Review

Karl MacNaughton and Gerry Smith: "Fiddlin' for Steppers" (World Records WRC1-1151: Black Donelly Music, Box 376, Lucan, Ont. N0M 2J0).

The front cover of this album is reminiscent of something K-Tel might put out. There is a nice picture of a fiddle and a pair of step-dancing shoes, accompanied by a large maple leaf-shaped insignia which reads "20 NEW ORIGINAL CANADIAN FIDDLER TUNES", this in turn followed by a list of contents. Very tacky. If, however, you come across this cover in the discount bin at your local record store, don't be put off.

Karl MacNaughton and Gerry Smith are well-known fiddlers in southwest Ontario, and while their fiddling technique is nothing extraordinary, they have written some good tunes for Ontario-style stepdancers, if this collection is anything to go by. The waltz, clog, jig and reel are all represented, and three sets of clog, jig and reel, at beginners, intermediate and competition speeds respectively, are included for the budding stepper.

I was particularly struck by some very pretty waltzes, this being a tempo that is sadly neglected by younger musicians, despite the fact that many regions of Canada are rich in good examples. Only two of the twenty tunes on the album were not written by MacNaughton or Smith, and one of them, "The Blue River Waltz" by Nelson Coulthard, is probably my favourite.

Solid but rather pedestrian backup on piano and bass is supplied by Linda and Wayne Smith, and there is some nice guitar work by Ken Ducharme, plus a bit of bluegrass-style banjo from Keith Freebairn.

As I have said, this is not an outstanding musical offering, but as original source material for fiddlers or for up-and-coming stepdancers, "Fiddlin' for Steppers" could be a nice album to have around.

- Ian Robb

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