johnson Mountain Boys in the 1970s, a band that spearheaded the revitalization of traditional bluegrass that took place in the 1980s. Since 1996, Connell has been lead singer for the current Seldom Scene lineup, has been an important part of the two (so far) Longview projects, and is generally acclaimed to be

among the five or so best bluegrass singers on the planet.

So, with a cast like this, what are the chances of *Sounds Like Bluegrass To Me* turning out to be a dud? Somewhere between slim and none. True, virtually every one of the sixteen cuts on the album is a tried-and-true bluegrass standard that's been done hundreds, if not thousands of times ("Long Journey Home," "Poor Ellen Smith," "Sweet Sunny South," "My Home's Across The Blue Ridge Mountains"), but these four guys are part of the reason they've retained their popularity – and it would be hard to do them better than this. Classic bluegrass, by four guys who know how to get it done. — JL



NOB HILL BOYS
Country Blues
Nob Hill Boys

As I am involved with community public radio, I was especially interested in the Nob Hill Boys. This bluegrass band was formed in May of 1998 after performing for a fundraising block party for radio station WORT-FM in Madison, Wisconsin.

The members of Nob Hill have been involved in bluegrass since a very young age, proving that it's best to get 'em while they're young. Banjo player Jon Peik has been immersed in the music for most of his life. His father is a picker and collector and took John to many festivals. He began playing in family jams by the time he was twelve years old.

Dan O'Brien, guitarist and lead vocalist, started off in his musical travels in a much more conventional manner as a rock player and a student of jazz and music history in college. He gradually moved over to the acoustic side of things with the help of the Grateful Dead and Old and In the Way. He met mandolin player John Fabke after moving to Madison and searching for acoustic jam sessions.

John Fabke was introduced to traditional based music through the Sacred Harp singing of his mother and hearing Ramblin' Jack Elliott while in college in Vermont. He later spent time playing the blues, singing old-time music in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and playing and singing for a season with Pete Seeger on the Clearwater.

The band is rounded out with bassist Pat Logterman, a member of the Madison band the Cork 'N Bottle String Band and Len Springer, a fine old-time long bow fiddler.

The selections on *Country Blues* range from standards such as "Sweet Little Miss Blue Eyes," "Ain't Nobody Gonna Miss Me" and the Delmore's "Sophronie" to band originals including "Hell Gate" a fine instrumental breakdown and a wonderful rendition of Dock Boggs classic "Country Blues" with plaintive vocals, clawhammer banjo and wailing fiddle. The musicianship is far better than most regional bluegrass outfits and their poise belies their short existence.

If there is anything to criticize on *Country Blues* it is the selection of standard tunes and the occasional choice of lead vocalist. Perhaps a bit more care could have been taken in this area. Maybe had they used an outside producer rather than doing it themselves, a fresh outlook could have been offered on the choice of material and the vocal arrangements.

All things considered (pun intended), WORT-FM is mighty fortunate to have the Nob Hill Boys on their team. They can play at our radio fundraiser anytime. — TD

MELVIN GOINS AND WINDY MOUNTAIN
Bluegrass Blues
Hay Holler 1346

With his banjo playing brother Ray, singer and guitarist Melvin Goins has been a fixture on the bluegrass scene for nearly a half-century. After spending much of the 1960s as members of the legendary Lonesome Pine Fiddlers, they formed their own Goins Brothers Band and toured the bluegrass circuit for some thirty years until Ray's health forced him to retire from touring in 1997. Melvin didn't have to look far to find a replacement for Ray's banjo – Dale Vanderpool had been subbing for Ray on a regular basis. Guitarist John McNeely had been with the brothers for several years. After recruiting a couple of young talents in vocalist/mandolinist John Rigsby and bassist Jason Hale, by 1999 Melvin had rechristened the band Windy Mountain (from the tune of the same name by the late Curly Ray Cline, a former Lonesome Pine bandmate) and prepared to carry the hard-edged, traditional bluegrass sound of the Goins Brothers into the next millennium. *Bluegrass Blues* is his first recording with the new band, continuing a long association with Virginia-based Hay Holler Records.

Both Goins brothers were born in Bramwell, West Virginia (Melvin is the elder by three years), a small town in the

southern part of the state nestled near the same New River that cuts across the Virginia/West Virginia/Tennessee/North Carolina region that spawned Carter and Ralph Stanley, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, and many others of the great early bluegrass acts. Like many of their regional contemporaries, particularly the Stanleys, the Goins sound carried strong echoes of the mountain music they grew up with, and though he's approaching the age of 70 with a new, young band, his new album suggests that Melvin Goins has no intention of straying from that sound. *Bluegrass Blues* is classic, hard-core, rough-around-the-edges, strong-as-black-coffee bluegrass, with no pretensions to being anything else. Lots of it, too – fifteen cuts worth, from the opening title track, through the aforementioned “Windy Mountain,” to the closer, a Rigsby-penned instrumental, “Mouse Tracks In The Bacon Grease.” You just don't find titles like that on any Michael Bolton or John Tesh albums. The Goins Brothers have long been known for outstanding gospel material, and their last album before Ray's retirement, *Run Satan Run* (Hay Holler 1338) was an all-gospel release. *Bluegrass Blues* features three gospel efforts, “He Showed Me The Way” (with Ray sitting in), “Death Came Creepin' In My Room” and “Worry No More” (a showcase duet for Hale and Rigsby). And, lest the beginnings of bluegrass be forgotten, there are tunes from each of the Monroe Brothers, Bill's instrumental “Pass Me Not” and Charlie's “We'll Love Again, Sweetheart.”

Like fine Kentucky bourbon, this kind of proto-bluegrass sound may be a little strong for the tastes of some, but it's pretty much what Melvin and Ray Goins have been doing for some fifty years now, and it's stood the test of time well. — JL

BUTCH BALDASSARI, ROBIN BULLOCK, JOHN REISCHMAN

Travellers
SoundArt 1255

Crossover continues to be a growing, positive trend within various genres of acoustic music. For those more traditionally-based forms, it provides new opportunities to expand the audience; in “new folk” circles, it reaches back to roots. Regardless, when one relates two divergent sounds, the similarities become more clear.

On *Travellers*, three consummate musicians join forces to create a condensed encyclopedia of wonderfully eclectic acoustic music. From the bluegrass camp, we have Nashville Mandolin Ensemble founder Butch

Baldassari. John Reischman, playing mandolin and mandola, visits the cutting edge of new acoustic where he has made his mark consistently over the years. Finally, Celtic music has its showing via virtuoso Robin Bullock, who contributes guitar, mandolin and cittern work on the recording.

The trio moves readily in and out of styles, blending talent and technique. Half the CD is comprised of “medley” cuts. The six tracks (1, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11) demonstrate best their deep traditional roots on both sides of the Atlantic, with tunes dating from 18th century Colonial America (“Kelsterne Garden” / “Childgrove”) to the contemporarily-penned “Rising Fawn Reel” by Bullock. Rich, deep tones enhance the understated beauty of the former medley, the two tunes exquisitely representing early music that originated in the Old World and that was brought to the New World. The stately formal style suggests perhaps a courting dance.

Bill Monroe is paid tribute to in the “Dead March” / “Jenny Lynn” medley, nothing fancy, just pure Monroe bluegrass mandolin. The two tunes come from the repertoire handed down to Monroe by his Uncle Pen Vandiver.

One treasure comes early in the album. “Little Jacky Wilson” (cut 2) is a seldom-heard Kentucky fiddle tune which becomes a perfect platform for trio mandolin. Reischman's “Birdland Bounce” (originally recorded with Tony Rice as “Birdland Breakdown”) has all three letting loose swing-style, with precision and grace.

Traveling south of the border, “El Grillo (The Cricket),” “Jesusita En Chichuahua (Jesse Polka)” and “Como Lloro Una Estrella (As Weeps A Star)” – the first two from Mexico, the latter from Venezuela – capture with panache the essence of the countries from which they originate.

“Miss MacLeod's Reel,” the third part of the track 7 medley consisting of “Little Rabbit” and “Arkansas Traveller” (note: the back cover notes have these latter two tunes in reversed playing order), was originally written for Scottish bagpipe. Here it is given an equally full sound as bagpipe substituting triple mandolins.

Frank Wakefield's “Waltz In The Bluegrass” closes this polished compilation that sounds like three friends just sitting around, jamming and having a great time picking together. Is *Volume 2* around the corner?

The elegant, sophisticated playing and blurring of genres from each of Baldassari's, Reischman's and Bullock's unique perspectives reinforces why music labels just aren't necessary when it comes to outstanding acoustic music. This recording is going to be played a lot in this house. — SPL

GEORGE SHUFFLER

Aged To Perfection
Copper Creek 0172

Less recognized for his driving bass style as demonstrated while working with the Stanley Brothers, George Shuffler is an instinctive player and innovator best known for his exquisite, delicately precise cross-picking guitar style. He developed the technique while touring with Jim and Jesse and the Virginia Boys, yet he first employed it on record with the Stanleys in a 1960 recording session for King Records, somewhat by happenstance as explained in the liner notes of *Aged To Perfection*.

Apparently, Carter Stanley asked Shuffler to play his guitar “like a quick mandolin lead.” But George reminded him he played guitar, not mandolin, but proceeded to play some cross-picking style guitar. The engineer suggested it sounded good and that he should do more of it. And so he did.

Shuffler renewed his bass talents during a stint with Reno and Harrell in the sixties. The '70s and '80s saw him traveling with his brothers and children as the Shuffler Family. Shuffler has been getting much-deserved, renewed attention in recent years. A few years ago, he returned to the stage solo and continues to perform on a selective basis doing concerts and workshops.

Aged To Perfection is just that. The CD is a delightful sampling of mostly traditional and folk tunes, rounded out with some bluegrass, performed as only the one who invented the cross-picking guitar style can. His playing is graceful, with a subtle, light touch to the strings.

Most of the tunes might be “aged,” but they're not old in the hands of this master. While this is a solo instrumental guitar album, per se, Shuffler overdubbed himself on bass. Most notable are his renditions of “I Am A Pilgrim” and “Down In The Willow Garden.” We are also treated to one Shuffler original, the light-hearted “Give The World A Sunny Smile.”

The popular “Miller's Cave,” that Shuffler used to feature while playing with the Stanley Brothers and which was also a hit for country artist Hank Snow, is included here. There is a lovely but all-too-short (a little over a minute and a half) jazzy, lilting jaunt on Libba Cotton's “Freight Train.” While any number of the tunes, including Bill Monroe's “It's Mighty Dark To Travel,” have lyrics, they are not missed here as Shuffler's notes fill them all completely.

This CD was too long a wait from such a significant contributor to acoustic music history; when's the next? — SPL

CHRIS BRASHEAR

Wanderlust

Copper Creek 0171

Of late, there seems to be a resurgence of bluegrass songwriters capturing the Monroe tradition in style and delivery. At the head of the list should be Chris Brashear. For a number of years a member of the popular, Oregon-based Kentucky Rose, guitarist-fiddler-vocalist Brashear teams up on *Wanderlust* with Jody Stecher (mandolin, guitar, fiddle, vocals), Peter McLaughlin (guitar, vocals), Laurie Lewis (bass, vocals), Bob Black (banjo), John Averill (mandolin, vocals) and Ed Neff (fiddle). The final product is a superb presentation of material, including five originals by Brashear.

Fiddles are well-represented in some interesting displays. "Newport," an instrumental, definitively takes the listener into the hearts of the two fiddlers, Brashear and Neff, who play in harmony to each other with delight and zest. Hear Neff's soulful, even notes in the Loretta Lynn-penned "Today's The Darkest Day." A Brashear original, "When Day Is Done," has a bluesy Kenny Baker-like swing to it in; Baker is cited in the liners as one of Brashear's influences. With former Blue Grass Boy Bob Black providing banjo, one could well imagine it's indeed Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys on stage, especially with John Averill's exacting Monroe-style mandolin. "Father Bill" would certainly approve.

There is a nice representation of songs not overly recorded. A.P. Carter's "Home In Tennessee" finds Laurie Lewis playing bass and providing harmony vocal. Loretta Lynn's "Today's The Darkest Day" gets a straightforward, heartfelt treatment. Another sleeper that's a pleasure to hear on the CD is the Reno-Smiley-Leftwich song, "Unwanted Love," again, just some great picking and singing.

Brashear's voice is clear, suited well to the music and to lead singing. Triple fiddles and triple vocals grace "Wanderlust," written by Brashear. On it we are treated to Jody Stecher singing lead with Brashear in the tenor seat and Peter McLaughlin providing baritone notes. The song is full of images and feeling and could easily cross over into folk or country genres.

No slacker on guitar, Brashear puts across a relaxed polish to his delivery. His superb songwriting summons up moving, meaningful lyrics, including the album's tearjerker opener, "Mason's Lament."

Wanderlust is a well-rounded, beautifully paced compilation. Listening to it,

you'll feel like you're at a concert and all the players are having a genuinely good time playing for you. — SPL

5 FOR THE GOSPEL

Victory Is Sweet:

Live At Ashland, Kentucky

Hay Holler 1347

Voted by the Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music in America as the "Best Traditional Bluegrass Gospel Singing Group," 5 for the Gospel is an exciting quintet rendering nothing but good, old-fashioned gospel music bluegrass-style ... and then a whole lot more. In reality you have a highly polished entertainment package that also adeptly preaches the gospel while successfully engaging audience participation.

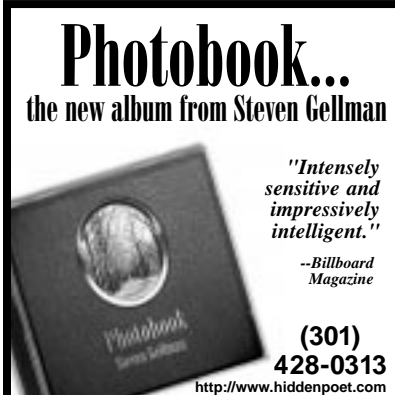
This recording was taken from the soundtrack of a concert video, taped and recorded before a live audience in the WTSF-TV 61 studio in Ashland, Kentucky. It is so expressive that one doesn't miss the visuals at all.

Joyous voices sing out in spirited, powerful harmonized bluegrass vocalizations. Solid, expert instrumentation backs up throughout the album. There is one instrumental here, "Pickin' The Jubilee," a terrific number where all the players take a turn to shine: Rick May, mandolin; John Thornsberry, guitar; Pat Holbrook, bass; Johnny Branham, banjo; Albon Lee Clevenger, fiddle.

The entire hour-long show is very upbeat, heartfelt gospel. "No Not Alone" takes its cue from the *a capella* street corner singing style adapted by doo wop proponents in the '50s. The banjo on "He's Coming Back Again" features a distinctively rolling folk style often heard during the folk boom. It is obvious these five guys have listened to a lot of different styles of music and, while they've given voice to their music via bluegrass gospel, they have simultaneously preserved the respect that the music's roots – and branches – demand.

Many of the cuts are feisty, dynamic numbers; "Praising Up A Storm" barrels down the tracks with its punch. Emotive lyrics and companion fiddle bring "Red, Red River" home with deep religious feeling. Mandolin also steps forward with flowery breaks on this latter number as well as on "He Satisfies." John Thornsberry's lead vocals can be compared to the soulful grace of ex-New Grass Revival's John Cowan.

While the lyrics, naturally, all follow the same religious thread, the deliveries are as diverse as any bluegrass show containing a



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thoughtful mix of unhurried gospel along with driving banjo and fiddle numbers.

Stage patter consists of preaching, praising and Biblical quotes. The next to last number journeys into "The Great I Am," where the ministers in the house / audience are called forward to lead the "congregants." The CD crescendoes to the final cut, "Victory Is Sweet," with audience participants "ascending." — SPL



JIM HURST
Open Window
N. N. Guido

Jim Hurst has one of those highly distinctive voices that has the ability to captivate an intimate audience as readily as a large concert hall. Full of clarity and punch, his superb vocal abilities and grand delivery are a winning combination that ought to make him a star. Just as such country artists as George Strait or Randy Travis are quickly recognized within their first few notes, such is the case with Hurst; when you hear him sing, you're going to sit up and take notice if you haven't already.

For several years, he toured and recorded with Grammy-nominated Claire Lynch and the Front Porch String Band and now partners on the road with IBMA Bass Player of the Year and ex-Lynch bandmate Missy Raines. Hurst has a full, rich voice with just the right amount of edge to it. He glides effortlessly between genres, from innovative, undefinable styles to sliding in and out of pop, country and gospel to traditional country and cutting edge bluegrass.

On *Open Window*, his first solo CD, Jim Hurst surrounds himself with the best. For starters, Raines, of course, is there; the two fit each others' styles like a matched set of sterling silver and fine china – simply elegant. Fred Carpenter provides some sharp, driving fiddle breaks, while the ever-tasteful Gene Wooten gives it up on the dobro and baritone harmonies on "17 Days." Hurst comes in not only on guitar but also on banjo on this number, an original composition.

Hurst's guitar playing is showcased without flaw on his arrangement for solo guitar of Bill Monroe's "Wheel Hoss," not an easy feat for any lone instrument! He pulls it off and you'd swear you heard at least four other instruments playing. Hurst

cites Jerry Reed as his "biggest influence" and hence his tribute, "Swamp Reed," a heady instrumental with Raines on bass, Rob Ickes, dobro, and Sam Bush kicking out mandolin chops.

Always a pleasure to hear on contemporary recordings is a Louvin Brothers song. "My Baby's Gone" is a great one and the treatment Hurst gives it is picture perfect. Andrea Zonn contributes fiddle while Claire Lynch sings tenor to Hurst's lead and baritone.

An original instrumental, "Alarm Clock," gets an interesting touch with Raymond McLain's unique banjo style, in which he occasionally strays from three-finger bluegrass rolls to throwing in a frail or two. Hurst lets it all hang out here, jazzing up the house with his excellent guitar playing.

"Crazy Locomotion Blues," a Hurst original co-written with Steve Hylton, is another prime example of why someone in Music City ought to grab this man and sign him to a major recording contract. His ability to put across a song effortlessly blends well with his rich, full country-style voice.

All-told, the entire CD contains a winning selection of numbers and appealing arrangements; six of the thirteen are originals by Hurst or co-written with Steve Hylton. More highlights are the swiny "This Old Guitar" from the pen of Jonathan Edwards, with its quiet hint of drums and Raines playing ever-so-tasteful bass. "A Minor Infraction," an original instrumental, is filled with interesting mandolin and guitar patterns and fills. Hurst and Raines showcase their duo appeal on "The Pearl of Pearl KY," an exquisite instrumental original.

There is unbeatable depth to the gospel "I Can Tell You The Time." Here Claire Lynch sings tenor, Michael McLain, baritone, Sheaton Feazell, bass, with Hurst singing lead, alto and playing spare guitar accompaniment. "Tall Pines" again shows off Hurst's bluegrass side on guitar and vocals with Vic Jordan offering up banjo, Keith Little playing mandolin, Bobby Hicks fiddling his smooth lines, Ben Surratt donating baritone vocals and Raines rounding out on bass.

Don't try to pigeon-hole this recording into one genre; it's a heck of a great compilation of just what Jim Hurst and his music are all about. — SPL

TARBOX RAMBLERS
Tarbox Ramblers
Rounder 9051

Self-titled *Tarbox Ramblers* is an unusually captivating recording. Reminiscent of the sixties British skiffle bands (or

even Ned Sublette during the eighties), the CD is typified by a certain raw edge to the vocals and a driving percussion backing with a definitive bar sound. In fact, for the past three years on a weekly basis, Jon Cohan (drums and percussion), Daniel Kellar (violin and vocals), Johnny Sciascia (bass fiddle and vocals) and Michael Tarbox (guitar and vocals) have been getting together and playing at a Boston pub.

On this debut album they offer an eclectic, yet musically connected, conglomeration of hot rockin' blues, traditional country and reinvented folk. The heartfelt renditions, while unrefined in sound, are not at all irreverent. Toss any type of roots-based music their way, and it's evident that they can handle it.

They go through the paces of genres with a certain sameness to the vocals and instrumentation, yet it doesn't get old but grows on you. It's a darned interesting mix of tunes, from the well-known to the obscure. From a quasi-rockabilly "Columbus Stockade" to a spiritual-like "Stewball" to flat-out "Jug Band Music." "Honey In The Rock" is jazzed up country swing-style.

Tarbox Ramblers may present a relatively rough sound to some listeners, but it's also refreshingly infectious. Give yourself a chance to have a good time; listen to this recording! — SPL

AULDRIDGE-BENNETT-GAUDREAU
This Old Town
Rebel 1758

This Old Town combines the beautiful vocal and instrumental talents of bluegrass veterans Mike Aldridge, Richard Bennett and Jimmy Gaudreau. While Bennett is the less known of the trio, his credentials are solid. He's done guitar-playing stints with Flatt and Scruggs fiddler Benny Sims' band (when he was 15!), recording projects with fiddle great Vassar Clements and spent seven years touring with J.D. Crowe and the New South before going out solo. Aldridge is, of course, best known as a founding member and dobro player extraordinaire of the groundbreaking Seldom Scene. In recent years he's toured and recorded with Chesapeake and Lyle Lovett. For more than thirty years, mandolinist Gaudreau has been recognized as one of the premier sidemen in bluegrass, having worked with the Country Gentlemen, helping to form IInd Generation with Eddie Adcock, touring for nine years with Tony Rice, to name a few, and most recently performing along with Aldridge, T. Michael Coleman and

Moondi Klein in Chesapeake. The band is backed up by Joe Sharp on bass.

Selections include four originals from Bennett ("Sally On The Treadmill") and Gaudreau ("Old Columbus Blues," "Two Hearts and "Glide Path"). The remaining cuts come from a host of wonderful songwriters, including two women. Kate Wolf's "Across The Great Divide" is an excellent choice to close any CD, while the relative newcomer Kim Fox (Fox Family Bluegrass Band) comes up with "Love Remains," a song that could easily reach the country charts.

Trio harmonies are splendid on this recording. "We Live In Two Different Worlds" is just one example and it is topped off with Auldrige's trademark dobro backing and breaks as well as great guitar lines from Bennett. "Southern Son," from the pen of Charles Roehrig, is another find.

Album highlight is Norman Blake's "Billy Gray," an often-overlooked song, presented here with unmatched, smooth delivery. Subtle Dobro and Gaudreau's ever-tasteful, distinctive mandolin work complement the vocals.

Reaching back we find a couple of oldies but goodies. "You Didn't Say Goodbye" comes from bluegrass greats Bill Emerson and Cliff Waldron. Tom Gray's "Silence Or Tears" is a classic and is put into overdrive by Auldrige-Bennett-Gaudreau. The trio's talents are maximized on this high-gear version – great lead and harmony vocals and snappy breaks by each on mandolin, dobro and guitar.

This Old Town is great contemporary bluegrass with a timeless touch. — SPL

JIM LAUDERDALE AND RALPH STANLEY
I Feel Like Singing Today
Rebel 1755

This release is a treasure trove of dyed-in-the-wood bluegrass from the winning combination of Nashville songwriter-singer Jim Lauderdale and legendary bluegrass icon "Dr." Ralph Stanley.

Originally from North Carolina, Lauderdale has a pure, natural voice equally at home in his usual country and rockabilly digs as we find here in bluegrass, be it singing lead or harmonizing with bluegrass legend Stanley. The two stick true to tradition – straight-ahead old-time interpretations.

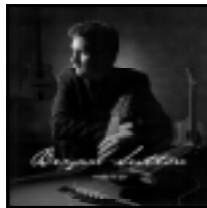
A well-established and perhaps one of the best contemporary songwriters, Lauderdale also writes "in the tradition" and his style is a perfect fit for Stanley's "mountain soul." The title cut, which kicks

off the album, is his and "I Will Wait For You," co-authored with Robert Hunter, is so right on, one wonders if perhaps Lauderdale isn't a reincarnation of a mid-twentieth century bluegrass writer. In all, nine of the CD's fifteen tracks are by Lauderdale or co-written with either Frank Dycus, Ollie O'Shea or Hunter.

Lauderdale's composing abilities capture the bluegrass gospel spirit as well. "Another Sinner's Prayer" is hauntingly religious as well as particularly reminiscent of Carter and Ralph harmonizations. "Highway Through My Home" is yet another standout on this superb collection.

Some classic standards are included, among them, very graceful versions of Carter Stanley's "Harbor Of Love" and "Who Will Sing For Me" as well as the Brumleys' "This World Is Not My Home."

While instrumental virtuosity is clearly evident on this album, it's the singing and the songs that are the focus on this outstanding release. A must for bluegrass collections. — SPL



BRYAN SUTTON
Ready To Go
Sugar Hill 3906

With a host of stellar musicians guesting, former Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder guitarist Bryan Sutton steps out on his first solo release, *Ready To Go*. A past IBMA "Guitar Player of the Year," Sutton also produced the recording which features Skaggs, Dolly Parton, Jerry Douglas, Jeff White, Ron Block, Aubrey Haynie, Rob Ickes and Nashville Bluegrass Band's Pat Enright (his trademark lead vocals heard on "Blue Night"), to name just a few of the fourteen guest players.

Sutton plays guitar and mandolin on all tracks, with a handful of others lending mandolin work as well. Brother Jerry Sutton provides rhythm guitar to Bryan's lead flatpicking on the beautifully spare "Chief's Medley," a collection of three tunes that Sutton credits his grandfather, Grover, having played on the fiddle.

Four of the fourteen cuts are vocals. In addition to Enright leading "Blue Night," Parton sings her own soulful "Smoky Mountain Memories" with only Sutton backing up on guitar. Exceptional is "The

Water Is Wide" with expressive, graceful fiddle and tingling harmony vocals from Becky Isaacs Bowman and Sonya Isaacs Surratt. Jeff White does vocal duties on "When Love Comes To Town," where we also find Jerry Douglas offering up some sweet Dobro.

A number of tunes are originals, affording ample ground to showcase Sutton's light, sensitive touch on his guitar. From the lightning-speed of "Decision At Gladly Fork" to the pensive, lullaby-like melody of "The Good Deed," the CD's final cut, clean, precise notes are always on tap.

There's a nice, evenly-paced "Brown County Breakdown" from Bill Monroe's repertoire. The picking is solid with Aubrey Haynie backing up Sutton on fiddle, Ron Block on banjo, David Harvey playing mandolin and Dennis Crouch rounding out on bass.

Sutton tips his hat to jazz with Stephane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt's "Minor Swing," and the Gershwins' classic "Lady Be Good." Both tunes feature only Crouch on bass and Haynie on fiddle as backup to Sutton's guitar.

Ready To Go is a solid first solo effort by this remarkable musician. Now I'm ready for more! — SPL

BOB BUCKINGHAM AND FRIENDS
My Friend Is A Mule In The Mines
Dark Holler 881

Old-time music is social music, people getting together to play for dances, parties or just for their own enjoyment. Often old-time recordings tend to become academic exercises much more suited to the research of a particular style of playing or region, or tour-de-force all-star picking sessions that ignore the reason we bought the record in the first place to listen to and enjoy.

Bob Buckingham is a master banjoist and fiddler from Pennsylvania. His new recording is a bit of a travelogue through his musical past. We are treated to some of the tunes Bob learned early in his playing career such as his rendition of "Roving Gambler" inspired by Ian Tyson's version 35 years ago and "Long Steel Rail Blues," learned in the late sixties from a recording purchased while in the military. Bob has taken these and made them truly his own. He also offers tunes from players who inspired him in a more direct way. "Unicorn" comes from a tape of Duke Criswell, and later Bob played music with Duke's son, Sonny Criswell. "Forked Deer" featuring Bob on fiddle, was learned

from the playing of Harold Carney, an old miner who first played with Bob in 1973.

Bob is joined on a number of tracks by fellow banjoist Reed Martin. These were recorded casually on the morning after playing a dance and sound typically sleepy and laid back but oh so right. Two masters communicating in the best possible way. Reed mostly stays with the fretless banjo, playing an octave below Bob on the tunes "Old Molly Hare" and "Liberty." The old chestnuts "Soldier's Joy" and "Sally Ann" take on a completely different drive when propelled by Reed's plunky fretless basso-profundo banjo.

Also, joining Bob on *My Friend Is A Mule In The Mines* is one of his banjo students Tim Renner (featured on a wonderful laid back version of "Sourwood Mountain"), along with Bob Hess on guitar and banjo and Todd Clewell on guitar, bass and vocals. Bob is quick to mention that the inspiration behind this project grew out of the enthusiasm of his students.

The title track "My Friend Is A Mule In The Mines" is a short one stanza *a capella* tune learned by Bob from his granddad who worked for many years in the anthracite coal mines and later became a preacher after his mining days were over.

It must be mentioned that upon first inspection *My Friend Is A Mule In The Mines* would appear to be another collection of standard tunes played on the old-time banjo and fiddle, and in a way you would be right, of course. Most of these selections are the ones we all learned on, but you would be hard-pressed to find a better collection of great performances than these. Granted, the recording is a bit funky in spots, occasionally having the ambience of a one-mike jam session tape; and perhaps Bob doesn't have the best voice to grace your living room speaker system, but the music is well played and the sincerity of the project and the love of the music is evident from the very first note. We are fortunate to have players like Bob Buckingham, and others like Dwight Diller, Reed Martin and Hank Schwartz presenting old-time banjo as it was intended to be played.

Bob writes in the first line of his liner notes "Old time music, heck all music, is an all-consuming passion for me." That passion is infectious and if you are looking for a wonderful informal recording to inspire you to play along or recapture a memorable afternoon playing or listening in the shade *My Friend Is A Mule In The Mines* is just what you're looking for. — TD



CUCANANDY
He Didn't Dance
Milky Way (no cat #)

Based in Asheville North Carolina, Cucanandy (pronounced Koo-Kuh-Nahn-Dee) recall another North Carolina band that performed Celtic tunes with a distinctive Southeastern slant. Touchstone made two great recordings for Green Linnet and I see many similarities with Cucanandy.

The band is made up of Mike Casey, on Irish wooden flute, guitar, lap dulcimer and whistles. Mike has studied the flute styles native to the Galway region and is a great innovator on the lap dulcimer. He incorporates many seemingly unrelated styles into his dulcimer playing. Stephanie Johnston, on guitar, bodhran, step dance and vocals, was raised in England and Nashville. She has been singing professionally since her teens and has studied both classical and traditional styles when not working as a museum educator. Malke Rosenfeld, on Irish wooden flute, whistle, bodhran and step dance, has toured internationally with the Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble including the London run of Riverdance. She is fluent in many dance styles including Cape Breton step dance and old-time flat-foot and clogging. Filling out the band is special guest fiddler and mandolinist Jason Cade, who studied with North Carolina master Bruce Greene. He has studied field recordings of Irish fiddlers and spent a year studying abroad at the University College-Dublin. Besides old-time and Celtic styles, Jason has honed his improvisation skills playing in a variety of rock and jazz bands in and around Chapel Hill.

The fifteen selections that make up *He Didn't Dance* range from "Bretan An Dros" three dance tunes from Brittany, "Cucanandy," the band's namesake, a child's mouth music piece, and "Where The Hieland Thistle Grows" a North Carolina original from the pen of Jim McGill about emigrants from the Scottish Highlands and Northern Ireland and their arrival in the Carolinas during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The most curious selection for me is "The Wounded Hoosier" a slow Celtic march featuring Jason's fiddle and Mike's expressive dulcimer playing. Except for its squared-off rhythm, it is almost a note-for-

note recreation of the old West Virginia tune "Queen Of The Earth And Child Of The Stars" so memorable from the Edden Hammons collection from West Virginia University and their Chappell collection. It is mentioned in the notes that the tune is also known as "The Blackbird" a connection I had known about but had not previously heard.

The musicianship is top-notch throughout *He Didn't Dance*. The production, handled by Pete Sutherland, who lends his talents on piano and harmonium, is flawless. A real highlight is the inclusion of foot percussion on a number of selections. The driving rhythms of Malke and Stephanie propel these wonderful dance tunes and medleys. Stephanie's clear golden voice illuminates the vocal tunes. There is lightness to the arrangements due in part to the impeccable rhythm of the players and the driving frolicking flute playing. This recording is a joy to behold. I think I'll go dig up those old Touchstone recordings. — TD

KATE AND LOU GIAMPETRUZZI
Mississippi Ripple
Bluewind 100

Recorded between 1979 and 1981, *Mississippi Ripple* is a sweet remembrance of the old-time music scene in New York City in the early '80s. At a time when disco seemed to be the king, Kate and Lou's liner notes attest there was a very strong roots music scene happening in the Big Apple and most of it was centered around a couple of coffeehouses and clubs. The most notable of these clubs are the Good Coffeehouse in Brooklyn, still going strong each Friday night and the Eagle Tavern which supported the bluegrass scene until just the past few years.

The story of *Mississippi Ripple* goes back even further. Kate met Lou Giampetruzzi in Artie Traum's kitchen in Woodstock New York in 1973. It would appear as the fairy tale come true with love at first sight and a professional relationship begun at about the same instant. Together they studied the music of such notables as Libba Cotton, Utah Phillips, David Bromberg and John Cohen. This was the early '70s, long before the abundance of independent artist labels, when you really had to have a major label contract to get your music out. But there was always another way. They describe pouring over the County Records monthly bulletin for authentic mountain music.

After running a coffeehouse and living in upstate New York for a number of years

they took the plunge and moved to Brooklyn and have lived there ever since. They fell into a community of players with the same obsession and formed the Wonderbeans, who along with The Wretched Refuse String Band and Major Conte and the Canebrake Rattlers anchored the old time scene in New York City. At about this time Lou completed an accordion instruction book for Oak Publications called "Contemporary Accordion."

Mississippi Ripple was recorded during the hey-day of the old time revival in New York. It includes many of the stalwart players of the period, including Bill Christophersen, Steve Garcia, Joel Ponzan, Arnie Reisman and Steve Uhrik. It's recorded in the old fashioned way, 2-track analog with a live mix. It's refreshing to hear just the sound of acoustic instruments and singing all together in the same room, warts and all.

The selection of tunes defines the term eclectic. Lou's keyboard accordion is the centerpiece of most of the arrangements and a good deal of the music is rooted in the blues / zydeco / Cajun / French Canadian tradition. Kate's vocals borrow heavily from Geoff and Maria Muldaur's classic *Pottery Pie* recording as well as the playing and singing of Eric and Suzy Thompson. A few standouts include the opening tune "Somebody's Been Lovin' My Baby" a re-arrangement of an old vaudeville tune turned into a campy blues with a great slinky guitar solo and a sassy vocal, "Tickle Toe" from the repertoire of Adolph Hofner the great TexasBohemian swing king with its Roy Smeck inspired-arrangement, "Hound Dog Baby," featuring Lou's full throated vocals and pumping accordion and "Jealous Hearted Me," the Carter family classic done up as a two-step with fine two-part vocals and fluid guitar. The title track "Mississippi Ripple," a Kate and Lou original, is a guitar and mandolin duet inspired by a sunny day in Cape Girardeau, Missouri along the banks of the Mississippi. "Le Reel Du Sucre" is a spirited Québécois dance tune learned from the playing of Joseph Allard and Louis Beaudoin. It features the melodic lines doubled on the accordion and harmonica and the rhythm is absolutely infectious! I defy you to keep your toes still!

There is very little information in the updated liner notes about what has gone on with Kate and Lou Giampetruzzi in the twenty or so years since this recording was made. I hope they have kept the music alive and are still playing, if not, they can be duly proud of *Mississippi Ripple*. It's a timeless testament to the power traditional music has in the most unusual of places, New York City. — TD

JELLY ROLL JOHNSON
... And A Few Close Friends
JMJ 1111

Harmonica wizard Kirk “Jelly Roll” Johnson has spent most of the last quarter-century in Nashville racking up album session credits for the likes of George Jones, Kathy Mattea, Guy Clark and the Judds, to name but a few, but judging from his own debut release, he’s at his best on stage in a smoky bar or blues joint, sitting in with the singer-songwriters who haunt Music Row, people like Fred Knobloch, Verlon Thompson, Malcolm Holcombe, Tony Arata, Darrell Scott, all of whom are among the “Close Friends” helping him out on this disc. Actually, even though it’s his name that’s in large type on the front, Johnson still retains something of the sideman mentality as he joins them on an eleven track country blues journey highlighted by Holcombe’s “Mouth Harp Man” and “Marvelene’s Kitchen,” Arata’s “Night By Night,” and a sizzling duet by Thompson and the marvelous Suzi Ragsdale on “Troublemaker.” Johnson serves as his own producer, managing to keep his own solos inspiring, yet never overpowering, and the album’s stripped-down feel is much more suggestive of an intimate club gig than a studio session. Nicely done all the way around, it’s music that seems to have been made for nothing more or less than the pleasure of making good music. — JL



MEMPHIS SLIM
The Folkways Years, 1959-1973
Smithsonian Folkways 40128

By the time he began recording for Moses Asch’s Folkways Records in 1959, Peter “Memphis Slim” Chatman had been playing piano and singing blues-based music for 30 years, first in rural, Southern honky-tonks and then in Chicago, where his musical colleagues included Big Bill Broonzy and bass player-writer-producer Willie Dixon and where his boogie-woogie roots sprouted into jump blues and R&B, usually played with small combos. Following Asch’s suggestion, however, Chatman returned to being a predominantly solo pianist and singer and to em-

phasizing an older approach to the music, one calculated to have greater appeal to the burgeoning white, folk music audience. As for other rural musicians – both black and white – who followed this “authenticity” approach, the result was positive, and Chatman found his career revitalized. He also soon discovered a demand for his music in Europe, where he then lived much of the time until his death in 1988.

The 21 tracks on this eco-packaged collection find Chatman playing solo and with several sidemen, including frequent partner Willie Dixon. Chatman seems most at ease alone and with Dixon, whose solid bass playing – which sometimes includes percussive slaps – fits comfortably with Memphis Slim’s left hand. A rollicking “Joogie Boogie” sets the rough, barrelhouse tone, with Chatman’s right hand tickling cascading runs and trills from the treble keys as his left hand hammers out a rumbling bass pattern and with Dixon contributing a series of effective and dynamically varied bass solos. Dixon also contributes to the collection’s most unusual selection, a slow, bluesy treatment of the free-ranging racehorse ballad, “Stewball,” with Chatman and Dixon swapping the vocal lead half-way through and joining voices for a rough harmony on the last line of each verse. Although Chatman is a limited singer, he gives Bessie Smith’s “Backwater Blues” a sorrowful, understated reading and imbues the live “Every Day I Have The Blues” with convincing melancholy. Most of the ensemble tracks seem spontaneous, with uneven results. Arbee Stidham’s reedy singing on “Walking Blues” (not the Son House classic) is effective, but Jazz Gillum’s half-spoken vocal and harmonica work on “Key To The Highway” are lackluster. Electric guitarist Matt Murphy delivers a tasty solo (and some strange backup) on “If The Rabbit Had A Gun,” but Jump Jackson’s aggressive drumming detracts from Chatman’s spoken explanation and reminiscence of the 1930s Chicago music scene on “Chicago Rent Party.” The main focus, however, is Chatman, who provides variety by giving “Mean Old Frisco” a New Orleans feel and “San Juan Blues” a rumba rhythm. He even demonstrates his chops on Hammond organ on the aptly-titled “The Gimmick” and lends both piano and vocal support, along with Dixon, to Pete Seeger’s rousing, live “Midnight Special.”

Memphis Slim was one of the few piano players to receive attention from folk audiences, and this collection confirms that that attention was well-deserved and deserves to continue. — MG

BIG BILL BROONZY
Trouble In Mind
Smithsonian Folkways 40131

In 1920, country fiddler William “Big Bill” Broonzy migrated from Mississippi and Arkansas to Chicago, where former medicine show performer Pappa Charlie Jackson taught him to play the guitar. By the 1930s, Broonzy had become one of the mainstays of the Windy City’s blues scene. In 1938 he appeared in producer John Hammond’s historic “Spirituals to Swing” concert at Carnegie Hall, replacing the recently deceased Robert Johnson. But black musical taste was changing, and, as the years progressed, Broonzy struggled to support himself as a musician. Eventually he found favor among white folk musicians and enthusiasts, who encouraged him, as had Hammond, to focus on his earlier “folk-based” material. By the time of his death in 1958 from throat cancer, Broonzy had emerged – along with Brownie McGhee, Sonny Terry, Lead Belly, and Josh White – as a musical spokesperson for, and representative of, vernacular, rural, black culture among white, urban folkies.

Broonzy recorded the 24 tracks on this eco-packaged collection for Folkways in studio sessions, concerts, and radio broadcasts (on “Studs Terkel’s Almanac”) during the last two years of his life. They display him as a powerful, versatile guitarist and extremely expressive singer, a creator of compelling, crafted performances infused with a great range of dynamic and emotional shading. Broonzy’s singing could rise from an intimate murmur (“Poor Bill Blues”) to a pained wail, often within the same song (“Trouble In Mind”). These and other slow blues also display his free manipulation of time by holding and playing with syllables and his dramatic yet spare use of the guitar as a second voice, punctuating and answering, rather than strictly accompanying, his vocals. On faster blues (“C. C. Rider,” “Willie Mae”) and songs, Broonzy’s playing reflects a ragtime influence, with contrapuntal treble lines dancing over a thumping, Mississippi-style “dead-thumb” bass. Two instrumentals, “Hey, Hey Baby” (with incidental snatches of lyrics) and “Shuffle Rag” further attest to Broonzy’s skill as a guitarist and remind us of his roots in Southern, rural dance music. Broonzy also displays his roots on “Joe Turner No. 2,” which he dates from 1892, and “Mule Ridin’ Blues,” through spoken monologues that chronicle life in the deep South. The collection includes perhaps Broonzy’s best-known song,

“Key To The Highway,” along with two musically similar originals – “When Will I Get To Be Called A Man” and “Black, Brown, And White” – songs that other labels were unwilling to record and that leave no doubt about Big Bill’s contempt for the racism he encountered and saw around him. Pete Seeger joins Broonzy on a civil rights-oriented “This Train Is Bound For Glory,” one of several non-blues that round out this collection and that remind us that Broonzy, like many of his peers, was essentially a songster, equally able to sing folk songs, religious songs (“Hush, Somebody’s Calling Me”) and popular tunes (“Frankie And Johnny”).

Once again, we have Folkways’ founder Moses Asch to thank for recognizing the power, beauty, and vitality of music that commercial labels no longer had a use for, and of a musician whose artistry has few equals – in any genre of music. — MG

ERIC ANDERSEN

You Can’t Relive The Past

Appleseed 1032

Beginning with a stunning opener and moving through some of the grittiest tracks he’s ever recorded – including four songwriting collaborations with the late, great Townes Van Zandt and another with art rock legend Lou Reed – *You Can’t Relive The Past* is one of the strongest sets in Eric Andersen’s 35-year-long recording career.

Andersen begins with “Eyes Of The Immigrant.” Ostensibly, a beautiful tribute to the many waves of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island on the way to a hoped-for better life, Andersen also uses the song to remind us that the “home of the brave, of the free” was also built on the backs of slaves dragged across the ocean in chains. Enhanced here by Lucy Kaplansky’s gorgeous harmonies and Artie Traum’s nylon-stringed guitar leads, “Eyes Of The Immigrant” relives our collective past with reminders that we can all use from time to time.

Another very beautiful song is “Magdalena,” Andersen’s remembrance of cellist Anne Sheldon, who was killed in a car accident not long after collaborating with Andersen in 1984.

Andersen recorded about half the album in Mississippi with veteran blues musicians Sam Carr, James Johnson and Kenny Brown. These tracks, like “Every Once In A Pale Blue Moon,” are among Andersen’s strongest achievements in folk-rock with their gritty, driving arrangements and

story-telling lyrics. And, like many of the songs on this album, “Every Once In A Pale Blue Moon” is evidence that reliving the past can make for great songs.

The four songwriting collaborations with Van Zandt were worked on by the two back in 1986 and then almost forgotten. Andersen recently rediscovered and finished them. “Night Train” is a tough glimpse at the darkness of self-destruction while “The Blue March (The Iris)” seems to be yet another of Van Zandt’s prophecies of an early death.

The co-write, and duet, with Reed is the title song, “You Can’t Relive The Past.” In the refrain, the pair insists “you can’t,” while, of course, the verses do. — MR



DAVID ROTH

Irreconcilable Similarities

Wind River 4011

David Roth writes more than songs. He writes short stories, novellas and parables. For example, the first song, “Cutter Of Stone” (see page 80), is a parable about the curse of being granted what you wish, as well as a lesson that sometimes the lowly is more powerful than the mighty. An essay by Emily Perl Kingsley inspired “Holland,” about raising a differently-abled child. “Life Learned” tells of experiences of ordinary folk in a book by H. Jackson Brown, Jr., and personal experiences as well, resulting in snippets of wisdom, from the silly to the profound. So it goes on this CD, stories gleaned from the books, essays, and poetry of others, all magically turned into song by Roth. Perhaps one of the warmest and most moving is the song Roth crafted from the friend’s anecdote about a couple of chance meetings with Louis Armstrong. “These Two Times” probably does more to enhance Armstrong’s reputation in 5:10 than many a lengthy biography. One of the shorter songs on the CD, “Two For One In Podunk Town” tells how growth ruins a small town, and how one small local pizza shop repels the corporate pizza invader. “The Dream,” in a rather humorous fashion, tells how basketball star Hakeem Olajuwon bends corporate sponsorship to the public good. As you’ve probably noticed by now, every Roth song comes with a moral and a

morality. He sneaks up softly and gently and serves you a helping of righteousness on a silver platter. Roth sings of “we, we, we” not “me, me, me.” It’s something of a relief to come across a contemporary singer-songwriter writing about the world rather than himself. The production of the CD gives each song a lofting lilt. Simple piano, guitar, bass, mandolin, and Dobro, occasional woodwind and percussion fill each song to perfection. Roth sings softly with conviction, his pleasant voice easily carrying the weight of his songs. This CD conveys a different kind of intimacy than you might expect, and I recommend sharing it with Roth. — RWarr

TERRY KITCHEN

Blues For Cain & Abel

Urban Campfire 1006

There’s an obvious, but non-strident sense of Christian spiritualism – not unlike some of Bob Franke’s songs or even some of Bruce Cockburn’s early work – that runs through Terry Kitchen’s latest release. A couple, “Noah & The Selfish Son” and “Blues For Cain & Abel,” are inspired by biblical legends. Then, in “Martin Luther,” Kitchen pays tribute to Luther’s religious rebelliousness and questions whether contemporary society has lost that sense. And in “Good Friday,” Kitchen links his spiritual beliefs with the miracle of nature’s annual rebirth each spring.

While not quite so obvious, Kitchen’s spiritualism permeates most of the other songs as well. “Atlas” contrasts the commitment of three people: a social activist with the world on his shoulders who never takes a moment for himself, a workaholic businessman who never sees his family and a songwriter dedicated to her art. All three so dedicated to their pursuits that the rest of the world seems to pass them by.

This is a quiet, contemplative album that shows Kitchen continuing to develop as a subtle, but keenly observant, songwriter. In addition to a dozen of his own songs, there’s a very nice *hidden* version of Lennon and McCartney’s “Let It Be” at the end of the disc. Perhaps the Beatles’ most spiritual song, it’s a natural addition to the original material on this disc. — MR

CHRISTINE LAVIN

Getting In Touch With My Inner Bitch

christinelavin.com 572

Featured on this new live CD from the folk scene’s greatest advocate, Christine Lavin, are 8 new songs, plus four live

versions of previously recorded works. Recorded at performances at Saratoga's Caffé Lena, the Madison Folk Festival, WFMT's Folkstage in Chicago, WXPN's World Café studio in Philadelphia, and Boston's WUMB studios, the disc includes short introductions and ditties that merit their own track listings, (including chatting about eating ice cream with Philadelphia DJ Gene Shay) ... this is the next best thing to experiencing Christine live. The banter reveals her spontaneity and clever comebacks, whether she's reacting to someone reading during her set or to an audience member asking if she is perhaps an ex-nun. ("Yeah, that's the look I'm going for.")

On the title cut Christine offers three spoken comedic examples of her inner bitch erupting as other females lock in power plays, one on the street and two at the bank, in the song. During the final verse, a discussion of being on hold with the airlines leads to a confrontation with an audience member. A Christine Lavin crowd always seems to be part of her shows. If not in direct mock confrontation, you'll at least have the flashlight she mounts on her hard hat shone onto your table as she wanders through the crowd with her wireless microphone.

Christine Lavin moves as fast as her ideas. Going wireless is just one addition to her set. Getting heavy use on this new live release is her high-tech Boomerang Phase Sampler, which records her as she sings. The boomerang enables her to clone herself right before your ears. Singing again and again, over her recorded and played-back self, we hear Christine Lavin, times four, as her own bitching babe quartet. With the use of the boomerang she displays her arrangement and harmony talents. She closes many a tune on the CD with this fun tool, including a munchkin sounding birthday tribute to an audience member named "Maureen."

Christine can find humor anywhere. In her tune about a surprise encounter with Harrison Ford (passing between the same restaurant doors) she takes a few second encounter and entertains with it for four minutes. Sometimes, lost in the humor, is the fact that Christine Lavin is an accomplished guitarist, having studied for a time with Dave Van Ronk. Among her serious numbers on the CD is a tune called "Adjust Your Dreams," which suggests doing just that when they are obviously no longer attainable.

A new song called "Piper" is thoughtful and gripping. She begins with the fall of an individual baby when trying to stand, and then builds to rapid-fire examples of how society has failed and fallen. Ulti-

mately we have to pay the piper. Another new song "Plateau," is about a woman whose peak seems to be only as an extension of her man. Also on this collection is her now classic "What Was I Thinking?" with a new naughty ending about Monica Lewinsky, which she says she was forced to put in, to defray the ex-nun image.

The disc may open with a tune entitled "A Single Voice," but Christine is far from that. She is a multi-voiced compilation of her varied interests and accomplishments. — AP



STUART WHITFORD
Vertical Land
Stuart Whitford (no cat #)

For quite a long time singer-songwriters have struggled with the need to express their singular vision in a conservative market that spurns the original. It takes a good deal of inner strength to follow your own muse. It's so much easier to follow the accepted pattern.

That said, I approached Stuart Whitford's recording *Vertical Land* with caution. Recently I have been somewhat impatient with singer-songwriters. My personal vision is influenced greatly by traditional music, but I found myself intrigued by the instrumentation and the players involved on *Vertical Land*. Some of the same musicians were featured on one of my very favorite recordings, *Presley's Grocery* by the Brother Boys, on Sugar Hill Records. These players include Brother Boy Ed Snodderly on various mando instruments, Roger Rasnake on guitar and the always-tasteful Missy Raines on bass. Special mention must be made of the lovely background vocals of Jennifer Peart. Her sweet and clear tone adds contrast and clarity to the recording.

Stuart's tunes are evolved from the mountains or *Vertical Land* of the Great Southwest. They borrow much of the western imagery we have become so accustomed to, but the lyrical content is a bit more oblique, allowing each story to be open to various levels of interpretation, which is all the better for repeated listening. The tunes move at a casual pace allowing for the arrangement to fully materialize and the song to completely envelop the listener. Stuart's voice has a comfortable quality with just

the right amount of expression. It reminds me somewhat of Bill Staines or the cowboy singing of Skip Gorman.

A few of the standout tracks on this fine recording include "The Mexican Sky," a dream sequence involving a trip across the Rio Grande, "Borderland," a stark vision of the border as viewed by those who cross it just to survive, featuring only Stuart's guitar and vocals, with the mandocello of Ed Snodderly, and "Steppin' Down the Alley" a sprightly instrumental swing tune featuring the fiddle of Kevin Jackson and Stuart's octave mandolin. The recording, however, seems to run out of gas by the last couple of tunes. The theme and even the texture appears to change by the time "Kingston Market" and the gospel classic "Farther Along" close out the recording. They seem to be additions to a project that was very well defined until then.

The program notes, by Jerry Douglas, describe his friend Stuart as a quiet family man living in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He mentions that he was quite surprised with the high quality of *Vertical Land*. He comments on the complexity of the compositions and I do agree the writing is very fine indeed.

Stuart Whitford has created a distinctive song cycle of great beauty and delicacy. Great care has been taken with every note and arrangement in portraying the *Vertical Land* of the Southwestern Mountains. Perhaps I should start paying closer attention to singer-songwriters. — TD

BILL STAINES
October's Hill
Red House 139

Do you go to the wine shop and inevitably purchase a favored varietal from a particular vineyard and vintage? The kind of wine you know will always please, that has a mix of spice and fruit and a fine, long finish without surprises? That's the essence of Bill Staines' *October's Hill*. You want to sit around the fire and let Staines' affable, avuncular voice warm you from the inside. The opening song, "Dear Friend" welcomes you back, you just know that Staines wrote the song for you no matter how many of you buy the CD. "On The Road Again" is another of Staines moving road songs. This one tells of the small town boy making it big, but always returning. Nor has Staines lost his touch with (unrequited) love songs, as evidenced by "Some Distant Hill," which contains the memorable lines: "... it was the sweetest song I ever heard. But I listened only to the tune and never to the words." Some of his phrasing sounds very traditional, as if

the song might be 200 years old. You can just about dance to “Virginia’s Reel,” which you might guess is based on square dance tempo and calls, and is a double-entendre since it is about a fiddler named Virginia. This is the kind of catchy tune at which Staines excels. Keeping with his tradition, he includes a lovely instrumental “An Afternoon At Cohans.” However on this one he plays piano and leaves the guitar duties to Guy Van Duser, who accompanies Staines on many of the songs here. Staines includes “The Game’s People Play” by Joe South, and A.P. Carter’s “Gold Watch And Chain,” and concludes with the song written in 1848 by Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander “All Things Bright And Beautiful.” Staines self-produced *October’s Hill* with a wide range of accompaniment from just guitar and piano to full band to string choir. The production always suits the song while adding variety and interest to the overall sound of the recording. So pour me another glass of Staines so I can admire its color in the firelight and enjoy its lasting finish. — RWarr

TOM RAPP

A Journal Of The Plague Year

Rubric 4

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

Constructive Melancholy

Birdman 021

Tom Rapp was the voice and poet of Pearls Before Swine, a very fondly remembered band of the late '60s and the first half of the '70s. This is his first album of new material since then, and what a welcome return it is!

Now, as then, Tom’s songs are gentle and romantic, yet very dark. Some even have direct threads to some of his best vintage work. “Space” recalls “Stardancer” while “Mars” like “Rocket Man” (not the Elton John song) looks to have been based on a Ray Bradbury *Martian Chronicles* story. “Hopelessly Romantic” glows with love and humor as it details the difficulty of writing a song for a very close love.

The album is bookended with twin versions of Tom performing William Butler Yeats’ “Song For The Wandering Aengus,” here called “Silver Apples.” with an original musical setting. At the open is an *a capella* version, while the later version is backed by harmonica, harp and shenai which sounds like a cross between wild geese and bagpipes.

“Shoebox Symphony” is the album’s coda. The melange of three songs according to the notes was “adapted from a Pearls

Before Swine tape found by Tom in a shoebox marked '1968.'" Some elements of the original tape were used in the new recording, but most was newly recorded very much in the style of the original. It sounds for all the world both sonically and lyrically like a psychedelic relic.

The whimsically titled *A Journal Of The Plague Year* is a bolt from the blue delight. Maybe a warm reception will encourage Tom to bring us more.

For those of you longing for Rapp's earlier work, look no further than this fine collection. Pearls Before Swine made its music and songs from 1967-73 in varying shades of blue. From sad to reflective, from melancholy to dour with occasional welcome humor from time to time. As alluded above, Rapp, Pearl's singer/songwriter/perpetrator, was an eloquent and highly poetic writer who wore his Leonard Cohen influence like a badge of honor. On the second of the two Pearls albums on ESP they covered Cohen's "Suzanne" wonderfully. Rapp's songs plumbed the depths and intricacies of the human heart and soul.

Constructive Melancholy contains 26 songs. Twenty-three are culled from the five Pearls releases and one Rapp solo album that Reprise issued. The choices, in the words of noted critic Stephan Holden, are scrupulous. Among these are such well-remembered and beloved songs as "The Jeweler," "Rocket Man," "Sail Away" (not to be confused with Randy Newman's classic which it also preceded), "These Things Too" and many more. Two selections are newly recorded: a medley of two very early songs "I Saw The World/Another Time" and a Gregorian chant rework of "Miss Morse." "Love/Sex" is a 1972 radio interview performance. The sound and performances are exquisite. The package is gorgeous.

Get both releases. — MT



RICHARD SHINDELL
Somewhere Near Paterson
Signature Sounds 1256

Richard Shindell's deft ability with language, piercing vision, and mastery of irony create some of the most intriguing, pithy songs in the singer-songwriter genre. Shindell is arguably one of the four or five top writers currently plying the trade. His

originality also sets him apart from most of his comrades in song. In his oblique way Shindell tackles the maxim "money can't buy happiness" in the opening "Confession," of the slowly disintegrating successful stock trader dependent on illicitly dispensed drugs to keep functioning. "You Stay Here" mysteriously tells of a family on the run, perhaps illegal immigrants, the homeless, or political extremists. That's one of Shindell's specialties, to keep the listener thinking. "My Love Will Follow You," comes as a relief from the intensity of the opening songs, and that's saying something when a passionate love song comes as a relief. His Cry Cry Cry friends Lucy Kaplansky and Dar Williams sing a very nice backup. "Wisteria" laments leaving a place once loved, a house that was once a life. It makes an interesting prelude for "Waiting For The Storm," which relates the awesome despair of a man who has sent everyone he loves away, and waits in his seaside house for the hurricane to sweep him away. The rent steeply rises forcing the old neighborhood grocer into unanticipated retirement in "The Grocer's Broom." It is an exquisitely constructed song, in which the grocer goes home to his dark livingroom to sit in his old chair "Where silence sits playing the flute. He finds the tune, hums along. She will teach him all her five-hundred songs." In the end he offers bittersweet acceptance of his fate. Perhaps the strangest song on the CD is "Transit," filled with black humor, elevating road rage to an ethereal dimension, if not damnation. One can't paraphrase it, it must be experienced. Shindell closes with Dar Williams' "Calling The Moon," a poignant, complex song of losing direction and placing yourself in the hands of fate, or in this case, the moon. Or maybe it's simply a song of lost love. It's the simplest production on the album, just Shindell and his guitar. The rest of the tracks feature about a handful of instruments from rock to simple acoustic, many of which are played by producer Larry Campbell. If you're looking for substance, Shindell's your man. — RWarr

STEVE YOUNG
Primal Young
Applesseed 1033

Whether singing a song of his own making, one borrowed from another writer's catalogue, or a traditional folk song, each of Steve Young's 11 performances rings with the truth and passion that is at the heart of real folk music. This is Young's first new release in seven years,

but he's a veteran performer who, since the late-1960s, has made a series of powerful, passionate, indeed primal, albums that draw inspiration and songs from any number of musical genres. I have most of his previous recordings, all are first-rate, and this CD ranks with the best of them.

The tone of the album is set with "Jig," a Young original that borrows the melody from "A Shanty Man's Life." In this song, Young reveals the ancestral source of the music within and asks for a similar revelation from the listener. Then, in "Scotland Is A Land," he pays tribute to poet and song collector Robert Burns.

Young's politics are revealed in several songs. "Worker's Song (Handful Of Earth)," written by Ed Pickford and learned from a Dick Gaughan album, is an emphatic condemnation of the powers that be who use ordinary people as their tools. And in his version of Frankie Miller's "Blackland Farmer," he celebrates the joys of earning an honest living from the land.

From the country songbook, Young does superb interpretations of Tom T. Hall's "The Year That Clayton Delaney Died," a tribute to an inspiring local musician, and Merle Haggard's "Sometimes I Dream," a powerful inner look at human failure. And Young does a wonderful job turning the old rhythm and blues hit "Lawdy Miss Clawdy," into a country blues with an arrangement reminiscent of Bob Dylan's version of "Corrina Corrina."

And as much as I've raved about the songs I've mentioned in this review, I could easily go on about the rest. Highly recommended. — MR

DAVID OLNEY
Omar's Blues
Dead Reckoning 0016

David Olney is a fine writer yet to receive the recognition he deserves. No less than Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris, Rick Danko and Townes Van Zandt have savored his gifts, but his cult status has yet to be acknowledged by the general press or by the fans in Nashville where he has been residing these last 26 years. Perhaps Olney's own performances are an acquired taste, combining sometimes course vocals with occasionally spoken lyrics?

On his 7th release, *Omar's Blues*, Olney divides the material into three sections: Love, Religion and Hollywood. The CD's lyric booklet begins with a poem attributed to Omar Khayyam. This quatrain is actually from an Edward FitzGerald translation, which, it has been argued, goes beyond Khayyam's own poetry.

Much of Khayyam's four-line poetry stresses the pursuit of joy, pleasures and beauty before your limited life has gone. Yet while advocating this, he was plagued by a nagging for a definition of reality and existence. This paradox, to be pushing sheer joy, while obsessed with the inevitability of death is mirrored in Olney's songs here, and each of the three sections has its own "Omar's Blues" (#1, #2, #3) as a beginning song.

There are many parallels in the two men's recurring themes. Khayyam, an astrologer, mathematician and poet used images of roses, filled wine cups and references to destiny. He was interested in two realities of life: death and love. David Olney, in his last album, laid the ultimate culmination of this seed with the story of the prostitute and the soldier. (*SO!* v.43#4).

Both men dabble with the inevitability of death and aging. In "My Wild Youth" Olney talks about the young and wild with a "bulletproof" mentality of agelessness. Later, he refers to how "time is precious to a dying man." Pervasive is the acceptance of destiny. Olney makes references to the wind blowing ("If It Wasn't For The Wind") or the force of a cue on a billiard ball ("Fast Eddie") determining destiny. Both men succumb to the idea of destiny being beyond our control. Since you have little influence on your fate, you may as well enjoy a "Pack of smokes, and a six of beer, that's the way we do it around here" ("Omar's Blues #3").

In his "Reverend Omar" section, Olney sings four songs, three of them as King David. He sings of faith ("If I'd Have Known I Couldn't Do It") in fighting Goliath, and of being a slave to his heart, though he may be King to others ("Batheheba's Blues"). And finally in Absalom where he mourns for the death of his son. His lamenting is for death itself, without blame in the pursuit of pleasure, for in Omar's eyes there is no room for repentance of joy. Blame instead rests on the misguided pursuits of power and victory.

It is in the final third of the album in a song called Lazlo that links well both to Omar Khayyam's thoughts on existence as well as being key to Olney's writing itself. He begins: "My name is Lazlo, but call me whatever / I'm not really sure that I'm real, / I come from the mind of the man you hear singing."

In David Olney's head lives snooker sharks, French detectives, prostitutes, King David, and others, all demanding to behave believably ... a crowded room waiting to take on story lines. He can make us feel equally both sides of the law with the meet-

ing between the villain and the inspector in "Paris Incident." Reminiscent of inspector Javert's relentless pursuit of Jean Valjean in "Les Miserables" – the portrayal is theatrical as both men's personalities emerge. After opening the song with the clean-up of a murder, the villain later offers a café chair to the lawman who is sure he has his man.

The beautiful string arrangements by Bruce Sweetman deserve special mention. With the help of these arrangements and various horn productions, Olney captures the mood that his imagined characters demand. Whether suggesting Israeli or carnival settings, or the feeling that someone may break into a yodel perhaps ("Delta Blues"), he varies his singing accordingly, either slightly in off-pitch Middle Eastern scales, or talking amid horn arrangement.

From the opening song referring to dawn to the last which asks where a man's life has gone, one could argue that the sequencing represents one life's emotional journey. The characters that Olney brings into existence can be pictured easily from the few lines ... the sign of a great writer. — AP



SLAID CLEAVES
Broke Down
Philo 1225

Slaid Cleaves' songs are populated with people desperately trying not to slip over the edge. There's Sherry and Billy, the lovers in the title song, a disaster as a couple but each horribly missing the other. There's the frustrated fellow of "One Good Year" who vainly aches for that one break that would set his life in order. And the sad guy shooting pool in the "Horseshoe Lounge" wishing he had the balls to take one last shot at getting back the lady he lost.

In "Bring It On" Slaid sings from the viewpoint of a guy who knows he "may be losing but ... ain't lost," and he sings it with stubborn, gritty determination. "Lydia," which was written by sometimes Cleaves collaborator Karen Poston, is about a woman who had lost her son and then lost his miner father in a fire below.

"Breakfast In Hell" is the most ambitious song here. It is the story of the death of lumberjack Sandy Gray in the wilds or upper Ontario a century ago. The lengthy

narrative recalls the wild and wooly work of Robert Service, and it is an impressive piece of songcraft.

"This Morning I Am Born Again" is a grim Woody Guthrie poem that Slaid has set to a dark, intense melody. The closer is Del McCoury's "I Feel The Blues Moving In." It is beautifully rendered with just two acoustic guitars and three part harmony.

All save the finale were produced by Gurf Morlix, who also plays a bevy of instruments over the course of the album. He adds strong harmonies, too. His production is concise yet eloquent as it adds only what is necessary for Slaid's songs to shine. Upright bassist Ivan Brown is another key contributor.

Broke Down, Slaid Cleaves' third album, finds the artist in excellent form. He is assured and confident in his singing and songs, and the album has been crafted to fit him as well as a favorite pair of jeans. — MT

BYRON HILL
Gravity
BHP 4501

Byron Hill is a country singer with an interesting voice that invites, and sometimes commands attention. It's a deep baritone that occasionally bottoms out in the bass regions, suggesting comparisons with the likes of major country stars like Alan Jackson and George Strait. It's a good enough voice to make him a star in Nashville, and there are plenty of arena-filling hat acts who can't sing as well as he does. What really sets *Gravity* apart, though, is that it's a solid, mainstream country album that gets by without any of the production clichés that Nashville relies on these days. No electric guitar power chords. No crashing drums. No string sections. No Stetsons, even. Working with acoustic guitars, mandolin, fiddle and Dobro, *Gravity* is so retro that even the bass is a stand-up acoustic doghouse. This alone makes it a refreshing change of pace. Of course, the fact that Hill co-produced the disc and released it on his own BHP label probably has a lot to do with this.

All fourteen songs on the album were co-written by Hill with a cast of collaborators that includes veteran Nashville writers like Tony Hiller and Tony Martin, and on the whole, it's material that's sometimes amusing, sometimes thought-provoking, and generally worth paying attention to, even though all but one of the songs are romantic ballads of one sort or another – good love, bad love, lost love, found love, wistful love, desperate love. And, come to think of it, the one exception ("Thanks For

The G Chord," the album's closing track) deals with parental love. All pretty well done, but it would have been nice to have a little more variety of subject matter and theme. Still, on cuts like "After You've Gone" (with its sultry echoes of Gordon Lightfoot's "Sundown"), "Took Her To The Moon" and "Serious Crime" Byron Hill shows signs of being the kind of distinctive country talent that Nashville should be (but sadly, is not) rushing to record. Maybe *Gravity* will catch the attention of one of the major labels, and maybe Hill will end up as just another country-flavored rock singer, but it would be a shame if he didn't do another album like this. — JL



JIMMIE DALE GILMORE
One Endless Night
Rouder 3173

While touring solo last year, Jimmie Dale Gilmore talked about the acoustic album of covers he was about to record. Looks like it turned into the full-fledged project that has appeared as *One Endless Night*.

The songs are a delightful bunch with a couple of eclectic twists. Jimmie does offer two new originals among the 13 selections: the title song which is a co-write with David Hammond, and the seductive "Blue Shadows," which he wrote with Hal Ketchum. Some of the old favorites are Steve Gillette's "Darcy Farrow," Townes Van Zandt's "No Lonesome Tune," Jesse Winchester's "Defying Gravity," the Grateful Dead's "Ripple" and a sober and startlingly good "Mack The Knife." Butch Hancock is represented by "Down By The Banks" and "Rambling Man."

Performances and production are razor sharp. The sound is full yet never cluttered in the least. It is another excellent Buddy Miller production. Buddy's assorted guitars and mandolins are all over the album along with those of Derroll Scott and Rob Gjerse. The Byron House/Don Heffington rhythm section is ace. And Tammy Rogers' fiddle is a frequent pleasure.

Harmony singers include Emmylou Harris, Victoria Williams, Buddy and Julie Miller, Jim Lauderdale, the Callahan Sisters and the Cry Cry Cry trio of Richard Shindell, Lucy Kaplansky and Dar Williams.

The album plays like a terrifically warm gathering of friends who had a great time singing and playing songs they all love. *One Endless Night* is one superb album. — MT

ELLIS PAUL
Live
Philo 1229

I first saw Ellis Paul performing live in 1997 to a handful of people in a hotel room in Toronto. It was Valentine's Day and he was visibly upset that, although he was working in his chosen career, his valentine was very far away.

By 1999, Ellis had divorced and released his fourth album, *Translucent Soul*. Though the title cut of that release spoke of seeing deep into a soul beyond race and skin color, most of the writing lets you into Ellis' own soul and the changes of the path his life was taking.

Now in March, 2000 he releases a double CD called *Live*. What *Translucent Soul* did as a window to his writing, *Live* does as a window to his performance, bringing us even closer to the soul of this talented man. Wooing with words he slips his willing audience into deep emotion. From the moment he begins singing "Take Me Down," he actually takes the audience down, instantly commanding attention. No wasted words, no wasted images.

Armed with great guitar skills and an expressive voice, Ellis has lyrics to match. He is one of those writers that can ride both highs of mastering writing as a craft while simultaneously maintaining a hit sound. This balance won him the honor of having one of his tunes featured in the new Jim Carrey movie due out this June ("The World Ain't Slowin' Down").

There are 20 live recorded performances here, from February, November and December of 1998 and May of 1999. Vance Gilbert, Patty Griffin, Don Conoscenti, Chris Williams and Chris Trapper make spot appearances. Thirteen of the songs were recorded previously. Hearing the silent attention of the sell-out crowd and the intensity possible in a live performance, makes any re-purchasing of titles very worthwhile. Many of these repeaters begin with the welcoming ovation of crowd recognition.

Each of the seven newly recorded titles is a gem. In "Mrs. Jones," Ellis manages a murder within a lullaby. The woman wakes with another unknown lover in her bed, "Fill me like the light fills the moon." As with other tunes on the collection this one clearly shows how he is a master at creating pin-drop silences, and then, singing around them.

At an Ellis Paul concert there is something for everyone who loves words. His writing is poetry, with or without music. As is his practice, he proceeds with a poem after breaking a string on this recording. There are in fact three poetic recitations, three that is, if you don't count the poetics of his songs. When he sings he gives every syllable its own space. For someone who obviously holds a reverence for words, I am disappointed to see no lyrics in the insert.

Though it's true he has a talent for demanding our attention quietly, he also has a great rock sound. Occasionally we hear how capable he is of being one of the loudest voices in the folk circuit. Knowing how and when to play with these volume variations is one of his strengths.

The editing of this CD is very clean, sometimes slicing the introduction either side of a track division and allowing any DJ to feel that the song began right at that spot. Although recorded live, no sound quality has been compromised.

"3,000 Miles," seems infinitesimal compared to the distances he has personally traveled since writing that tune, building his fan base the entire time. Capturing this compilation gives him the freedom to begin recording a whole new set of tunes for it seems that they come fast to this gifted man. Ellis has the voice, the performance skills, the musical chops and the bare writing mastery to allow him to continue this career for as long as he wants to pursue it. — AP

MARY McCASLIN
Rain: The Lost Album
Bear Family 16232

In her 54 years, McCaslin has seen the peaks and valleys of contemporary folk music. The songs on this album were recorded in Los Angeles in 1967 and 1968 for Capitol Records but not released. Mary went on in 1969 to record an album for Barnaby. During the 1970s Mary and husband Jim Ringer recorded 5 albums for the tiny Philo label. When Philo stopped recording in 1980, Mary and Jim moved on to Flying Fish to record *A Life And A Time* in 1981, the last she would release for 13 years. In 1992 the revitalized Philo label released a best of compilation, and in 1994 released *Broken Promises*, her most recent.

Of the 18 tracks, 16 had previously not been released. This unfortunate circumstance has now been rectified by this German release. This is an important release because Mary was and is a fine interpreter,

and the songs here are important period pieces by Leonard Cohen, Lennon & McCartney, Tom Paxton and Michael Murphey.

Mary's voice lacks the lilt of a Judy Collins or the range of a Joan Baez, or the joy of a Joni Mitchell. Rather, it compares well with Rosalie Sorrels. It has a bit of a twang and a touch of rural country that is somewhat surprising, considering her California upbringing, but it is more than adequate to hold interest and deliver some of the better songs written in the middle years of the 20th century in the folk world.

Mary has been noted for her guitar playing and clawhammer banjo picking, and she is supported on the album by a good ensemble of performers whose identities are long-since forgotten. All of the cuts are interesting, while some are familiar, like Leonard Cohen's Suzanne, Lennon/McCartney's "I'm Looking Through You," and Lewis/Clark's "Boy From The Country." They are all good solid songs that are worth hearing many times.

This is a sleeping giant of an album. McCaslin fans will be amazed that this all-but-forgotten album sounds so good. Well worth the listen. — VKH

JOHNSMITH

To The Four Directions

Johnsmith

Anyone would want the sort of peace of mind that John Smith's songs suggest he has obtained. Smith has a lyrical ability to find comfort and be thankful for anything that life offers. His opening tune sets this attitude immediately as he announces his appreciation for all that life has to offer, and continues in the same vein. It seems nothing can bring him down. Even loss and pain, crying and death have a welcomed placement in Smith's writing. "It's not a matter of good or bad, the sun and rain go hand in hand."

I keep thinking, "Isn't this guy famous? I know this tune... No, maybe not." I keep thinking, "I've heard this voice ... or is it just this clear type of singing voice?" He has that kind of easy to listen to, smooth tenor voice, that sounds effortless, clear and unaffected; Red Grammer-like in quality. His voice slips into minors just when you might think you know the tune. Harmonies and production back off his vocals which are left prominent, rightfully so, in each tune.

The CD title and the Indian symbol on the cover refer to the four directions that complete the circles of life and the seasons. East representing birth and spring,

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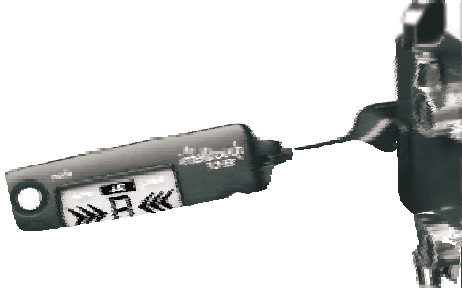
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South representing growth and summer, West representing the journey and the autumn of our lives, and finally North being dormant and representing winter. The journey ends with inner peace awaiting the new beginnings that would complete a circle.

There are love songs to the earth and love songs to lovers. Many focus on finding the true north inside you. "Making Her Move" involves having the courage to make changes, one step at a time, if you find yourself facing the wrong direction. Despite the advice or criticism of others Smith points out in "I Like The Way It Feels" how we know what rings personally true. Smith listens to his heart, and his singing makes us listen to our own.

Spiritual though not religious, Smith acknowledges that we are always moving on the "most beautiful ride to God knows where, and God knows why." In what proves to be an otherwise totally pleasing album I find the first verse about Columbus' faith in "God Knows Why" misplaced on a collection so Indian and earth friendly. Smith's words are, "So he called upon his faith and he raised his sails up high." Columbus' own journal, however, reads, "let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold." Entrepreneurial perhaps, but not the modern kind of faith Smith conveys in the rest of the CD.

In this world of rushing and worry about what we could be doing (ala Cheryl Wheeler's "Unworthy") John Smith can be an antidote. He sings, "*I can't change what was, what could be is just beyond my touch.*" His positive acceptance lifts the burden of control. If any song speaks best for the general flavor of this collection this one called "What Is" does; the most obvious carpe diem message on the album. He points out that he has wasted time, missing all that he had, and resolves to spend "a little less on what was or what could be and a whole lot more on what is."

When you want help coping with unexplainable wrongs, or anxiety in your life, John Smith's CD is your prescription for a pleasant, calm listen. We can all use his musical tonic in varying degrees. You can't stop Smith's voice from reaching your soul. He presents calming acceptance to the varied and sometimes-negative directions our lives take. — AP

VANCE GILBERT
Somerville Live
DISISMYE 003

Making reference to this first live recording, Vance Gilbert's liner notes begin by addressing his fans, "This was not

my idea, it was yours." And here you'll find a typical Gilbert live performance, always connecting directly with an audience. He interacts with a six-year-old who admits she really came to see Ellis Paul. Taking instinctive advantage for any chance at humor, Gilbert assures her mom that after his set, she'll only be dating black men. Much of Gilbert's comedy between songs revolves around being black and a folksinger, a rare niche, whether as an imagined model for a future Lomax tour, or a black Teletubby.

When exposed to live Vance Gilbert, an audience can react with appropriate awe at how his amazing set of lungs can fill a space. Here, though, without the benefit of the full sensory experience, some vocals seem too loud.

This is far from the case on "If These Teardrops Had Wings." The beauty of his voice is a religious experience much more moving than the recording on his 1994 release *Edgewise*. "Icarus By Night" is also a showpiece for his fabulous tenor delivery.

This CD will not add greatly to the recorded repertoire of Gilbert's work. There are only two new tunes and one cover not before available. There are, however, five comedic between-song pieces, and you'll find some fun multimedia where you can view Club Passim performances of "Taking It All To Tennessee" and "Amelia," bringing the live feel even closer. — AP



SARA HICKMAN
Spiritual Appliances
Shanachie 8034

This is Hickman's sixth album, one more irrepressible than the last. Considering the dark times she has had both personally and financially, you would expect a pall covering her and everything she touches. Not so. Sara brings light and hope to all she comes in contact with.

Sara's music is pop. Not pop-folk. Not folk-rock. Pop in every sound she sings or records. If you don't do your homework, you would think that Sara is a bit light-headed and her voice is primarily another musical instrument. But Hickman has self-produced and convinced Shanachie to release an album probing thirteen emotions. And those pop sounding words convey

deep meanings that require repeated listening. Lyrics for all songs are on her website www.sarahickman.com. (The booklet in the jewel case is dedicated to fighting homelessness.)

The thirteen emotions expressed here are all well-defined. Strength. Confusion. Lust. Love. Acceptance. Denial. Anger. Loss. Mercy. Happiness. Freedom. Mutuality. Perseverance. Each song conveying the emotion in choppy repetitive phrases that cut through to the listener and usually produce a response of understanding.

This recording will not be everyone's top choice of the year. But it is Sara Hickman at her most intimate self. Sara's fans will love it, and so will many coming to Sara late. Don't expect ballads, and do give it several listens. — VKH

BLAZE FOLEY
Live At The Austin Outhouse
Lost Art

Country music has produced its share of legends, those players who died before their time. Often these performers are best remembered in songs written by their compadres. Blaze Foley, who was murdered in 1989, four weeks after making these recordings, has been the subject of tunes by Lucinda Williams ("Drunken Angel") and "Blaze's Blues" by the late Townes Van Zandt.

Foley, whose real name was Michael David Fuller, was virtually unknown outside of the close-knit Austin songwriting community. He was born in 1949 and grew up in West Texas. He began his career performing in his family gospel act the Fuller Family. After a period of time he arrived in Austin and was kind of a poster boy for non-conformity. He never held a day job and slept on friend's couches or on pool tables in the various clubs he'd frequent.

The Austin Outhouse was his home base. These recordings, made with a borrowed guitar, seem to be mostly sound board tracks made at what appears to be an open mike at the club on December 27 and 28, 1988. The editing is sparse, so we get Blaze's between-tune banter and comments with the crowd. These rantings are perhaps as interesting as the tunes presented. You get a tiny glimpse into the mind of the performer when he's totally candid and alone with no set of lyrics to fall back upon. There is a hint that this recording may have been intended as a demo to be sent to Merle Haggard, which is included in one of the song set-ups. The notes remind us that Merle indeed did record Blaze's "If I Could Only Fly" with Willie

Nelson and called it "the best country song I've heard in 15 years." Blaze's version is included on this recording.

The comparison to John Prine and Kris Kristofferson is quite obvious, with the same world-weary baritone voice and 1-4-5 progression so prominent in both artists' work. The subject matter is also very reminiscent of Prine's writing in the late '80s.

The collection includes two studio tracks featuring the background vocals of Sarah Elizabeth Campbell and Champ Hood's fiddle. The notes remember a series of broken record company promises, lost tapes, limited pressings and other maladies that prey on the songwriter who stubbornly resists giving in to the powers of the music establishment.

Twenty percent of the proceeds from this CD will benefit the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless. One last note about Blaze's murder in 1989, he was killed protecting an elderly friend's pension checks. Blaze had intended to donate one dollar from the sale of each recording to the homeless. Instead proceeds went to defray his funeral expenses. I think that fact, along with the quality of the songs on *Live From The Austin Outhouse*, tell a great deal about the artist and help to explain why he has become so revered by some of the our finest contemporary songwriters. — TD

ROBIN AND LINDA WILLIAMS
In The Company Of Strangers
Sugar Hill 1064

Robin and Linda Williams invented "Americana" long before it became a radio format. A dollop of country, a soupçon of folk, with highly original seasoning might describe the flavor of their music. It's mostly acoustic, but given extra tang with pedal steel and an occasional electric guitar lick. Produced by Kevin McNoldy, who picks a variety of guitars, and bass, *In The Company Of Strangers* sustains the energy and drive that have become a trademark of the Williams' recordings. They also continue their decades long songwriting collaboration with Jerome Clark. The trio penned 11 of the 12 songs on this disc, the distinguished exception being "Cold Cold Heart," by Hank Williams. They also treat listeners to guest appearances by Tim O'Brien and Mary Chapin Carpenter, along with regular accompanists Kevin Maul and Jim Watson, who's limited to vocals on this recording. The darkness of many of the songs on this CD prevents mistaking it for mainstream country. Even the more light-

hearted songs come tinged with a heavier lining. The songs tell of have-nots, down-and-outs, losers, and those lost on the highway of life, even in up tempo tunes such as "Bar Band In Hillbilly Heaven." However, before you buy a hankie along with the CD, the Williams deliver their songs with vigor and a glimmer of hope between the lines. Sometimes the lively and intricate picking softens the mood, and even attracts attention away from the lyrics. Robin and Linda are in as good a voice as ever, continuing the perfect duet. They don't try many fancy vocal maneuvers, rather they know exactly how to fill out the lines in an intuitive partnership. Perhaps the most powerful song is their original title song "In The Company Of Strangers," which sounds very much like a traditional song. It's simple and direct with an emotional plea many of us can take to heart. Linda's banjo contributes greatly to its sound. The song could easily be a sequel to their early classic "Don't Let Me Come Home A Stranger." Robin & Linda Williams probably aren't strangers to many folk music lovers, but in any event, they are good musical company. — RWarr



THE WIGGINS SISTERS
Minnesota
Wiggins Sisters

There's nothing like hearing the blending of sibling voices, and Mizzy and Casey Wiggins have great ones. Typical of their sound is a strong melody line joined by a harmony line under it. This is very effective in creating their moving vocals. They also have an ability to mold their delivery to fit the lyrical message. At times the overall sound can be similar to Lucinda Williams, or perhaps the Indigo Girls, and then you'll be thinking Buffy St. Marie or Michelle Shocked. This chameleon-like approach to each tune is one of their strengths.

Though the Wiggins work out of Connecticut now, they are from Minnesota. The title cut "Minnesota" closes the CD, where a school reunion brings back memories such as, "I left him ... in a tear stained graduation gown." Simple lines like this one enable us to fill in the larger emotional story. First love is a special connection. It

is almost, but not quite, the same strength in which you love the very earth of the place where you were born.

Perhaps if the Wiggins sisters were not so attractive, audiences would be paying more attention to their lyrics and interpretations, and we'd be reading more about them. My vote for their next CD is for less production. They don't need a lot of extras, distracting from their best qualities; the versatility and strength of their vocals. — AP

THE NONCHALANTS
Drive
Found Dog 1831

The Nonchalants are Jean Synodinos and Steve Uhler, presently based in Austin, TX. They previously released *Live At Stone Mountain* in 1995 as Kick At Heaven, creating a stir for themselves in New York City and environs. They were selected for the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival Showcase and Jean was a finalist in 1995 and an award winner at the Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk competition in 1996.

Drive is a collection of 11 songs, some raucous, some gentle, all written by the duo. They have drawn from a rich pool of Texas musicians to round out their own musical talents. Sara Hickman and Ruthie Foster add backing vocals, Gene Elders is on violin, Glenn Kawamoto is on bass and Paul Percy on drums and percussion, and a host of others are appropriately used. Glenn Kawamoto produced the album and obviously had his hands full getting a coherent product out of an eclectic set of performers.

Jean's voice is a mid-range, gravelly, warbling, passionate instrument that makes her a convincing lead singer. Steve is rarely heard vocally, unfortunately, because he provides an excellent smooth contrast to Jean's sometimes edgy vocals.

But Jean and Steve have always been about meaty songs with lots of words requiring concentrated attention with a significant payoff. "Drive," the title song of the album starts off "I'm tired of being angry, I'm tired of feeling blue. But most of all I'm tired of being tired of you. I'm tired of talking about it. I believe we talked it to death. I'm all out of love, out of words, and I'm all out of breath. You say my kisses don't take you so far, time to pack up those kisses, gas up the car, and drive 'til I can't see your face in the mirror ... Tell the dog what you like. I'm gonna miss him more than I miss you."

The more I listen, the more I enjoy this album. It is not nonchalant. It is passion-

ate and pertinent, a dynamic commentary on modern life. I like it. Recommended highly. — VKH



TERRY TUFTS

Two Night Solo, Live @ Rasputin's
Nutshell 09

Terry Tufts has spent his musical lifetime making other singers sound good. However, this live album from Ottawa's Rasputin's stage, clearly shows why Terry should not be bound to back-up work. His vocals are delivered with the same strength as his solid and impressive guitar work, even when reaching a higher register, in fact, especially in these ranges. There is something about the sound that revisits that combination of Lightfoot's voice and Red Shea's guitar work but spilling from only one man. Is Terry's sound definable as Canadian, or is it just that his strings have backed many a Canadian over these past decades?

A particular standout on the CD is "Marylou In Burgundy." This tune, not new to Tufts' repertoire, documents the beginning performer's hell and abuse of "No one listening, no one leaving." Then a certain lady walks in and catches his eye and he has trouble concentrating. The song bounces on the guitar as he sings about his attraction to the Irish woman wrapped in the shawl of royal burgundy. The Irishness of the woman seeps "a wee bit" into the lyrics and the beat. "I ducked back in my song" is an appropriate visual as he notices that this Irish attraction has been waiting on a date.

Terry's guitar work is exceptional. The opener here is a solid instrumental, and this live performance captures three instrumentals and 10 songs, including a Lennon / McCartney cover. Though I have always enjoyed what he adds musically for other musicians, it is great to hear his own voice accompanying that skill. — AP

DAVID FRANCEY

Torn Screen Door
Laker 1001

This disc arrived in my mailbox in an avalanche of CDs by artists with whom I was unfamiliar. Giving a fair listening to

many of those "unknowns" causes a fair amount of tedium. Thus, it was with joy and revelation that Francey issued forth from my speakers. Although from Quebec, he sounds very British Isles in both his writing and singing. The 14 original songs on this CD sound strongly influenced by the tradition. Most of the songs on here are about work and loss of work, life and loss of ways of life. The song protagonists run the gamut from truck driver, steel worker, sailor, to farmer. It sounds like he's actually worked these jobs. He also writes love songs that go straight to the heart and stay there. Not only is Francey a master of lyric, he's also a remarkable tunesmith. "Saints And Sinners" stands out with its infectious melody and thought-provoking lyrics, and the excellent use of repetition. The song questions who is the saint and who is the sinner. Similarly "Sumach Street," with its memorable melody, sings of lost love using repetition to drive home the hope of reconciliation. Reinforcing the musical impressiveness of the recording are some of Quebec's finest musicians, such as Gaston Bernard and Simon LePage. The production is always just right, such as the perfect mandolin break for Bernard in "Wind In The Wires." This is such an intensely musical recording it begs for you to hit the repeat key on the CD player. You may not be familiar with David Francey, but you should be. If you're looking for a fresh voice with ample talent in a strongly folksy vein buy this CD. — RWarr

JP JONES

Ashes
Vision Company 1099024

John Paul Jones recorded his first album in 1972 at the age of 23. Released on CBS Columbia/Windfall label, it sold only 8000 copies. He waited eighteen years to release his next self-produced album, and has, over the past 10 years, released three more. This is his latest.

Jones has a gravelly voice and some 300 songs stored up to sing. He feels that maturity has given him something worth writing about. He does indeed have a variety of styles to go with a variety of messages. At one point he says: "now don't you worry, if you're a loner / your spirit can be wounded but it never can be killed / some how I know it deep down inside me / every longing of the human heart / shall one day be fulfilled."

There is a bit of the rocker in Jones, along with a Dylan sound, and some Jack Hardy. All in all, it is an unusual collection of songs performed well. In an age of silly

lyrics and indistinguishable voices. JP Jones indeed has something different to offer. He is worth serious attention. — VKH

BETH FERGUSON

Inside Talking
North Track 002

Beth Ferguson was working on miracles. Considering the leaps she made in her last years of life (see *SO!* "Last Chorus" v.44#2) she achieved them. *Inside Talking* is her second CD in three years. Filled both with celebration and struggle, Beth was the woman Susan Werner could have been talking about in her song "Still Believe" who, though battling cancer, still asks, "wanna go with me to Italy next year?"

The title track, "Inside Talking," whose name was evidently suggested by Ferron, manages to move musically while handling the difficult truth of a body not keeping up with the active creative brain untouched by deterioration. On the contrary, it is as if the body and the mind are on diametrically opposed tracks. Beth was not beyond levity, however, following her line "Why me, why now" with "it's almost laughable somehow."

Though this CD doesn't stray from the realities of struggle, it is filled with hope and faith. The music is uplifting and the melodies last after you're miles from any sound system. Terry Tufts lends tasteful guitar and Erin Corday adds vocals as well as a co-write credit on "Remember Me," which closes the CD.

In what I find to be the most moving of songs on the CD, "It'll Be Alright," written for her daughter, she admits, "there were times I really needed a mother too." I know of people moved to tears, and then into action, with this piece that centers on increased communication within the mother-daughter bond.

Even in the vulnerability of some of her lines, we hear her strength. It would take someone strong to admit appearing less than perfect. "I've given up pretending to have the answers and the smiles, All I know is we're joined in the mystery."

In her tune "Where Does Music Come From?" her own mother tells her, "A singer is a vessel angel voices can pass through." Beth is now that angel and the many stories of the miracles from her CDs are just beginning to pour in.

One wonders, as with any talented writer taken too young, what songs she could have written for her next CD. She was certainly on the path of a gifted writer. — AP

AENGUS FINNAN

Fool's Gold

Shelter Valley 1

Aengus Finnan was born in Dublin and emigrated to Canada in the 1970s. He has been a student of the visual arts, an actor, a research diver and a schoolteacher. In addition, he spent most of his early life immersed in story and song. He recently moved to southern Ontario to begin playing music on the club and festival circuit. He has won several songwriting competitions, showcased extensively in Canada and appeared frequently on radio.

Fool's Gold is a collection of original compositions by Aengus as well as some well-chosen traditional tunes. The recording is produced by Paul Mills, long associated with the finest Canadian players including Stan Rogers, whose recordings *Fool's Gold* most closely resemble. Participating in the recording are some of the same side players featured on Stan's classic sessions, including Curly Boy Stubbs (Mills' guitar playing alter ego) and David Woodhead. The fine clawhammer banjo playing of Chris Coole and the luscious background vocals of Jenny Whiteley are two additional highlights of *Fool's Gold*.

Aengus is a very talented writer with a distinctive storytelling style. His narrative abilities bring to life selections such as "The Ballad Of Marguerite De La Roche" (composed along with producer Paul Mills) and "Fly Away." My favorite original tune on the recording, "Lately," a love song to "reconcile the distance I once put between Edmonton and Montreal" features a wonderful backing vocal from Whiteley and the delicate slide guitar and mandolin of David Woodhead. The most fully realized traditional tune with its sentimental *a capella* vocal is "Sweet Evalina" learned from the English trio Coopes, Boyes and Simpson. The traditional Irish flute of Lorretto Reid sets a somber and melancholy mood for "Black Is The Colour."

"John Tyrone," a new murder ballad from the pen of Jenny Whiteley, is a powerful tune about vengeance and retaliation in the years after World War I. The fiddle of Zeke Mazurek recalls Garnet Rogers on the very best of Stan's recordings. This must be a real showstopper in concert!

My only reservation about *Fool's Gold* is the apparent search of Aengus for his own distinctive voice. His writing bursts forth fully realized but each selection features yet another vocal style or model. Sometimes it has the power of Stan Rogers, or the precise diction of pop balladeers Chris de Burgh and Al Stewart and sometimes the casual tunefulness of Ralph McTell, with

even a hint of James Taylor. These are not inappropriate examples on which to model ones' voice, but perhaps a choice should be made, certainly before the next recording.

Aengus Finnan is a supremely talented composer looking for his voice. This is quite different from most of today's songwriters who have a voice long before they have the material to sing. Keep an eye on Aengus Finnan, his talent is no fool's gold. — TD



**BOBBY WATT, HOLMES HOOKE,
OLIVER SCHROER**
Caught By The Tale
Holmespun 001

This is a truly amazing collaboration between three musical friends. Bobby Watt and Holmes Hooke speak and sing, while Oliver Schroer plays violin. Watt and Holmes share most of the songwriting, with Schroer composing the instrumentals. The violin parts are not just tunes, but musical comments, exclamations and punctuation. There's also Robert Service's poem "The Cremation Of Sam McGee," for good measure, recited by Holmes, with fiddle sound effects by Schroer. Service is well serviced by this rendition. The CD mixes spoken poetry, songs, and instrumentals to remarkable effect. It's a refreshingly original work of unusual poems serving as introductions to terrific songs with instrumental interludes separating different steams of consciousness. Those streams run from ecology, to the sea, to an homage to World War II casualties, to the reconstruction of Canada's parliament building, to the flatulence of cattle. Watt, Hooke, and Schroer kidnap you on a fascinating journey that you don't want to end.

Talent radiates from these artists whether reading, singing, picking or bowing. Schroer's fiddle accompaniment of the poetry speaks almost like a second voice reading. They invite other musicians and vocalists in where appropriate, providing an even more interesting texture to the recording. Particularly memorable are the songs "Old Kilkeel," and "Twenty One Graves," and the poems "Men Of Stone," about the stone masons who rebuilt parliament, and "The Word." Obviously this recording was made for love, as such originality and creativity rarely make money. If you appreciate art that departs from the beaten track

give Watt, Hooke and Schroer your money, you'll love this recording. — RWarr

GREAT BIG SEA

Turn

Sire 31085

Great Big Sea's *Turn* has already made a big splash in Canada; now U.S. audiences can soak it up. GBS is beloved in their native Newfoundland and the Maritimes region and *Turn* shows why. This multi-purpose quartet is equally adroit as a pop group, a forecastle full of chantey singers, a Celtic traditional ensemble, or a rousing party band. "Consequence Free" has as many hooks as any songs you'll hear on Top-40 radio and considerably more depth. "Can't Stop Falling" is infused with hoppy energy, with Alan Doyle's guitars and vocals maintaining the same driving pace as Séan McCann's percussion, Bob Hallett's accordion, and Darrell Power's second guitar. Their four-part harmonies have led some to dub them Newfoundland's answer to The Beach Boys and the comparisons don't stop there. They revel in good-time music and their festive summer concerts known as "Great Big Picnics" are rapidly becoming legendary.

But The Beach Boys never nailed a briny season like "Jack Hinks," which tells of a mythical Newfoundland character whose feats of strength are, to put it charitably, exaggerated. And about the time you're worn out by the GBS perpetual motion machine they turn in a surprisingly gentle song like the wistful "Boston And St. John's," or a quiet, straight-up version of the traditional ballad "Captain Wedderburn." In fact, one of the most impressive things about *Turn* is the way in which GBS has matured. Previous recordings showed their enormous promise, but the band sometimes came off as a bad boy bar band. On *Turn* they maintain all their youthful insouciance and high voltage, but are so in control that they know when to let the rough edges cut and when to smooth over the seams. This is especially true of Doyle, who has become a singer who commands all aspects of his vocal range, not just the loud end. *Turn* is what heads will be doing when they hear this superb recording. — RWeir

NATALIE MACMASTER

My Roots Are Showing

Rounder 7033

In a recent interview, Natalie MacMaster told me that she worries that live audiences would tire of an entire concert of tra-

ditional music. Perhaps that's why the innovative and sometimes experimental *In My Hands* was released in the United States before *My Roots Are Showing*, though the latter was recorded a year earlier. If the Canadian response to *Roots* and this U.S. citizen's opinion are any gauge of the matter, Ms. MacMaster can put her fears to rest.

My Roots Are Showing won multiple Juno awards in Canada and for good cause. The album demonstrates that when good tunes are played by a musical genius you don't need a lot of gilding on the proverbial lily. This is the music MacMaster grew up with: jigs, reels, and the Cape Breton strathspey-reel. Those who've followed her career will recognize tunes like "Hey, Johnny Cope," "Willie Fraser," and "Queen Of The West" that have been kicking around in her repertoire for quite some time. In the latter MacMaster demonstrates amazing finger and bow control as the notes tumble off her strings at a speed that stretches the ear's ability to hear them. She's even more impressive on the lovely air "The Shakin's O' The Pocky," a Scott Skinner composition the oozes melancholy. But mainly this album is about traditional music, not MacMaster's technique. To that end the arrangements are relatively sparse, with MacMaster's fiddle playing off piano or acoustic guitar. She ends her collection with the ultimate tribute to her roots: a rousing live dance set duet with her uncle, Buddy MacMaster. — RWeir

JODY STECHER
Going Up On The Mountain
Acoustic Disc 39

I first encountered Stecher's music with the original release of *Going Up On The Mountain* back in 1977, and he rapidly became a favorite. At last I can revisit the album on CD. *Going Up* is presented in the original sequence, followed by most of Jody's previous album *Snake Baked A Hoecake*, an album I had not previously heard.

I still get chills listening to Jody's twin versions of Gordon Bok's masterful "The Hills Of Isle Au Haut," his "Golden Vanity" and his loving takes on "Don't You Hear Jerusalem Moan" and Bob McDill's "Amanda." But "Oh, The Wind And Rain" is something special, an eerie ballad in which one sister murders another and the corpse is transformed into a fiddle and bow. Bob Dylan used the song as the template for "Percy's Song." Jody revisited the song, with an expanded treatment, as the title track of his recent Appleseed album. That new album and this reissue are cross-

referenced in the each other's liner notes. Martin Carthy also contributed an essay to the Appleseed set. In reading his thoughts it struck me that in many ways Jody Stecher is to American folk music what Carthy is to the British. Jody, like Martin, is a highly accomplished player who takes fresh and unusual slants on familiar songs and ballads, and both really dig into some incredible yet obscure material. Jody is a treasure.

The *Hoecake* songs are a wonderful addition to *Going Up*, too. "Blind Fiddler" and "Leela" in particular both stop me cold and rivet me.

The packaging is wonderful, especially the cover shot which looks to have been taken is the same spot the cover of the original *Going Up* was shot 23 years back. The only visible changes are that Jody has a new hat and that his hair has whitened with time.

Very highly recommended. — MT



GORDON BOK
In The Kind Land
Timberhead 11

Recent months have provided lovers of Gordon Bok's music with much to celebrate. Reviewed elsewhere in this issue are two solo albums and two Bok, Muir & Trickett albums that have returned from the LP age. Best of all, though, is this lovely set of new recordings. Here Bok puts his distinctive, deep voice and skill on several instruments to the service of an eclectic set of songs from various places and times. Some of these songs are authentically traditional while the contemporarily written ones ring with traditional authenticity.

Bok opens the album with "Faraway Tom," Dave Goulder's descriptive song about the lonely life of a Scottish tramp, and then takes us to New Zealand in "Bright Fine Gold" for an equally lonely song from the point-of-view of a poverty-stricken woman whose husband is out chasing the 1860s gold rush there. Then, still set in the 19th century, Bok delivers a superb version of "The Last Battle," Bill Gallaher's descriptive ballad about the 1885 Métis Rebellion in Saskatchewan that led to the hanging of its leader, Louis Riel.

And so it goes on this album, one great

song after another, delivered in always-interesting arrangements. The biggest surprise here is the version of "Jones," a vintage Bahamian song by Blake Higgs (aka Blind Blake and not to be confused with Arthur Blake the early American blues artist who also recorded as Blind Blake). In this song, Bok, who normally seems like such a gentle man in his music, is singing about going after Jones, the man who stole his woman, killing him, and "cutting him up in pieces just big enough for stew." But like Higgs, and Paul Geremia who recorded the song in the 1970s, Bok sings it with such playfulness that there's no doubt that it's all in fun. — MR

GORDON BOK
Jeremy Brown And Jeannie Teal
Folk Legacy 84

GORDON BOK
A Rogue's Gallery Of Songs
For 12-String
Folk Legacy 94

In addition to his well-known skills as a singer, guitar player and songwriter, Gordon Bok is also a compelling storyteller, as evidenced by his classic "Peter Kagan And The Wind," and here by "Jeremy Brown And Jeannie Teal," an 18-minute story that dominates his 1981 album of the same name that has now been reissued on CD. Set at Christmas time in the Canadian Maritimes, the narrative story tells the story of sailor Jeremy Brown, his schooner, the Jeannie Teal, and a family of cranky passengers, the Hogans. I won't give the story away except to mention that fans of Bok's sea songs will recognize much of the phraseology. The album is rounded out by several traditional and original songs that serve as nice complements to the story.

A Rogue's Gallery Of Songs For 12-String, originally released as an LP in 1983 and now also reissued on CD, is an eclectic mix of traditional and contemporary songs whose commonality is that they're all solo, and typically superb, performances by Bok on his 12-string guitar. Bok's distinctive boat songs like "McKeon's Coming" and "Old Fat Boat" mix nicely with songs like Lead Belly's version of the western blues ballad "Duncan And Brady" and the musical poetry of Judy Goodenough. As an aficionado of both cowboy and maritime songs, I quite enjoyed Bok's transposing of "I'm A Rambler, I'm A Gambler" into a down-easter with its verses about the Canso girls. — MR

BOK, MUIR AND TRICKETT
Turning Toward The Morning
Folk Legacy 56

BOK, MUIR AND TRICKETT
All Shall Be Well Again
Folk Legacy 96

Here are two very welcome reissues from an occasional, but longstanding, trio of very talented friends who make gentle, yet strong, music.

Turning Toward The Morning, originally released in 1975, is mostly traditional songs that give each of the trio opportunities to shine and to lend their gorgeous harmonies to each other. I particularly enjoyed the two Australian songs, "The Cocky At Bungaree," performed by Gordon Bok, and a down under version of "Gentle Annie," Stephen Foster's mid-19th century classic featuring a lead vocal from Ed Trickett with harmonies from the other two. Ann Mayo Muir's finest moments come with her beautiful interpretation, again with harmonies from Bok and Trickett, of Bok's "Isle au Haut Lullaby," a sailor's dream of his island home.

The album concludes with a song that itself is worth the price of the whole disc. Here is the original, classic version of Bok's "Turning Toward The Morning." Melodically beautiful, it is one of the most comforting, poetic songs I've ever heard and one that is certain to enter the folk music tradition and be handed down to subsequent generations.

All Shall Be Well Again, originally released in 1983, continues where *Turning Toward The Morning* left off and is mostly contemporary songs that could pass as traditional. Songs like Rod MacDonald's "Sailor's Prayer," Don Cooper's "My Images Come," and Paul Metsers' "Farewell To The Gold," another Australian song, are all given lovely, harmonious interpretations, as are a couple of really traditional songs, "Fear a Bhata," and "Jennifer Gentle." They also offer a lovely, folkified version of "St. Thomas," a Caribbean-flavored tune by jazz composer Sonny Rollins that features Trickett's hammered dulcimer with Bok and Muir on 12-string guitars. — MR

SAM HINTON

The Library of Congress Recordings,
March 25, 1947
Bear Family 16383

On March 25, 1947, at the age of 30, Sam Hinton came to the Library of Congress and recorded 54 songs in one take. Sam paused only to allow Dr. Duncan

Emrich, the curator of the Archive of Folksong, the chance to turn over the 16 inch aluminum discs that held these precious performances.

The recording session was informal, to say the least, and it's safe to say that nobody present on that day anticipated the release of 46 of these songs on CD, 52 years later.

Born in Oklahoma in 1917, Sam Hinton moved to East Texas at the age of 12 where he began his exploration of the natural sciences and folk music – two of the four occupations that continue to fuel his rich and satisfying life. Sam had it in his head to learn every song he ever heard and so began soaking up the diverse musical landscape of East Texas. These influences, along with a well-worn copy of Carl Sandburg's *American Songbag*, became the seeds of the song selections on *Sam Hinton: The Library of Congress Recordings, March 25, 1947*.

Sam's tenor voice and infectious enthusiasm for these songs is prevalent throughout the recording. Expect to hear familiar folksongs such as "Down In The Valley" and "Careless Love" as well as several Child Ballads and children's songs. Also included in this collection is a well written biography by Adam Miller and notes to each song written by Sam.

As fun as this record is to listen to, it would be a shame if it didn't lead to a resurgence of interest in Sam Hinton's career and to the reissuing of more of Sam's recordings – especially *The Wandering Folksong* and *Whoever Shall Have Some Good Peanuts?* released originally on Folkways Records. [Editor's note: All Folkways recordings are available on CD. Those which have not been commercially reissued are available as CD-Rs, complete with photocopies of all the original notes.] — MW

VARIOUS

'Til We Outnumber 'Em
Righteous Babe 20191

Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe label has released this souvenir of the September, 1996 Woody Guthrie tribute concert at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. Eight read or off the cuff spoken moments are interspersed with 11 of Woody's songs. Singing participants on the album include Arlo Guthrie, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Dave Pirner of the rock band Soul Asylum, Billy Bragg, Ani DiFranco, Indigo Girls and Bruce Springsteen. Speakers and readers include Arlo, Peter Glazer, Fred Hellerman, Craig Werner, Country Joe McDonald and Tim Robbins.

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DiFranco's deconstructed brooding "Do Re Mi" and Springsteen's "Ridin' In My Car" are the most radically changed songs, each a compelling performance. Ramblin' Jack's "1913 Massacre" and "Talking Dust Bowl" are pure Jack, and that's always welcome.

It's a really nice album from a most memorable show. One gripe: at just 41 minutes there is a lot of unused room on the CD. I would really love to have heard another half hour of the show. — MT

**VAN MORRISON, LONNIE DONEGAN,
CHRIS BARBER**
The Skiffle Sessions
Virgin 48307

This is a live album recorded November 20-21, 1998 at Whitla Hall in Van Morrison's hometown Belfast. The 15-song set reflects the blues and folk music that powered Britain's skiffle explosion in the 1950s.

Chris Barber, slide trombonist and bassist, was first exposed to jazz and blues as a boy in the mid-1940s, and he started playing in his first band, which was also British blues pioneer Alexis Korner's first, as the decade ended. A few years later, young Lonnie Donegan became skiffle's biggest star, peaking Stateside with his huge novelty hit "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavor (On The Bedpost Overnight)." And in Belfast young Van Morrison was taking it all in avidly.

The three gathered together for an informal celebration of that music they all loved early on, and the album from the shows is delightful. The songs include such familiar war horses as "It Takes A Worried Man," "Frankie And Johnnie," "The Ballad Of Jesse James" and "Railroad Bill." There's a lot of Leadbelly in "Alabama Bound," "Midnight Special," "Goodnight Irene" and "Good Morning Blues," which with "Goin' Home" features the piano of Dr. John, who happened to be gigging across town and dropped in. Worth noting: "Irene" features Van singing the original, uncensored "I'll get you in my dreams" lyric.

What is certain is that everybody had a great time putting on the shows which have translated into a fine, breezy album. — MT

MARGARET BARRY
I Sang Through The Fairs
Rouder 1774

During the 1950s, American folklorist Alan Lomax, sometimes assisted by Peter Kennedy, recorded the remarkable

Irish singer Margaret Barry. Born into a family of tinkers ("traveling people"), Barry took up the family tradition of street and pub singing at age 13, soon expanding her range of venues to include football matches, to which she sometimes traveled with the teams.

Like many another musician who eked out a livelihood satisfying a range of audiences, Barry accumulated an eclectic repertoire – including traditional ballads, popular ditties, and art songs (some adapted from traditional songs). But whatever the source, Barry sang them all with compelling intensity and conviction, in a voice that is always earthily rich and often hauntingly ethereal.

The most unusual aspect of Barry's performance style, however, was her use of the 4-string banjo, which she learned to play from her mother. Barry's accompaniment styles ranged from simple, percussive strumming to a variety of arpeggios. She also often played the song's melody using a steady, mandolin-esque tremolo. Although this variety of techniques allowed Barry to vary the texture of her accompaniments, the staccato sound of the banjo usually provided a stark contrast with the songs' poetic lyrics and lyrical melodies. At times Barry's banjo is quite lyrical as well, as on her rippling treatment of "The Factory Girl," a melancholy tale that combines older ballad imagery with characters and a setting from the industrial revolution. At other times, however, the clanking banjo accompaniments are distracting, as on the street song "Bally-jamesduff," which Barry sings beautifully and whose melody displays a direct link to American country music. But Barry clearly thought about her use of the banjo. On some songs ("Her Mantle So Green") her sporadic arpeggios punctuate or answer her metrically free vocal phrasing, while on others ("The Galway Shawl"), the regularity of the arpeggio creates an effective tension with the more flowing vocal line.

Barry is at her very best on the ballads and laments, whose modal and minor-tinted melodies, with their dips, twists, and swoops, bring out the mournful, keening quality and emotional nuances in her otherwise declamatory voice. Her signature song, "She Moved Through The Fair," heard here in two versions, is the jewel in this collection's crown, a ghostly story with a haunting, modal melody that Barry sings with both poignancy and power. Barry comments on her own experiences of singing "through the fair" in one of several interview segments included with the music. These further establish Barry as a strong individual as well as singer. One of

these leads to Kentuckian Jean Ritchie singing "Loving Hannah," her version of a song to which Barry refers, while a segment in which Barry explains her composing of "The Strayaway Child" leads to her frequent musical partner, Michael Gorman's playing of the tune on fiddle. A reprise of "Her Mantle So Green," by both Barry and Gorman, provides a taste of the pub atmosphere in which so much of Barry's musical style developed and flourished.

Barry was a remarkable singer, and this collection showcases her well. I did, however, find the combination of Barry's forceful voice and hard-edged banjo fatiguing after a while. Get this CD; but you might want to listen to it over a couple of sessions. — MG



PETER BELLAMY
Wake The Vaulted Echoes
Free Reed 14

Anyone who had the good fortune of hearing Peter Bellamy sing live probably hasn't forgotten the experience. His performances lingered. His unconventional stage presence, wild yet focused voice, and his unprecedented devotion to old and traditional material made clear his genius. Those who knew him well, loved him.

Those who didn't know Peter or his music now have the chance with the release of *Wake The Vaulted Echoes*. This 3-CD set explores Peter's entire musical career and includes a 70-page booklet complete with discography, song notes, and some moving reminiscences from Peter himself, Martin Carthy, Bob Copper and Peter's wife Jenny. *Wake The Vaulted Echoes* contains over three-and-a-half hours of material drawing mostly from Peter's career as a solo artist. His influential work with the Young Tradition and his brilliant folk opera, *The Transports*, can be found on various other reissues.

CD one begins the same way most of Peter Bellamy's concerts began, with the singing of "On Board A '98." With that begins the celebration of and the journey through this influential and compelling artist's contribution to folk music. And what a ride it is.

Arranged mostly chronologically, *Wake The Vaulted Echoes* begins in a recording booth in a record shop in 1964, and ends with a live performance of Peter's own "Goodbye," recorded at the Cheddar Folk Club on July 22, 1991, the same year as his sad and untimely death. In between, of course, you will find an astonishing array of songs taken from an astonishing array of sources. Commercially released albums, privately released cassettes, and tapes from Peter's own collection combine to make *Wake The Vaulted Echoes* an essential addition to any fan of Peter Bellamy's work.

If you are new to Peter's music, some of these rare recordings might be a little out of reach. My suggestion: concentrate on the studio quality tracks first – especially the unbelievable settings of Rudyard Kipling's poetry – and then revel in the rare pieces.

Whenever a recording draws from such a wide variety of source material there is bound to be some unevenness in the sound quality from track to track. I can't help thinking that some of this could have been corrected in the mastering process. Even so, the material is so rich and the performances are so wonderful you will quickly forgive these recording flaws.

Peter Bellamy's devotion to and appreciation of old and traditional songs has been established. What might surprise you is the depth of his repertoire beyond the English tradition. Listen for his renditions of Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, Doc Watson, Barbecue Bob and even Lou and Peter Berryman!

Listening to *Wake The Vaulted Echoes* makes it clear that Peter Bellamy knew a great song when he heard one. Lucky for us, he learned most of them. — MW

VARIOUS

Classic Ballads Of Britain And Ireland,
Volumes 1 & 2
Rounder 1775/1776

American Folklorist Alan Lomax made the 51 field recordings on these two CDs during an 8-year stay in England beginning in 1950, at a time when the rich ballad tradition documented (as texts) at the end of the 19th century by Harvard professor Francis James Child was in danger of disappearing from an increasingly urbanized Britain and Ireland. Lomax's recordings helped not only to preserve these songs and make them aurally available to the nascent British folk revival – musically as well as lyrically – but to honor the singers who were keeping the songs alive in the first place.

Of the over 300 ballads collected and catalogued by Child, Lomax and his team found these 51 still being sung, many of them by Scottish tinkers (“traveling people”), among whom the ballads continued to play a vital cultural role. Most of these songs deal with murders, betrayals, seductions and other reflections of some of our most persistent, if least desirable, human propensities. There’s a fair dose of the supernatural as well. Some of these ballads (“Barbara Allen”) remain widespread and well-known; others (“Clyde’s Water”) have met with less success among folk revivalists. Some (“The Gypsy Laddie”) have American cousins; others (“Broomfield Wagner”) either did not cross the Atlantic or did not survive transplanting. On some tracks, the producers have edited together variant recordings of a single ballad (“The Twa Sisters”), providing an instant comparison of melodies and performance styles; on other tracks, perhaps regrettably, ballads have been shortened in order to accommodate more of them on each CD.

There is also great variety among the singers, most of whom sing the unadorned melodies unaccompanied in the traditional manner, some with strong, assured voices, others more timorously. Jeannie Robertson (“Willie’s Fatal Visit”) earned well-deserved recognition for her spectacular, expressive singing through the British folk revival that Lomax’s collecting and other work helped to spearhead. Harry Cox (“Georgie”) was also well-known, beginning with recordings he had made in the 1930s. But most of the singers remained outside general public awareness, although Cyral Poacher, joined by a chorus of fellow pub denizens (“Broomfield Hill”), and Jessie Murray, recorded at an Edinburgh ceili (“Lord Thomas And Fair Ellen”), certainly met with local approval.

This collection is indispensable for students of the ballad tradition and of Anglo-American folklore. It will also reward anyone who appreciates the variety of voices that, at least through the 1950s, have kept these living ties with older traditions alive. — MG

JUNE TABOR
A Quiet Eye
 Green Linnet 3129

Another glorious June Tabor project. Once again she teams with pianist Huw Warren, a musician whose flair for drama matches her own. Warren mixes chords and arpeggios to back the vocals, provide somber transition, or make the

spaces shimmer, as each song demands. His prodigious talents are supplemented by the 11-piece Creative jazz Orchestra, giving this album a bolder instrumental sound than recent Tabor solo efforts.

Tabor is once again in full-voiced splendor. Her song pallet uses mainly dark hues. “The Gardener” (Child ballad 219) is sometimes performed as a jaunty song, but Tabor transforms the maiden’s pride into a dangerous thing with hints of homicide lurking at the edges. She has a knack for choosing songs that match her temperament and on this album she covers “Waltzing For Dreamers” and “Pharaoh,” from her soulmate of the shadows, Richard Thompson. By placing them back to back, Tabor underscores struggle in both its individual and social aspects. She delights in handing us sugar with one hand and a bitter lemon in the other. In one suite she combines the “The Water Is Wide” with the love-turns-sour “Jeannie And Jamie,” suggesting that a separating sea between lovers isn’t always a bad thing! In another, she pairs Edwardian standards “The Writing Of Tipperary” and “It’s A Long Way To Tipperary” to catalogue pre-World War I suffrage battles, plague, wars in the Balkans, Irish rebellion, and anarchy. That little trick takes the starch out of the patriotic pretense of the latter song. Never afraid to stretch herself, Tabor also plays jazz chanteuse, with a smoky cover of “I’ll Be Seeing You,” and fronts a bright rhythm section for an uptempo version of “A Place Called England.” In all endeavors, Tabor is an icy queen of precision who’s not afraid to challenge herself or her listeners. — RWeir



VARIOUS
*The Ballad Operas: The Martins And
 The Coys*
 Rounder 1819

Sometimes a song can take on a life of its own. It grows and matures, even changing form as it ages. In its most vibrant years it directs the destiny of songs it surrounds and the singers and musicians that perform it. As it ages and moves into its golden years it acquires the moniker of elder statesman, always watching as new tunes take its place in more modern musical history, but it never really goes away.

The story of the song “The Martins And The Coys” begins in 1936 when the song was composed by Alan Cameron. The inspiration was quite obviously the legendary story of the Hatfields and the McCoys. This novelty song concerned the “the days when guns was law.” The tune was brought to Chicago bandleader Ted Weems, his band recorded it and the tune became a hit in May of 1936. Many parodies were recorded and the tune was even covered by some country singers of the day. Interestingly, the tune became very popular in the British Isles.

One of the most successful parodies was composed in 1942 by Millard Lampell of the Almanac Singers. His version depicts the feuding families bonding together to fight the Axis powers during World War II. Later that year the tune was incorporated into an anti-fascist review staged by Lampell entitled “It’s All Yours.” It featured a number of topical songs and ballads and included in its cast Woody Guthrie, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee, Josh White, Huddie Ledbetter and others. This would also prove to be one of the last appearances of the Almanac Singers.

After the review closed the parody continued to be played by folk musicians throughout New York City. The song was included on the 1944 recording “The Union Boys” recorded for Moe Asch by Alan Lomax with a host of other musicians.

Shortly after this recording was produced Alastair Cooke approached Lomax and his wife Elizabeth Lyttleton about producing a ballad opera for the BBC. Cooke apparently was very interested in the southern Appalachian mountains, especially the feuding families and clans. He found them to be similar in many ways to the feuding of the various clans and families in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands.

Radio was not a new medium for Alan Lomax. In the U.S. many listeners became aware of folk music through his contributions to “The American School of the Air” broadcasts on CBS in 1939 and 1940. He produced “Transatlantic Call” for The Office of War Information as well as “Back Where I Come From” which featured folk music in support of the war effort here at home. His weekly broadcasts for the Mutual Network featured classic recordings of blues and mountain music. He also produced many programs for the BBC prior to beginning “The Martins And The Coys”

Lomax drew up an outline for the opera featuring various topical and traditional songs and tunes. The script was written by Elizabeth Lyttleton. Surprisingly she was unaware of Lampell’s parody of the original song. She based her writing upon her memories of growing up in the South. The

production, recorded for the BBC Home Service in 1944, features Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Sonny Terry, Fiddlin' Arthur Smith, Haly Wood, Lily May Ledford, Will Geer and as narrator and storyteller, Burl Ives. Essentially the story describes, in rather simplistic terms, the feuding between the two families and their subsequent putting aside of their differences to fight the axis powers and the fascist machine.

The production is highly professional and flows along at a lively pace. Traditional tunes and those rewritten with the war effort in mind are handled with great enthusiasm and the playing and singing are top-notch. Perhaps the production is most surprising when you consider most of these performers had no training as actors. Of course they were given their roles because they could play music of the southern mountains but actually they portrayed the characters in quite a believable fashion.

Lomax would go on to produce a second ballad opera for the BBC Home Service called *The Chisholm Trail*. It was created for broadcast in 1945 and is also expected to be released by Rounder as part of its ongoing Alan Lomax Collection series.

Included on this recording is the entire opera, but with the opening monologue inexplicably omitted. It also includes bonus tracks of the original Ted Weems recording of "The Martins And The Coys" as well as the one recorded by the Union Boys along with a few bonus tracks by Lily May Ledford, the original "Banjo Pickin' Girl."

It must be stated that perhaps this music should be approached with an open mind. It portrays the traditional stereotype of the feuding southern families and sheds no new light on that subject. However, it was not intended to. It was designed as entertainment with a patriotic theme created for the British audience who was in the midst of enemy bombardments. It's easy to find fault and even to view this opera as trivial when compared to the work most of these performers would later produce. But its importance lies with the eventual spread of American folk music and the advancement of the war effort in Britain and beyond and for that we can thank the tune "The Martins And The Coys." — TD

SHANTALLA
Shantalla
Green Linnet 3130

Add the name Shantalla to the ever-growing list of dynamic, new Celtic bands. The quintet features a Scottish vocalist, Helen Flaherty, and an Irish supporting cast of Michael Horgan (uilleann pipes,

flute, penny whistle), Kieran Fahy (fiddle, viola), Joe Hennon (guitar, bodhran), and Gerry Murray (accordion, bouzouki, whistles). There's nothing unusual about across-the-Irish Sea collaborations these days, but Shantalla goes one step further: they're based in Brussels, Belgium. As if signaling intent to knock down Celtic borders, Shantalla open their debut album with "The Rocky Road To Cashel," a Breton tune appended to an Irish reel. The set has a distinctly hybrid feel, enveloping the precise musical stresses of Breton dance tempos within a fluid Irish shell. Shantalla revel in a lush sound in which tones and textures saturate the ear. "P Stands For Paddy," their reworking of "The Verdant Braes Of Screen," opens much as one would expect: fancy bouzouki work from Murray and deep whistles from Horgan are a prelude to the vocal. But Flaherty's voice is initially channeled through an echo chamber, while Murray's harmonies are not. Then the rest of the instruments enter, the pace quickens, and the song becomes as thick with interwoven sounds as a Van Gogh canvas with paint.

Murray's versatility allows Shantalla to be two bands in one. When he picks up the accordion, as he does on tunes like "Finbar Dwyer's" set, in places the band sounds as retro as Flying Cloud. Ditto the effect on "McCallum's," wherein Murray switches to mandolin and allows Hennon's rich guitar to take center stage. When Murray picks up the pipes, however, the proverbial fur flies. "The Woods Of Old Limerick" begins as a simple accordioneled jig until complicated fiddle and flute work from Fahy and Horgan up the ante. Murray double tracks accordion and pipes to imbue the piece with both solid rhythm and a buzzy undertone. The instrumental excellence of Shantalla alone would make the CD well worth its sticker price, but Helen Flaherty's vocals make it an absolute bargain. She sings clear and lovely on slow ballads like "The Blantyre Explosion," nails a tongue twister like "Cam Ye O'er Frae France," and make us weep with an *a capella* jewel like "The Highland Widow's Lament." — RWeir

LIZ CARROLL
Lost In The Loop
Green Linnet 1199

Some fiddlers dazzle with fiery showmanship, others with textbook technique. And some are just so solid in everything they do that you'd swear they rosin their bow with magic. Liz Carroll falls into the latter category. The Chicago-

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based Carroll has just released *Lost In The Loop*, her first solo effort in over a decade. Rest assured that the title's just wordplay; she's not the least bit disoriented.

Carroll recruited an impressive lineup to assist her, including Zan McLeod, Winifred Horan, Michael Aharon, and Solas standouts John Doyle, Daithi Sproule, and Seamus Egan, the latter of whom also produced the album. Carroll opens with a set of reels titled "Sevens" and immediately showcases her talent. Once she establishes a swing tempo, Carroll intersperses quick bursts, complex finger runs, and fluid sustained notes. Egan and McLeod hold the set together with steady percussion and heavily accented bouzouki. Carroll likes strong contrasts. "The Old Maid Of Galway" opens with Chico Huff's thick bass notes. Carroll chips in with a surprisingly light touch, allowing the reel to evoke a sashay rather than a frolic. On the slow air "The Crow And The Sun," she and guitarist Sproule, who composed the piece, turn near classical. Carroll abruptly turns the tables again with "The Ugly Duckling," a bouncy, charming, and offbeat original tune. Later, she teams with pianist Aharon on "The Didda," a composition that evokes formal Scottish competition tunes but with a

looser feel. From there she segues into "Fly And Dodger," in which she uses long bowing techniques and Winifred Horan's second fiddle to weave a tune that assumes anthem-like proportions in short spurts, only to pull back into something less lofty. How good is Liz Carroll? So good that Mayor Richard Daly proclaimed September 19 "Liz Carroll Day." And the Dalys don't impress easily. — RWeir

KÍLA
Lemonade & Buns
Green Linnet 3132

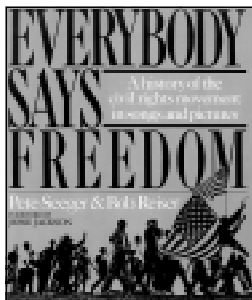
Ireland's Kíla bills itself as a "tribal-trad" band and for once, the invented label works. Kíla is a percussion-based septet that draws heavily on African and Afro-Caribbean rhythms and play Celtic music as if Ireland were an island located in the Greater Antilles. In a typical Kíla set you never know what instruments will wend their way into the mix. In addition to standard Irish issue like fiddles, uilleann pipes, penny whistles, and accordions, Kíla tosses in everything from saxophones and clarinets to rainsticks, congas, shakers, and djembe. The percussion – augmented by thick bass from Brian Hogan – forms the

basis for their "tribal" aspect. Their signature sound is drum-driven rapid-fire Gaelic vocals that are a cross between mouth music, scat, and reggae. The heart and soul of the band is lead vocalist and bodhrán wizard Rónán Ó Snodaigh. His full-tilt vocals, altered pitch percussion, and Rasta-like sensibilities will make you think that Kingston is a suburb of Dublin. All of this makes for a cool sound of which younger listeners are particularly fond. Kíla also plays relatively straight up traditional music as well. When peaking, Kíla sets are majestic. "Andy's Bar" layers sounds, tempos, and instruments like sheets of permeable gauze fluttering through the mix. It must be said, though, that Kíla's fondness for percussion is better developed than its sense of melody. Neither Dee Armstrong (fiddle, accordion) nor Eoin Dillon (uilleann pipes, whistles) bring the same passion to their playing as they do to their drumming. A set like "Where Did Ya Hide That Train, Joe?" packs the wallop of a hurricane, but not a sense of melodic completeness. At the present Kíla is one of the more intriguing and promising bands on the Irish scene, but it's also an uneven one. Its signature sound is so singular that there's a tendency to overdo it. If not reined properly and contrasted with more solid instrumentation, the current Kíla sensation could prove to be a one-trick pony. — RWeir

ANNBJØRG LIEN
Baba Yaga
NorthSide 6044

Annbjørg Lien is the acknowledged mistress of the hardanger fiddle, the intriguing Norwegian violin that is tuned higher than normal to allow four strings to vibrate as drones to the bowed strings. A really good player sounds as if there are two of them; Annbjørg Lien is so good she sounds like an entire string section. Previous projects have played close to the traditional vest, but *Baba Yaga* uses convention as the springboard for innovation. The album draws inspiration from a legendary Russian witch who forces individuals to confront the dark recesses of their inner selves, somewhat akin to the Shadow in Jungian symbolism. Lien heads a full band and together they cross cultures, psychological barriers, and musical boundaries. The album kicks off with "Loki," named for the Nordic trickster god. The piece is eerie and magical and manages to come across as both fresh and ancient. It's also a pleasure to hear Lien's vocals, which are almost as sublime as her

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playing. She follows with "Iriandia," one of several pieces which blend Norwegian and Sami musical cultures. Lien boldly adds other things to her bewitching brew. "Åja" again combines Sami and Norwegian sounds, but ends with sampled Tuvan throat singing. By contrast, "Astra" is a near tone poem, with crystalline soprano vocalizations resonating against elemental fiddle pulses. On "January," Lien makes the same fiddle sound like a pianolin. If all this weren't enough, Lien also travels to Africa. The title track draws from Mussorgsky's famed "Pictures At An Exhibition," but also borrows some North African colorings and industrial rock undertones to create a truly spooky synthesis. She fully demonstrates musical ecumenicalism on "Inoque," which juxtaposes the precision of Scandinavian rhythms with the looseness of Mozambiquan singing, and the fluidity of Lien's fiddle. Baba Yaga may have been a witch, but I felt blessed, not cursed, when listening to this album. — RWeir

STEVE ASHLEY
The Test Of Time
Market Square 102

STEVE ASHLEY
Stroll On – Revisited
Market Square 104

Steve Ashley was right there when the British folk-rock revolution began over thirty years ago, but he never benefitted from the kind of public recognition peers like Richard Thompson received. The release of *The Test Of Time*, however, a compilation covering Ashley's career from 1974 through 1998, and *Stroll On - Revisited*, a reissue of Ashley's debut album *Stroll On* (with three added tracks) will make up for lost time.

Stroll On (originally released in 1974) is about as perfect a slice of classic English folk/folk-rock as there is. Although all of the songs except for Lord Bateman are original, their structure (melody, stately rhythms, lyric phrasing) recalls that of centuries old folk ballads. Steve Ashley's singing has those precise English inflections, and the instrumental backing, featuring members of the extended Fairport Convention family is just right.

Listening to *Stroll On - Revisited* to write this review was like being reunited with an old friend. The timeless melodies and romantic, pastoral imagery of "Fire And Wine," "Finite Time," and "Silly Summer Games" are unforgettable, as is the warm friendliness of Ashley's singing.

Of the three added tracks, two were recorded at the same sessions as everything

else, but were deleted to include an epic version of "Lord Bateman," which reunited the original "Albion Country Band" lineup: Steve Ashley, Ashley Hutchings, Sue Draheim, Dave Mattacks, Simon Nicol, and Royston Wood. But now, thanks to CD technology, the lovely medieval flavored "Spirit Of Christmas," and "Love In A Funny Way," which has a jazzy spirit brought out by two flugelhorns and lightly syncopated rhythms are back where they belong. The other special treat is "Old Rock'n'Roll" wherein Ashley teamed up with "Fairport Convention nine" (Dave Swarbrick, Jerry Donahue, Dave Pegg, Dave Mattacks) augmented by Lea Nicholson (concertina).

More sides of Steve Ashley are revealed on *The Test Of Time*, a compilation covering his career from 1974 through 1998 and including tracks from all of his albums. After the classic folk rock style he explored thoroughly on *Stroll On*, Ashley incorporated a greater diversity of influences into his arrangements and song writing. For example, "Well, Well, Well," taken from his second album, *Speedy Return*, is a jaunty pop number with vaguely Latin rhythms. "Mysterious Ways," the title track from Ashley's 1990 album, is an exuberant pop tune with a catchy chorus. "Family Love," culled from the 1982 release *Family Album*, presents a sardonic picture of a family outing set to a lively morris dance like tune. This revealed Ashley's great sense of humor which didn't get too many outings on record. Also from *Mysterious Ways* is a Britfolk/Cajun stomper "Back On The Road Again" with rockin' fiddle from session guest Chris Leslie.

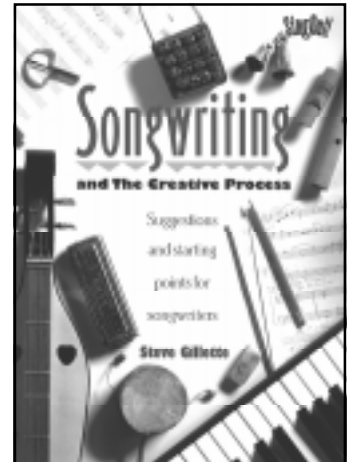
The Test Of Time closes with "Over There In Paradise," a song "dedicated to absent friends Peter Bellamy, Trevor Lucas, and Royston Wood." As Ashley explains in the CD booklet notes, "The song is not from any previous collection, but is here as a representative of the next album, if I ever get round to making it." — KR

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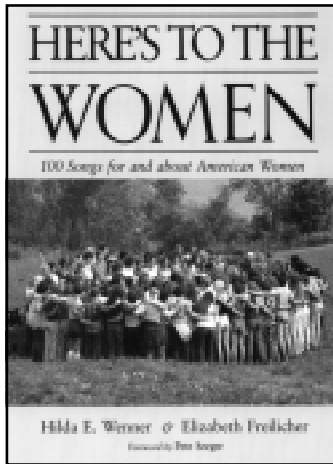
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Boxed is the fifth release for Rock, Salt & Nails, a band based in the Shetland Islands. Some reviewers label the sextet as a “Celtic rock” band, but that’s a misnomer. The band mixes things up, but traditional music is always at the core. And *Boxed* is certainly more bluegrass-influenced than rock infused. Emma Johnston’s fiddle licks are enthusiastically rendered and cast a true hoedown feel and a set titled “Rye-Grass” rather speaks for itself. Nor is the bluegrass fusion hidden from “Speed,” though the tune is actually “Lord MacDonald’s Reel” and the vocal harmonies sound more like Township jive than Appalachia. Led by songwriter, lead vocalist, and guitarist Paul Johnston, the band is a superb blend of eclecticism, energy, and verve.

Amoebas are microscopic organisms often found amidst rotting pond vegetation. They are famed for their ability to form temporary false feet that enable them to move about, and some forms are parasitic. These biological factoids may sound gruesome, but the Tartan Amoebas feed off varied musical styles to good effect. As for false feet, how about using trumpet and saxophone as a prelude to a bagpipe solo? There’s little the Amoebas won’t try. “Rescue” uses programming and cascading drum sequences to frame Julie Fowlis’s vocals and produce a song that’s more at home on the disco floor than the Scottish glens. By contrast, the title track opens with dual bagpipes blaring away atop a chunky electric bass. Jazz, pop, world music, splashes of reggae; you name it and the Tartan Amoebasglom onto it. There are even healthy doses of Celtic music shining through the cracks, though these folks must drive Scottish purists into suicidal depression! — RWeir

JULIE MURPHY
Black Mountains Revisited
Beautiful Jo 26

As proven by her outstanding work with Anglo-Welsh band Fernhill, Julie Murphy will soon take her place as a peer of such distinguished British folk divas as Maddy Prior, June Tabor, Polly Bolton, Jacqui McShee and the late Sandy Denny.

Black Mountains Revisited presents another side of Ms. Murphy’s art. It’s a very serious and dark collection of traditional and contemporary songs done in a bluesy mood with gospel like intensity. The sparse arrangements serve to emphasize the dour atmosphere. This isn’t an album to play at someone’s next birthday party.

Murphy is a supremely soulful singer and her performances here are heart felt.

Just listen as she laments conditions (some things never change) for farmers, miners, and weavers on “The Farmer (A Love Song).” And Murphy’s interpretation of “Are You Ready?” (with precise vocal harmonies from Neil Woollard) adapted from a Baptist missionary song according to the CD booklet notes, is stunning – a perfect example of the emotional power human voices alone can create.

While the instrumental backing on *Black Mountains Revisited* is sparse, Murphy selected ideal collaborators. Martin Simpson’s subtle slide guitar licks add a nice bit of color to “Polly Vaughan” and “Black Is The Color.” Nigel Eaton’s hurdy gurdy vamps combined with Murphy’s spirited singing helps bring out the urgency of “Sylvie.”

But to this reviewer, the standout track on *Black Mountains Revisited* is “As In The Market (Carmarthen, 1982.” For this dramatic poem (inspired by the “siege of Lebanon”) by Janet Dube, Murphy composed new music with an unforgettable melody. Every element comes together on this track; Murphy’s passionate singing is underscored perfectly by Danny Thompson’s descending bass lines, and Dylan Fowler’s guitar and mandocello provide rhythmic pulse. — KR



NASS MARRAKECH
Sabil A Salaam
Alula 1021

In my view, an album that accurately describes what it contains gets cut a certain amount of slack from the get-go. So there is no mistake that Moroccan Nass Marrakech veers off from tradition when he includes “West African, flamenco and Indian percussion, Japanese flutes and many other global beat elements.” You want the real thing? Skip this album. You want a group of musicians steeped in Gnawa, yet playing with friends from out and about, this is pretty darn fun. (The Gnawa are a religious brotherhood of descendants of slaves and other immigrants from other parts of Africa to the North. Gnawa ceremonies are infused with music, much of it retaining its pre-Islamic elements.) Sure, I can be a purist, but there’s just no point in skipping the gut-tingling

sintir (three-stringed, long-necked lute) and the infectious karkabas (large, double, metal castanets). Add the relative “wall” of the Gnawa chorus style and a soaring vocal, *Sabil A Salaam* stands out and makes both sub-Saharan percussion instruments and Japanese shakuhachi fit right in. Heck, when a movie such as “Being John Malkovich” has given “portals” new cachet, think of Nass Marrakech transporting you quickly to a new or heightened appreciation of Moroccan Gnawa music and its trance-inducing influences. — RD

THE ANANDA SHANKAR EXPERIENCE AND STATE OF BENGAL

Walking On
RealWorld 48118

Sitar meets microchips. I’m not sure what to tell you. On the one hand, some critics will pan *Walking On* in a heartbeat. Me? I enjoy this. A couple of favorite instruments, sitar and tabla, and a host of others ranging from electronic drums, electric guitar, Moog bass, programming samples and flute ought to let you know you’re off the traditional music path. Not to worry, it’s an adventure worth taking. Raised in a musical family, Ananda had made it to America’s west coast by the late ’60s. Well-positioned for the collision between rock, pop and Indian melodies, Shankar’s experiences – including jamming with Jimi Hendrix and producing covers of the Rolling Stones’ “Jumping Jack Flash” and the Doors’ “Light My Fire” – garnered respect as an innovator whose original recordings have long been sought by collectors. Joining in the ’90s to collaborate with State of Bengal, and thrust into rehearsal for a tour and WOMAD appearance, Shankar made a victory lap. Ananda expressed his work this way: “My dream is to break barriers, any kind of barrier – through music, love, affection and compassion. I have this dream of musicians from all over the world playing for an audience all over the world. When we are all here we are one, and when we go out I am sure we will all be one.” Ananda Shankar was born December 11, 1942 and died March 26, 1999. — RD

CHEB MAMI
Meli Meli
Ark21 186-850-007

In the world of Rai singers, Cheb Mami has a voice that’s as pure as the desert air and as well-suited to the plaintive expressiveness of his music as you’ll likely

find. *Meli Meli* is Cheb Mami’s fourth release and is a showcase for his talents, whether singing of lost love or the tragedy of his country’s civil war. Like reggae, modern rai (pronounced “rye”) is an immediately recognized music genre with a fundamentally political and dissenting character. From its rural roots, rai through the last century has evolved as the pre-eminent youth music to spring from North Africa. As French rule gave way to Algerian independence in 1962, rai served as a touchstone for the Algerian underclass and the mobile youth and immigrants who traveled between Paris and their homeland. Though the raw spirit that threatened the new status quo has often been toned down, rai continues to provoke, leaving its artists at risk. (A number of musicians have been murdered during the course of the Algerian civil war.)

Cheb Mami was born and raised in southwest Algeria, moving to Paris at age 19, and the mixture of styles – traditional, modern, Arabic & European – all come through on *Meli Meli*. You’ll catch threads of Andalusian Spain (“Bledi”), and a bit of North American hip-hop (“Parisien Du Nord”), but the delight of *Meli Meli* is the superb orchestration, driving dance rhythms, and soaring vocals of Cheb Mami. A pleasure, this one. — RD

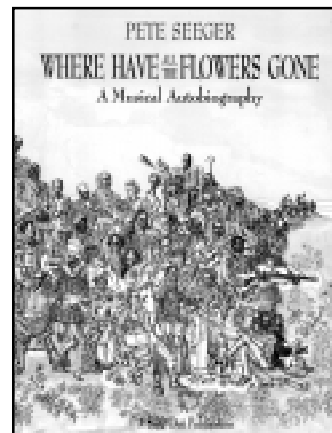
YIDDISHE CUP KLEZMER BAND

Yiddfellas
Yiddishe Cup 1002

This Cleveland, Ohio-based quintet pays occasional tongue-in-cheek tribute to the un-hip, mid-20th century era of klezmer, when it was merely just a part of a Jewish dance band’s repertoire alongside swing, cha-chas, jazz, and Mickey Katz’s Catskill novelties. There is, however, plenty of well-played, vintage Dave Tarras and Naftule Brandwein to be found here – Steve Ostrow injects the latter’s “Der Yidisher Soldat In Di Trenches” with some New Orleans-style sassiness on trumpet, and digs into his fiddle for a poignant version of Brandwein’s “Di Tayereste In Bukovina” – and the group’s adept leader, clarinetist Bert Stratton, knows his way through a bulgar backwards and forwards, as evinced on the aptly-titled medley, “Be Fat Bulgars.” Vocalist Irwin Weinberger tackles Katz’s “That’s Amore” parody, called “That’s Morris,” and acquits himself well on the contemporary Hasidic melody, “Shabbos Nign,” a bouncy version of the Yiddish standard, “Mekhutene Mayne,” and a swingin’ rendition of the Barry Sisters’ “Zug Es Mir Nokhamol.”

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Nor is the group afraid to stretch out, as they do on an intriguing medley of “Kandel’s Hora” – played as an Old World-style flute-simbl duet – and a percussive, Middle Eastern-influenced version of Brandwein’s “Fun Tashlikh” that nods toward the Klezmatiks. The Yiddish staple “Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen” starts out with Weinberger singing the lullaby straight to guitar accompaniment, until a theremin plays a fiddle-like verse – undoubtedly the first time the proto-electronic instrument has found its way onto a klezmer album. Stratton puts heart and soul, however, into a remake of Dave Tarras’s “Gypsy,” from the landmark 1956 album *Tanz*, and it’s on this number that the ensemble really jells. — SR



BRAVE OLD WORLD
Blood Oranges
Red House 134

The Klezmer revival can be roughly divided into two decades. The 1980s saw the likes of the Klezmerim, Andy Statman, the Klezmer Conservatory Band, and Kapelye reconstructing old-time Yiddish instrumental and vocal music, whereas the '90s were about experimentation, with groups like the Klezmatiks, the New Orleans Klezmer Allstars, and the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band incorporating an array of non-Klezmer influences into the mix along the way toward creating a modern Klezmer that spoke with a contemporary voice to audiences while satisfying and taking into account the musicians’ own diverse musical backgrounds.

Enter Brave Old World, a venerable Klezmer supergroup comprised of forward-looking veterans from several of the original revival groups. From the outset, their mission was clear: to create a “New Jewish Music” (the term is emblazoned on the jacket of *Blood Oranges*) firmly rooted in traditional Klezmer yet at the same time going beyond the music’s folk aesthetic to embrace larger concerns, both musical and lyrical.

Ironically, this means Brave Old World goes even further back in time than previous groups do to draw upon Old World devices such as the *badkhones*, the recitative form of the wedding poet, whose combination of satire and social critique anticipated the folk-protest singers of the

'60s. And the group’s chamber format, featuring a quartet of violin, keyboard, clarinet, and bass, gives it a more stately, shtetl-like feel than the brass-heavy parade bands of immigrant America or the rock bands disguised as Klezmer groups that proliferated in the '90s.

On *Blood Oranges*, Brave Old World has come up with its finest work to date, and perhaps the supreme achievement of the Klezmer revival. A stirring, dramatic song cycle equal parts tradition and innovation, infused with authenticity and virtuosity, this is Klezmer as gorgeous chamber music, informed by jazz and other ethnic musics, including salsa and South African township jive. Arrangements startle in their intensity, as the players – keyboardist Alan Bern, violinist/vocalist Michael Alpert, clarinetist Kurt Bjorling and bassist Stuart Brotman – toss the focus around with intuitive, agile grace, giving the music added depth and a visceral sense of space. It’s ancient, modern, utterly contemporary – in a word, timeless. — SR

FLYING BULGAR KLEZMER BAND
Tsirkus
Traditional Crossroads 4292

Since its eponymous debut in 1990, the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band has been threatening to break out into the front ranks of the Klezmer renaissance along with bands like Brave Old World and the Klezmatiks. With *Tsirkus*, the group’s fourth album, the Flying Bulgars finally make good on their promise. A sprawling effort, nearly epic in scope, the 14-song, 63-minute recording ranges from jazzy balladry to traditional Klezmer to Latin-klez fusion and more, on original songs and instrumental compositions as well as adaptations of traditional material.

Tsirkus introduces an almost wholly revamped lineup for the Toronto-based Flying Bulgars, still led by mastermind trumpeter and composer David Buchbinder. New vocalist Dave Wall is a versatile, affecting singer, handling the Yiddish pop-jazz of “Oy Vey Mameshe” and the achy wordless vocals of “Flora Hora” with equal aplomb. Instrumentalists Marilyn Lerner (keyboards), Daniel Barnes (drums), Andrew Downing (bass, guitar), Lori Freedman (clarinet), Wall (saxophone) and Buchbinder strike a crucial balance between authentic Klezmer ornamentation and authentic jazz swing, so that a familiar tune like “Rebns Tants” can be enjoyed equally as good jazz (it features a hot drum solo by Barnes) or as an innovative take on a 70-year-old Klezmer standard.

The song I keep coming back to, however, is the title track. Based on an erotic poem by Celia Dropkin, its catchy hook and funky keyboard pulse suggests what Steely Dan would sound like if Donald Fagen were to explore his ethnic heritage through the music of his ancestors. The jacket copy describes the sound of *Tsirkus*, which means circus, as “Jazz-inflected New Yiddish Music.” It’s as apt description as any, and a good one for this veritable three-ring hothouse of modern klezmer. — SR

JUDY TREJO
Stick Game Songs Of The Paiute
Canyon 6284

Competition is natural; everyone does it. Some peoples have developed ceremonies to regulate this tendency, to keep the fun from getting out of hand. Among the Paiute of northeastern California they play the Stick Game, where teams gamble on where a team member has hidden a bone token. Special movements and songs accompany these games of chance, calling for luck for one side, and confusion for the other. Canyon Records of Phoenix, Ariz. has documented elder Judy Trejo, of the Chatiovich family of the Owens Valley area, near the Sierra Nevadas and eighteen selections of her Game Song repertoire (her luckiest ones!). Trejo, a retired school teacher with a Master’s degree in counseling, sings in a strong, clear voice, even though she is, in her own words, “kissing sixty.” The Game Songs are short, a couple of minutes in length, and are vocals accompanied with percussion sticks, and sometimes frame drum. In regards to this music, Louis Garcia, in the Encyclopedia of North American Indians, tells us that the cadence of “the fast, hard-soft beat employed in the hand game ... is ‘against’ the heart’s rhythm. This counter-palpitation creates psycholological excitement, confusing the guesser and adding to the emotion of the game.” Sounds intense; try it. — SGW

MEDICINE DREAM
Mawio 'Mi
Canyon 7039

It’s rock. It’s almost folk. It’s nearly country. But it’s got those Indian chants and stuff in it. What is it? It’s a group of Native musicians who reside in Anchorage, Alaska! The child of Paul Pike, who hails from Newfoundland, Medicine

Dream is positive music, coming from Native sounds, but not glued in them. “If We Were Wolves” is great! It’s got a catchy hook, and points out that indigenous wolves, frogs, sparrows and fish are protected species, lauded by the courts and citizens alike, but indigenous people aren’t! Think about it ... The group’s sound – in vocals and use of the organ – is reminiscent of Three Dog Night, the “blue-eyed soul” aspect replaced with Native sensibilities. The use of “Pow-Wow”-inspired chanting (as in “If You Dream Of Eagles”) brings up the energy, too. The CD ends with an Honor Song, dedicated to students graduating from the University of Anchorage. Aho! — SGW

VARIOUS
Women Of Rembetica
Rounder 1121

Musically, rembetica songs represent the transition from traditional Byzantine to contemporary Greek folk and popular music. They were developed in the marginalized urban proletariat, day-worker and disenfranchised class, coincident with the early industrialization of the circum-Aegean regions in the 1800s. Though not politically motivated, rembetica songs were an expression, nevertheless, of distress and despair. The “rebetes” (literally, rebels) refused to be subjected and subjugated to the rules of the system. The songs are earthy, up-front and outspoken, sensual and often explicit, vocalizing thoughts and desires that were taboos in mainstream society.

Women Of Rembetica is a unique sampling of the rembetica scene primarily from the early 1930s. This recording highlights the work, talent and passion of several of the most famous (and some lesser known) female vocalists, including such stars as Maríka Papagíka, Róza Eskenázi, Maríka “Polítissa,” Ríta Abadzí, Yeoryía Mittáki and Stélla Haskíl.

The CD opens with a lively love song (“Tha Spáso Koupes / I’ll Smash The Glasses”) sung by Maríka Papagíka in a style clearly descended from the music of the Aegean Islands. The mood changes in the second song, with the slower tempo and more sensual, fluid mode of “Alaniára Meraklou / Good Time Girl” with its suggestive, lustful lyrics rendered in Róza Eskenázi’s trademark style. More of her rich, passionate voice is heard on tracks 6 and 18.

Maríka “Polítissa” (cuts 3, 7 and 9) transfers us to the coffeehouses of her hometown (her moniker, “Politissa” means “woman of Constantinople”). She be-

longed to the first generation of women singers of Smyrnaika-style rembetica. The selections in this compilation provide a true cross-section of the styles and moods of these songs. Ríta Abadzí (songs 4 and 5) was one of the two most popular Greek female singers, the other being Róza Eskenázi. The two tracks showcase her rich, expressive voice, range of styles and nuanced delivery.

Tracks 16 and 17 (“Argilé Mou Yiati Svinis / Argilé, Why Go Out On Me?” and “Ise Póndos Extra Extra / You’re a Real Sharp Operator”) are classic examples of two dances typically associated with rembetica (zeimbékiko and karsilamás, respectively). These two tracks are also notable for their stylistic purity – spartan orchestration, simple phrasing, and strong rhythm. Yeoryía Mittáki’s clear, high voice completes the picture. Track 19 (a hasápiko dance) features Sophía Karívali along with Márkos Vamvakáris and Vassílis Tsitsánis on one of Tsitsánis’ most popular tunes, “Na Yiati Pernó / That’s Why I Pass By.” Karívali’s fresh voice contrasts beautifully with the gravely, steely voice of the men, Vamvakáris and Tsitsánis, who were two of the most influential and respected musicians of the time.

This CD accomplishes two feats: it faithfully captures the essence of rembetica, in terms of musical styles (modes or “makámia”), tempos, poetry and language. It also provides insight into what it meant to be a rembetisa, a woman who defied the social norms of the day.

From a technical standpoint, recreating recordings from scratchy 78s is always a challenge. Rounder did a great job resurrecting these recordings to their original beauty. The translations and transliterations are very good, but are occasionally thwarted by the artists’ diction and the subtleties of the Greek language.

Just as fascinating and valuable as the recordings themselves are the photographs in the accompanying booklet. The pictures on the front cover provide the best visual summary of all the clichés and mystique surrounding rembetica. The cabaret-style photograph of Róza Eskenázi epitomizes the sexuality and sexual rebellion of the rebetes. The pseudo-oriental dress-up of Maríka “Polítissa” is an early marketing ploy, playing on the notions of Maríka’s home town and the mystery of eastern women (but is obviously a fake, as evidenced by the fashionable hat, the elegant patterns of the cloth, the short sleeves, the “short” hemline and hand on the hips). The photographs inside the booklet are so rich in temporal and cultural information and

nuance they deserve a review and analysis of their own. — TT/SPL



PETE SEEGER
American Folk, Game & Activity Songs For Children
Smithsonian Folkways 45056

This reissue presents the contents of two different children’s recordings made by Pete and originally released on Folkways Records. It includes selections from *American Folk Songs For Children* released in 1953 and the 1962 release *American Game And Activity Songs For Children*. The tunes on *American Folksongs For Children* were selected from a children’s anthology of folk songs edited by Pete’s stepmother Ruth Crawford Seeger. Old-time fans may already be acquainted with the Rounder and Folkways recordings of Ruth Crawford Seeger’s collection featuring the other Seeger clan members Mike, Peggy and Penny and their children.

Ruth Crawford Seeger was a composer of avant-garde music when she began to transcribe field recordings for the Library of Congress. She was quite excited about the project and her arrangements became the standard collection for the presentation of these traditional tunes. Pete was a teenager when his stepmom was investigating this music. One can only imagine what would have happened if Ruth had not chosen to do the transcriptions.

The second album collected on this anthology, *American Game And Activity Songs*, focuses mostly on dance tunes and tunes that might have been best called “play party” tunes. The derivation of this term is clearly explained in the notes. Since some folks viewed dancing as sinful, the tunes were given the code name “play party” songs. In the original notes the words to the songs were annotated as were the dance steps.

Any fan of the banjo style of Pete Seeger would do well to acquire a copy of this recording. The only accompaniment save for some clapping and stamping now and then is Pete’s wonderful banjo. Also any traditional musician looking for some clear lyrics to such tunes as “Liza Jane,” “Jim Along

Josie” and “New River Train” will find these tunes and lyrics easy to follow. This is Pete in his prime and in fine voice!

I do need to take exception to the marketing of this recording as solely a children’s recording, though. This is truly a *family* album with wonderful sing-along tunes and would be just perfect for a traveling recording. I can see the entire family singing along with classics such as “Jim Crack Corn.” “Frog Went A Courting” and “Skip To My Lou.”

My only other criticism with the recording is that there are no sing-along voices. Pete extols the listener to sing along but perhaps we are so accustomed to his song leading in concert that the absence of an audience is missed. However, this is not a reason to avoid adding this recording to your collection. It’s great fun and clocking in at almost 60 minutes in length, it’s perfect for those long car trips. — TD



ELLA JENKINS
Seasons For Singing
Smithsonian Folkways 45031

What a joy! Recently I had the chance to play music for a dance at a local elementary school. It’s amazing what children will do when exposed to the real thing. They could have played recordings for the dance but chose to invest in a live band to give the participants a chance to dance the real thing. They really responded well, and the evening was a hit!

Ella Jenkins has been doing much the same thing for over five decades, playing music for and with children, often creating the individual tunes with help from the participants. *Seasons For Singing* was recorded during a summer workshop at St. Paul’s Church in Chicago in 1969. Ella calls this a “listen and take part immediately” record. She suggests that with a little time anyone can become part of this wonderful workshop.

The selections range from lively call and response as in “Lord, Lord, Lord,” infectious sing-along tunes as in “You Look So Sweet,” spirituals as in “All Night, All Day” and an intro to the blues harmonica on “Freight Train Blues.”

Throughout the recording Ella is engaging and encouraging, always bringing out

the best in her young participants. The recording is well engineered with the children’s voices recorded clearly to enable participation.

If you play music for children and want to try some tunes with a bit more authenticity try a few of the selections on *Seasons For Singing*. Ella won’t let you down. — TD



SUNI PAZ
ALERTA Sings & Canciones Para El Recreo
Smithsonian Folkways 45055

This reissue features two recordings produced and performed by Paz. She is a talented and engaging musician and singer who has always pulled together music from the various cultures where she has lived. She creates music that is accessible to children as well as their parents.

ALERTA Sings is a collection of songs originally released by Folkways in 1980. It features songs from Latin America and the Caribbean arranged and performed by a group of musician-educators. ALERTA is an acronym for A Learning Environment Response To All, a curriculum developed at the Institute for Urban Education at Teacher’s College, Columbia University. It was created by educators who held a strong belief in bilingualism and the beauty of multiculturalism all tied into the wonder of childhood. The individual selections were collected from casual recordings of children served by these educators. These selections, along with the childhood memories of the individual educators, helped to create the 31 songs that open this recording.

Canciones Para El Recreo; Children’s Songs For The Playground mostly contains arrangements of tunes Paz collected in Argentina and Chile. The original Spanish texts as well as the English translations are included in the recording notes.

I suggest that these recordings perhaps are best suited for use in elementary school music curricula, especially for the challenged music teacher looking for something unusual to please today’s bilingual and multicultural classroom situation. — TD



SHORTCUTS

LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO, *Live At The Royal Albert Hall, (Shanachie 66023)*. For all the many albums available by these household names from South Africa, none capture the group’s childlike, slightly goofy charm quite like this live set recorded in London. What you get here, unlike the more polished studio albums, is the little oddball routines they do to introduce songs. Playful snatches of father/son bickering lead into “Abadala,” the men’s gentle, accented English adding a non-confrontational lilt to outbursts like “Shame! What is going on here?” and “They are not fighting – they have different ideas.” On “Phansi Emigodini (Deep Down In The Mines)” grunting outbursts slowly resolve themselves into a workmen’s chant and then a tough-minded repetitive melody that brings home the dangers, exhaustions, and exhilarations better than any journalism. Like most live albums, this one is made up mostly of old favorites like “Hello My Baby,” “Rain, Rain, Beautiful Rain,” and the Paul Simon-penned “Homeless.” What makes it special is what happens in between the songs. — PS

MAMADOU DIABATE, *Tunga, (Alula 1019)*. Mamadou Diabate’s latest is neither gussied-up with all sorts of production tricks nor tricked out with all sorts of Western guest-stars. It is merely a simple, unadorned piece of West African folk, full of stellar kora playing and atmospheric grooves. Taking a leaf from Ali Farka Toure’s book, Diabate adds in stop-time choruses and other devices of the Chicago/Mississippi blues, especially on the title track. But he and the small group behind him never lose the airiness of Manding music, the sense that under the steady 4/4 pulse burbles 6/8, 12/16, and half a dozen other implied time signatures that they’re all having too much fun to notice. — PS

VARIOUS, *The Rough Guide To Calypso & Soca, (Rough Guides Ltd. 1040)*. If anyone can wade through the ocean of synthesized crap that fills the Trinidadian bins to find an album of lively, danceable, un-hackneyed soca, it is the Rough Guide people. Among the attractions here are the Mighty Sparrow’s “Phillip, My Dear,” which uses the story of the prowler who invaded Queen Elizabeth’s bedroom at Buckingham Palace a few years ago as the occasion for some lively double-entendre fun. There are party-hearty anthems like Chris “Tambu” Herbert’s “Free Up” and David Rudder’s “Caribbean Party,” both

unclined dance-floor-fillers. But social messages are part of the music, too, like Singing Sandra's "Voices From The Ghetto" and Brother Resistance's calypso/rap "Cyar Take Dat." Indeed, for those bewildered by the proliferation of second-rate soca, this guide will be indispensable both as an indication that the form, for all its good-times rah-rah, remains a viable musical expression and as an hour of great boogie madness. — PS

THE ALEXANDRIA KLEZTET, *Y2Klezmer, (Kleztet 1)*. Duke Ellington meets Papa Haydn on the way to a bar mitzvah on this debut album by the Virginia-based quartet led by clarinetist Seth Kibel, of the late, much-lamented Cayuga Klezmer Revival. Bits of jazz, world-beat, classical, Jamaican dancehall, Latin swing, and other influences are combined seamlessly with Yiddish melodies on this witty, inventive album of acoustic Klezmer fusion. Kibel's original compositions sit comfortably beside traditional instrumental melodies and tunes borrowed from the Yiddish folk song tradition. Includes a Hanukkah medley. — SR

FROM BOTH ENDS OF THE EARTH, *From Both Ends Of The Earth, (Both Ends 001)*. From Both Ends Of The Earth brings together five Canadian musicians with a wealth of experience in folk, jazz, and Jewish music, including members of Finjan and the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band. They apply that experience to nine traditional songs and melodies, and one original composition. The result is one of the more successful attempts at fusing Yiddish music and acoustic jazz. Pianist Marilyn Lerner lends a Bruce Hornsby-like pop touch to "In Mayn Garten"; with its swirling piano and clarinet ostinatos, "The Chess Tune" veers off into Philip Glass-style minimalism before winding its way back into an old-time hora rhythm; the title track is a bit of smoky torch song featuring David Wall's emotive vocals; Russian immigrant Sasha Boychouk's clarinet takes the Hasidic "Khosidl" into Coltrane territory, and then to the Ukraine with a sopilka solo on "Xostropetz." — SR

VARIOUS, *Di Grine Katschke (The Green Duck), (Living Traditions 1801)*. The production values for this beautifully annotated and illustrated collection of Yiddish animal songs are inordinately high in terms of both musicianship and scholarship, making this ostensible children's album equally valuable as a historical cultural document as well as an educational tool. The combined effort of key klezmer revivalists from the Klezmatics, Kapelye and the Klezmer Conservatory

Band, *Di Grine Katschke* collects traditional Yiddish folksongs and lyrics by contemporary Yiddish poets, with vocal duties shared among such well-known Yiddish singers as Lorin Sklamberg (Klezomatics), Paula Teitelbaum, Adrienne Cooper and Henry Sapoznik, and instrumental support from Frank London (Klezomatics), Lauren Brody (Kapelye) and Jeff Warschauer (KCB). The 44-page booklet featuring Old World-style woodcuts and lyrics in Yiddish, transliteration, and translation, is equally invaluable. Don't be surprised if you find yourself dropping Yiddish words into conversation after listening for a while. — SR

CONNIE O'CONNELL, *Ceol Cill Na Martra, (Shanachie 78033)*. Cill Na Martra is a Gaelic-speaking parish in County Cork. Connie O'Connell's latest fiddle album honors the region's strong dance tradition on a solo fiddle album. Slides, jigs, reels, hornpipes, and flings dominate and though O'Connell backs his strings with keyboards, guitar, and bouzouki, the project retains the homespun feel of a kitchen party. Tunes like "Johnny Cope," "The Blackbird," and "The Magpie's Nest" are pretty well-traveled, but O'Connell's skill and his lack of pretense make them fresh offerings. — RWeir

VARIOUS, *The Rough Guide To Irish Folk, (Rough Guide 1036)*. This CD distinguishes itself from the crowded pack of Celtic compilations by showcasing performers who don't get to North America much and are thus less known to audiences here. The Rough Guide did an especially nice job of culling from the superb Gael-Linn label and treating us to the penny whistle magic of Brian Hughes, the fiddle mastery of Paddy Glackin, sean nós singing from Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin, and Gaeltacht traditional songs from Áine Uí Cheallaigh. In all, 20 tracks from various parts of the Emerald Isle. — RWeir

IVAN DREVER and DUNCAN CHISHOLM, *The Lewis Blue, (Iona 062)*. Ivan Drever has left Wolfstone and this new collaboration with that group's fiddler Duncan Chisholm may well indicate why. Although most of the tunes and songs on this album are originals penned by Drever, its flavor is traditional and miles from the electric mayhem of Wolfstone. His "The Battle Of Falkirk" ranks among the best tellings of that epic struggle. Chisholm — one of Scotland's fierier fiddlers — is likewise more subdued, though just as passionate. Phil Cunningham lends his prodigious talent and Brian McNeill engineered and produced it. For my money this album howls louder than Wolfstone. — RWeir

IAN McLAGAN and the BUMP BAND, *Best Of British, (Gadfly 260)*. The name may not ring a bell immediately but scan old recordings of The Small Faces and you'll find his name. Check studio recordings by The Rolling Stones, Bonnie Raitt, Bob Dylan, Melissa Etheridge, and others and you may find it as well. "Mac" McLagan is not just a rocker, though. In fact, his first solo album in nearly 20 years is one of those records that's nearly impossible to pigeonhole. The title track sounds like the early Beatles with its pop hooks and skiffle-like guitar. Other songs evoke everything from folk to reggae. Guest performances from Billy Bragg and ex-Faces partner Ronnie Wood contribute to this intriguing collection. — RWeir

KIMBERLEY REW, *Tunnel Into Summer, (Gadfly 259)*. Most folk music fans would pay little heed to a record from a veteran rocker who's scored songs for Robyn Hitchcock, The Bangles, and Katrina and the Waves. But maybe a project including Dave Mattacks (Fairport Convention) will catch their attention. If not, the killer opening track "Simple Pleasures" ought to rein them in. It's the kind of jangley, sunny tune that you'll be humming for days. And the rest is pretty good too. Much of the album has a late '70s pop rock feel, but there are some inspired quiet moments as well. It's well worth a stretch for folk fans seeking some electric diversion. — RWeir

MARGARET MacARTHUR, *Ballads Thrice Twisted, (Whetstone 05)*. This gloriously old-fashioned record does for New England what early Jeannie Robertson projects did for Scotland. MacArthur, based in Southern Vermont, is a connoisseur of ballads housed in the Helen Hartness Flanders collection at Middlebury College. Many of the Flanders songs — plus the several Child ballads thrown in for good measure — originated in the British Isles and migrated across the Atlantic in colonial times. How else to explain how "King John And The Bishop" or "Lady Isabel And The Elf-Knight" were popular in Vermont? MacArthur lets the ballads tell their stories according to their own time and logic. This is a relaxed album in which MacArthur's warm voice is backed mostly by dulcimer. For folksong purists, this one is a treasure. — RWeir

HOLLY TANNEN, *Rime Of The Ancient Matriarch, (Holly Tannen)*. You gotta love a CD that opens with a Mark Graham song. In the case of this disc, it's Tannen singing "High And Lonesome;" that place where old-time music and new age meet. This, it turns out, is a perfect introduction to Holly's own delightfully twisted view of things. Holly has

a knack for updating old songs – especially if it involves bringing them online. She also has a very real sense of the traditional ballad which complements perfectly her very real sense of humor. This recording is, in a word, fun. Holly's own accomplishments on the mountain dulcimer are supported well by a cast of solid players including Gene Parsons, Meridian Green, and Danny Carnahan to name a few. — MW

ANN and PHIL CASE, *Never Grow Old, (Dry Run 002)*. There is something so basically appealing in an old-time country duet. The simple, straight forward presentation of the 13 songs on *Never Grow Old* make it clear that Ohio musicians Ann and Phil Case have earned a link on the chain of musical groups keeping this tradition alive. Ann's strong lead vocal and Phil's solid accompaniment are perfectly suited to the mostly familiar repertoire on *Never Grow Old*. Gospel favorites, Carter Family standards, and even a Lonnie Johnson blues make this one worth a visit. — MW

TOM, BETTY and NATHAN DRUCKENMILLER, *'Til The Clouds Roll By, (Little Cat 005)*. This is literally homemade music – something you might expect to hear at an informal gathering of friends who have a deep-rooted love of old-timey tunes and songs and the ability to bring them alive. Recorded in their home, and complete with all the appropriate ambient sounds, the Druckenmillers have created a CD that runs through 17 songs and tunes in the tradition with the emphasis on the love of the music. Slick and professional? No. Warm and heartfelt? Absolutely. — MW

QUICK DRAWL, *Two Dollar Buffet, (Dry River Bed 7009)*. Austin has produced its share of bands looking for fame and fortune. The variety of styles to come out of the coffeehouses and taverns range from cowpunk-twang, heavy nudie-suited outfits, to all acoustic bands like Quick Drawl. *Two Dollar Buffet*, features the core of mandolin, guitar and bass and adds an interesting element with the fiddle of Miss Darlene. Her playing is not simply to add the occasional break or atmosphere, it's an integrated part of the band's original compositions. The selections range from rapid-fire vocal and instrumental tunes to the late PeeWee King's "You Tried To Ruin My Life" with a code-a-phone message leading to the heartfelt vocals of Miss Darlene. Quick Drawl must be the perfect band for a Friday night at the pub. — TD


WYLIE & THE WILD WEST, *Ridin' The Hi-Line, (Rounder 3168)*. These guys sound like a Sons of the Pioneers splinter

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right out of the 1940s. Wylie's 13 original cowboy songs in the set range from love songs, to boogie-woogie and Western Swing, to yodels, to songs purely about the cowboy life. Between them they have just about all of the colors of the Western sky from painted sunrises and sunsets to azure and midnight blues. A Joe Babcock cover and an unusual take on the traditional "Buffalo Girls" complete the set. The band is crackerjack. The sounds Duane Becker coaxes from his steel guitar are astonishing as he does spectacular retro effects. Wylie's production of the album is spot on. This is a cowboy gem. — MT

LARRY CORDLE & LONESOME STANDARD TIME, *Murder On Music Row, (Shell Point 1001)*. Ironically, although the title song of this CD bemoans the death of real country music at the hands of the Nashville music industry, this recording itself reflects a similar problem in contemporary bluegrass – the homogenization and substitution of interchangeable sounds for the variety of approaches that made early bluegrass bands so distinctive from each other. What once were highly personal characteristics and attributes have become a catalog of external gestures, albeit made by accomplished singers and pickers, including Cordle and his Lonesome Standard Time colleagues. Everything here is clean and well-crafted, but even so potentially moving a song as "Deep Mine Blues" lacks inner conviction. Cordle's honeyed voice strives for understated soulfulness but only succeeds in imitating it, while his bandmates play all the right notes but rarely achieve the "drive" that, in convincing bluegrass, is much more than a matter of speed and precision. In 1993, I heard a lot of potential in Lonesome Standard Time's first release (*SO!* v.38#3). Now it seems that it will take more than putting Cordle's name in front of the band's to fulfill that promise. — MG

THE BAGBOYS, *Just Say Moo, (Hairy Moon 0002)*. It often seems to me that too many young bluegrass bands take themselves and the music much too seriously. The Bagboys – four Bag brothers and a Bag sister – are a Northern faux-family bluegrass band who don't take themselves at all seriously, but make music that stands up well and is a lot of fun to listen to. They're very good players and singers and this CD has a nice mix of clever original material along with several bluegrass and western swing standards. Sure, I'll say it. "Moo." — MR

SNEEZY WATERS, *Sneezy Waters Sings Hank Williams, (Borealis 122)*. Off and

on, from 1977 until 1990, Ottawa's Sneezzy Waters literally became Hank Williams in the stage and film versions of "Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave." In the early-1980s, he recorded this terrific collection of some of the best known numbers in the Williams canon: "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," "Jambalaya," "Hey Good Looking," etc. Each cut is a great interpretation that is simultaneously true to Williams, yet distinctly Sneezzy. But, the original LP only scratched the surface of Sneezzy's repertoire of Hank songs. I wish he'd gone back to the studio for the CD reissue and added more material. With only ten songs and 32 minutes of music, this album is over much too soon. — MR

JAMES TALLEY, *Woody Guthrie And Songs Of My Oklahoma Home, (Cimarron 1009)*. The overdue release of this collection of Woody Guthrie songs sung by James Talley is most welcome. Recorded in 1994 in New Mexico, the players are all area musicians who do a fine job of capturing the songs' intentions and spirit and the 21 selections comprise a fine primer to Guthrie's work. Virtually all his best known songs are here, making this a terrific introduction to Woody. The only one not a Guthrie original is an instrumental take of "Red Wing" which Woody "borrowed" for the melody of "Union Maid." It certainly belongs here. A delightful, excellent album. — MT

CHIP TAYLOR, *The London Sessions Bootleg, (Train Wreck 10)*. You may not know Chip Taylor's name, but you probably know his songs: "Angel Of The Morning," "I Can Make It With You," "Try (Just A Little Bit Harder)" and "Wild Thing" are just a few. Starting out as an on-the-fly demo session in London that went really well, Taylor pressed up several varying versions of the sessions and sold them at the shows as a kind of self-issued bootleg. With ensuing New York sessions plus some light Nashville overdubs the project grew into this 2-CD set with over 2 dozen songs. They are mostly gentle country flavored, a far cry from the "Louie Louie" thump of "Wild Thing," mature, tuneful songs reflecting a life full of both highs and lows with redemption in there, too. The London sessions are a bit more rocking. Key guests include Lucinda Williams singing on three tracks, Evie Sands on one other and Tammy Rogers fiddling on five. — MT

DAN HALL, *1000 Ft. Keel, (Deep Harbor)*. Dan Hall is back with his second collection of mostly original songs inspired by the ships that sailed the Great Lakes.

Just like his last release, *It's Quiet Where They Sleep*, Dan teams up with lyricist/poet David O. Norris to create moving stories within songs celebrating and commemorating those who gave or almost gave their lives to the lakes. The disc also includes two first-hand accounts of shipwreck survival from Dennis Hale and Frank Mays. This, combined with a chorus-driven original shanty, a beautiful love song, and moving stories of the sea, makes *1000 Ft. Keel* worth finding and treasuring. — MW

COCO KALLIS, *Environmental Songs For Kids, (Smithsonian Folkways 45048)*. In these 11 songs (12 tracks, one song is repeated with a different arrangement), Kallis provides the foundation for children to learn about their own, and society's, responsibility to the planet, with songs that are fun to listen to, easy to sing and play, and that preach without being preachy. Some, like Malvina Reynolds' "God Bless The Grass" and "What Have They Done To The Rain?" will be familiar to old folkie parents (and grandparents), others are new songs to create awareness on such environmental issues as recycling, oil spills, forestry and even littering. She also includes "Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream," Ed McCurdy's (see "Last Chorus" page 22) anti-war classic, to remind us of the environmental destruction that comes from warfare. — MR

KRISTIN LEMS, *Oh Mama – Plus!, (MM Carolsdatter Production)*. Kristin Lems founded the National Women's Music Festival in 1974, symbolizing the strong social message in all of her songs. Highly musical, humorous in places, thoroughly political throughout, *Oh Mama – Plus!* is a reissue of her first album, re-mastered and including three new tracks. A child of the 1960s, Kristin's messages should have long been rendered unnecessary. Unfortunately, they are largely operative today. If you enjoy beautifully rendered songs with a strong political overtone, you will certainly enjoy this album. — VKH

ADRIENNE JONES, *Talking River, (Adrienne Jones)*. Jones has been performing since 1984, much of that time with Margo Hennebach and Paul Kovit in the band Idle Rumors and then with Margo and Diane Chodkowski in the group Madwoman in the Attic. Now solo, *Talking River*, leaning towards the Celtic, is Jones' second album. The writing is generally strong, and Jones has an appealing presence on the album. She gets marvelous support from Rani Arbow (formerly of Salamander Crossing), Brooks Williams,

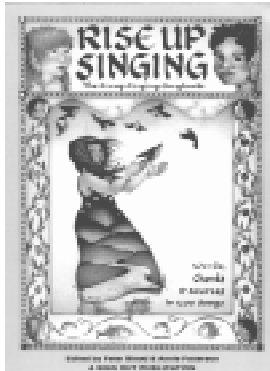
Lisa Gutkin, and Richard Gates, among others. The themes of her songs are philosophical, about breaking free, about life is what we do, and about love that continues. While not especially deep, the morals are worth expressing and hearing, and, overall, Jones has presented herself well. — VKH

JENNY REYNOLDS, *Colored In Poetry*, (Pretty Okay no#). To me, “pretty okay” means better than ordinary, and that’s how I’d define this pleasant recording of 10 original songs. Reynolds possesses a pleasing voice that she knows how to use. Her songs make sense and are eminently listenable. The tight, well conceived production, on the pop side of folk, keeps the music moving, although the percussion tends to be too loud in places. There are some great lines in her songs, such as in “Weight Of The World,” Reynolds sings: “she’s a small town girl with a Dear Abby heart.” Listening to *Colored In Poetry* is a delightful way to spend 38 minutes. — RWarr

COLIN LINDEN, *Raised By Wolves*, (Compass 4284). Colin Linden devotes most of this album to bluesy, swampy, rootsy rock ‘n’ roll arrangements of good original songs like “Ten Years,” a sad remembrance of a fallen friend and “George Chuvalo,” a tribute to the Canadian boxing champion whose spirit endures despite a life filled with harrowing personal tragedies. And listening to the version of “Easy Rider” on this album, I’m fondly reminded of the young Colin who became an adept master of traditional blues styles before he was even old enough for driving lessons. — MR

THE KENNEDYS, *Evolver*, (Zoë 1009). As the title suggests, the music here is evolved from the smartly written and executed songcraft that Pete and Maura have woven over several albums. Integrating programmed electronic beats into their sound gives the album a sound both modern and retro. “Pick You Up” opens the set. It opens with a bit of electronica that announces their intentions and then settles into its upbeat tempo and a message of hope amid ruin. “Good Morning Groovy” feels like a piece of vintage psychedelia retrieved from amber. “The Girl With The Blonde Eye” is essentially a Ventures style instrumental with sweet “do do do” vocals. Similarly 1960s is the set’s one cover, “Here Without You” by Gene Clark of the Byrds. The album is effortless listening. As always Maura Kennedy’s voice is a welcome honeyed presence and Pete Kennedy’s guitar work is exquisite. Always nice to hear from the Kennedys. — MT

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