The Irish Descendants. Gypsies and Lovers. WEA CD-98237

The Irish Descendants are gradually gathering a large and loyal following across the country. Appearances on "Rita and Friends" on CBC-TV, and CBC Radio's late "Swinging on a Star," have begun to let the country know about this group.

A recent sold-out concert at the Calgary Folk Club brought out some "downhomers," who cheered, clapped and stomped their way through many of the songs, sometimes to the chagrin of the regular patrons.

Since the release of Look to the Sea in 1993, two members have been added to the group, and their instruments (keyboard, flute and percussion) bring a balance to the performance, to produce on stage a sound that is "just like the record."

Lead vocals, split between Con O'Brien and D'Arcy Broderick, are matched to the songs, which range from traditional to local (Maritimes) and Irish.

A surprise on the album is Donovan's "Catch the Wind." I wonder if Donovan ever thought his song would be recorded by a Newfoundland folk group 30 years after he wrote it in the early 60s!

Along with "Lovers" and "Raggle Taggle Gypsy"—hence the title, Gypsies and Lovers—"A Walk in the Irish Rain" and the novelty song "Rattlin' Bog" comprise the "inland" part of the recording which I mentioned (tongue-in-cheek) in my review of the previous record [29:1, p. 48].

Sea songs have not been forgotten. A rousing version of Stan Rogers' "Barrett's Privateers" contrasts the beautiful "Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's"—the final resting place of a tired, aged fisherman.

The current situation of the fisheries in Newfoundland is not neglected, in the poignant "Will They Lie There Evermore?"

The variety of instruments used are well chosen, and fit the arrangements for each song. Also, a welcome addition to the CD is the inclusion of the words, although I wish more information was provided about the songs and songwriters.

In performance, the group's main object is to present music, so sparse comment is made between songs. Two standing ovations and encores at the Calgary concert showed that the group has good support from fans in the Calgary area.

—Dave Foster
Calgary, Alberta

Mary Knickle. Who Will Take the Throne? Windward Productions, CD WPP CD-02. Valerie Enterprises, Woodburn Road, RR #1, Hannon, Ontario, LOR 1P0.

Originally from Nova Scotia, singer-songwriter Mary Knickle is now based in Toronto. Her first cassette-only release, On the Wind and the Sea, was firmly based in the Nova Scotia tradition, featuring an even mix of traditional and original songs. The new CD doesn't ignore either the sea ("Female Sailor," with its shanty overtones, and "Sea Fever") or the tradition (the album includes a fine variant on "Barbara Allen"), but it moves further afield as well.

There are songs here of dreams and muses, winter landscapes and castles, MicMac melodies and Christmas gifts. The instrumental back-up is quite modern, but many of the cuts retain a sense of the past, with a sax taking the place of pipes, keyboards the place of a harp. Knickle's vocal style is a little reminiscent of Loreena McKennitt, but I mention that as a touchstone rather than a strict comparison, for Knickle remains her own woman throughout.

—Charles de Lint
Ottawa, Ontario


For all the percussion and flute-type wind instruments listed in its credits, the performances on Knee Deep in Moon Shavings aren't as adventurous as one might first assume. The various recorders, flutes, drums and other percussion add colour, certainly, but it's really an album of a cappella songs, delivered in a high clear classical vocal style reminiscent of Joan Baez or Mary O'Hara, which will either appeal or turn off listeners, depending on how they feel about that style.

The unfortunate thing about the album is the decision to include too much tired material. Do we really need more recordings of "She Moves Through the Fair," "Mormond Braes," "False Night on the Road," "Three Ravens" or "I'll Tell Me Ma"? Such old war horses can work in concert, but they need a fresh perspective when put on record, and they don't get that here.

Which isn't to say that this is a bad album. It's just that it strikes me more as a good souvenir of a Sheela-Na-Gigh performance as opposed to an album that stands on its own in terms of its originality.

—Charles de Lint