A Peak in Darien

If you read last issue's introduction you might understand the title—but we still need a catchy name for this feature. Any suggestions? (And, I guess we don’t all use the term "product," even though it’s spreading—the insidious mindfog is creeping over more of us as time goes by...)

Recordings

Boob artists, only some 325 have an entry in the guide. With even a cautionary note, for the cover does suggest a little of what is BrdonFicklling. PAD 105D ~~shFi<klleClub, P.O Box 823, North Cambridge, MA02140, Rick Fielding. LifeliBC. CD-123. Foll-Lepcy Reco1Is, P.O. Box 1148, 85 Sharon MINntain Rd., Bill BCMIme and SbaDn.xI Jolin_. Victmy TraiD. Fn:e Radio CD 001. Fn:e Radio Rec.-ds, 6814 -110 Rjck B.x:k1Ie1'. Trouble With the M.,... Harby Dar Music, Box 224, Wha1etown, B.C. VOP 1111 (X;SIO, USA

In giving tags or labels to the performers, Wilburn and his currently listed on the Board of Directors of The Sing Out Corporation) to write a three page Foreword. Cristall tells us at the start that the book "is going to change your life. It is also, if you have any imagination at all, going to cost you a lot of money." He suggests that if you are not going to use it as a buyer’s catalogue you don’t buy it. I reply that the book does act as a quite full overview of what is happening throughout Canada in that commercial category labelled "folk music."

Access is through the Artist Index (where the page references for the main entries are in bold type), the 84 page Song Index, and, in the book’s main body, the alphabetical listing of the highlighted artists or groups. As they appear, under each name is from one to three descriptive tags in which Wilburn places the performer(s)/performance(s), followed by an introduction to the artist(s), a little background with pointers to references for the main entries are in bold type), the 84 page Song Index, and, in the book’s main body, the alphabetical listing of the highlighted artists or groups. As they appear, under each name is from one to three descriptive tags in which Wilburn places the performer(s)/performance(s), followed by an introduction to the artist(s), a little background with pointers to contents. Wilburn gives each disc a rating on a four-star scale plus a check for those specially recommended.

In giving tags or labels to the performers, Wilburn and his helpers (he lists several) provide a view of what they mean by "folk." In his Introduction, Wilburn writes:

To the probable distress of musicologists and folklorists, I’ve used the term folk to include the spectrum

Comptes-rendus/Reviews

Books


What the...! Why the Folk?

The title on the cover of Northern Journey: A Guide to Canadian Folk Music differs from the catalogue listing (from which I purchased the book), which appears on the title page, in that it adds the words on CD. Perhaps this was intended as a cautionary note, for the cover does suggest a little of what is to be found in Gene Wilburn’s 1995 buyer’s reference. Half the front cover is a delightful smiling photo of a young fiddler, Cyrena Eddy of St. John’s, Newfoundland. There is an irony here, for the name of Ms. Eddy does not appear among the over 1300 names in the 14 page Artist Index. Who then does appear? First, performers who have been on CDs released in the past decade. The recorded performances are thus predominantly recent, but there is a representation of CD-reissued material from earlier vinyl and/or cassette tape productions. Of all those artists, only some 325 have an entry in the guide. With even that many, one wonders what criteria Wilburn uses to call all their performances "Canadian Folk Music."

Gene Wilburn is aware that the title needs explanation. He enlisted Gary Cristall (for 15 years Artistic Director of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, now the Jazz, Folk and World Music Officer at the Touring Office of the Canada Council, and

Orexis. Night Visions. GC1D 1152. Green Lisset Records, 43 Beaver Brook Rd., Danbury, CT 06810, USA


Three Strong Winds. We Are Here. Anabillis AM 451. Jim Edmondson, 1023 E. 21st Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V5V 186

Keith Walter. Give Me Your Hand. (no address on packaging)


The actual labels that are used reflect this list just quoted, but in greater and subtler combinations. To get into the mind of computer systems analyst Wilburn as he struggled to categorize items within "the spectrum," I have gone through the alphabetical entries to note how they were tagged. Here follows a review of the actual wording.

As said above, each of the 325 performers or groups is given one to three labels. A few labels have just one word, and most are longer, many being composites. As an example, here are the first two lines of the first entry in The Artists section. It is for the Celtic rock band 1755.

1755
FRENCH CANADIAN; CELTIC/ACADIAN ROCK;
SINGER-SONGWRITERS

The words found in the tags may be put into several piles, namely:

1. Broad popular music categories (marked with * if always in combinations): folk, blues, country, jazz, bluegrass, jugband, rock*, klezmer, polka, show tunes, salsa, gospel*, rockabilly*.

2. Regions or ethnic groups: French Canadian, Acadian, Maritimes, Celtic, Irish, Bolivian/Andean, Haitian, Latin American, South African, South Indian, Sephardic, Nubian, Caribbean, West African, European, Middle Eastern, Slavic, Gypsy, Yiddish, First Nations, Gaelic, and Scottish.


4. Creative involvement and aim of the performer(s): singer-songwriter(s), composer, humour, humour/satire/political [or social] commentary, and folk/satire/humour.


6. Time orientation:
   (a) The Past: traditional folk, traditional/contemporary folk, traditional instruments, traditional Scottish, traditional/contemporary Canadian-Irish Folk, old-style songs, folk/jazz/old time, "rootsy" pop, Nubian roots music, and traditional Chinese instruments.
   (b) The Future/Now: avant garde folk/Celtic, folk/new age, world folk/jazz percussion, worldbeat jazz, Canadian-Latin fusion, and Caribbean fusion.

Since the book asserts that it is about Canadian Folk Music, how does the word "folk" appear in the labels? As a single word, "folk" is found in 39 entries, 36 of them with the additional tag "singer-songwriter." Five entries are described as "traditional folk" [Anita Best/Pamela Morgan, Moira Cameron, Jean Hewson, Michael Mitchell, and Len Wallace]. "Folk" more generally appears in combination with "pop," "country," "jazz," "blues," "gospel," "rock," "bluegrass," "Western," "Maritimes," "Celtic," and "choral," often joined to two of these words, e.g., "folk/pop/country." Sometimes "folk takes a secondary position. What is the difference between "folk/country" and "country/folk," which both appear?

There are two other clusters where other words predominate. "Fiddle" nearly always appears with such other words as "Maritime," "Cape Breton," "Acadian," "French Canadian," "Irish," and "country." The other word, "Celtic," is always in combination, most often with an instrument, but shockingly also as "Celtic rock/jazz," etc.

The only alphabetical entry without descriptive labels for the artists is Anthologies. This group of 26 CDs is broadly representative and has hundreds of performers; each CD is rated, ten of them given special checks.

To aid in finding a CD, Wilburn provides 13 pages of Record Company Addresses. A final list of 46 Folk Festivals in Canada in all 12 provinces and territories may be intended for the reader who hopes to hear the performers in person. The festival directory may also be of service to the ambitious, hopeful, and perhaps hungry artists.

Whatever these performers' hopes and dreams may be, they will welcome the publicity afforded them by the publisher of Northern Journey and the sales that may follow. How many will consider their product "Canadian Folk Music" is a question. However, the value of the book as a catalogue is in no doubt. It also has worth as an overview of what is current in a specialized niche of the music business, together with a glance at the past through the CD reissues. If the books finds a market, an update will likely follow before too long.

Another way to view this tome is to compare one's exploration of it to one's experience at a folk music festival where six workshop stages are on the go. As a festival veteran, I am fully gratified if I find 16% of the offerings to my taste. The reader may be that lucky with Northern Journey.

-Phil Thomas
Vancouver


The recent publication of two collections of oral narratives and traditional tales is more than ample proof that folktales and legends are not mere survivals in today's Canada, but actually thrive and flourish in the rich soil of Canada's cultural heritage. It is more than appropriate that the guiding lights who authored and compiled these two collections were perhaps the two fore-
most folklorists in twentieth-century Canada.

The twenty-two legends Fowke retold in this slim but nonetheless excellent collection span four centuries of Canadian history: from Sir Humphrey Gilbert's encounter with a sea serpent off the coast of Newfoundland in 1583 to several reports from the late 1950s involving ghostly and spectral goings-on at the home of William Lyon Mackenzie, Toronto's first mayor and the organizer of the uprising of 1837. Along the way the reader will encounter a Scotsman turned chief of a native tribe in Nova Scotia; a man, said to be a sorcerer, who saved the French colony from capture by a British fleet; and a woman warrior who led her people in battle via a prophecy that their fortunes would increase as long as she was their leader—just to mention a few of the more unusual legends herein retold.

Fowke included several major types of legends in Notes From the Continuing Tradition: there are several religious legends, such as the vision of Saint Anne given to a French soldier in 1690 and the tale of Father Jean de la Brosse, who foretold his own death in 1783 and whose demise was accompanied by the simultaneous and unexplained ringing of church bells throughout Quebec. There are several legends in which native and European traditions are merged, as in the tale of Thompson of the Dirk, where a Scotsman, forced to flee his native land, according to tradition, became the chief of a local Indian tribe in Cape Breton, and the unusual legend of La Perouse, where the Tlingit creation myth is superimposed upon the tribal account of its first contact with Europeans in 1786. There are historical legends involving personages from Canadian history, such as the tale of an Irish woman of high birth who, tradition says, mothered the first European child born in Newfoundland; the story of the burial of Tecumseh, legendary Shawnee chief in 1813; and the strange tale of John Montgomery, a participant in the uprising of 1837, who foretold the eventual fate of his accusers, judge, and jurors at his trial and who outrivaled most of them. There are several legends of a maritime nature involving several noteworthy ships, including the American privateer Young Teazer, sunk during the War of 1812 to avoid capture by the British and whose ghost has haunted the eastern coast of Canada since 1813; The Empress of Ireland, wrecked in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in 1914, whose sinking is attributed to a curse placed upon its captain three years earlier by English wife-murderer Hawley Crippen; and the tragedy of the sealing vessel Newfoundland in 1914 with its ghostly aftermath. Fowke has also included several legends where supernatural manifestations play a major role, such as the MacKenzie River ghost, the Baldoon Mystery, and several tales of local persons said to practice witchcraft and magic, such as John Troyer of Long Point and Mother Barnes of Plum Hollow.

Fowke is always quick to point that although many legends are by their nature specific in time and place and limited to a particular location, they often nonetheless exhibit similarities to other parallels and types in places far afield from their supposed happening. Although the legends she has included are Canadian in locale, content, and character, some of them are related to tale or narrative types of an international nature: two examples are the tale of La Corriveau, the Québécoise spouse murderer, which has definite similarities to such well-known stories as Charles Perrault's Bluebeard, the English Mr. Fox, and such Anglo-North American ballads as "Reynardine" and "Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight"; and the legend of the woman warrior, which will remind many of those ballads in which women dump their domesticity and go off to seek adventure, either joining the military in search of glory or a lover, or going off to rob and purloin on the King's highway, in such ballads as "The Female Drummer," "Jackie Monroe," and "William Taylor." Each tale is accompanied by background notes on its origin and original source in print, listing informants where possible; there is also a general section of source references, a bibliography for those wishing to read the original texts, and several indexes of tale motifs and legend types found elsewhere in world folklore. This collection from a truly gifted folklorist offers entertainment, enjoyment, and instruction.

Legends are often, but not always, stories that take place in the recent historical past, involve actual persons, places or events, and are usually believed by both teller and listener alike; folktales, especially non-realistic or wonder tales, are of a more fanciful nature, and non-temporal, taking place in once-upon-a-time setting, and usually involve a suspension of disbelief on the part of the narrator and hearer alike, and more often than not, these kinds of tales serve to entertain an audience or else instruct the listeners in some form of ethical behavior or moral lesson. Whereas Fowke's collection centers on the legend as told in Canada, past and present, the stories found in Helen Creighton's Folktale Journey Through the Maritimes are non-realistic or wonder tales. In their introduction to this volume, Ronald Kaplan and Michael Taft point out that this is not merely an assortment of traditional folktales, though if it were, it would still be worth its weight in narrative gold, but a journey on several important and major levels. This was not just a decades-long journey Creighton took to collect tales through the Maritimes; it was a journey of tales, most of them from their ancient roots in European tradition to the shores of eastern Canada, where many are still told today; this was a journey of storytellers, who were steeped in the love of tradition and were fortunate enough to encounter Creighton during her numerous field trips to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. This was not just a journey of a collector with often primitive recording equipment into areas often hard to reach save by foot, but a journey of the heart, soul, and spirit. It is an account of the ongoing endurance of tales from one generation to another.

Little did Creighton realize in the summer of 1928, during a field trip to Nova Scotia, ostensibly looking for pirate songs, that when she met the Hartland brothers, Enis and Richard, a new and extraordinary world would soon open to her eager vision. This is a book of interactive words and images: not just the tales of the tellers, but their own words to Creighton and her observations of the larger social context, including the community importance of the sessions of tale-telling, which were an integral part of community life and development.

Creighton's collection includes a number of different types of traditional tales: animal tales and jocular stories, formula tales and tales of magic and fantastic marvels, trickster tales and personal ghost stories and other supernatural happenings. Here
are Maritime variants of well-known tale types: Cinderella, Jack, the devil as card player, the fox as thief and trickster, the animal bride or bridegroom transformed to human by act of faith and love, out-riddling the judge, and many more besides. Gaps exist in Creighton's notes, such as the tale types of each story, and the dates and names and locales of the informants, but were added by the editors. As Taft and Kaplan so aptly put it, Creighton never quite knew what she would encounter or hear, so this truly is a journey which will take the reader where it will, and the roads followed are numerous and often hard to foresee.

The tellers from whom Creighton collected these tales were as diverse in origin and tradition as were the very tales themselves, traditions as varied as English and Acadian French, Irish, Scottish, and German, and in one case, two of Creighton's informants, Louis and Evangeline Pictou, represented the native Micmac of Nova Scotia. Some of the most memorable moments of this collection are Creighton's own dialogue with several of the more evocative storytellers such as Laura McNeal of West Pubnico, Nova Scotia, or the Hartland brothers of Southeast Passage, or Wilmott McDonald of Newcastle, New Brunswick, both during and after their personal favorite tales were told to Creighton's eager ears. McNeal's "Cinderella," which begins the journey, and the Hartlands' "Jack the Servingman," MacDonald's "Sword of Brightness," and the three versions of "Big Claus and Little Claus," which end the journey, are truly memorable. But even with the last period of the last sentence of the last story, the journey never really ends. Many of the tellers may no longer be with us physically, but they live on in their tales, for stories never die, but go on and live in all of us. Among Creighton's many superb legacies are the tales in this important collection, and let us hope that somewhere in the places she so loved, folks are still telling these timeless and beloved tales of magic and laughter and enduring hope, which is what really good stories are all about.

—Robert Rodriguez
New York City
Recordings


Voilà un disque qui se distingue dans la production francophone-ontarienne. Des disques de folklore, il y en a bien entendu très peu en Ontario français; des disques de folklore qui présentent un répertoire original recueilli par l’artiste lui-même, Marcel Béneteau est le seul à l’avoir fait. En cela, il suit l’exemple des Raoul Roy, Yves Albert et le duo Breton-Cyr au Québec.


Sur ce disque, nous retrouvons un répertoire d’une très grande diversité: des complaintes médiévales, des chansons à répondre d’une grande originalité, des chansons épiques et religieuses, des chansons d’ivrogne et à boire et des chansons d’amour où sont abordés les grands thèmes folkloriques, tels le départ ou le retour du soldat, l’amoureuse éconduite, les idylles amoureuses, les fréquentations et les maarmariés. On reprochera à Béneteau un choix trop éclectique, mais c’est le prix à payer pour sortir des sentiers battus.


Marcel Béneteau est accompagné par des musiciens traditionnels de la région du Détroit à l’accordéon, au banjo, aux concertinas, aux cuillères, à la guitare, à la harpe celtique, à la mandoline et au violon. Comme il faut s’y attendre, les arrangements musicaux s’accorderaient davantage à la musique traditionnelle irlandaise, ce qui, malheureusement, ne convient pas toujours à l’esprit des chansons de tradition française. Pour cette raison, le chanteur a tendance à les interpréter d’une façon saccadée qui manque de légèreté. Celui-ci aurait gagné à s’adresser à un musicien arrangeur qui l’aurait conseillé et assisté dans la réalisation du disque, qui lui aurait permis de varier ses arrangements. Ainsi, la chanson "La Soirée des noces," par exemple, aurait mérité un accompagnement davantage approprié au caractère plaintif de la chanson. Par ailleurs, j’ai noté quelques problèmes de diction dus à la volonté de l’artiste d’imiter des prononciations archaïques. Ainsi, à quelques reprises, des « e » sont ouverts en « a », comme dans « espervier » prononcé « esparvier » ou « donnerais » prononcé « donnera », ou encore le « s » en « w » comme dans « voiles » prononcé « welles ». Ces efforts ne sont pas toujours justifiés et dérangent l’écoute.

Ma seule autre réserve va à la couverture de l’album conçue à partir d’une ancienne photo en noir et blanc. Malgré sa valeur patrimoniale, cette photo n’est pas du tout vendeuse. Elle a peu de liens avec le contenu du disque dont elle termine la présentation générale.

Marcel Béneteau nous offre donc un second disque au contenu unique, très bien documenté et qui nous en apprendra certes beaucoup sur la tradition orale française du Sud-Ouest de l’Ontario. À avoir dans sa discothèque.

Donald Deschenes
Sudbury, Ontario

Christy and Fred Cook. Mélange: Hammer Dulcimer Music. Borealis Music, PO Box 811, Bragg Creek, Alberta, T0L 0K0.

The word "mélange" is occasionally used in the English language as a substitute for "mishmash" and other words with a somewhat negative tone. This very positive work, however, uses "mélange" in its other meaning, simply to indicate variety, and the recording truly incorporates quite a bit more variety than one usually finds on recordings of hammer dulcimer music. It ranges in style from gypsies to Joplin and includes classics and original pieces, all played with the same ease and cleanliness of delivery throughout.

The recording opens with an original work written by Christy, "Rhapsody for Adrionna," in which one can find suggestions of Celtic music in part A and a combination of Greek music and a soft love song in part B. This is followed by two, back to back, works of Bach, deftly transcribed for two instruments. As in most of the tracks Christy plays standard hammer dulcimer here, while Fred plays bass hammer dulcimer. A solo work by Christy, in a similar vein, "Fugue II" written by D. Zipoli, follows as track 3, after which we take off on an Eastern European journey.

Gypsy music in general is vast in scope of style, with its influences cropping up in the folk music of many lands. Even here, in these few recorded tracks, the styles range from Roumania (1:5) (2:6) and Ukraine (1:4) to "The Klezmer Medley" (2:4). Within these musics Fred’s bass hammer dul-
cimer is especially effective. This is the instrument known in Hungary as the cimbalom, whose nature, for many years, totally mystified me when I heard it played on the awesome recordings of Tata Miranda and his Hungarian Gypsy Orchestra that I first discovered in my youth. The Moorish influences can also be heard here as part of these melodies and they make an interesting adjunct to the music as a whole. The works require some deft instrument changes, and some multitracking that adds flute and drum to a number of the tunes, both played by Christy.

"Fairlight Mirage," an original work by Christy, departs from the other tracks by being somewhat typical of pensive pieces for hammer dulcimer, and Christy follows this with a solo work, "Rigaudon," written by J. Rameau, which has slight Celtic overtones and some interestingly complicated passages.

Reminiscing about Tom Lewis, and his singing, in preparation for reviewing his excellent new recording Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Singer!, my thoughts went back to my time in the Royal Navy, when the ships were changing from steam to diesel. Back in the days of steam it took twenty-four hours to get the ship's engine-room up to speed before we could sail, but, with diesel, we were off in no time. Tom's voice reminds me of the ship's engine-room up to speed before we could sail, but, with diesel, we were off in no time. Tom's voice reminds me of the diesel engines he has also left behind—instant power and off with a full head of steam.

The recording kicks off with "150 Days Out From Vancouver," based on the poem "The Ship's Good-Bye" written by his soul-mate Cecily Fox-Smith. Tom's on going love-affair with the works of Fox-Smith is readily apparent as one listens to the well-balanced tune, written by Tom, that so appropriately fits Fox-Smith's words. By reviving Fox-Smith's insightful poetry, Tom has also performed a great service to the West Coast's maritime heritage.

This is followed by the contemplative "Sirensong," written and sung by Tom, accompanied by Cherie Whalen on piano and with Grit Laskin (who never ceases to amaze) on Northumbrian small-pipes. "New York Girls" is taken (with a pinch of artistic licence) from Stan Hugill's Shanties From the Seven Seas. With the augmented chorus and the slightly outrageous musical accompaniment, I was reminded of a sailor's sing-a-long ashore and the leaves the listener with a feeling of satisfaction and peace.

Henry Purcell's Prelude to Suite No.5 in C major, both effective and welcome, follows as track 3 on side 2. After this "The Klezmer Medley" follows as a giant leap in diversity, and "Sunflower Slow Drag—a Ragtime Two Step," written in 1901 by Scott Joplin and Scott Hayden, is a small gem for lovers of good music—the sort of people who undoubtedly buy this type of music on tapes and CDs. The Roumanian "Wagon Serba Sirba din Carata" ends the recording with bounce and notable counterpoint. Hopefully we can look forward to further mixtures and melanges in future. The West Coast is a hot bed of hammer dulcimer players but Christy and Fred would be welcome anywhere.

—Mike Ballantyne
Cobble Hill, BC

Tom Lewis. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Singer! Self-Propelled Music, PO Box 1095, Salmo, BC, V0G1Z0.
Friends of Fiddler's Green are impeccable.

1 Cecily Fox-Smith is noticeable for her absence in a number of books, including both The Oxford Companion to English Literature and Lois Decker O'Neill's The Women's Book of World Record and Achievements. For those of you who might want to pursue her writings and collections, through reprints, used book stores, or the excellent Interlibrary Loan system, titles to request include A Book of Shanties, Songs and Chanties, Sailor Town Days, Sea Songs and Ballads, A Book of Famous Ships, Ship Alley, The Return of the Cutty Sark, Full Sail, and Tales of the Clipper Ships. Cecily, by the way, is pronounced "Sigh-slee", and you can ask Tom about that, too.

2 A version of "Blow, Boys, Blow." See Hugill, pp.226 et al.

—Mike Ballantyne

Gopher Baroque. Holdin’ Down the Fort. Great Lakes Recording Co. GB 95003. RR #1, Sydenham, Ontario K0H 2TO.

Gopher Baroque (great name!) are a trio from Sydenham, Ontario, who specialize in producing themed educational shows for schools and children’s audiences. Dawn Callan, Jan Singleton, and Terry Snider present a good variety of material on this CD, much of it written by themselves.

Callan is the main songwriter and has a real talent for seeing the human impact of historical incidents. In “Parson’s Harbour,” a wife recalls her memories of family and neighbours as she and her husband pack up their belongings to leave their dying outpost community and move to the city where they will have to stand alone. I particularly enjoyed her songs, "Somewhere in France," a sweet song of first World War love letters, and "It’s Colder Tonight," a country song which deserves to reach a large audience.

Many of the songs are inspired by Canadian history and geography. My review copy came with a background paper, and much of the sense of the songs would have been lost without it. Presumably financial constraints prevented Gopher Baroque from publishing informative sleeve notes with the CD, but this is a real shame, as the background information adds a lot.

All three band members are good singers and produce some lovely harmonies. They draw on both North American and Celtic influences, moving effortlessly between traditional love songs, rousing "singalong" material, and songs with a distinctly country feel.

Brent Mason. Down to Heaven. 3 Second Street, Apt. 2, St. John, New Brunswick E2K 3L3.

Brent Mason has been a staple on the New Brunswick music scene for a number of years. He has enjoyed success on a local and regional level, opening for such notable performers as Susan Aglukark and Lenny Gallant, but somehow national recognition has managed to elude him. With this release of his second recording, Down to Heaven, one gets the feeling that this is about to change for this prolific singer-songwriter. Brent categorizes himself as a "neo-folk" artist, and after listening to his work, you may be inclined to agree. After all, he does document his astute observations of a contemporary universe with gritty, unapologetic lyrics. His mission in song, however, bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the minstrels of long ago. Their stories, like Brent's, were gleaned from the shifting shadows where we have all taken refuge at one time or another. I get the impression, after listening to this CD a couple of times, that this thinking man's writer rises every morning and does a slow 360-degree turn on the centre line of life, then calls 'em as he sees 'em. Evidence of this is presented in the poetically poignant title track, "down to heaven." [capitalization sic] where a woman, over the monumental mind-game-playing age of 40, deals with the claustrophobic walls of loneliness and the ramifications that arise from her reactions. In setting up this scenario, Mason sings, "She comes in slow, still, and scared ... like her reflection." As the rest of the story unfolds, Mason will have you believing that you know, personally, just who it is he is singing about—and maybe you do.

Some of Brent's music will make you feel downright uncomfortable, and that is not entirely a bad thing, considering the subject matter. In "song for Mark Lepine," you will be struck by the courageous insight that Brent is able to bring to the disturbed mind of a madman. When I first heard this song played live, the hair on the back of my neck stood on end, and it renewed my resolve to never forget this senseless massacre. In a lighter vein, the bluegrass-backed tune "wrong again," Brent manages to take a tongue-in-cheek look at political correctness. If complacency has ever sneaked into a relationship...
that you have been involved in, then "don't touch me like a friend" just might strike a familiar chord with you. On the final track, "wicked rain," my favourite, Mason manages to capture creatively, in the seemingly effortless turn of a phrase, port towns like his own native Saint John.

The music on this CD definitely challenges the status quo. It is mostly about a man whose stories are his music. It can be dark and brooding at times, or insightfully enlightening, depending on your perspective on life. If you have never taken the time to see who lives in the shadows of your town, then perhaps it's time you did. Brent's music is frequently heard on Maritime CBC stations, and he has been a featured performer on Murray McLaughlin's Swinging on a Star.

_Sherree Gillcrist_
_Hampton, New Brunswick_

---

Laura Smith. B'tween the earth and my soul. Cornermuse Recordings, Box 34105, Scotia Square PO, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 1N0

I first encountered the magnificent voice of Laura Smith a couple of years ago on CBC television. She was singing at a community concert in Newfoundland. When she took to the stage with her commanding voice, as clear as a mountain stream, and proceeded to sing a song called "The Tide's After Shifting," a capella, I knew as soon as the hairs on the back of my neck settled back into place that I was watching a formidable talent, and one that the country would have no choice but to embrace wholeheartedly. This song, to the best of my knowledge, has not been recorded as yet, but it should be. Its genesis was primarily for a community theatre group to which Laura belonged in Cape Breton.

She is a transplanted Maritimer, having grown up in London, Ontario. We proudly claim her as one of our own, with the same warmth and possessiveness that we extend to her predecessors, Stan and Garnet Rogers (around here we tend to believe that those boys only vacationed in Ontario throughout the year but headed for the Maritimes when they needed a taste of home). It is no surprise to find that Laura has a solid background in poetry. Lyrically her work is as delightful to read as it is to listen to—gritty, honest emotion served up in a shimmering cauldron of diverse musical styles. Laura appears to be equally comfortable in all of the musical genres that present themselves on this CD. Whether it be the twine and the twine of the country core song "Four Letter Word," her haunting rendition of the traditional "My Bonny" or the jazzy, smoke-filled club sound of "Clean Up Your Own Backyard," they all receive her undivided attention. Her throaty voice has a rusty quality, like something that's stood in the wind just to feel its force, and, without overstating the obvious, is haunting, soul-searching, introspective and deeply personal, as are all her songs. One gets the feeling that Laura sings no differently when she's sitting on her bed than when she sings in public. That voice, with its soul-scratching honesty, is as unpretentious as the singer herself and the folk roots from which her work grows.

I had the pleasure of seeing Laura perform this past summer at the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival. The concert was wonderful, but I did find the band distracting. At times in the concert, the music, not the words, became the medium, and I wished that I could have "unplugged" Laura Smith. However, I did not find the same to be true of the recording. Personal options aside, don't make this recording just a singalong compilation. Take the time to really listen to the message. This gal has been everywhere and weathered many personal storms, and allows us, through her music, to walk inside the walls of experience that have shaped her life. Her husky voice, conditioned, I'm sure, with the salt spray of Nova Scotia's coastline, is a gift she offers to us all. All of the music on this CD makes me time travel to places that we all have been before. My favourite cuts on this recording will most likely not be yours, as you will find yourself inside the words of all the songs, but "My Bonny," "Duine Air Call," and "Whirlaround" all speak volumes to me. Proud to be a Canadian, you're damn right, and Laura Smith is one of the reasons I am.

_Sherree Gillcrist_

---

Trinity Troubadours. Trinity Troubadours. GCP015. Christopher Avard Eaton, 21 East Main Street, Sackville, New Brunswick EOC 3C0.

The trinity of Prince Edward Islanders—Christopher Eaton, Douglas Millar and Patricia Murray—present interpretations of 11 Canadian-penned folk songs as their nominations to the Canadian Folk Music Bulletin 30.2 (1996) ... 43

Trinity Troubadours. Trinity Troubadours. GCP015. Christopher Avard Eaton, 21 East Main Street, Sackville, New Brunswick EOC 3C0.

The trinity of Prince Edward Islanders—Christopher Eaton, Douglas Millar and Patricia Murray—present interpretations of 11 Canadian-penned folk songs as their nominations to the canon of songs that "define Canada through music." This collection includes compositions by Joni Mitchell, James Keelaghan, Stan Rogers and Spirit of the West, among others. The recording's instrumentation is nicely traditional, including guitar, mandolin, accordion, tin whistle and bodhran. There is an emphasis on sparsity of instrumentation and on vocal harmonizing. This approach provides some truly sincere and pleasant moments. Unfortunately, the line between vocal instrumental and intonational grace and clumsiness is quite often crossed. A repetitive rudimentary guitar style, severe intonational difficulties, especially in the tin whistle harmonies, and at times in the vocal harmonies, and some serious ensemble problems are inescapably distracting. Having said this, the Trinity Troubadours' intent and spirit are so clearly well-meaning and positive as to make their endeavour worthwhile.

_D.N.A. Cebuliak_
_Bragg Creek, Alberta_

I remember Mom most for her ability to simultaneously play the violin and dance to a Red River Jig tune
_Author unknown. Peace River Remembers (Peace River, Alberta)_{

For those who love fiddle music, especially the Maritime/Scottish variety, this album is a special treat. At the ripe old age of 17, Richard has released his third album (after Cutting the Bow and All Fired Up). The twelve tracks and 45 tunes explore his Scottish heritage, though thirteen of the tunes are composed by Richard himself in the tradition. Seven others are attributed to the likes of J.S. Skinner and J.M. Henderson, but most are "trad." In fact, several are titled simply "reel" or "jig," though some sport intriguing names such as "Democratic Rage" and "The Night We Had The Goat."

Most of the tracks are sets of tunes running to four and five minutes, and the combination of strathspeys and reels are reminiscent of Highland piping. Two tracks are airs by Richard: the lovely "Celtic Touch" and mournful "Memory of Dot MacKinnon." The album is rounded out by three sets of jigs.

The fiddling is more than lively; it downright rips a hole in the rug as you listen. Richard really "drives 'em," as they say in the Maritimes. This is a younger playing far beyond his years with confidence and intensity. Those new to strathspeys may find those rhythms odd, and old time fiddlers may be daunted by the relative obscurity many of the tunes. However, every one is played with style and precision. The production is also top notch.

Though this is a "fiddle" album of tunes, the superb backup musicians and the arrangements add considerably to the enjoyment. Kimberley Holmes's piano provides both rhythm and sparkling counterpoints. Skip Holmes on guitar adds wonderful intros to the sets and solid accompaniment. Dave MacIsaac, one of the top guitar players in any field, takes the melody on a couple of occasions to great effect. Greg Simm on bass and Maurice Nadeau on drums lend support a few of the tracks, and Richard's foot is omnipresent in the jigs and reels.

Anyone who has seen Richard perform knows his foot. Holding the fiddle body and bow almost vertical, his upper body melts into the instrument while his step dancer legs pound out the rhythm.

This is happy and intense fiddling by a teen who obviously loves and lives the music. It comes across full force on this highly recommended album.

—Gordon Fisch
Regina, Saskatchewan


Any Canadian interested in the folk music of our land soon becomes dismally aware of how little public support is being given to it. This Society has always led a hand-to-mouth existence, scarcely able to sustain its journals and often not able to furnish enough support to bring to its one national Annual Meeting even the members of the Executive, let alone other participants—folk singers, musicians or scholars—who might have contributed greatly to that meeting's value and excitement. When one contemplates the vast sums expended across our broad land to support symphony orchestras and that essentially alien musical phenomenon, opera, one feels almost willing to weep in frustration.

Very different is the attitude of the Republic of Ireland. It is little more than forty years since Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (The Association of Irish Musicians) was founded in Dublin; yet now it has branches, not only in every Irish county, but also in eight other countries—in all, over 400 branches. The success of this organization is so great that many people regard the Irish tradition as the only true folk music stemming from the British Isles. Yes, it is remembered that the Scottish play bagpipes, but there is little awareness of the rest of the Scottish traditions and almost none of the equally rich musical traditions of England and Wales. This may be frustrating for English-born folksingers like myself, but it is beyond doubt a great tribute to C.C.E.

The Calgary branch was formed in 1986 and is sufficiently strong that fifteen highly skilled musicians are to be heard on this, its first published recording. The instruments include (of course!) fiddle, bodhran and flute, but also guitar, whistle and string bass, as well as cittern and keyboard (on two tracks each).

There is only one singer, Derrick Penny. Derrick sings well, giving an authentic texture to his three songs, but other voices might have added a greater individuality to a record which, while ranking worthily alongside other recent Canadian recordings of instrumental Irish music, does not stand out from them.

The planning of the order of tracks might have been better thought out. The mood set by Derrick's haunting "My Lagan Love" is too instantly destroyed by the loud cheeriness of "Jack McCann," while his excellent singing of "The Shamrock Shore," essentially a lament, accords equally ill with the next track, "Dennis Murphy"; had it been followed instead by "Hewlett," all would have been much better. Both changes are as abrupt and unwelcome as the intrusion of a rowdy, drunken party into a church.

Yet there is much to enjoy—the imaginative use of the cittern on "O'Carolan's Concerto," a very good rendition of "The Morrisons" ("Morrison's Jig") and especially good fiddle on "Moran's Return." The rather breathy whistle on "Morgan Magan" and the intriguing two-whistle performance of "An Culleen" add to the musical interest. The attractive design of the L-card (the cassette equivalent of a sleeve) also merits mention.

On balance, then, a sound enough recording, very creditable to Calgary's own C.C.E. and deserving good local sales. If it isn't quite in the forefront of Canadian Irish music, that is because many other groups are also very good.

—William A.S. Sarjeant
Regina, Saskatchewan
Roy Johnstone. Stark Ravin’. Fiddle Head Productions, RR #1, Bonshaw, Prince Edward Island COA 1CO.

I agree with the title word Stark, as this CD features fairly simple arrangements and unadorned fiddling, but Ravin’ overstresses the case. Roy Johnstone sounds like a nice guy who does a lot of walking in the woods with slow, measured jigs bobbing through his head. And, hey, I admit I went home with "Langstrom’s Pony" bobbing along in my head. It’s a great tune, and one I know well from a piper friend. However, I wish Roy would go out dancing more, or running stark raving naked through the streets of Charlottetown. In fact, many of the tracks here are good on their own, but the whole album can be a little boring.

Roy keeps the same measured pace throughout most tracks. The tunes, as with many East Coast fiddlers, come straight from the piper’s book, but with the ornaments and grace notes stripped off. His playing is clear and steady but with little drive. Not that everyone should sound like Natalie McMaster or Richard Wood, but I kept asking myself, "Where’s the lift?" The arrangements don’t lead to any climaxes. The bits of guitar or bass unison playing on melody, the odd tunes with stops, the bits of harmony add sparks of interest but stand out as the exception to the rule.

Roy does shine on the airs, where vibrato and emotion lift the pieces up; "Bovaglies’s Plaid" is my favourite cut. He does a very nice "Ashokan Farewell," adding some pleasing harmony, though, as they say, it’s been done.

That said, I really like the sound of this tape. The production/sound engineering by Chris Corrigan has resulted in a warm, clear CD. All the instruments sound great, with the fiddle having a rich tone that should be the envy of many an engineer. Chris also did the arrangements and contributes on guitar, percussion program, pump organ and keyboards. Unfortunately, this may be holding Roy back, and maybe he does step out a little more in person or with a band he plays with regularly.

I can’t really recommend this album, but I would recommend that Roy get his dancin’ shoes on and start ravin’.

—Gordon Fisch

Christina Smith. Fiddle Me This. Singsong SS9411. PO Box 6371, St. John’s, Newfoundland A1C 6J9

I realized this was a Newfoundland recording after the first few bars. The guitar opening from Jean Hewson (co-producer and co-arranger of the disc) put me in mind immediately of albums from Pigeon Inlet Productions and the playing of Jim Payne, accompanist for Kelly Russell and the late Rufus Guinchard. And of course, the tune was "The Banks of Newfoundland." On the whole this is a very nice album and a great collection of tunes.

Christina’s playing betrays a classical background. At times a bit too exacting and measured, she does best with her own compositions and those of Rufus Guinchard. These seem to take on a life of their own and transport the listener to dance hall or kitchen somewhere on the Rock. Other tune writers covered include Emile Benoit, Edward Didham and Wanda Crocker. Emile’s "Debbie’s Waltz/Wedding Waltz" are very well done with lovely accompaniment. "I'll Hang My Harp on a Willow Tree" is wonderfully haunting, and the mood is complemented by the excess of reverb. The fiddle sound in general is a bit on the thin/reedy side, not as robust in tone as it could be.

Jean Hewson’s guitar style, light and intricate and at times very interesting, can be so busy as to detract from the melody. This style, close to the syncopation of many Cape Breton accompanists, seems to dance around the rhythm. The album definitely gets a rhythm boost when Wade Pinhorn’s bass jumps in. Jean does a great job on the western swingish "Cabot’s Voyage/Jeannie’s on the Rum." (I betray my prairie roots!) Anita Best contributes vocals on two tracks to good effect. The album ends with a ceilidh version of "Green Grow the Rushes-o" with Fergus O’Byrne on bodhran, Wanda Crocker on mandolin and Jim Payne on accordion.

For those with an interest in Newfoundland fiddling, this album can be a good introduction. Though there is nothing quite like hearing Guinchard or Benoit play their own tunes, Christina Smith does a good job. Let’s hope she continues writing, and collaborating with Jean Hewson.

—Gordon Fisch

Cal Cavendish. Another Truckin Trip.

---. Flying Songs by Cal Cavendish. JSV9410
---. Wheels, Wings & Other Things (Live At The Jubilee '94). 02 1695.
---. This is Cavendish Country. COP-Z1075. Cal Cavendish, 2112 Vista Street NE, Calgary, Alberta T2E 6H4

Cal Cavendish briefly expanded his local fame as a singer/songwriter during the early 70s when he buzzed the Calgary Tower in his small airplane, dumping cowshit and copies of his newest single over the city. Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, he dropped out of sight shortly thereafter, making his way through day jobs and raising a family. "Day jobs" doesn’t quite explain his joy at truck driving, which became his primary career for most of the intervening years. His safety record in that field is commendable and belies whatever reputation he may have earned through his earlier happening. (He’s also regained his pilot’s license.)

He never quit singing or songwriting. Gigs were few for a while, but, then, he didn’t really pursue them vigorously. I was surprised a couple years ago to catch him interviewed on As It Happens, upon the release of Another Truckin Trip. Since this cassette features on Side One "Truck Sounds with Stereo Country Music" and on Side Two "Stereo Country Music without Truck Sounds," you won’t be surprised that this was featured as
a novelty interview. Side One is, I must say, for specialists. Cavendish's songs are good, personal interpretations of essential Nashville modes, but I think I'd rather have had two sets of songs and no trucks.

Flying Songs by Cal Cavendish was aimed at the flying enthusiast market, but enough of the songs have general interest that I feel safe recommending it to anyone interested in country music, singer/songwriters, musical humor, or Canadian vernacular culture in general. It is, er, blessed by the absence of airplane sounds. The snare drum-supported opening narration to "Star of America," with which the recording opens, isn't exactly to my taste. The Star of America, which is pictured on the tape's cover, was a Lougheed Super Continental rebuilt from wreckage by aficionados—the song is, in part a pitch for contributions to the maintenance of the plane, in part Cavendish's tribute to his own youth and the "10 cent Comet Airplane Kits" he built.

Wheels, Wings & Other Things is the record of Cavendish's "comeback" concert given at the Jubilee Auditorium on April 5, 1994. (See Bulletin 28.2, June 1994, for a review of this event.) The cassette offers highlights of the concert and presents a good introduction to Cavendish's range of moods, from as much of his songwriting career as I'm aware of. (I tend to prefer Cavendish the humorist, but I don't know whether you should take this as a comment on Cavendish or on myself. I do wish he'd left "Calcutta Cowboy" out, though.) Because it's a live, solo performance, this recording probably will have only slightly more commercial value than the other items I've mentioned so far, but this format does present Cavendish more intimately—one can hear what the songs themselves are, not what a band or pickup group has made of them. I enjoyed the concert, and I enjoy the recording.

After listening to Wheels, Wings & Other Things a number of times, I was reminded of Jim Payne's Empty Nets (reviewed 27.1, March 1993). Both Payne and Cavendish offer portraits of working-class Canadian life, from east and west. In some respects the musical tone differs, since Cavendish, when he uses accompaniment, tends to favor a standard Nashville/Bakersfield combo, where Payne's accompaniment is more various and includes bodhran and other items from the folk revival. Both men write songs that are conversational and use figures of speech only to a limited degree—they've cultivated voices that suit this stripped-down lyrical format, strong, masculine, and relatively uninterested in the melisma that the Jimmie Dickens clones (parodies?) so common today are wearing into the ground.

Wouldn't it be cool to have a cross-Canada tour by Payne and Cavendish? Mel Hurtig, are you listening? Anybody need to hide some money in a tax-loss?

Cavendish Country is from the manure-bombing era and offers the songs Cavendish was known for around Calgary during the early 70s. The title was also used in a National Film Board short, which should still be available. (Come to think of it, I should see if it's been put on video yet.) The original LP probably goes for a pretty penny nowadays, if you can find one. But Cavendish is keeping it available. The concerns of Cavendish's later career are all to be found here. "One AM Calgary" (reprised on Wheels, Wings & Other Things) gives his love of flying; several songs describe his love of the road—"The Mobile Philosopher" presents his rationale. "Good Old John" offers seriously the tribute to Diefenbaker that Bob Bossin parodied in "Dief Will Be the Chief Again," though I think that the two songs could sit comfortably together, like old friends who've lived different lives. "Them Foreign Cows" is Cavendish's bemused account of changes to everyone's favorite prairie industry. Why we have yet to print that song in the Bulletin is a mystery to me. We'll have to do something about that one of these days.

---GW L

El Nino Ambiance. P. Edwards, C2, RR3 Dixon Road, Powell River, British Columbia V8A 5C1

El Nino Ambiance is a small presentation, one song each, of the wares of six, presumably young, songwriters from the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. The writers are Michael Conway-Brown, Jamie Nuotio, Kristine Oudot, Robert Falls, Steve Formosa, and Jessica Aires. The liner, which appropriately gives the lyrics to all of the songs, calls it "...a sampling of the Canadian West-Coast way of life—sharing the flavour, the talent, the inspiration, and the friendliness of its people." My only complaint about the recording is that virtually all of the songs rehearse the sort of boosterism that is more suitable to the Chamber of Commerce or tourist bureau than to the independent artistic observer. Indeed, it's not difficult to suspect that Kristine Oudot's "Powell River" was written with the hope that it could be background for a tv commercial:

Up the Sunshine Coast lies Powell River
A spot of quiet solitude or loaded with adventure
Old timer, newcomer, the elderly and young
Her peace and beauty beckoned to us come.
The business men and women, our hospital staff

Those who teach our children work hard on our behalf....
She ends with what might uncharitably be referred to as a buckster's pitch: "Although perhaps you cannot stay, at least come say hello."

Indeed, nowhere in the cassette will you find a hint of discontent with the power of Mac-Blo, of the dangers of dioxin and other pollutants, of the aromatic nightmare of the pulp mills or of the controversy between those concerned with these matters and those who support the status quo. Or, for that matter, do you find even less controversial difficulties such as bitter winters (Now don't tell me that Powell River escaped this last one!), the dubious pleasures of growing old, the dangers of a loose jesus nut on a helicopter, or the blackflies waiting to pick your bones. My own personal esthetics are not satisfied by songs (or any other creative activity) which effectively deny significant aspects of experience, and I mean by that to say that the determinedly pessimistic does me no more good than does bourgeois optimism. To offer two examples, Jim Payne's Empty...
Nets and Sid Marty's Let the River Run are wonderful advertisements for the regions in which these singer/writers live, Newfoundland and southern Alberta, respectively, simply because they present as complete portraits of the regions as one can imagine on one recording, including problems treated both seriously and lightheartedly. You wouldn't come away from either of them with a feeling that someone was trying to hide something from you.

Perhaps the problem is less with the songwriters than with the A&R person, who is not named (though P. Edwards is listed as "project co-ordinator."). I should add that the content of this tape disappoints me in rather close inverse proportion to the degree that the musical skills of the performers please me, and perhaps the one song each contributed is not representative of their work. Beyond an occasionally excessive dose of reverb, El Nino Ambiance offers straightforward performances by singers and guitarists who are never less than adequate, and all of whom offer a few moments of genuine pleasure. I wish that I could feel that this talent was mustered to represent something more like the world I really live in.

On the other hand, I don't suppose that all readers will share my attitude about the content of these songs. There are days when I do wish that every day on the coast of our lives was sunny (or moodily misty and drizzly) and that the wind blew the fresh breath of adventure across our footsteps and that we all could walk with our lovers along the beach at gloaming (whoops, wrong sentimental decade)... I'd better stop now before I get cynical.

Seriously, if a laid back mood and basic performing virtues suit you, you should buy this tape. Not only will you enjoy it, but you will encourage the performers to keep at an often thankless task. Perhaps their next efforts will suit this old curmudgeon as well.

—GWL


The blues has become one of the (almost) universal musical languages, and white Canadians have been regularly playing in the genre since the sixties. Jackson Delta is a fine blues group based in Peterborough, Ontario, which began as amateurs jamming in the kitchen and eventually became a strong professional band.

The band is a trio, with members Rick Fines (guitars, vocals), Gary Peeples, guitars, dobro, vocals, and at one point, "ears"?), and Alan Black (harmonica, drums, washboard, vocals). Although they are tight and self-sufficient, two of these recordings feature other musicians, including both Richard Bell and Gene Taylor (piano), Colleen Peterson (vocal), Peter Jellard (accordion), and Terry Wilkins (bass).

To dispose of the only real complaint, the notes are generally uninformative. We are given little history except that the band took fourth place in National Blues Foundation Amateur Blues Awards in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1988 and the following year toured Georgia with a couple of American bluesmen. The absence of dates on the albums makes it difficult for the hearer to work out for himself/herself the development of the group. Although Looking Back has all the words, Acoustic has only words for the five originals and does not even credit sources of the others, and Live (apparently the fourth album)* has complete credits but no words. For two of the albums, there is not even a label—self-produced, perhaps? These guys deserve better information.

The repertoire is broad, and eclectic. Live is almost all original; Looking Back almost all original, and Acoustic has a balance. Songs come from many classic blues singers, including Big Bill Broonzy, Sleepy John Estes, Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Willie McTell, Jimmy Reed, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. Others come from that fine old master, Trad.

Original songs are often close to the tradition, with the simple elegance of verses such as: "People takin' out, Nobody puttin' in / It's a mean old world / Seems like it's sink or swim." Most originals are on Looking Back, with all members contributing (Fines six, Peeples four, and Black one). Originals largely use the traditional subject matter of blues, with trains, happy and unhappy love affairs, American cities, rebellion against authority, and other familiar ground. There is no obvious evidence of CanCon in the words of originals—don't Canadian situations inspire blues players?—the spiritual pilgrimage of these fellers is clearly "back to Memphis / The place the blues call home."

Some performances are close to the original styles, such as the Sonny-and-Brownie-type harmonies on "Ain't Got No Baby." There's dirty tone, fake trumpet choruses, and whoops and hollers, but these are not black singers from the deep south—for one thing, you can understand the words. Instrumentally they are all more than competent, arrangements are tight and often witty, and there are some fine flights of fancy: listen for instance for interesting bass lines, or the deliberately off-key piano on "Liquor Store Blues." Although there is a strong bias in favor of urban traditions (not many 12-bar's in here) Jackson Delta's blues are very diverse—slow and fast, humorous and serious, laid back and hard driving, simple and complex, and derive from a variety of blues traditions.

Acoustic has the threesome closest to the roots, with traditional songs like "C.C. Rider" and "John Hardy." Looking Back is almost all originals, and the group is supported by a variety of other musicians. Live presents a concert with a sometimes noisy audience, containing a mix of material, all supported by Gene Taylor's rhythmic but sometimes pedestrian piano (though he puts down some great boogie woogie on "All by Myself").

If I had to choose one album, I would find it hard to select from this extensive body of work. If you like urban or contemporary blues, it's worth trying all of these.

—David Spalding
Pender Island, BC
I discovered the following on the Internet recently, from the *Jackson Delta Main Page* (Rick Fines also has one, for all you surfers). "A Profile of Jackson Delta": "... cut their first album in the famed Sun Studios in Memphis—in a single hour. The resulting tape, Delta Sunrise [nice pun, no?], is a collector's item these days as only 250 copies were pressed." —GWL

*Ken Hamm. Eagle Rock Road. North Track NTCD9501. Distributed by Festival, 1351 Grant Street, Vancouver, BC V5L 2X7*

One of the happiest developments in the last few years is a crop of recordings by singer/songwriters of both Anglo- and Afro-American origins who base their work firmly in the traditions of the country blues but have found a voice within those traditions rather than being content to merely re-interpret or imitate. Recent releases by Paul Geremia, Keb Mo' (Kevin Moore), Chris Smithers, Lonnie Pitchford and others all happily represent this trend, and to that list one can add Ken Hamm's newest effort.

Writer of seven out of the fifteen tracks here (and arranger on the pre-blues instrumental "The Colored Aristocracy"), Ken plays dense, intricate fingerstyle guitar throughout, punctuated with some great slide work. The accompaniment ranges from duo pieces such as the title track, with just Hamm and guest vocalist Sue Leonard singing to Ken's playing on an old arch-top guitar, to full band backing, consisting of string bass, drums, mandolin, dobro and Bruce Everett's supportive harmonica (he and Ken have made so many miles and so much music together, their playing assumes a near-telepathic quality).

My only reservation about the ensemble tracks (well-produced and well-recorded as they were, by Pat Coleman and Perry Barret, respectively) is a small one. Although the blues grew in large part out of black stringband tradition, and fiddles, mandolins, resonator guitars, &c., most surely belong in blues-oriented instrumentation, the dobro (nicely played by Doug Cox) feels too contemporary Nashville, à la Jerry Douglas, and the mandolin (John Reischman, another good player) relies heavily on a Bill Monroe style chop rhythm to such an extent (with the exception of the lovely instrumental "Swap the Vest") that these tracks take on a slightly jarring Bluegrass quality, when perhaps a more Son Sims or Mississippi style stringband would have matched the overall tone here a little better.

The songwriting, from the labour struggle blues "Bay Street Line" to the touching "He Always Had A Smile" and the infectious working-man stomp of "Fishing Grounds," is intelligent, unaffected and effective; no navel-gazing here! The covers, ranging from Robert Johnson and Jelly Roll Morton to Chuck Berry and Bob Marley, are all well played, although my tastes run to tunes less often covered than Johnson's "Walkin' Blues" or Mississippi John Hurt's "Richland Woman Blues." As touchstones of the tradition in a live performance, one can see why most acoustic blues performances include these tunes, but they are surely among the most over-recorded covers in the genre. That said, however, Ken and Bruce find great new rhythmic takes on the two Johnson tunes, it's nice to hear a version of Morton's "Windin' Boy Blues" not derivative of Ian Buchanan's early '60s Elektra version, and the lilting take here on Bob Marley's classic slow ganja dance "Stir It Up" won me over after a few hearings.

These nagging thoughts aside, this is a fun disc, with enough high spots in every track to keep you from wearing out the skip button on your CD player as you try to separate the wheat from the chaff.... One high point I forgot to mention earlier is a two-National-guitar attack (Hamm and Vancouver Island guitar hero David Gogo) on "North Road Blues." Put this one on in the morning along with the coffee and start your day with a grin.

—Tim Williams
Calgary, Alberta

*Tim Williams. Riverboat Rendezvous. Cayuse W 001. Festival Records. 1351 Grant Street. Vancouver. BC V5L 2X7*

Not having much of a blues vocabulary, I find myself running into difficulty when trying to describe this album. I can tell you what it isn't. It's not the honky-tonk of Spider John Koerner or the dirty electric blues of either of the Vaughan brothers. It's not the long cool of Robert Cray, smooth like Bonnie Raitt, or rough like Robert Johnson. It's not John Mayall or Blind Willie McTell or BB King, but another animal entirely.

Mostly, Riverboat Rendezvous has a folksier sound, for all that there's electric guitar and some ensemble work on it. The predominant impression I came away with was acoustic guitar and solo voice, warmly produced, with some very nice picking and a good choice of material. There are songs from the aforementioned McTell, King, Johnson and others, as well as some fine original material from Williams' own pen, all of which blend into an entertaining fifty-some minutes. Sort of like catching a long set without any of the patter.

What I like best is the honest simplicity with which Williams presents his music. Instead of gussying the songs up because there's a studio, overdubs, and other musicians available (as opposed to the more limited resources he might have at a solo performance in a small club or on a festival stage), Williams serves the song first. If all it needs is acoustic guitar with a little slide break, then that's what it gets. Another cut might add in a harmonica and a little piano. The arrangements are always appropriate and tasty.

—Charles de Lint
Ottawa