

## Reviews/Comptes rendus

*Maybe it's a good time to remind people: opinions expressed in reviews are those of the authors only, and don't necessarily express the views of the editors of the Bulletin, or the views of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music. Letters responding to reviews probably won't be printed unless they bring new facts to our attention or raise substantive issues likely to be of interest to the folk music community in general.*

### *Books*

*Ordering folksong books? Were you ever frustrated?*

Skimming lists of books-in-print, I occasionally spot one from a small publisher which looks interesting. In Vancouver, a well-established bookstore, *Duthie's*, has taken my orders, and

although I've had many of my orders filled, at times I've waited in vain for books especially from small publishers. A message from the bookstore comes to me that the book is unavailable, out-of-print or whatever. When a new catalogue, (say, **Bowker's**

1995-1996) appears and the item is still listed, I order again to no avail. I point out to the bookstore that the book is still listed; they say they'll check, and eventually the same message comes back. It appears that in some cases the ordering is through a broker in the USA. Who's to blame?

Recently I spent over a year trying to get Katie Letcher Lyle's *Scalded to Death by the Steam: Authentic Stories of Railroad Disasters and the Ballads That Were Written about Them*. It was published in 1991 by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a division of Workman Publishing, New York. [ISBN 0-945575-01-7(pbk)]. Perhaps to quieten me, David Duthie suggested I phone the company. We looked the publisher up in *Books-in-Print, Volume 9: Publishers*, and found there was an 800 number [800-722-7202]. So at no cost I phoned New York, confirmed the book was available, ordered one, gave them my Mastercard information for payment. In less than a fortnight, the book arrived, costing in US funds \$12.95 plus \$5.00 postage. (Fortunately Canada Customs, while they

Gale de Vos. *Tales, Humors, and Gossip: Exploring Contemporary Folk Literature in Grades Seven to Twelve*. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1996.

If ballads, *märchen* (wonder tales), and tall tales were the primary types of popular folk narratives to be enjoyed and appreciated by folks in times and generations past, then it is equally valid to say that the dominant and most popular type of folk narrative to emerge during the second half of the twentieth century is what folklorists have referred to as urban legends, also known by some as urban belief tales. Although these modern folk narratives have been studied and analyzed by folklorists and students of oral culture since at least the late 1940s, it was not until 1981, and the publication of a pioneer volume, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, compiled and written by Jan Harold Brunvand, that the phenomenon of the urban legend really came into its own, *viz.*, in the popular imagination; Brunvand was subsequently to publish four further volumes, and with the work of such other academics and collectors as Gary Allan Fein, Rodney Dale, and Paul Smith, the interest in these contemporary legends would become more pronounced. Thus enters Gale de Vos, who, although not a folklorist, is a teacher and specialist in library science, and who has been a professional storyteller for over ten years.

This book is a first on several levels. It is the first major work on the subject of contemporary legends by a Canadian who has studied the phenomenon for many years; it is the first major work to examine the contemporary legend primarily as it involves its popularity, transmission, and acceptance by younger tellers, listeners, and fans, especially those inhabiting the academic arena of students in grades seven to twelve.

In the first portion of the book, de Vos defines, analyzes, and discusses vital terms necessary to the understanding of contemporary legends, including the differences among "legends," "rumors," and "gossip," and other important concepts such as "redemption," "ostension," and "legend-tripping." De Vos spends much time analyzing how these urban legends function in the larger context of social interaction, between the students themselves, and between students and the larger society as a

examined the invoice, did not charge me the GST plus that annoying \$5.00 processing charge!)

The book is great! In addition to "The Wreck of the Old 97" and "The Wreck of the Number Nine," both well-rooted in Canada through the old Vernon Dalhart 78 rpm's, twenty-four other disasters are recounted in detail, with pictures, maps, documents, first hand recollections, etc. To accompany the texts, twenty-two tunes are provided. As well as being an historian, Lyle has informed herself through such folklorists as Malcolm Laws, Norm Cohen and Albert Lord. All the wrecks were in the States, the songs made in Missouri and eastward. Although some work has been done on railway songs in Canada by Tim Rogers, I wonder if there is enough material on Canadian train wrecks to produce a Canadian counterpart. It may be that some of the Lyle's songs really knew no borders, as did numbers of American and Canadian railroads.

—Phil Thomas  
Vancouver, BC

whole. She also discusses the role of the print and electronic media in the rise of popular interest in these modern folk tales, and how newspapers, television, and books have added fuel to popular acceptance of contemporary legends, often believed to be true happenings by both tellers and general listeners. De Vos has amassed an impressive array of sources, citations, and reference materials, including local newspaper accounts, many of them from her own home city of Edmonton, folklore journals and other academic publications, and books relevant to this field, both legend collections and folklore treatises.

The second portion of de Vos's treatment centers on several major types of contemporary legends: legends dealing with such areas as science and technology, contaminated foods, animals and pets, thieves and thievery, legends dealing with children and young adults (including stolen body parts, abduction, AIDS lore, and Satanic ritual), and scary and ghostly urban legends popular among children and young teenagers. Two chapters are devoted to two specific legends: the vanishing hitchhiker and *la llorona*, the weeping woman, most prevalent in Hispanic and Latin American traditions. Although it is not prevalent in Canada, it is interesting that de Vos has researched this centuries-old tradition in depth; she explains that it has been a personal favorite of hers for years.

Urban legends are a global phenomenon, and this is reflected in de Vos's work, in which variants are reported not only from Canada and the USA, but also from Brazil, the United Kingdom, Russia, Scandinavia, South Africa, Japan, and Australia, among other places. One fascinating aspect of de Vos's treatment of these modern legends is her interest in their historical antecedents, as well as in their folkloric cousins, analogues from distant cultures and in parallel plots from literature and mythology. Media accounts are also included, plus a look at how cinema, television, and novels and short stories have adapted these urban legends to their own unusual retellings.

As de Vos, among other specialists in this genre of folk

literature, is quick to point out, many contemporary legends speak to the darker side of human nature and often reflect concerns about crime, poverty, distrust of outside groups, racial and ethnic antagonisms, concern for the safety of children, large, impersonal corporations and their seeming domination of modern life, and doubts about the ever-increasing dependence upon technology. This is certainly reflected in the types and kinds of urban legends popular today: Killer in the Backseat, the Kentucky Fried Rat, the Poison Dress, and a host of other disquieting, and often grisly belief tales commonly in circulation, which, even as they are debunked, are nonetheless still believed and accepted as true. As de Vos so cogently states, as long as there is distrust of different ethnic and racial groups, suspicions about large mercantile combines, and uncertainty about new technological advances, no matter how improbable many of these belief tales may be, they will be willingly transmitted by those wishing to find easy scapegoats to blame for one ill or another.

The appendix will be a huge aid to those teachers who wish to engage their students in fruitful dialogue on this subject. De

Mike Ballantyne. *Pint Pot and Plough: Thirty-One English Traditional Folksongs*. Barley Wine Music, PO Box 312, Cobble Hill, BC, V0R 1L0. ISBN: 0-9695840-0-8.

Like many other performing folk-music enthusiasts, I have a bookshelf devoted to songbooks. Some of these have been gifts, but of those I have chosen for myself most have been bought on the strength of one or two unusual songs ("I've never seen that song in print before!") or for their encyclopedic completeness ("This book has *everything!*"). Truth to tell, however, there are few of these books that I consult with any regularity. Most of these song collections are compiled on the basis of a particular musical style, a discrete historical period, or a common narrative theme, and this just isn't that useful to me.

When I go through a song book, a book of fiddle tunes, or what-have-you, I usually find that the wheat-to-chaff ratio is small; that is, there are few "good" items in most collections. (Let me hasten to point that I am using a strictly idiosyncratic and operational definition: a "good" song is one that at any given time interests me thematically and that I enjoy singing. My selection of "good" songs from a particular collection will be different from that made by any other singer; as well, although my assessment of certain songs will vary with the passage of time, the core of "good" songs that I identify in a song book is fairly consistent.)

Attentive readers of these pages will recall my glowing review of Mike Ballantyne's *Pint Pot and Plough*, a brilliant recording of unaccompanied songs (Bulletin 26.3). The songs on this tape are English in origin and include ballads, drinking songs, shanties and music hall favorites; the common feature uniting the songs is that they are all suitable for a *capella* performance. Accompanying the tape is a splendid song book that shows the same care and attention to detail that made the recording such a delight. By my definition above, this book is full of "good" songs: it is all good grain, with no detectable chaff.

Passing briefly over the physical production of the book: it is spiral-bound to make for easy use on table or music stand, and

Vos lists possible topics for class discussion, such as Scapegoats in History and Magic and the Supernatural, just to mention two. If this were simply a collection of urban legends without any further comment, it would still be a worthy effort, but with de Vos's excellent scholarship and impressive diversity of sources, this book becomes much more. It is truly entertaining, sometimes amusing, more often disturbing, and presents a less-than-admirable picture of how society's tenuous bonds may be stretched through the transmission of such urban belief tales. This is a most worthwhile and notable addition to the general folklore canon, and in particular, to the still popular field of the contemporary legend, and just as in the case of Brunvand's work, which has become a classic in this genre, I predict that in years to come, Gale de Vos will be recognized as another pioneer in this area of modern folklore. The field of folklore and oral culture will hear a lot more from this Edmonton storyteller in years to come, and I for am quite pleased at that prospect.

—Robert Rodriquez  
NYC

the music has been computer-set and printed cleanly on smooth white paper. The music is well-spaced, with no crowding of notes or words to save paper but hamper legibility. Although Mike performs these songs unaccompanied, he has generously provided chords to aid those who prefer harmonic support when they perform. The notes that accompany each song are witty and informative without being pedantic; additional references are provided to direct the keen student to more detailed sources without overpowering the non-specialist. Of particular interest are the references to recordings and to other versions of the songs. Although Mike has given the song as he sings it, he has no illusions about the existence of any definitive or authoritative versions.

Standouts for me in this collection are, not surprisingly, the same ones that I most enjoyed on the tape: "Artichokes and Cauliflowers," "The Nutting Girl," and "Tavistock Goosey Fair" come immediately to mind. Curiously, the high quality of the recording on *Pint Pot and Plough* might be thought to work against the marketing of this book, since Mike's superbly clean diction makes transcription of lyrics a straightforward process, if somewhat tedious when many verses are involved. Mike has cleverly included some additional songs in the book. This material meets the same high standards by which the taped songs were selected, and my experiments in the shower suggest that these songs should also be suitable for unaccompanied voice.

A budding folksinger would be well advised to use this book to establish a core repertoire of "good 'uns"; almost any performer will find material here that they can adopt with profit. *Pint Pot and Plough* is a working songbook, and one that is frequently left out on my desk, rather than gathering dust on my bookshelf. If you liked Mike's tape, you'll want to have this book.

—Michael Pollock  
Calgary, Alberta

Lawrence Nowry. *Man of Mana: Marius Barbeau*. New Canada Publications, NC Press Ltd., Box 452, Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1H8.

Prior to reading this book I was very ill-informed concerning the life of Marius Barbeau, founder and longtime president of this Society. Now I can say that I know much more about our illustrious forebear, one of the pioneer anthropologists and ethnologists of Canada, and I certainly recommend the book to CSTM members on that basis. Many of us will think first of Barbeau as the collector of songs which became standards in the folk repertoire, such as "Mary Ann" and "Blanche comme la neige." Yet his extensive work with the traditions of French Canada was in fact only an offshoot of his career, and a radical offshoot at that—his main work was with autochthonic peoples, mostly the Huron/Wyandot and various Pacific Northwest groups. European-based folklore was at the time virtually ignored by others working in the field in Canada. We have Barbeau to thank for recognizing the value of the traditions of his own people and getting the ball rolling on preserving them. In that sense, all members of the CSTM are his spiritual descendants.

In 1965 Lawrence Nowry interviewed Barbeau at length (3 1/2 hours of taped material), and these reminiscences in Barbeau's own words (but in English only) have been the "centre of gravity" for many projects since then, including this book. Nowry also drew on reminiscences of numerous friends and acquaintances of Barbeau, as well as documents and civil service records.

Despite all these authoritative sources, I came away from the book without a feeling of really knowing Marius Barbeau as a person. Although Nowry says in his introduction that it was "a rare, brief privilege to have shared the confidence of this fine man" (11), he damns with faint praise. I get the impression that Nowry didn't really warm to Barbeau the person, as opposed to Barbeau the scholar, and doesn't want to let us know that, so tries to stay uninvolved personally. However, sometimes, by accident or design, the mask of anonymity slips, for example in the occasional use, without elaboration, of the word "vanity." While some might think it admirable that Nowry allows readers to make up their own minds, based on the facts that he chooses to present, I would have preferred more guidance on the search for the human face of Barbeau, or perhaps more candour from Nowry as to his own point of view.

Barbeau was a government employee, and his constant struggles with underfunding and the civil service mentality are detailed at length. Barbeau appears to have been the sort of person who believes that "It's easier to explain afterwards than to get permission beforehand," and his overspending and requests for extra funds recur with depressing regularity throughout his career. Perhaps for this reason alone, certain of his superiors in the bureaucracy were overtly hostile, and made things difficult for him. For his own part, Barbeau had friends in high places, and did not hesitate to go over his superiors' heads, even invoking (successfully) his friend Louis St-Laurent after the latter became Prime Minister. Being Barbeau's supervisor must have been a thorny task, especially for civil servants in the Department of Mines (under whatever other names). under

whose incongruous and sometimes unsympathetic auspices Barbeau's work was conducted.

It seems that Barbeau in his younger days left a string of broken hearts behind him, from Paris to Oklahoma, and throughout his life was a "great admirer of the fair sex" (287). The amour which is documented most fully in the book, with a Wyandot schoolteacher in Oklahoma, was doomed, Nowry hints, because of her Native ancestry. She was "the pretty Indian woman he fell for but would never have married" (302). In fact, it is in the area of Barbeau's relationships with his Native informants that Nowry most often strays from impartiality and comes close to taking his subject to task.

Barbeau in fact seems to have been genuinely liked by many of the Native people with whom he worked, and Diamond Jenness, on going into an area where Barbeau had worked earlier, is quoted as writing "...everyone welcomes me because I am a friend of Mr. Barbeau." Barbeau championed Native cultural causes, and particularly opposed the outlawing of the potlatch, a piece of cultural genocide whose ill effects are still felt today. On the other hand, Barbeau's advice to aspiring fieldworkers on how to approach subjects with a view to obtaining information from them (211-12; from the 1965 interview) gives the impression that privately he viewed the people as mere subject matter for his researches. Barbeau's dealings with William Beynon, seen by Nowry as a world-class ethnologist who was not taken seriously because of his Tsimsyan ancestry, are criticized. So is Barbeau's habitual use of the term "halfbreed," surely a pejorative then as it is now.

Barbeau also participated in the practice, pretty well universal in those days, of buying or otherwise acquiring important cultural and religious objects from his informants, thus distancing the people from the tangible aspects of their heritage. A poignant story is told of Barbeau's attempt to buy a large totem pole from an elderly chief, who refused with the ironic comment that he would trade his ancestors' pole for Governor Douglas's tombstone—"a dignified rejection of a degrading request" (235). Barbeau simply waited for the old man to die, then bought the pole from his heirs. (It can still be seen in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.) Barbeau supplemented his income by acting as agent for museums and collectors buying artifacts, so he probably had a hand in alienating enormous numbers of objects from their spiritual owners. The defence could be that "everybody was doing it," but it's hard to believe that Barbeau gave no thought to the implications of the artifacts trade.

Most of these attitudes were surely received by Barbeau as part of the culture of his times. Perhaps he struggled, sometimes successfully, to rise above the prevailing mentality. Or perhaps, as Nowry hints, he was vain, hypocritical and self-serving. Obviously Barbeau was a great man with some less than saintly attributes. He certainly did great work, for which all Canadians should be thankful. Nowry's book details much of this work, while leaving many questions about Barbeau's character unanswered, or touched on only obliquely.

Lastly, Barbeau's role in founding the Canadian Folk Music

Society is dealt with briefly, as part of a four-page section entitled "Folk Music Societies," including the International Folk Music Council. I expect that our members who are scholars will take exception to Nowry's statement that "Later Canadian Folk Music Society emphasis became more the interpretation of folk

music than its scholarly study" (383). Obviously he has not been paying attention to what we've been doing all these years. Nevertheless, this is a book which has been much needed, and which all CSTM members may read with profit.

—JL

## Recordings

Jackie Dunn. *Dunn To A 'T'*. JAD-CD Jackie Dunn, RR#7, Antigonish, NS B2G 2L4.

Jackie Dunn, a Nova Scotian step-dancer, pianist, and fiddler, has put out a fine CD of East Coast tunes. From the upbeat opening set of "Dan Hughie MacEachern's/Down The River/Jackie I Hardly Knew" to the "Grand Finale" set, her enthusiasm is catching, and her talent is obvious. A student of Gaelic music, Dunn comes from a musical family. Her mother is a famous step-dancer and her grandfather was a noted fiddler. She easily captures the feel of the music, from the reels and jigs to the slow airs.

The production, as on so many recordings from Nova

Scotia, is excellent. Back up by Hilda Chiasson-Cormier on piano, Dave MacIsaac on guitar, and Jeannie Henman-Beks, vocals on "M=Eoiri Bhan Og (Mary Young And Fair)," gives Jackie wonderful support. One has the feeling that Jackie, Dave and Hilda spent a lot of time researching, rehearsing and polishing this project. The effort shows.

I'm sure we'll be hearing more of Jackie in the future.

—Gordon Fisch  
Regina, Saskatchewan

Natalie MacMaster. *Fit as a Fiddle*. NMA-CD 1972. CBC/Maritimes. Natalie McMaster, RR#1, Port Hastings, Cape Breton, NS B0E 2T0.

*Fit as a Fiddle* is a brilliant album. Thirteen tracks, mostly sets of strathspeys and reels or jig sets with a couple of airs and a waltz thrown in, fairly jump off the CD with excitement and driving rhythms. "My Dungannon Sweetheart," a Graham Townsend tune, was my first favourite, but many sets had me dancing along.

Having seen Natalie live, I was a disappointed at first not to be able to watch the smiling and charming Natalie leaping about the stage, but the CD is a close second.

Her playing does justice to those slow but methodical strathspeys with their sudden surprises of multiple triplets, and the jigs and reels are infectious fun. Her snappy bow work adds bounce to the tunes. She knows how to "drive 'em," as they say down East.

The backup is top notch, with the ever-present Dave

MacIsaac on guitars, Howie MacDonald and Tracy Dares on piano, Tom Roach on drums and guest spots by Jamie MacInnis on Highland pipes and Sandy Moore on Celtic harp. The piano work stands out repeatedly, complimenting the fiddle with bouncing partial chords splattered in syncopation around the keyboard and many a related chord to add tension to the repetitive nature of many of the Scots tunes.

The production is clear with a great mix; the fiddle sound is wonderful, full-bodied yet catching just enough of the bow grabbing the strings to add that rough tinge that makes you jump; the liner notes give plenty of detail on the origin of the tunes.

This is a great package, and Natalie should be proud.

—Gordon Fisch

Calvin Vollrath. *Instrumentally Yours—Something Different*. BPR-1050C. Bonnie Pearl Records, 9212 150 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5E 2N8.

Calvin's 17th recording finds him back in the studio with a full band, after several years of recording direct to DAT in his basement. For those not familiar with Vollrath, he is a North American Fiddle Champion from Edmonton who has worked tirelessly as a guest artist at fiddle contests, teacher at fiddle camps, leader of the country band *Wheelhoss* and session player for many other artists. He is also a collector of Métis tunes and a writer in the old-time, swing, and Métis traditions with over 100 tunes to his credit.

This album features 15 of Calvin's originals with four tunes co-written with others. Most are named after various fiddle and dance friends of Calvin's from across the country. The fiddling is flawless, with many styles represented, from old-time to

swing to Métis to Ukrainian. Calvin's tone and technique are wonderful to hear. No one can match his sliding double stops, which add a special touch to some beautiful waltzes. His swing tunes, such as "*Zupfgeign*" (named after the "Plunking Fiddle" pub in Germany) show a great lyrical sense of melody, with the band obviously in their element. The "Smokin' Bow Reel" is typical of the old-time tunes, with many quick rolls and fast licks. "Before the Sunrise" shows off his Métis sensibilities, and "Jean Duperrault" the French-Canadian, with their rhythmic phrasing and time changes. His bow work captures the beat, or off beat, to drive the tunes along, while many melodic surprises spice things up.

The production is good, with the fiddle sounding full and

warm. Not as bright as an East Coast dance hall (as captured by many fiddle recordings from Halifax, which fairly leap out of the stereo at you) but more like a warm and friendly club on the outskirts of Edmonton, where the band plays old-time, the men wear cowboy boots and bolo ties, and the dance floor is always full. While this is a "fiddle" album, the arrangements give Richard Chernesky on lead guitar and Trent Bruner on piano a chance to take the spotlight, giving the album a nice balance.

Calvin says he sells a lot of records in Germany, where he

Michel Faubert. *Carême et Mardi gras*. MPDC 1095. Les Productions Mille-pattes, 168, rue du Canal, Joliette, Québec J6E 4T8.

Avec *Carême et Mardi gras*, le chanteur folklorique québécois Michel Faubert en est à son second disque. Si son premier disque, *Maudite mémoire* (Mille-pattes MS 995) a été principalement consacré aux chansons de tradition française, celui-ci s'intéresse à une tradition plus près de nous, plus locale. Le choix des chansons est marqué par la réflexion, par le devenir de l'être humain. Il n'hésite pas à aborder des thèmes comme la misère dans les chantiers, la mort, les liens familiaux, la charité, l'éloignement et la solitude, des thèmes qui conservent, encore d'aujourd'hui, toute leur actualité et leur universalité. Michel Faubert délaisse ainsi le ton léger et dansant si caractéristique de la production folklorique québécoise pour rechercher davantage de profondeur et d'authenticité. Cela en fait un disque plus sérieux, mais au pouvoir d'évocation plus fort.

C'est ainsi qu'on retrouve entre autres sur ce disque des complaintes comme "La Misère dans les chantiers," "La Mort en camion" et "La Chanson du vieux Sandy," le dialogue légendaire de "Carême et Mardi gras" et une énergique chanson de veillée, "La Veillée chez Gervais (On est parti une gang)." À ce bouquet traditionnel, s'ajoute deux chansons de la plume même de Michel Faubert, composées dans «le style traditionnel», "Sabbatique" et "Le Banquet des soixante," cette dernière écrite sur une mélodie traditionnelle. Le mélange est heureux, quoique le fil conducteur des textes est parfois ténu et pas toujours apparent.

Killiecrankie. *The Haggis Egg*. CD464693. Killiecrankie, PO Box 27016, Cambridge, Ontario N1R 8H1

While the band's first release, the cassette-only *High Road to Linton*, was a fine recording, their new CD is a winner on every count. The production is exquisite, the arrangements delightful, the musicianship and singing first-class.

It's true there are a few old chestnuts—"The Lowlands of Holland," Leezie Lindsay, "The Bonnie Ship the Diamond"—but there are far more less-familiar and original pieces, and Allison Lupton does such a lovely job of "Lowlands" that I certainly don't mind hearing yet one more version of it. Lupton also plays a mean flute, aided and abetted by Andrea Barstad on fiddle, and Bill Aitken and Martin Smit on various plucked string instruments.

The tune sets are well-considered, with nice interplay between the flute and fiddle on Dougie MacLean's "The Osprey" and a particularly fine version of the great Nathaniel Gow air, "Coilsfield House," by Barstad on the fiddle. The rest of the sets mix airs, strathspeys, reels and jigs featuring various

has been touring each spring for four years, so he wanted to have "instrumental" in the title to make it obvious there was no "singing." Even so, I don't find the title very evocative. If there is a problem with this album, it might be the lack of focus in material, as it has quite a wide range. But that's what Calvin plays. If you are looking for variety, done by a Western fiddle master with a great backup band, this is your album.

—Gordon Fisch

Pour rendre ces chansons, il se sert d'arrangements rock qu'il use avec beaucoup d'à-propos, se servant de l'opposition et du contraste marqués entre les genres pour créer une fusion. Contrairement à d'autres groupes où la chanson folklorique était au service du rock, ici au contraire, et c'est cela qui est heureux, c'est le rock qui se met au service du folklore. Ce n'est pas sans rappeler par moment le groupe français Malicorne. Cette opposition des genres a l'avantage de mettre en évidence la force des mélodies et des rythmes traditionnels, comme le prouvent particulièrement les chansons "Carême et Mardi gras" et "La Veillée chez Gervais." Toute l'énergie déployée par cette musique et contenue dans cette poésie prennent le pas sur la nostalgie et le patriotisme qu'inspirent habituellement ces chansons. Il ne s'agit pas d'un disque à message, didactique. Au contraire. Faubert recherche pour chacune des chansons une atmosphère qui lui soit propre, qui la prolongue en quelque sorte, au delà des mots et des notes. Pour ce faire, il s'est associé d'excellents musiciens rock qui le servent bien.

Cela dit, il s'agit d'un disque résolument moderne pour une tradition bien enracinée, qui nous propose d'aller hors des sentiers battus et de s'arrêter pour écouter.

—Donald Deschênes  
Sudbury, Ontario

combinations of instruments, while the album closes with some lovely old tunes in ¾ time on which the band is joined by harmonica player Ian Duncan.

Besides writing many of the tunes on the album, guitarist Aitken handles most of the vocal chores as well. He did the same on *High Road to Linton*, but whether it's the difference in production values, or that he's matured as a singer, his voice seems to have more resonance on the new album, as well as improved phrasing, and the songs are the better for it.

Killiecrankie may be based in Ontario, but their take on Scottish music is as good as anything originating in Scotland itself and *The Haggis Egg* is an album you'll return to again and again, because like the best traditional music, its appeal is timeless.

—Charles de Lint  
Ottawa, Ontario

Elysian Dream. *Celtic Collision*. ED0595. Elysian Dream Productions, PO Box 112, Glen Morris, Ontario N0B 1W0.

I've listened to this album a few times now, trying to get a handle on it, and I still can't figure it out. I get the sense that the band (a duo made up of Dave Pearson on vocals, guitar, harmonica and the like, and T.C. Pettit on vocals, bass and percussion) couldn't make up their mind what kind of album they wanted either.

On the one hand there are some very dull versions of standard songs ("Wild Mountain Thyme," "Star of the County Down," "Loch Lomond") performed with far more enthusiasm than skill, the kinds of songs you can hear in any generic Irish/Scots pub—if you can actually make them out above the

general racket in the place.

On the other hand, Pettit proves she has a lovely voice on other songs such as the opening cut, "Old Greybeard," and Pearson shows off some fine instrumental skill and subtlety on a handful of instrumentals.

The end result is a disjointed album, one that won't entirely please either the Irish Rovers crowd, who might go for the more enthusiastic numbers, or those interested in more traditional Celtic music. In that sense, I suppose the title forewarned us: Celtic collision, indeed.

—Charles de Lint

Will Millar. *The Lark in the Clear Aire*. CHACD 042. Chacra Alternative Music Inc., 3155 Halpern, St-Laurent, Quebec H4S 1P5.

The Irish Rovers are arguably Canada's most successful Celtic music group, with many hit records and a TV show to their credit over the years. However, it must be said that they achieved their success by emphasizing entertainment rather than musicianship. So the chance to hear the group's former front man, Will Millar, on an instrumental album highlighting his whistle playing is intriguing. Turns out, though, that the album isn't quite what I was hoping for.

Which isn't to say that it's inferior. On the contrary, this collection of Celtic tunes is impeccably recorded. Many quality musicians make contributions, including some Rovers members. The arrangements are lush and rich. The tunes are Irish and Scottish classics, with a couple of American tunes thrown in as well.

One of my reservations is that the tunes will be well known to anyone who listens to Celtic music with half an ear. Yes, they got to become classics because they're wonderful melodies, and I derive pleasure from listening to them, but there's no adventure in the selection. Nothing here challenges the listener familiar with the genre. Nor is there excitement in Will Millar's whistle playing. Often his instrument is buried in the mix (or

perhaps just not there); it's out front mostly on the slow airs, which he plays competently and pleasantly. But I'd like to hear him cut loose! His other instrument, the "lute" (presumably the cittern-like creature in the inside photo), doesn't come to the forefront often enough to make its presence felt.

All but two of the tracks are medleys, and three of those medleys are labelled thematically ("Islands," "Factory Girls" and "The Irish Brigade—1864"), which doesn't really add anything, in my view. My other quibble, a relatively minor one, is that all but one of the tunes in "The Irish Brigade" in fact have little connection to the American Civil War. Particularly, it's becoming irritating that people regard "Ashokan Farewell" as a tune from that era—it's a recently-composed melody which happened to be used as a theme for the "Civil War" TV documentary. A marvellous tune, currently in danger of dying from overexposure, and travelling under a false identity.

In its performance and recording quality this CD is much superior to the "Celtic Favourites" albums sold in craft shops, but in its content and concept, that's where it belongs.

—JL

Grit Laskin. *A Few Simple Words*. Borealis Recording Co., 26 Noble Street, Toronto, Ontario M0K 2c9.

*A Few Simple Words* is a meta-musical<sup>1</sup> autobiography<sup>2</sup>. One might worry that an autobiography might be self-serving. Grit himself sings, "forgive the boast, but it's clear the most predominant instrument is guitar." Somehow, though, this album comes across more as a tribute to Ken Whiteley, Grit's musical inspiration and the source of some amazing musical moments on the CD, and to Judith, the love of his life. Though his voice and his guitar are the constants, Grit comes across as humble and admiring of the singular talents that light up the individual songs.

Jani Lauzon's native flute becomes a haunting looncall on "Ojibway Country." Dennis Pendrith's tuba brings hilarity to the lighthearted "Let my stomach be soft and round." Though wacky both in its lyrics and in its crazy jugband sound, this song is a message song about being who we are and "living with the code that's in (our) genes." It has become a daily singalong in our house, round about dessert time.

In the title meta-song, "a few simple words," Grit's articulate guitar fingerpicking combines effectively with a simple hammered dulcimer. "Guitar Maker" is a joyous celebration of the rich variety of sound that can be created by 6 (or 12) strings. To a lilting Caribbean-style bongo rhythm, we hear acoustic guitar, joined one by one with archtop guitar, bass guitar, tenor guitar, classical guitar, slide guitar, and 6 and 12 string electric guitars. Though his harmonies are wonderful, Grit's trademark use of unison sound is heard at its best near the end of the tune, when all of the guitars join up in a single round of the old folksong "Matilda."

Grit does get serious, in "One Sunday Night," a dark ballad retelling a 1993 case in which three women accused a man of deliberately infecting them with HIV. I was disturbed by the heavy bass in the music and by the lyrics. I suppose that was intended. The messages are strong in "The Never-Ending Quickstep Waltz" and in "A Begging I Will Go," Grit's NAFTA-

inspired take on the traditional song.

And then comes a delicious break, with a song that has "Nothing to Say." The album ends with a soothing lullaby for overstressed adults. Both "Won't Somebody Sing Me a Lullaby" and "Soft and Round" have the potential to become singalong songs for all of us.

*A Few Simple Words*, a meta-musical autobiography, sings of honesty: of being true to ourselves and honest to our lovers. Grit Laskin bares his soul to us, and lets us love him as much as we love his guitars.

<sup>1</sup>Meta-musical: music about music, a song about song, a fiddle

Barry Luft. *Lean a Little*. Lufty Folk 623667-200066. Barry Luft, 4604 15th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta. T2T 4B2.

Barry Luft's new recording offers some of his favourite music from across a wide range of folk and contemporary musical styles. There is a solid core of songs and instrumentals from the bluegrass/gospel traditions of British-rooted North America, the cowboy poetry of western rural life, some darker contemporary urban themes and a sprinkling of Folk Club humour to balance the mix.

The first track, after the opening drummer's call to join the song circle, is the stirring shanty "What's the Life of a Man?" with its rousing 88-man chorus. The unique recording session for this track is documented fully in Richard Scholtz's article in the June 1995 Bulletin (Vol. 29, No. 2). Any song following this track could not be anything but anticlimactic, so Barry wisely follows with a self-penned instrumental with a related theme—not the life of a man, but pathways in life followed by his two daughters.

Barry's primary instrument is the banjo, well-miked on this recording, with a clean and resonant sound. In "God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens," his work on the fretless

Keith Walker. *Give Me Your Hand*. DMS001. Keith Walker, 2012 Bowness Road NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 3K8.

Keith Walker is a Calgary musician who has been playing hammered dulcimer for over 12 years. His first CD, *Give Me Your Hand*, features traditional tunes and some classical pieces. Keith spent three years learning the instrument from Calgary musician Christy Cook, and one of Christy's compositions has been included, "Molly's Welcome."

The opening tune, "Fanfarinette" by Jean-Philippe Rameau, is nicely performed, with additional accompaniment by synthesizer. The compositions by O'Carolan lend themselves well to the dulcimer, and Keith has developed some into short medleys or as solo pieces. Hidden in the background of the tunes "Give Me Your Hand," "Aldivalloch" and "Bonny Portmore/The Ash Grove" is guitar, recorder and guitar/recorder respectively. This accompaniment is provided by Jessica Ernst, and adds a subtle touch to these tunes. Keith also provides occasional background with synthesizer, but does not overwhelm the beauty of the dulcimer.

talking about fiddles, gripping message songs followed by a message song whose message is that it has nothing to say, nine different types of guitars telling about guitars in a guitar-maker's song about guitar-making, and a lullaby that croons, "Won't Somebody Sing Me a Lullaby."

<sup>2</sup>Autobiography: bare-souled, honest lyrics and melodies that let us into Grit's distinctive world, a world in which all sensations and all events are experienced as music. I trust Grit on this. Honesty come through as a major theme in his lyrics, and I believe that he truly does experience his life as a changing melody.

—Nomi Kaston  
Calgary, Alberta

five-string echoes the lyrics, bending and stretching the melody like a Delta blues guitarist. He also varies the sound with lead instrumental tracks on the autoharp, guitar, concertina and harmonica, and is well supported by the instrumental and vocal contributions of several fine musicians, notably Jim Dauncey (guitar), Elmer Udahl (fiddle) and Alan Law (dobro).

Family and friends are integral to the material and performances on this CD. In a harmonica duet with his father, he pays tribute to Dad's guidance in starting him on his musical path. Daughter Toupey joins him in singing her own "Song for Ety." In bringing us this album of music that he loves and leans on, Barry Luft has "leaned a little" on all of the foundations of his life: his environment and its history (and climate!); his faith and those he shares it with; his family; and his friends and colleagues. The result is a work filled with joy, humour, thoughtful questions and, at the root of it all, sincerity.

—Pat Keenan  
Calgary, Alberta

Unexpected tempo changes add to the pleasantness of the music, but there is no gimmicky speed play to show how fast the musician can move the hammers. Instead, harmony is emphasized, using both hammers, rather than long stretches of continuous single note melody playing. During a short interview, Keith said that he does play a couple of overdubbed duets, on "Greensleeves" and "Molly's Welcome." I was sure that "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" had something extra added, but Keith said, "No, that's the way I play it."

The quality of the recording is extremely clear, and Keith has taken great care to preserve the natural sound of the dulcimer. This is an excellent first release by an artist who obviously enjoys this intriguing instrument.

—Dave Foster  
Calgary, Alberta

Kathleen Yearwood. *Book of Hate*. SW 0394. Amatish Music, 6840 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Markham, Ontario L6B 1A8.

My old colleague George Lyon requested that I review this CD, a responsibility I promptly attempted to dodge by explaining that it might take me years to get around to listening to it, my pile of unlistened-to discs was that massive, and since most of my days at home are spent in my recording studio I rarely listen to anything at all by the time I finish up to 12 hours of editing, production, mixing, playing.

Besides, the review would not be unbiased. I am already a Kathleen Yearwood fan, based on a performance I attended years ago at the Winnipeg festival. I had dragged my six-year-old daughter Molly to this particular workshop because I wanted to see Townes Van Zandt. Molly had other ideas and was not impressed by Van Zandt. While the rest of the crowd went googa over the Texas C & W (*Cult and Weirdo*, not *Country and Western*) hero, Molly said, "This sucks!" in a loud voice. When Yearwood came on, her attitude changed. Here was her favorite kind of person: a young lady.

I'll never forget Yearwood's comments to the audience, mostly directed at Van Zandt. She said that she couldn't really rise to the occasion of the workshop (*Tragic Ballads*) because since she had a middle-class upbringing in Calgary, she really didn't know anything about real tragedy. Then she proceeded to play, I think, a Scottish ballad, thrash-rock style. Marvelous.

This is really a great CD. I managed to step it forward into my listening time by taking it out of my disc pile and getting it into the nighttime listening regime of Molly's younger sister,

Lizzie, now eight. Lizzie has a thing for female vocalists—her favorites are Peggy Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Maria Muldaur, Dolly Parton, and Kate and Anna McGarrigle—so it was relatively easy to slide the Yearwood disc in.

Occasionally I bomb out with these female vocalist choices, such as the time I put on Astrid Gilberto, so sure the bossa nova lilt would have Lizzie snoring in minutes. Instead the disc included some uptempo parade-style numbers, and I was told the disc made Lizzie "too excited" to sleep.

Yearwood was not too exciting for her. No, just too frightening, especially the prison song, "Who Killed Phillip," with its simple but haunting arrangement, and the strange dirge, "Amsterdam Street."

Lizzie not only found the content of some songs disturbing, but the continual reaching for new effects and striking arrangements was simply too much for her. Which to me is one of the best things about Yearwood's music. Although certain artists can be proud of their broad and instant appeal with children, let's face it, some music children are willing to listen to over and over is wimpy. If Kathleen Yearwood is wimpy, then I am Lord Nelson.

Sorry about the delay in reviewing this, but I hope the lateness of my praise won't prevent those who like challenging music from checking out this fine recording.

—Eugene Chadbourne  
Greensboro, North Carolina

[Eugene Chadbourne was one of the first acoustic guitarists to assimilate the insights of such composers and performers as John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, John Cage, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. He began his solo performing career in Calgary, returned to the States at the end of the 70s, and has performed widely as a soloist and in a variety of contexts, with such different artists as Tony Trischka and Carla Bley. Kathleen Yearwood also began performing in Calgary.]

Leigh Cline. *Orient Express*. SRD912. Scimitar Records, PO Box 148, Station O, Toronto, Ontario M4A 2M8.

Canadian guitarist and mix engineer Leigh Cline has created a rock version, or perhaps a world-beat version, or shall we say a celtic-jazz-blues-synthesizer-fusion version, of the exotic Eastern Mediterranean musical styles he learned over twenty years of performing with Greek, Turkish, Arabic, Israeli, Iranian, Assyrian, and Indian musicians.

Cline has a real feel for the intricate polyrhythms of Eastern Mediterranean music. He shifts from 22/16 to 15/16 as glibly as he mixes *kementche* with synthesizer. Kementche is an ancient stringed instrument you might see in Byzantine paintings. Imagine uncovering some archaic picture of early musicians playing their *saz* (long-necked lute), their *zils* (finger cymbals), and their *tulum* (double chanter bagpipe) in a high tech rock studio with cutting edge electric guitars, synthesizers and drums.

The great thing is that these authentic instruments maintain their distinctive Turkish-Greek-Armenian flavour throughout the recording. Each has its moment of solo glory. The kementche player, Michael Kaliontzidis, is particularly attuned to Cline's daring concept.

There are moments of true brilliance in this zany musical eclecticism. The "Sabres of Paradise" begins with a long, mystical *santur* solo. (The santur, played here by Ali Koushkani, is a variety of hammered dulcimer.) Suddenly, like a wind from Azerbaijan, the synthesizers blow in, and the piece turns into some wild rock concert. Leigh Cline's *Orient Express* is technically impeccable, and acoustically thrilling.

—Nomi Kaston

Bob Stark. *One Candle Burning*. SRR 532. Snowy River Records, PO Box 4655, Station E, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5H8.

Bob Stark offers up eleven selections, all original, and supplies vocals and acoustic guitar on this effort. Lyrics tend to be oblique, requiring explanatory remarks for each song in the booklet. Fine production by Ian Tamblyn, and lovely backing

vocals by Susie Vinnick and Meg Lunney, are highlights on this journey through African-influenced, folk and country melodies.

—Tim Williams  
Calgary, Alberta