

## Reviews / Comptes-rendus

**Six Mile Bridge.** Canal Records. P.O. Box 57029, 797 Somerset St. W., Ottawa, Ontario, K1R 1A1

Six Mile Bridge is, as you might expect, a septet from Ottawa. They follow the fusion tradition that was pioneered by the Incredible String Band in the Sixties (though, really, some of Pete Seeger's adventures in the decades before have to be considered part of this stream, too), and nowadays taken up on the continent by a variety of groups like Blowzabella and Edward II and the Red-Hot Polkas, and closer to home by Ad Vieille Que Pourra: i.e., a kind of cross-cultural mixture, shall I call it a part of folk rock? I'm trying to avoid the term "fusion," which causes me to reminisce about some of the most boring hours of the Seventies.... Maybe I'd better just describe a few tunes on this disc.

"Bombay Revisited/Marioro" is, as you might expect, an impressionistic rehearsal of one member's trip to India. Expect more of the pop side of Asian music, not the delicacy or intense development of classical Indian music. Also expect these guys to be more comfortable with those danceable oddball rhythms than you'd have imagined six nice Ottawa boys to be a few decades ago.

I don't know whose idea it was to accompany "The Banks of Lough Gowna," with African thumb piano, but it was a lovely move, showing commonality where some people might not have expected it. The Irish strain is arguably the most commonly evoked in their music -- I say arguably because there's a great deal of rock here, not always in forms that the average dumbbell in a baseball cap would recognize, and since there's no way to quantify such gestures, I won't bother trying. This is pop music, no doubt about it (I just wish it were more popular!).

What I find particularly interesting about their music, what makes them stand out for me, is that they seem also to listen to what some European classical composers have done with similar themes. I'm thinking of Bartok, Percy Grainger (and I don't mean all the cornball arrangements of "Country Gardens," for which he had no responsibility), and, in the States, good old Charles Ives. Listen particularly to "Flowing Tide/Tommy Sullivan's Polkas," in which the harmonies are stretched in ways that are certainly nothing new in "classical" (God, I hate the terminology we're stuck with -- but that's better than "serious music," isn't it?) circles, though I don't remember hearing dance music that seems to dissolve into the ozone this way. Good stuff! Every so often the controversy about arranging Irish music comes up: personally, I find a lot of the so-called arranged versions utterly boring, since it usually just means that first one instrument plays the tune, then another, often as not with someone banging a guitar underneath it all. I've always figured that the original tunes are quite nice all by themselves and that you ought either just to play them or to do something *really* interesting with them. Listen to this cut, compare it to most renditions of Irish music, and you'll see what I mean.

The group's instrumentation includes whistles, uilleann pipes, fiddle, a couple of reeds (soprano sax, clarinet), various percussion and guitar/mandolin permutations, keyboards; several members sing. Not everyone plays on all cuts, and they've invited friends in for others, so there's a fair bit of variety. I'm rather fond of the old Brit/reggae item "The Wee Room," a bit like Edward II with vocals but not accordions (though I really don't have a clue what the references in the song are to -- it's probably quite obvious and I'd put my ice cream cone in my forehead if someone explicated it for me, but the fact remains that I *don't get it*, duh....)

As I type, "Blarney Pilgrim/President's Choice" (described in the notes: "A simple unassuming Irish jig ends up at a metal/funk Italian wedding in Wembley Stadium" -- they might have added that it makes a stopover at Nairobi on the way) is winding up to its bizarro climax. We've sure come a long way since Harrison's sitar fill on "Norwegian Wood," haven't we?

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