Reviews/Comptes-rendus

Live Performances

Cal Cavendish, Jubilee Auditorium, Calgary, Alberta, April 5, 1994

On April 11, 1975, Cal Cavendish made what we might call musical history in Calgary. I suppose it might be called by other names, as well, but that can pass for now. His pilot’s license had been suspended, apparently because the Ministry of Transport had discovered that Cavendish had been under psychiatric treatment, so the pilot/singer/songwriter loaded up his single engine Luscombe 8A with a hundred pounds of cowshit and a hundred copies of a recent single of his, "Government Inspected," buzzed the control tower at the Calgary airport and the Calgary Tower, a revolving restaurant on a space needle (both of which were evacuated) and performed what he called an "aerial ballet" over the city, dumping his load of records and manure. He claimed that he came close enough to the restaurant to see the faces of diners.

The subject of an NFB film, Cavendish had made several laps and singles before his adventure, and he continued to perform sporadically in the city and in the small towns nearby, but gradually disappeared from sight as the Seventies drew to a close. I saw that he was booked to play at rodeo star Ivan Daines’s country music picnic in the summer of 1988 or ’89, but I didn’t make it to the gig myself.

During the intervening years, the singer has worked at a variety of day jobs, some of which clearly mean as much to him as does music, particularly trucking. He has been at the latter for 15 years, owns his rig, and has recorded two cassettes which feature recordings of semis as accompaniments to his songs. CBC Radio’s As It Happens interviewed him and sampled one of these a couple of months ago. He’s also regained his pilot’s license (“Let’s have a big hand for the good judgement of the Ministry of Transport!... I wouldn’t spit out of an airplane now—I couldn’t afford another 14 years!”)—and has recorded a cassette of songs which feature "the beauty and humor of flying."

This April 5, the 53-year-old Cavendish gave a sort of comeback performance, a benefit for STARS, the Alberta Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society. He entitled the concert, which featured his own songs and parodies, Wheels Wings And Other Things. "Wheels" represented trucks, primarily his beloved eighteen wheelers, but a few others as well. "Wings" were his own planes, as well as planes that he had ridden in (transport planes) and read about (bush pilots). "Other Things" included oil rig work and workers, waitresses, his wife, and the alleged benefits of drinking non-alcoholic malt beverage beer (the primary one being that no one can be sure whether you’re insane or drunk!).

Apparently, he booked the cavernous Jubilee Auditorium himself, and he must have been disappointed at the turnout. No prophet, it seems, in his own city. "And if you don’t believe it’s my city," he quipped, "look at how much it’s grown since I fertilized it." He kept any disappointment to himself, however, and was clearly warmed by the admiration the several hundred who did show up offered him.

Referring to himself frequently as the Mad Manure Bomber, Cavendish had prepared a model of the Calgary Tower to stand to his left on the stage. Audience members were given 8½ x 11" programmes, with the notice that during the intermission there would be a PAPER PLANE CONTEST, with the instructions, PROGRAMS ARE REQUIRED FOR THE PAPER PLANE CONTEST. As he left the stage for his break, he informed the audience that the winner would be whoever managed to get his or her plane closest to the mock Tower. The audience happily complied, and in less than the twenty minute intermission, the stage was littered with airplanes, particularly since quite a few people went back for more than one throw—there were, you understand, a lot of programmes to go around! Many saw the winning plane hit the Tower, and the thrower was informally and enthusiastically cheered. I gather that he won a flight with Cavendish, which the singer joked about as a fearsome thing.

One interesting aspect of Cavendish’s songs is that, although he identifies himself powerfully as a working class Albertan, he notably avoids the stereotypically cowboy image. As attractive as the cowboy stereotype image is, and useful for the political right (see the note on the Alberta Report feature on Ian Tyson in this month’s News, Views, & Stuff), it is at best an incomplete icon for Albertans, since so many other occupations—oilfield work, farming, mining—and their attendant support systems have given workers in this province their livelihoods and helped to form their cultures.

Cowboys only came up twice in Cavendish’s concert. One was a quip: nowadays most cowboys wear sneakers so they won’t be mistaken for truckers. In the song "Pass and the Drum," the narrator and Dynamite Mac, two coal miners on a spree in Calgary, precipitate a fight with the call, "Let’s have some good stuff, not that cowboy beer." After they’ve laid out their share of buckaroos, been arrested and hauled up before the judge, they learn that Cowtown has "... got a cell reserved for the Pass and the Drum," for Crowsnest Pass and Drumheller, that is, two of the major coal mining areas of the province.

Although he professed to have no truck with helicopters, he offered, in honor of STARS, "The Jesus
NUT," about the nut which holds a helicopter's rotor in place: "The Jesus Nut can save your butt / be sure it's on there tight.... If that Jesus Nut comes off, you can kiss your ass goodbye."

A number of Cavendish's songs assume a working knowledge of the equipment he has operated. Cavendish writes and sings for the people who work the controls of heavy machinery, of trucks, of tractors, of airplanes—and who daydream about the machines they won't handle themselves. Introducing a song about flying into Calgary in a transport plane, Cavendish notes that most passengers are merely annoyed by the shakes and tremors of the plane, but he always imagines himself bringing the baby in. There's no doubt that Cavendish is one of the people he sings about.

Stylistically, he blends the raunchy honkytonk-derived truckdriving style pioneered by Dave Dudley with the gentler dissonances of 1963 Greenwich Village. His voice occasionally flattens out of control when he has to hold notes in a ballad, but otherwise it's an excellent instrument for the moods he intends to convey, particularly, but not exclusively, the faster, humorous songs.

Why was the audience so small? Tuesday night is probably not a great concert night. I don't know how well it was advertised; I myself managed to get there only by chance, but, then, I'm not part of any of the circuits by which most people learn of such events. Cavendish commented that one song had been a favorite of the crowds at the Sancious Coffeehouse during the Seventies, and, though the audience seemed to include at least a broad demographic in terms of age (it was definitely monoracial, and other class factors are not easy to judge), I certainly didn't recognize any of that old crowd at the Jubilee. Most of them have probably moved on to something trendier, or they don't attend concerts anymore, anyway. Perhaps such a self-identified proletarian image is too strong for most working people, who often seem to prefer to be cowboys.

Or it may be the urban ones who are afraid of this image. Called back for an encore (which he'd angled for previously, in good spirit), Cavendish promised to make the concert an annual event, possibly holding it in a less ambitious location, such as in one of the nearby towns. "If this would have been in Balzac, we'd have had 'em packed to the sides!"

As I was leaving, an enthusiastic audience member said to me, "In better times, he'd a' made it." But Alberta has been through some very good times, indeed, during Cavendish's careers, musical and otherwise. Maybe the man meant "better times" to mean "times of better taste." Cavendish is worth our attention now.

The concert was taped for issue as a cassette or cd (Cavendish didn't say which). In the meantime, he has two cassettes of truck driving songs (beware, those which feature the accompaniment of truck engines will not be to everyone's taste, though Cavendish professes to find them lovely), the one of flying songs, and an recording from the 70s, Cavendish Country, which features the delightful "Good Old John" (Diefenbaker, that is) and "Foreign Cows."

For more information on these releases write Cavendish at 2112 Vista Street NE, Calgary.

GWL

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1An unpleasant note was struck with his old song, "Calcutta Cowboy," Cavendish's 1960s response to the raga rock phenomenon. The mock-Pakistani accent the singer used to introduce the song has a provincial subtext that is at least worrisome.

### Winnipeg Folk Festival, Birds Hill Park, 1993

Birds Hill Park lies on the outskirts of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and though it may seem just another unassuming plot of grass, it is unique in its unrelenting ability to bring people together. Every year for the past twenty, Birds Hill has been host to the Winnipeg Folk Festival. One of the largest in Canada, it has grown to include eight stages, featuring 90 groups in 200 separate performances over a three-day span. While you certainly can't take in everything, the variety and sheer quantity of great music you'll hear each day makes this event one worth checking out.

Everything at the Festival is well laid-out and planned, from the scheduling of each artist to the location of each stage, creating a simple, almost effortless experience of good feelin' and, of course, great music.

Every type of music is represented here, from the wildly popular Skydiggers to the eclectic sounds of Fat Man Waving. Those who seek proof of Canadian talent need look no further. Notable Canadians at the '93 festival included the Lost Dakotas, Vancouver's Stephen Fearing, and the quasi-a capella Moxy Frévous, back by popular demand.

One can also find, however, entirely foreign styles of music throughout the weekend, as well as styles you may have thought long forgotten. The Fairfield Four and their a capella gospel bring back memories of the 1940s, while the solo harmonies of the Tuva Ensemble conjure images of lands far away. [For those who've not heard the Tuva Ensemble, trust us that the term "solo harmonies" is not a typo. GWL.] There is always something completely different to listen to, something new to look at.

Something else that sets the Winnipeg Folk Festival apart is its friendly atmosphere. No other event can bring so many people together to celebrate music and the positive effect it has on our lives. One can see friendly smiles in the midst of a downpour, or sit and chat with a stranger over
Whale’s Tails. It is a profoundly heartening experience.

The technical aspects of the festival are also impressive. Feedback and other chronic problems which seem to plague festivals across the country are absent here. After twenty years of experience, the staff of Winnipeg Folk Festival continues to present a dynamic, exciting weekend for people with an interest in both Canadian and foreign music. All the best to them for the next twenty!

Roger Leeder
Calgary, Alberta


Let me admit at the outset that I jumped at the chance to review this book. Having already heard of its publication (and being somewhat of a sucker for such books), I was pleased at the opportunity to inspect it at my leisure—to inspect it before shelling out my $29.95 (list). To be blunt, in these days of "new-found" interest in "unplugged" music, there is an ever-burgeoning pile of books describing the history, the construction, the art, of the acoustic guitar. I was curious to see if and how this book differs from the rest.

From the moment I opened it, it was clear that this one was indeed different—substantially so. Though its size, format and meticulous photographs would place it among the better "coffee table" books on the market (at least those which have a historical focus), this book is primarily intended as a practical guide to playing the guitar. Of its nearly 200 pages, over half of them are devoted to this practical and technical aspect. Still more of its pages are devoted to other practical matters: choosing an amp for your style of playing, the care and maintenance of your guitar. Fewer than 40 pages are spent on history and other more general matters. They comprise the first section of the book—and a few brief comments are in order.

Given what I’ve already said about the "ever-burgeoning pile" of historical coffee table books, one might expect me to downplay this first section. On the contrary, I found it to be one of the strengths of this book. Chapman begins with a seven-page timeline (1500-1992). Using small (but wonderful) photos of historically significant instruments placed along this line (about eight to a page), he is able to give a marvellously graphic representation of the history and development of modern guitars. Next to each photo is a description of the instrument, the maker and its place in history. Also included are sidebars of important innovators: Martin, Torres, Gibson, Fender. It’s "guitar history at a glance," and in its elegance of presentation, it’s worth the price of admission.

The timeline is followed by a more thorough discussion of what Chapman terms the four main types of guitars: nylon-stringed classical, steel-stringed acoustic, archtop, and solid-body electric. Each type is afforded a few pages wherein we discover more about its origins, its innovators and, via photos of not-yet-assembled instruments, its construction. Here too we find discussions about strings, machine heads, wood, and more. This portion of the book is also extremely well done. The format is eminently browsable: photos with captions, sidebars, brief snippets of text. One does not learn the facts in this section so much as one discovers them.

The historical overview finished, Chapman now turns to the practical side: Playing the Guitar. Here one finds technique from the most simple (how to tune it, how to hold it) to the most complex (modal improvising, soloing over chords). Virtually every aspect of guitar playing is covered: flatpicking, the cycle of keys, scales, playing the blues—the list goes on. Tablature is introduced early and used throughout, as is standard music notation. To supplement these systems of notation, he also supplies photos of a player’s hand as it fingers the various chords and exercises. These photos are particularly helpful—and novel. Whereas the photos in other method books are of the hand of someone (the instructor) sitting across from you, these photos are taken as though you were looking at your own hand—an extremely useful perspective for those who attempt to teach themselves via this book.

Still, this leads me to my one complaint. I cannot imagine that anyone would attempt to teach themselves using the book—certainly not through it alone. It’s as though there’s too much information here. Put simply, it’s daunting. One gets the impression of having to work through methodically, page by page—and yet, within the first few pages there’s enough to keep the average beginner occupied for a week, at least. First, we are told, one must learn the notes on the fingerboard. Aaaak! Heck, couldn’t we first play "Tom Dooley"? No. Not here. In fact, in the entire book there is but one tune to play ("Malaguena") that I could find. The rest is chords, scales, exercises—with some explanation of why, a great deal on how and a great dearth on where. Really, then, despite its promise of "complete" and "all-encompassing instruction," it’s far from being the only method book you’ll ever need. In fact, if you’ve just inherited Aunt Molly’s guitar and are looking to learn some sing-along campfire tunes, I dare say this is not the book you need. (And if you do manage to learn "Tom Dooley" via this book, you’ll be calling out the chords to your campfire confrères as "G major" and "D dominant 7" instead of "G" and "D7" like everybody else!)

That said, let’s turn to the final section of this book, Sound and Amplification. Somewhat misleadingly, it concerns only amplification by magnetic pickups. Electric
guitars and amps, in short, are discussed, to the exclusion of a wide (and ever-growing) variety of piezo pickups and mini-microphones for acoustic guitar. Nevertheless, it is an interesting section. In it, Chapman covers the basics of magnetic/electronic amplification: clean vs. distorted sound, tube vs. solid state circuitry, reverb, particular famous amps (Vox AC30, Mesa/Boogie, Fender Twin, Marshall stack). He even touches briefly on the topics of studio and home recording. The book then closes with a brief discussion of guitar care and maintenance.

Given my area of expertise (player, repairer and builder of acoustic guitars), I cannot comment on the amplification section much, except to say that I found it informative. I can say that Chapman’s discussion of care and maintenance will not lead you astray and may indeed prove extremely useful. It is a well-thought-out section and, with the exception of a few idiosyncratic British terms (e.g., "camber"), will help you and your repairperson discuss problems in a common language.

In closing (and in spite of my complaint), I think this is a wonderful book—for a specific audience. It’s not a book which will teach a beginner to play, though a beginner may well enjoy it for its other virtues. Rather, it’s a book for those who already play and who want to understand what they already do and expand upon what they already know. And it’s especially for those who want that together with a marvellous visual presentation of the guitar: past and present. There are plenty of folks like that out there. I’m one. I’ll but it!

Judy Threet
Calgary, Alberta

Recordings


The Judeo-Spanish song tradition rolls like a musical snowball, it seems, picking up a new layer in each country it passes through. Since Gerineldo is a Canadian Judeo-Spanish group, it is fitting that some Canadian snow be added to the thick layering of Biblical, Spanish, and Moroccan culture. This happens in "Me Vaya Kappará," a relatively modern song to which Solly Lévy has added his own verse about life in Canada’s cold climate.

Gerineldo was formed in Montreal, in 1981, to perpetuate and share the Judeo-Spanish songs of its Moroccan heritage. The voices of the four members, Oro Anahory-Librowicz, Judith Cohen, Solly Lévy, and Kelly Sultan Amar, blend magnificently in a full range of combinations, from Lévy’s virtuoso solo in "Las Prendas de Rahel," to the gorgeous blend of a mother and daughter dialogue by Cohen and Amar in "Ay Madre." The mother’s voice and the daughter’s voice are recorded on two separate tracks, bringing poignant realism to their conversation.

Traditional instruments lend authenticity and flavour to the recording. Instruments include the oud (Middle Eastern lute), derbuka (single-headed drum), bendir (frame drum), sonaja (tambourine), vielle (medieval fiddle), tar (long-necked lute) and the by now familiar recorder. The upcoming fourth cassette will also include a Moroccan-style folk violinist. A pleasing variety is achieved by the alternating of pure a capella selections with songs accompanied by spirited and rhythmic instrumentation. "Ay Madre," with its a capella blend of a mother’s and daughter’s pure voices, is flanked on either side by quick and rhythmic selections. The song after "Ay Madre" even includes the astounding barwala, or ululation, that distinctive guttural shriek heard on joyous occasions in North Africa and the Middle East.

The themes vary widely too. Here we have romance, death by heartbreak, weddings, lessons in Biblical and Medieval history, a cycle of Jewish holidays, from Simhat Torah to Purim to Passover and back to Simhat Torah again. And of course, indispensable in a collection of Judeo-Spanish songs, we have a song to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, "Ya Viene el Señor." I have always loved the story of a little baby, and of two women, each claiming that she was the mother. Both women went to the wise King Solomon, who would determine who the real mother was. "Cut the baby in two", ordered King Solomon, and of course one woman cried out, "No! Don’t hurt the baby. Give it to the other woman." And so it was clear, she was the real mother. This tale is retold in the song, "El Juicio de Rey Salomón."

The culture portrayed in these songs appears at first to be rigidly straight-laced. Adultery is punishable by murder, and a mother-in-law checks to make sure that the new bride is a virgin. But a lusty erotic imagery dances, thinly veiled, through the songs.

This is an important collection. While the liner notes are spirited and informative, I wish that Gerineldo would include the words and translations of the songs. You’ve created cassettes and a video, Gerineldo. When will you be putting out a book? These songs need to be listened to, but they also need to be sung. With a little help in printed form, more of us could add these marvelous Judeo-Spanish songs to our own repertoires.

Nomi Kaston
Calgary, Alberta
Beginnings (title also in Ukrainian: Pochatky), 1991. One compact disc (TMCD 141) featuring "Trubka" (see below) with separate insert sheet featuring group photo, bilingual (Ukrainian/English) list of song titles, acknowledgements, and production credits. Recorded and mixed in Edmonton at Anvil Sound Studios. Produced and distributed by Trubka Ukrainian Musical Ensemble, c/o 11127 —129 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5M 0Y6.

This recording from Edmonton salutes the centenary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada (1891-1991) and features the talents of three young males (Ralph Sorochan: accordion, keyboards, vocals; Jodie Watsko: drums and percussion, and Tim Zaharichuk: keyboards, vocals) who call themselves "Trubka," meaning "horn" in English. The accompanying notes suggest that the trio is representative of the third generation of Ukrainian Canadians, a matter that triggers a number of questions relating to the continuity of Ukrainian musical traditions in this country. Some of these questions are raised below.

Twelve pieces constitute Beginnings/Pochatky, the title given to this well-produced album of seemingly unbridled enthusiasm. Seven of these are cited as "traditional folksongs"—perennial hits from the Old Country canon that together with the remaining five items are performed as works that belong to the genre of Ukrainian Canadian party-dance. The polka and waltz dominate as bouncy rhythms that carry all. Nonetheless, distinctive signs of originality surface in the group’s intriguing arrangement for item no. 3 ("My Thoughts/Dumy moi," with text by the national poet of Ukraine, T.H. Shevchenko), its revolutionary rendition for no. 7 ("In the Field of the Three Wells/ Oi, u poli try krynchen'y"), and its acoustic portrayal of the blowing wind in no. 9, a favorite among prairie Ukrainians ("The Blowing Wind/ Viter vie," with words and music ascribed to F. Chytrybok).

The focus on sound (rather than text) as the primary acoustic vehicle for transmission of musical ethnicity reappears in no. 4 ("The Muddy Water Flows/ Teche voda kalamutna"), an import from the Soviet Ukrainian repertoire, like nos. 10 and 11 as well. This process of borrowing commonly obtains nowadays almost exclusively by listening to other sound recordings—a phenomenon that marks a radical departure from Ukrainian country music’s origins as a purely oral creativity unaccustomed to mechanical reproductive intermediaries of any kind.

The most innovative item in this album is no.5 ("With a Heartache/Z dushevnym boliu") featuring music and lyrics composed by the trio itself. This in itself confirms the tradition’s continuing viability.

Robert B. Klymasz
Canadian Museum of Civilization
Hull, Québec

Larry Kaplan. Worth All the Telling. Folk Legacy CD-122. Folk-Legacy Records, Sharon Mountain Rd., Sharon, CT 06069, USA; also Larry Kaplan, 7 Dennison St., Essex, CT 06426, USA

Worth All the Telling is an acoustic recording worth all the getting for any folk enthusiast (Canadian or otherwise). I first heard one of Larry Kaplan’s songs, "Song for Gale," sung by Saskatoon singer Paddy Tutty, and immediately wanted the album for my collection.

Kaplan is essentially a storyteller, and he tells some fine stories through songwriting on this CD. All seventeen numbers are written by him, including two instrumentals. Packaging of the recording includes brief notes and complete lyrics.

The strength in most of his songs lies in the articulation of the value and charm of the ordinary. Kaplan is able to capture events, situations and spoken phrases of the so-called common folks and project them into music. After even a few casual listenings to this recording, I often found myself humming excerpts from the songs and recalling phrases along with melodies. I even chuckled to myself, and out loud, while remembering the more humorous portions. Examples of phrases that have really jumped out at me during a time or two of listening include:

"...won’t matter to me if you sing ‘em that well."

"Turn the boat around..."
succeeded in producing a valuable addition to anyone's collection of recorded music.


On this ambitious disc, folk festival and studio stalwarts Ken and Chris Whiteley attempt to take listeners on a historical-geographical tour of the blues from inception to present times, and from the Mississippi Delta to Toronto. Too bad the tour isn’t worth the price of your ticket.

The production, by the brothers, is fine: sparkling clean without sounding too uptown-high-tech for the blues. The choice of tunes is well thought out, with regional styles from the Georgia Sea Islands, New Orleans, Kansas City, Memphis, and of course Chicago and the Mississippi Delta, as well as one fine original, "We Don't Talk," which sits alongside these chestnuts like it belongs there.

The cover and liner notes, however, treat this material like the dry stuff of a classroom lecture series on the history of blues, listing regions, styles and dates without the passion and writerly savvy of, say, Robert Palmer or Peter Guralnick, who can convey the information in a few words while giving a sense of the social context and life experience of the original artists.

Although Gene Taylor plays great, understated piano throughout, and Colin Linden’s slide solo lifts an otherwise pleasant version of "Wee Baby Blues" into a hotter zone, the playing for the most part is too cautious and considered, when this music cries out for an exuberant, kick-out-the-jams recklessness. This is a language of joy in the face of pain, of good times 'til you sweat, and what comes across here is (largely) didactic. There are some welcome exceptions, however. "Memphis Jug Blues," with the brothers over-dubbing themselves into an entire jug band, has the right kind of string band with a backbeat feel (not surprising when you consider the Whiteleys’ work in the Original Sloth Band), but it never gets beyond its uninspiring vocal performance.

Chris Whiteley’s harmonica on the Sonny Terry (or Blind Boy Fuller) tune "Custard Pie" is a nice homage to Terry’s rhythmic, chordal style, but his Little Walter licks are uninspired and annoying. Walter Jacobs’s style was full of rich, broad bottom notes and mellow, controlled highs; the harmonica here mostly sits in a single dynamic space, distracting from the impact of the songs.

The band, all of them more than competent players, sound exactly like a bunch of studio musicians playing on someone’s "project" recording; the grooves are played correctly, without passion or excitement or much feel. Musicianship without passion is a pretty dry exercise.

Occasionally a performer comes along who is capable of blending entertaining performance with educational discourse; Taj Mahal is perhaps the most popular example in the field of roots and blues. But, with the wealth of great blues re-issues now out on CD, the notion of a group of urban, journeyman blues musicians leading anyone on "A Journey Through The Blues" just doesn’t ring true.

Tim Williams
Calgary, Alberta

[Tim Williams’s acoustic blues trio, Triple Threat, was nominated for a Juno this year.]

Uisce Beatha. The Mystic of Baja. Cassette, UBCT01. 10 Lundy Lane, London, Ontario N6C 3G5.
Jimmy George. A Month of Sundays. CD, WSCD-001. 6 —155 O’Connor Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1T3.

The Pogues have a lot to answer for, both good and bad. With their hybrid mix of Celtic and punk, Shane McGowan and crew went on to influence a whole generation of musicians with similar sensibilities, from successful recording groups like The Men They Couldn’t Hang and Spirit of the West to unsigned acts such as Winnipeg’s Dusty Rhinos and who knows how many more.

It’s my belief that every city has a Pogues-clone band playing in some little pub or bar. Some great; some with more enthusiasm than talent. Some of them will go on to grow as artists and shed their more Poguish leanings as they find their own voices the way Spirit of the West did; others will either still be playing in those little-pubs and bars who knows how many years from now (the way you can still find Clancy Bros. clones still cranking out one more version of "The Black Velvet Band"), or they’ll just fade away.

Which is pretty much the way it is for any type of music. Someone has to start the ball rolling, and if the Pogues have gone on to inspire some really bad or derivative bands, they’ve also opened the door for Celtic music to an audience that might never have heard it otherwise. And while few could match McGowan at the height of his songwriting abilities, we’ve certainly seen some great musicians move on from under his shadow, including the new edition of the Pogues sans-McGowan. Here are a few recent Canadian versions to join the ranks.

Uisce Beatha are a Halifax-based band that originally played out of London, Ontario. Their most recent release, The Mystic of Baja, is a collection of good-time pub rhythms that hide some serious material when you stop to
Whether taking the lead on a dance tune, or backing up a word. Equally at home with the fiddle or various plucked string instruments, he brings a rare verve and sense of spontaneity to his impressively precise musicianship. Whether taking the lead on a dance tune, or backing up a song, he’s that preferred musician who knows that the notes one leaves out are just as important as those you play.

But while he shines as a musician, his singing lacks range and isn’t on quite the same par as his gift for instrumentation. Which makes his pairing with Linda Miller—an expatriate of Ottawa who has recently moved back to the area—such a serendipitous career choice. Miller has a lovely voice, equally at home on traditional material like the haunting "Fhir a Bhata," or more adventurous offerings such as "Sleepers Awake," written by Mike Heron of ISB-fame.

When you combine Miller’s singing with Curry’s songwriting, great instrumental backings and a few dance tunes, you have the makings of a fine recording which A Welcome At Your Door certainly proves to be. Also recommended is last year’s self-titled album by Curry’s electric Celtic band, Six Mile Bridge.

Linda Miller & Nathan Curry. A Welcome At Your Door. Visibly Shak’n Records, 1993; 46:05 min Cassette; Cat.# VS 001 219A Flora St., Ottawa, Ontario, K1R 5R6.

For about as many years as there has been a Celtic music scene in the Nation’s Capitol, Nathan Curry has been a part of it, playing in sessions and at the local clubs and festivals—sometimes solo, sometimes for various theatre groups, sometimes in bands such as Wickentree and Six Mile Bridge, sometimes in various one-off permutations. Lately, he appears to be concentrating much of his energy on his team-up with vocalist Linda Miller.

Curry is a superior musician in the best sense of the word. Equally at home with the fiddle or various plucked string instruments, he brings a rare verve and sense of spontaneity to his impressively precise musicianship. Whether taking the lead on a dance tune, or backing up a song, he’s that preferred musician who knows that the notes one leaves out are just as important as those you play.

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Charles de Lint
Ottawa, Ontario

In 1924, my husband and I spent our honeymoon at Buck Lake. We were chauvinists as my folks’ home. Everyone came on horseback or by wagons and they carried out some of the furniture so we could dance. No one could get a musician so finally Gilbert Siegel, a young boy who had a small mouth organ, played, and away we danced. Before they left, we had to promise to have a dance at the Buck Lake Hall, and this time we had Mr. Savage playing the violin and Mr. Haggland on the accordion. We danced until morning. It was my twentieth birthday. All in all it cost us very little, and Mr. Haggland settled for waltz with the bride. We thought it quite incredible, but also very nice.

Mary Wickham. Packhorse to Pavement (Buck Lake, Alberta)
Loretto Reid & Brian Taheny. The Golden Dawn. Reta Ceol, 1993; 24:34 min CD; Cat.# WPCD9301. 1561 Williamsport Dr. Mississauga, Ontario, L4X 1T7.

One of the big problems with too many of the more recent albums of Celtic music is the choice of material that gets recorded. Too often the tunes and songs are so familiar, they’ve grown tiresome. Or the musicians have tracked down deliberately obscure tunes, or obscure versions of more familiar ones, seemingly oblivious as to why they were obscure in the first place (they weren’t any bloody good). Or worse, the musicians take the familiar tunes and do bizarre arrangements of them, simply for the sake of being different, rather than because of any intrinsic artistic statement they wish to make, which can be plain irritating.

One solution to the above can be writing one’s own tunes, but let’s face it. Virtuosos though some of our favorite traditional musicians might be, not everyone has the gift of penning a good tune. And rarer still are those who can give us a whole album’s worth, instead of merely one or two. But happily there are exceptions to every rule, and Sligo flute player Loretto Reid (now based in Mississauga, Ontario) is definitely one such exception.

I first fell in love with her music not knowing who I was listening to. I was watching a CBC special called Gross-isle about the quarantine island for Irish immigrants to Canada fleeing the potato famine and was very taken with the haunting sound-track that accompanied the voice-over and images that told the story. The credits, unfortunately, went by too fast for me to catch the composer or musicians. That only happened when, after ordering The Golden Dawn, I discovered in some accompanying material that Loretto Reid had not only written and performed the terrific album in hand, ably joined by her musical partner Brian Taheny on guitar, dobro, fiddle, banjo and mandolin, but she had also been responsible for that moving soundtrack.

The real telling point with an album of original material such as this is how well it sits next to the tradition from which the composer got her inspiration. Reid’s music passes the test with flying colours. The tune sets on The Golden Dawn, from waltzes like the opening cut through to the various airs, reels and jigs, could all easily be traditional tunes. They feel as though they’ve been played in sessions for years and in fact, unless you’re familiar with the one set of traditional reels on the album, I doubt you’d be able to tell the difference. The production of this recording is pristine and the playing gorgeous, from the tone of Taheny’s fiddling and his exquisite accompaniments to the sweet roll and attack of Reid’s flute, whistle and concertina playing. The recording may only be EP-length, but it makes up in quality what it lacks in quantity. Besides, you can always do what I invariably do when I put it on and that’s set your CD player to "repeat."

Charles de Lint

I remember Mr. Wilkinson, the Anglican minister, being at a Patriotic Society concert at a nearby country school. After the concert and lunch were over, the younger people quite naturally wanted to dance away what remained of the night. One older woman among those present objected very strongly to this, because, she said, it would be disrespectful to the "cloth." Mr. Wilkinson noted the disturbance at the dishwashing area, where this one lady upheld her objections to the dance, and asked a schoolboy what was upsetting the ladies. "The old one," answered the schoolboy, "says it ain’t proper to dance where there’s a preacher." Mr. Wilkinson moved to the piano, sat down on the stool, called loudly, "Everybody waltz!" and began to play.

Mrs. Robert Maier, Shortgrass Country (Foremost, Alberta)

Rules posted at Community Hall, 1929:
1. No Dancing without coats
2. No Smoking Near Stage or Front of Main Dancing Hall
3. No Drinking Allowed on the Premises
4. No Excessive Noise or Shouting in the Hall.

The English Colony (Nightingale, Alberta)

Stop the Press

Last minute word came on this Festival event:
July 4 and 5, 1994
Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre's 2nd Annual Traditional Powwow Annual
Lake Ontario Park, Kingston, Ontario
Seya Whitefeather (Chairperson)
Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre, 26 Garrett St., Kingston, Ontario, K7C 1H0, (613)-548-7096
Traditional drums and dancers, cultural foods, native crafts. 9-6 with grand entry at 11:00 AM. Family event—come one, come all. No alcohol or drugs permitted. Not responsible for loss or damage or injury.