**Garnet Rogers**, Snow Goose Records: Available from CFMS Mail Order Service, Stock No. SGS III; $8.00, non-members $10.00, plus $2.00 for shipping.

At a recent spring gig in Toronto, Garnet Rogers shared with his audience an amusing anecdote regarding this debut album. For its title, he supposedly considered the name of one of his favourite *Farewell to Music*. However, in light of the fact that this was his very first recording, he deemed this idea rather self-defeating and chose instead to christen the album simply with his name. Clearly the antithesis of a goodbye, this collection of impressive and commanding songs echoes a resounding chorus of "Hello!" and should secure for Rogers his rightful place amongst esteemed Canadian folk artists.

A versatile musician, Rogers plays some eight instruments on this album as well as performing all tracks for voice. He masters an extensive and dynamic vocal range, and is as gifted at expressing the softer, more vulnerable human emotions of longing, gentleness and unrequited love as he is at boldly pronouncing rousing passion and rage. His phrasing can be eloquent to befit his renditions of tender ballads such as *Westlin Winds* and *Black-eyed Susan*, or biting for the angry call to justice, as in *Break the Law*. Rogers’ musicianship embraces graceful finger-picking, delicately sweet violin strains, the mellow harmonizing of the viola, a flute accompaniment *Westlin Winds*, as well as strident, full guitar strumming. There is tangible depth and clarity to his voice and instrumentals which intensifies the vibrant musical energy felt throughout the album.

Rogers’ choice of music for his premiere recording reflects his highly developed appreciation of lyric, poetry and fine songwriting. Included are Connie Kaldor’s compelling feminist tune, *Bird on a Wing*, Doug McArthur’s passionate
Break the Law, written for the Farmer’s Survival Association, Archie Fisher’s Final Trawl, a powerful and sentimental song with a contagious refrain, about the last pitiful catch of a fisherman’s beloved boat, and several beautiful love songs. To complete the album, Rogers has chosen a song of great hope, warmth and vision by Bob Franke, titled Thanksgiving Eve. Through his selection and interpretation of tunes, he is introduced to his listener as a man who easily relates to the full range of human feelings and who maintains a profound love of and faith in humankind.

Rogers strikes a pleasing balance in content and tempo and between traditional and contemporary songs on this recording and provides tight, clean arrangements for them. Each piece is given colour and texture throughout his thoughtful and creative instrumentation, including flute, piano, viola and violins. The effect of this solid arranging is a sense of natural flow within each song which, in turn, brings about a smooth blending of one song with the next. The only exceptions to this, my one criticism of the album, are the two purely instrumental works, Carrickfergus and Farewell to Music. Carrickfergus and Farewell to Music. Carrickfergus in particular seems too long, yet its ending leads well into the final cut on the first side, Final Trawl. I must concede, however, that after several listenings, the place and feeling of these two songs begins to “grow on you.” Perhaps there is more wisdom to Rogers’ inclusion of them than my first impressions suggested.

Hearing Garnet Rogers’ album sans his stand-up-comic-type banter that accompanies his live performance (some of it is truly funny, but . . .) allows the listener a purer, unadulterated experience of the man’s depth and bravura. One can savour the beauty of love songs such as Willie P. Bennett’s masterful Music in your Eyes and the inviting Woh Me by Roy Forbes undiluted by excessive jokes. According to Rogers’ personal notes on the printed material inside the album, he is well aware of his tendency to glibness. One wonders if he is ill at ease with his own imposing presence and virtuosity as a musician, so constantly does he detract from his performances with tedious wisecracking. Armchair analysis aside, it is a refreshing change to give ear only to Garnet Rogers the musician. For those who can appreciate at least a tolerable dose of his unique sense of humour (myself included), the album’s liner notes fulfill this requirement quite nicely.

If pressed to name personal “favourites”, I would list Music in your Eyes, Black-eyed Susan and Thanksgiving Eve as the treasures in this group of ten superb and polished songs.

There will be inevitable comparisons of Garnet Rogers’ work to that of his late brother Stan and, not surprisingly, some similarities and influences can be heard. It would seem strange to find otherwise, considering their deep-rooted musical and fraternal bonds. However, this debut album clearly demonstrates that the younger Rogers has remarkable musical talent and direction all his own that brings to the folk community a richness we can appreciate as much as his brother’s outstanding legacy. In his album notes, Rogers shares that he was prepared to end his career as a professional musician when grieving his loss of Stan, but that he was gradually able to move forward with the support of his wife, close friends and family. He says he now feels “as if I’m getting my legs under me again.” This debut album provides ample evidence that Rogers’ legs are indeed now quite solid and assures that they will carry him a long way on his minstrel journey. For this we have his loved ones and the artist himself to thank.

Carol Gladwell