Comptes rendus / Reviews

Books

Liette Remon and Guy Bouchard (tr. Laura Sadowsky). 25 airs tordus: Airs de violon du Québec—25 Crooked Tunes: Quebec Fiddle Tunes. Trente Sous Zéro—Thirty Below, 1108 rue Dollard, Val-Bélair, PQ G3K 1W6; <thirtybe@qbc.clic>; <nethttp://www.qbc.clic.net/~thirtybe>

The first thing that springs to mind when seeing this book is, What on earth is an "air tordu"? According to the book, a "crooked tune" is a tune that doesn't quite fit into the 8-bar, AABB, equal number of beats mold of "modern" trad/Celtic music. In the 19th and early 20th Century in rural Quebec, fiddlers played for dancing without any accompaniment save their own feet. As anyone who has done any form of contra/set/group dancing has probably noticed, the main thing you are looking for is the beat; the phrase length is not that important. There is always one set that finishes in seven bars and one that is still going after nine.

This, according to the authors, led to the music that is the subject of this book. As the dancers were mainly interested in the beat, the fiddlers could play tunes with seven and a half bars or nine bars, and it wouldn't affect the dancers. They suggest that varying phrase length was done during repeats as a form of variation, just like changing notes. With the arrival of recording devices, radio, backup musicians, &c., this is a practice that is rapidly disappearing. The preservation of this style of playing is therefore the main reason for this book.

The book itself is $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 5" ringbound, 26 pages in black and white. The cover has pictures of four of the fiddlers whose music is discussed inside, but there are no other illustrations. There are eight pages of notes, in French and English, discussing the background, origin and styles of the music included. Each tune is accompanied by a paragraph that explains its origin and a little about the fiddler it was collected from. Three of the tunes were collected by Lisa Ornstein, an associate of La Bottine Souriante, for her Master's thesis, and have quite detailed bowing and phrasing markings. The other tunes are straight transcriptions, with a few ornaments marked. The notes also include a discography where possible.

The tunes themselves are quite nice, not extremely difficult, other than the odd number of beats, and after a couple of tunes you get used to adding or missing a beat anyway. Definitely fun to throw at guitar and bodhran players, for those of us with a twisted sense of humour.

As I mentioned, the purpose of this book is to preserve a style of playing and a music that is in danger of disappearing. Do they succeed? I don't know, because this book doesn't convince me that the "crooked tune" is a genuine style. The notes do not indicate how many performances each transcription is based on—they could be based on several recordings, with roughly the same thing happening each time, or they could be based on one recording of a poor performance by a mediocre fiddler. There are a couple of tunes (i.e., "Reel des Voyageurs") with a few recordings listed, but even they come from one original source. Unfortunately the authors don't indicate the depth to which their research went, and without access to most of the recordings, we have to take an awful lot on faith.

As a tunebook, this is an enjoyable, if somewhat small, volume. There are good tunes in here, a few that hopefully will find their way into someone's repertoire. As a musicological document, I don't know—there are too many unanswered questions. I guess, though, that they have succeeded in their aim of preserving these tunes, because I'm going to keep playing at least a couple of them.

—Derek Lofthouse
Canmore, Alberta


The productive (bless him!) Paul Cranford here adds a fourth volume to the Cape Breton Musical Heritage Series, with an excellent anthology of a good deal of the repertoire of the premier Cape Breton fiddler, Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald (1914-1987). It contains 230 tunes, transcribed from recordings, some exactly, and some eclectic compilations from several playings. The arrangement is by class and key: hornpipes and clogs, pipe tunes, strathspeys and reels, jigs, polkas, and "airs, melodies and waltzes"; within each class the tunes are given according to their key, rather like Robertson's Athole Collection. The layout is big and clear, and the well-bound book seems to sit on the stand very firmly (an asset, believe me!).

Besides the "representative repertoire," Cranford adds a complete list of Winston's tunes obtainable in other books published by Cranford Publications (Athole, Skye, Walker, &c.). He also gives informative notes to most of the items, giving alternative titles (very useful), details of the way Fitzgerald used the tune, where he got it, and so forth, besides detailing, where possible, the composer of the tune (not always done!).

As to the tunes themselves: it's a good selection, and indicates well Fitzgerald's range of talent—which is also displayed to the hilt in the versions he created, making his very own set of a tune, especially in the variations which he added to some. I was particularly taken with his variations on "[Master] Francis Sitwell," a "marching air" by Nathaniel Gow, but best heard, I think, as a slow air. There are many well-known tunes...
here ("South of the Grampians," "Laird of Drumblair," "Teviot Bridge," "One Hundred Pipers"—this as a waltz), but many others not so ready to the mind, both old and (especially) recent, i.e., from the 20th Century, from such composers as J. Murdoch Henderson and William Lawrie.

The book serves very well for two purposes: as an affectionate memorial to the late artist and as a learning book for fiddlers of many levels. Not that such are expected to "learn"


Any enthusiast for traditional folk music, if asked which performers in the English-speaking world were best-known today, would surely reply, "The Chieftains." Their high level of musicianship, their tours, the relative frequency with which their music is featured by the media and their long run of recordings (LPs, tapes, CDs) have brought them to the respectful attention of all who enjoy music. Yes, at times they have strayed from strictly traditional paths onto other musical byways; yes, at times they have been recorded along with classical orchestras or rock and pop musicians in somewhat uneasy fusions. Even so, their influence has been both immense and well-warranted—surely greater, on Canadian musicians at least, than that of any other group. If traditional folk music has superstars, only The Chieftains and their Irish predecessors, The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, can truly claim that status. It is surely for this reason that John Glatt, earlier the author of historical accounts of rock stars and recordings, switched his attention to The Chieftains.

An uneasy prologue, in which he takes pains to demonstrate that these mere folk artists have been taken seriously by such giants of modern "culture" as The Rolling Stones, Peter O'Toole and even David Letterman, sets the stage for his account. No doubt this was intended to demonstrate to himself and his readers that these Irishmen were, after all, worthy of attention. Perhaps I am unusual in finding it almost insufferably condescending.

The approach taken subsequently is logical enough; indeed, it is essentially chronological. The main text commences with an account of Paddy Moloney's early years and the reasons for his involvement into folk music. As the other musicians destined to become Chieftains are encountered, their early years and musical doings are similarly summarized.

A few other persons gain similar treatment. The Honourable Garech Browne, heir to the Guinness fortune and an enthusiastic promoter of Irish music, merits extended treatment because he was especially to feature The Chieftains when he launched the Claddagh record label. Sean Ó Riada, born John Reidy, sets the stage for his account. No doubt this was intended to demonstrate to himself and his readers that these Irishmen were, after all, worthy of attention. Perhaps I am unusual in finding it almost insufferably condescending.

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three full pages (297-300) are devoted to their participation in a "private" Hollywood-style wedding.

Well, fair enough. The old days, when Paddy Moloney was striving so hard to rejuvenate Irish music, were gone by. Now they were taking "their places among the elite of rock n’ roll" at such functions as the celebration of The Who’s 25th anniversary (279) and a "$800-a-plate pre-Grammy party" (264). They were playing, not merely with classically-trained musicians like James Galway, but also with the likes of Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Sting and Mick Jagger. Glory be, they were even beating Mike Jackson for a Grammy award in the "pop" section!

Indeed, ’twas a long road The Chieftains had travelled, from the quiet, dimly-lit bars of Dublin to the noise and Klieg lights of American prime-time television scene and the crowded vast-nesses of the Hollywood Bowl. Surely Paddy Moloney had been genuine when he said: "I wanted to spread the gospel of Irish music" (293)—and, yes, he did it. However, by now he and his fellow musicians have reached out to embrace so many other musical styles that they have left many former fans behind and bewildered.

This book is an encomium for the commercial musical successes of The Chieftains. As such, it is fair enough, I suppose: it is well indexed, and it does include a useful discography. However, for a proper assessment of the music of The Chieftains and its significance (innate or seminal), we must await another book and another author.

—William A.S. Sarjeant
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

**Book/Recordings**


---. The Prince Edward Island Style of Fiddling: The Fiddlers of Western Prince Edward Island. Rounder CD 7014. Both available from Denon Canada Inc., 17 Denison Street, Markham, Ontario L3R 1B


Thanks to Ken Perlman, of the Boston, Massachusetts, area, for producing two fine CDs and a great tune book of fiddle music from Prince Edward Island. This impressive effort is obviously a labour of love, supported by many organizations and individuals, in addition to Perlman, who are dedicated to Prince Edward Island music and culture. Seven organizations, including the Earthwatch Organization of Watertown, Massachusetts, the John and Clara Higgins Foundation of Washington, DC, the PEI Fiddlers’ Association, and the Institute of Island Studies of Charlottetown, provided financial and other assistance. No less than 60 Earthwatch volunteers assisted Perlman with his fieldwork on the Island. Fifty-eight fiddlers were recorded during the fieldwork, giving 480 tunes, of which 427 were transcribed by Perlman for the Mel Bay Book. Hopefully, fiddling in Prince Edward Island will continue to flourish.

The two recordings demonstrate and describe differences in the Acadian/Québécois-inspired fiddling of Western PEI and the Cape Breton/Gaelic-inspired fiddling of Eastern PEI. The CD of Western PEI fiddlers includes high quality field recordings of 12 fiddlers playing 31 tunes, while the CD of fiddlers of Eastern PEI showcases ten fiddlers playing 29 tunes. Sometimes the accompanying instruments are a little too quiet in the mix, but there are a few precious accompaniment moments, such as the occasional pump organ parts, and the hum-along performed by Margaret Ross MacKinnon. (The pump organ is a traditional fiddle accompaniment instrument in PEI.) The overall sound quality is enjoyable.

The liner notes of both CDs are replete with a brief historical background, musicians’ biographies and descriptions of tune origins. Perlman made a special effort to research and describe, in as much detail as possible, the names and origins of fiddle tunes. This is especially obvious in the Mel Bay tune book.

The tune book includes transcriptions of all the tunes from the two CDs, plus numerous others. Transcriptions include accompaniment chord symbols, ornaments, and an indication of some alternate versions from a variety of PEI fiddlers. Ornaments and double-stop notes are the same small size, so as not to distract from the basic tune. Thus, fiddlers can learn the basic skeleton of the tune, or they can elaborate the tune with ornaments written in the tune book and according to the recorded versions. Composers of tunes are indicated when known, and many tunes are cross-referenced with known historical sources such as Cole’s One-Thousand Fiddle Tunes, printed in 1940 and 1967, and Ryan’s Mammoth Collection, from circa 1880. Perlman includes an extensive annotated bibliography listing numerous other historical and current sources of printed fiddle music. Two helpful appendices at the end of this book are the Index of Alternative Titles and the Index of Composers. The tune book includes more extensive biographies of fiddlers and a detailed description of PEI fiddle and accompaniment styles. Perlman also provides a brief but well-informed consideration of traditional PEI fiddle learning styles and the relationship between old time fiddling and dancing.

It might be noted that some years ago fiddlers in PEI, spearheaded by the PEI Fiddlers’ Association, decided to discourage and even ban fiddle contests. It was found that too often, as a result of contests, hostilities arose among Island fiddlers and among the families of fiddlers. Instead of contests, more inclusive events were supported, such as the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival. This summer fiddle festival attracts thousands of spectators and participants. The profits from the festival have been used for the last 15 years to sponsor free fiddle classes every Monday night at the Rollo Bay Consolidated School.

Perlman, PEI fiddlers and PEI citizens in general are to be commended for their dedication to encouraging, with some
success, the PEI style of fiddling. According to Perlman, there appears to be relatively broad social support in PEI, not just for this style of fiddling, but also for extensive related social and cultural activities. The growing popularity of fiddle tea parties, house parties, ceilidhs, and old time dances, as well as a demand for both stepdancing lessons and fiddle lessons, suggests some reasons for optimism.

—Rod Olstad
St. Albert, Alberta

Recordings

Al Simmons. Celery Stalks at Midnight. OSCD 090. Oak Street Music Inc., 1067 Sherwin Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 0T8; Sony Music Entertainment (Canada) Inc., 1113 Leslie Street, North York, Ontario M3C 2J9

"The continuing musical misadventures of Al Simmons..." If this is a set of Al's favourite songs (including some of his own) looking for a theme, then I think he has found it. As Sherlock Holmes, or the ubiquitous private eye, Al has set the songs around mystery, intrigue, dress/clothes, cryptic messages and lengthy explanation. Puns and word-play are important when Al decides to add material, dress up some of the lyrics and include some new ideas to suit the topic ("Celery Stalks at Midnight"). The songs range from music hall and vaudeville ("Where Did You Get that Hat?"; "Sam You Made the Pants Too Long"), through the '40s ("La Vie en Rose" by Edith Piaf) and the swing period ("Open the Door, Richard") to a more familiar '80s style ("Baby—Why Are You Crying So?").

This isn't a kids album, unless older kids (13+) decide to take some of the songs and act them out as skits in drama class. The humour would be lost on much younger listeners, although Al Simmons. Something's Fishy at Camp Wiganishie. OSCD 013. Oak Street Music Inc., 1067 Sherwin Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 0T8; Sony Music Entertainment (Canada) Inc., 1113 Leslie Street, North York, Ontario M3C 2J9

In this day and age when kids, younger and younger, are aware of what's on the pop charts, you've got to be able to capture their imaginations with the zany, the madcap, and, ah yes, the gross—and the "grosser" the better. Having a captive audience is one thing, but appealing to listeners to enjoy the songs you've created takes a lot when it's the younger set. At times children need an outlet for pent-up feelings, or just to do/sing something that mum or dad wouldn't like, which instead can be very personal and satisfying for the child.

This CD is set in a (summer) camp, and includes topics and feelings (except for homesickness) that are most likely experienced at least once by the participants. By the time children leave elementary school, many will have been to camp, whether it be an educational "outdoor school" or a holiday experience. With these songs Al encourages the listeners to participate through sing-a-long, echo and action-type songs. Topics mentioned are: hobbies ("I Collect Rocks", "Counting Feathers"); food ("I Want a Pancake", "The Stew Song"); activities ("I Got My Axe", "I Got a Horse"); getting ready for bed ("Singin' in the Bathtub", "I Can't Find My Pyjamas"); and dreams ("Secret Song"). The kids are introduced to a variety of musical styles—rich singing, blues, boogie, classical and swing—and arrangements with a variety of instruments that fit each mood.

These songs would be suitable at camp for the basis of skits, and would thus keep the listener involved, otherwise some get tedious to listen to on a repeated basis at home, but that was for me. All in all, the songs belong to the kids, and should be enjoyed by them—with not much interference from us big guys!

—Dave Foster
Calgary, Alberta

Various. We Will Remain: Patriotic Songs of Newfoundland. SingSong SS9803. SingSong Inc., PO Box 6371, St. John's, Newfoundland, A1C 6J9; <singsong@nfld.com>; <www.singsong.com>

Released during the spring of 1998, this album represents 49 years of Confederation between Newfoundland and Canada. It is a collection of a wide variety of artists and songs which are united under the theme of Newfoundland politics and identity. There is no other collection, as far as I am aware, that brings together such a diverse and comprehensive list of songs celebrating Newfoundland patriotism. This invaluable CD provides a necessary reminder of the strengths and struggles of Newfoundlanders as a people. As shown in the final track, Shane Mahoney's passionate recitation "We Will Remain," this is a culture that has survived the hardest of times. Despite the continuing dismal forecasts, this CD contributes to Newfoundlanders' confidence in continued survival as Newfoundlanders well into the twenty-first century.
Perhaps to the surprise of many Canadians, and even some Newfoundlanders, many of the songs recorded here concern not only Newfoundland patriotism but also anti-Confederation movements. They celebrate the notion of an independent Newfoundland. Some of them were written for the 1869 and 1949 anti-Confederation campaigns. One example is the anonymous "Anti-Confederation Song" (sung here by Arthur O'Brien), which was written for the 1869 debate and was revived during the 1949 debate. With a spirited chorus (given below), this song certainly stuck in the minds of many Newfoundlanders, a necessity for any campaign song:

Hurrah for our own native isle, Newfoundland.
Not a stranger shall hold one inch of her strand.
Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf.
Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!

Another traditional example here is Mark Walker's "'Antis' of Plate Cove" (sung by Fergus O'Byrne), "Antis," of course, is a reference to the "anti-Confederates." This song describes a fight between the "Antis" and the "Cons" during the 1869 referendum.

Many of these songs are recent compositions. They criticize the Confederation agreement between Newfoundland and Canada while exploring the controversies which surround this deal. Some songs continue to promote Newfoundland independence, a theme that appears to be growing in Newfoundland, at least in its portrayals in the arts and popular culture. Examples here include Jason Whelan's "'49" (sung by Whelan), Jim Payne's "The Whispering Wave" (sung by Payne) and Sean McCann and Bob Hallett's "Republican Song" (sung by Chris Andrews). "'49" is perhaps best known from its previous recording by The Punters, a St. John's rock 'n' roll band (see The Punters. 1995. Sound Solution PFO-007, The Sound Solution, 17A Downing Street, St. John's, Newfoundland A1B 2R9). "Whispering Wave" ends with the unforgettable lines:

500 years on the whispering wave, sceptical sombre and shaken.
Don't let it take 500 more to get back what was taken.

However, perhaps the most forceful lyrics come from "Republican Song":

So hear me, Newfoundland, it's time to make the last demand,
Gather strength against the force that would surround you.
For the Wolf is at your door, and you've kissed the mainland whore,
The time has come at last to make a stand.

"The Wolf," also used in the 1869 "Anti-Confederation Song," is a reference to Canada. I don't recall any previous encounters with the "mainland whore" analogy. You'll have to ask Sean or Bob (the composers and members of Great Big Sea) for the history of that one.

Although I consider this one the most comprehensive collections of Newfoundland patriotic songs, some things are missing. This is understandable, because an all-inclusive collection would surely be a multi-volume work. My primary concern is the exclusion of Newfoundland country music artists and the failure to identify this collection as one belonging primarily to the St. John's folk scene. This is not a criticism of that scene. It is merely a concern with the promotion of a perception that these artists are representative of all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The artists and songs presented here represent some of the best of Newfoundland talent, but the equally important, talented and popular Newfoundland country music musicians are not represented. Their music contains the same themes that are explored in this collection, but with a stronger portrayal of the voices of fishermen. Their musical style is quite different from that represented here, and would add greater diversity to the fairly homogeneous style of this recording. Perhaps what I'm suggesting here is the creation of a second compilation of Newfoundland patriotic songs, focused around Simani, Ellis and Wince Coles, Dave Pike and Tim Brown, just to name a few.

On this CD are 16 songs and one recitation, intermingled with several excerpts from anti-Confederation speeches from 1948-49. These are speeches from various politicians involved in the debate, such as Patrick Morris and Peter Cashin, powerful additions to the CD. The liner notes give detailed information on the history and importance of each song. Song texts are included, laid out in columns on an old Anti-Confederation campaign flyer. These flyers, containing cartoons and short headlines, continue to pop up in various popular culture media today. Some of the phrases mixed in with the song texts are "Newfoundland is not for sale" and "Every Newfoundlander under Confederation will know well what it means to be Taxed, Taxed, and Taxed...."

This is a well-produced, powerful recording. As an example of the increasing concern with nationalism in Newfoundland, it may very well become historically significant. As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation (1999), the issues contained here remain in the spotlight. How much longer will Newfoundland survive as a unique society? With the loss of the fishery, how can Newfoundland culture continue to survive? According to the strengths and achievements of the artists represented here, Newfoundland will survive forever.

...To those who decry the emergent indifference and opportunism, the pus-choked sores on the face of our culture, and to those who sadly believe that this latest crisis is truly our last, I would gently ask them to listen. Listen. Listen quietly to the more ancient rhythm, the faint drumming echoing backwards from the temporary present to the more concrete past, of something powerful, sure, and proud. Forever rising, forever falling, like the sea that runs through our salted existence, it is always there. Along the dark roads home we will meet ourselves, and in the instant of recognition the doomsayers and false priests will be slain. Newfoundland and her people will remain. [Shane Mahoney, excerpt from "We Will Remain"]

—Cory W. Thorne
Bowling Green, Ohio
Roy Forbes. Almost Overnight. AKA-CD 1002. AKA Records, Box 86013, North Vancouver, British Columbia V7L 4J5

Roy Forbes is in fine form on Almost Overnight. This well-known British Columbian singer/songwriter was first introduced to us as "Bim." Many have commented on Forbes’s unique singing style, but I think it fits the powerful songs that he writes.

What really stands out on this CD, right there front and centre, is that great guitar playing. Roy is re-introducing us to great tunes from earlier in his career. Listening to this recording for the first time brought back many memories of when I lived on the prairies and in BC. Thanks, Roy!

Of the 18 tracks on Almost Overnight, four have finally made it onto a recording after being on Roy’s concert playlist for years. "Headed the Wrong Way," "So Afraid," "Peer Pres-


This is Gregg Lawless’s first solo effort, and a very good one at that. It is not easy to explain the music, simply because it is all over the place, so I won’t even try to classify or label Gregg’s sound. I will tell you that there is a touch of Celtic, some hint of a blues flavour, a few tunes have a funky beat, and there’s also a touch of klezmer. With so many varied sounds on the CD, Gregg does a very professional job pulling it off with his versatile voice and in his playing of a variety of instruments.

The list of guest musicians on Greggorian Chance is as diverse as the songs and the music. Blue Rodeo’s Bazil Donovan, Kevin Breit (Holly Cole, Cassandra Wilson), John Sheard (Margaret O’Hara, Quartette) and Don Rooke (The Henry’s), keyboardist Matt Horner (T.P.O.H., Margaret O’Hara), multi-instrumentalist Sean O’Connor (NOJO, The Sidemen), bassist Artie Roth (The Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band) and drummer Mike Billard (The Henry’s) add much to this 15-track CD. At some points the CD sounds somewhat over-produced, but with so many sounds happening, that is to be expected. You really have to take a good listen to Greggorian Chance to appreciate the different ranges. There is something there for everyone.

"Joe Truck" is one of my favourite songs on the CD (I really like old trucks). The 1930s-sounding "Georgia On My Mind" is another one. Track 15 is "The Goodnight Song (Camp Trillium Lullaby)", a song Gregg wrote while working at a summer camp for children who have cancer. It has become the official Camp Trillium theme song, and is sung each night around the campfire. I might add that a portion of the proceeds of Greggorian Chance will be donated to Camp Trillium, so Don’t Make Copies—Buy It. (You’ll like it.)

—Terry St. James

Grit Laskin. Earthly Concerns. Borealis BCD111. 67 Mowat Avenue, Suite 233, Toronto, Ontario M6K 3E3

I used to seek out the opportunity to review records, those I disliked almost as much as those I liked. I suppose I was more of a crusader in those days, hacking away at hack music as well as supporting those performers and idioms I respected. At some point I got tired of what may or may not be a good fight but is usually a futile one.

I also used to seek to review records in order to add to my collection, especially to add to it things that I knew I would like. That, too, has become rather a thing of the past. I don’t own a CD player, have no plans to buy one (my wife has a little portable, and I occasionally tape items on that), and—to tell you the truth—I’m rather glad that the weekly trip to the record store has disappeared like my tobacco addiction.

I’m reviewing Grit Laskin’s new CD for neither of those reasons, but because I’m really not sure how I feel about it. I’d like to write out my reactions, work them over, and put them down in order that I may think about them longer. But, first, let me say that there is much to admire here and that I hope he sells a lot of copies. The disc features the work of a few of Canada’s finest players, and it offers a great deal of thoughtful pleasure.

I’m particularly fond of Laskin’s instrumentals, especially the two more danceable ones, "Driving To The Woods/Sorry I’m Late" and "Flipside." The instrumental reprise of the title cut, which ends the disc, is also pleasant, but I can’t say that it grabbed me. I guess that what I worry about here is that many people won’t be grabbed by Laskin’s songs, and I’m sorry for that.

When we interviewed Grit some months ago (Bulletin 31. 3/4), he spoke of his interest in the songwriting of Stephen Sondheim and Jacques Brel, which is more theatrical than most folk songs, even than the folk-derived music of people like Simon and Garfunkle or Joni Mitchell. At the time, I was reminded of a radio interview with Leon Rosselson, who spoke quite scathingly about the limits of folk musical forms, particularly, as I remember, directing scorn at American folk music, possibly even at Woody Guthrie, certainly at Guthrie’s imitators. Rosselson also named Jacques Brel as his lodestone. As well, at times one hears Brecht/Weill in the work of both Rosselson and Laskin. I’ll return in a moment to the question of whether or not traditional English-language forms really limit a serious
composer or singer/songwriter, but first I have to wonder how easy it is for someone to move into the idiom which Weill and Sondheim speak.

Let me hasten to assure everyone (starting with Grit himself, if he ever reads this) that I am not in the least undervaluing Laskin's talent. (Impugning Grit's talent would be very foolish indeed—consider his many accomplishments!) What I mean is that composers like Sondheim, Weill, Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin, or Leonard Bernstein began with a rather specialized training, one that is acquired as slowly as a lutherian's skills.

Laskin, too, has a great deal of training, in songcraft as well as in instrument building. He may have acquired this training in a less formal fashion than did "legit" musicians, but it is just as thorough and requires rigor and attention. The point that Alan Lomax used to make about vocal styles—"The way in which a country singer handles his voice is neither accidental nor unperejudicated. He is conforming to one of several inherited traditions of singing, all of which are at least as old, as highly cultivated, and as difficult to master as the bel canto of our opera singers" ("Introduction," The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language)—applies equally to the craft and grammar of folk song construction. Neither vocal technique nor repertoire come into being without study, whether that study involves the formal pedagogy of the conservatory or the possibly self-conscious immersion of rural singers and later city-billies.

That Laskin's immersion has largely been in the homelier musical arts, rather than in a more studied sort of culture, shows up frequently in his work. For instance, to go back to his previous disc, a few simple words, in "One Sunday Night," he sang, "I now understand that each squiggle and square / had a genius's reason for why it is there." What always struck me about this verse is that the speaker comes to Picasso as an outsider—he seems surprised that the squiggles make sense, as though they ever didn't. This is not necessarily a fault; it seems to me that Grit's musical personality is closer to Harpo Marx than to Noel Coward, and maybe not even very close to Chico Marx. (And anyone who knows me well should know that I adore Harpo!) I'm not thinking of Harpo's manic, wildly sexual or satirical side, but of the sweet, angelic mop-top at his instrument or Pied Pipering a row of street urchins or standing in for the missionary position is acceptable to the song's narrator. In the context of Broadway and Tin Pan Alley, this seems somewhat surprising. Wasn't it Yip Harburg, co-author of "Over the Rainbow" (and I don't care what your granny says, I call that a dope song!), who also wrote, "Let your kiss delicious have a tinge of vicious, though it's all fictitious..."? Again, I'm not sure that the prominence of certain sexual practices doesn't suggest worrisome things about our society—but I'm not convinced that they do, either. If Grit wants to preach to the converted, he'll miss me on this one. But isn't preachiness one of the limitations some people like to complain about in old time folk music, especially old time protest song?

If Laskin can be accused of preaching, the habit is most troubling in his account ("The Most Amazing Thing In The World") of an abused child who remains "unsinkably buoyant/luminous with courage." As I write, I've just graded a batch of first-year composition papers in which I had to try to drag a number of students from the general to the particular. My first response to this song is very like my problems with those papers. I don't really see this little girl. I get a rough idea of the horror of abuse, but I don't really see much about how this situation came about. **I am glad that the little girl has not lost the capacity to hope or touch—but how did this happen? What paths in her synapses got triggered? And, perhaps most important of all, how does he know these things? Can he trust whatever signals came to him?**

I do an exercise with my comp students, in which, paired off, they look at each other for 30 seconds, then have a minute to write down what they saw. Over and over, I get, "Nice smile." What is a nice smile? What—I usually have to press this out of them—did you see that made you conclude that the smile was nice? Once, however, a student wrote, "A fine face with no eyes. They were pushed back by the big cheeks caused by her huge smile." Point 1: I really can visualize that particular smile.
Point 2: I believe that it was a nice smile. Note how point 1 leads to point 2.

I want to return now to the question of whether or not the world of Sondheim and so on offers more sophistication than the world of folk music.*** For the last hour, a line from somebody's version of "House of the Rising Sun" has been floating through my mind: "One foot on the platform, the other foot on the train." The particularity of that moment has haunted me for years; not only is it sweetly cinematic—the character is poised here, as throughout the song, at the moment before she returns to New Orleans, to "wear that ball and chain." I think it's out of fashion to talk about "thresholds" in the social sciences, but the threshold still a powerful moment in any experience. This moment couldn't have been caught better even by Sondheim, Cole Porter, or Noel Coward (and I have great love for the work of these writers). Folk song at its best is every bit as sophisticated as popular or classical song. A fine face with no eyes... "One foot on the platform,..." I can't find a line like that in "The Most Amazing Thing In The World." I can only take Grit's word that she has a nice smile. I trust Grit, as I trust my students, for the most part. But something's missing from this experience, I'm afraid.

These are the sorts of difficulties I have with several songs on Laskin's latest venture. Though I may sound crabby, with the exception of "Fast and Loud," there's not a project on this disc relevant information on each song in three languages (French, English and Armenian).

The accompanying booklet includes song lyrics, sources and appreciation of Armenian traditional musical genres and styles. The booklet also includes ample information on Armenian folk songs. It explains how, despite extreme socio-political hardships, people orally maintained and transmitted these songs as part of a unique musical culture. A brief explanation is given on "The Modality of Armenian Folk Songs," which forms the foundation of the ensemble's performance style. The section entitled "Interpretation by Kotchnak," although extremely short, covers probably one of the most important issues to be addressed by an ethnomusicologist. In these two short paragraphs Kotchnak claim that their style of singing and playing is the result of research done over the past few decades. Indeed, Kotchnak's style may sound innovative to those who have lost touch with the...
source-link and with the continuity of Armenian singing style.
Yet in reality the near loss of this source-link, which was caused by the 1915 genocide and consequent events, brought about "the most radical and profound changes ever suffered in the history of this people."

Kotchnak’s renditions return to the origins in their modal and monophonic interpretation of these melodies, with simple yet poignant and expressive ornamentations, a unique voice production that stands out in its sheer clarity of sound, and an unequalled importance given to the expression of the text. The instrumental segments and accompaniments are rendered with high professionalism.

Benoît leBlanc. Poursuivre. Amérix C.AM 101.2. (no address on packaging)

The French verb poursuivre has several meanings: to pursue, to hound, to haunt or be haunted, to carry on, press on or continue, and even to prosecute! Benoît leBlanc is aware of the many levels of meaning of the word and plays with them in his liner notes and throughout the album. This is a haunting album, one which can touch the listener on a number of levels. For Poursuivre, Benoît leBlanc has drawn on themes and inspiration from a variety of literary sources and musical traditions. His songs are rife with allusions and quotes from authors and artists as diverse as Gilles Vigneault, Robert Charlebois, Shakespeare, and the Bible. The musical styles on the album range from Cajun and Zarico (Louisiana blues) to québécois folk. There is even a spoken word piece, "Le Chant," performed over 14th-Century Catalan instrumentalists. LeBlanc has for some years been known for integrating various musical styles, and he does so to great success on this album, constructing a coherent work of art from such diverse sources.

LeBlanc’s Cajun-inspired songs are not inauthentic. The song "Carry Me Back" evokes the sense of loss of a culture: "Mais j’connais pas quoi faire, c’est gone, and still my heart belongs to the land of my dreams."

There is an edge to this album. "Le président" is a hard-hitting a cappella piece rendered all the more effective by leBlanc’s driving vocals and the accompanying percussion. "Tam-tam di li dam" likewise is performed with a sense of urgency. There is political commentary here, yet the album offers much more than a soapbox for leBlanc’s world view. Pieces like "La tempête" and "Poursuivre (le chant d’hiver)" reveal leBlanc as poet and chansonnier as well as an accomplished musician.

LeBlanc accompanies himself on piano, guitar, harmonica and accordion on a number of pieces, but is assisted by some very capable musicians, including chanteuse Marie-Jo Thério, percussionist Ron Feather and the late Guy Dion on bass. While this is not the most recent of releases (recorded between June 1992 and June 1994), it is a wonderful introduction to the work of leBlanc and to recent trends in Franco-American folk.

—Steven Méthot
Calgary, Alberta

Suroît. Ressac. SUR-C-555. Suroît, c/o Kenneth Saulnier, 2460-2 Pierre Boucher, Québec, PQ GIJ 3X7

Over its 20-year history and several incarnations, Suroît, from the Magdalen Islands, have developed a reputation as a good-time "party band." Their second CD, Ressac, represents a departure for the group. Suroît’s musical reach has extended beyond its Madelinot roots to embrace such diverse styles as country swing, Cajun, Celtic and contemporary folk.

There is a great deal of beautiful music on this album. Alcide Painchaud, the group’s accordionist and pianist, has penned several haunting pieces, including "Le tour du monde," a latter-day shanty, and "Au claire de la brume," about writer’s block, which offers one of the most interesting lyrical lines on the album, in parody of "Au claire de la lune": "Au clair de la brume, mon ami Pierrot. Vas dire à ma plume, j’ai perdu les mots." ["In the light of the fog... go tell my pen that I’ve lost the words."] Félix Leblanc, the group’s violinist, delivers a more than capable arrangement of "Jerry Holland’s" and an original instrumental piece, "Orage," which conjures up images of an Atlantic storm.

The ensemble playing is well-executed and balanced. The two instrumentalists (kanoun and tar) also partake in the vocal sections, contributing to the overall sound variety and interest, and vocal contrast.

Biographical notes of the performers, along with brief descriptions of instruments (tar, kanoun, dap) used in this recording, make our reading complete. I highly recommend this CD to those who want to be exposed to a true rendition of Armenian traditional music. I should also mention that this is an excellent recording from Al Sur Studio, distributed by Media 7.

—Hasmig lnjegikian
Montreal, Quebec

All five musicians are excellent vocalists; their harmonies are tight and quite stirring on such pieces as "Gars d’la Baie," an interesting fusion of Celtic rhythms and Acadian sentiment.

Where the album fails is in the integration of these songs and pieces into something which hangs together or offers more than just an interesting sampler of music. Songs like "Le Pétrolier," about a potential ecological catastrophe, seem somehow out of place beside a rousing cover of Jim Corcoran’s "D’la bire eau ciel" ("Is there beer in heaven?") , and the country swing rhythms of "Le coeur à la bonne place." We’re left with the impression that the group, however "tight" musically it may be, is being pulled in a number of creative directions by its various members. It is ironic that the title of the album, Ressac, refers to the shaking turbulence of waves which consume or fall back upon themselves. While this is a wonderful album, I couldn’t help but feel that it was somehow less than the sum of its parts.

—Steven Méthot
Gayle Tapper. Here the Tides Flow. 02 50744. Gayle Tapper, 65 St. Clare Avenue, St. John’s, Newfoundland A1C 2J9; <gayle@infonet.st-johns.nf.ca>

Here the Tides Flow is a unique album by a unique performer. Raised with a background of both classical and Celtic music, Newfoundlander Gayle Tapper found her greatest love in the music of South America. Tapper now devotes herself to the playing of the Paraguayan harp. However, she is an artist who refuses to be limited by self-imposed musical boundaries. This recording reflects Tapper’s continued interest in the music of many cultures, and contains tunes from Paraguay, Ireland, Spain, Norway, France, Mexico and Venezuela.

From the beautiful artwork on the cover to the very last track, this CD creates a warm and friendly mood. This is rainy day music—uplifting yet soothing. Tapper plays with great skill but, more importantly, her playing is emotionally evocative. On the dance pieces her rhythms are steady yet still played with great feeling. The eclectic selection of tunes may fail to interest traditionalists with a more focused interest in harp music, but these tunes serve as an excellent introduction for those unaware of the harp’s potential.

My only real criticism with this album lies in the area of production. I found an excessive use of percussion in the arrangements. Often a handclap or snaredrum was added in an unsubtle way, which tended to dominate the mix. The Paraguayan harp is by nature a percussive instrument, and does not need these uninspired distractions. I also objected to the occasional addition of a New Age synthesizer background. These dreary sounds distract from the rootsy self-defined "kitchen music" that is Tapper’s real forte. Producer Jim Fidler should have had more faith in Tapper’s music and shown a little more restraint.

Let the harp speak for itself!

—Danishka Esterhazy
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dave Baker. This Land Is What I Am. CCP1000, Songs and Sounds of Canadian Steam: Canadian Railway History in Song. CCP04. Both available from Coast Country Productions, PO Box 439, 1195 Davie Street, Vancouver, BC V6E 1N2

Here are two albums of excellently played and sung songs and instrumental pieces about which this reviewer must immediately admit a bias: the style of performance and production is not much to my personal taste. Dave Baker’s voice and delivery bear very favourable comparison to the late, great Jim Reeves, and the "sound" of these recordings is not dissimilar to what I remember of Jim Reeves’s recordings. Asked to review it for a publication dealing with tradition and "folk" (whatever that is), I was unprepared for sumptuous (synthesised) string arrangements. It’s a personal prejudice—but I prefer listening to songs without orchestration, unless it’s Nina Simone or Frank Sinatra.

Whilst the guitar work and singing on both of these recordings is never less than excellent, the lyrics and studio production often wander far into territory I can only describe as "schmalztz." Likewise, the superb exponent of "slide steel" guitar (I hope I have the correct term) is ubiquitous to the point of predictability on track after track. The same plaudits and critique could be levelled at the wonderful flute accompaniments, but all too often these recordings—especially the first—sound like background music to be played in a hotel lounge.

However, Dave Baker obviously believes in the value of what he is doing—the sincerity shines through. Of particular note is his excellent and moving song (on This Land Is What I Am) "Land of Maquinna."

Songs and Sounds of Canadian Steam is obviously a labour of love, from a man who has been entranced with the railways (especially steam) for almost as long as he can remember. Though the recording bears many of the hallmarks of This Land, it is buoyed up by its subject matter and some tasteful choices of songs by other writers. Several are songs without which no album of this title could be complete—such as Ray Griff’s "Canadian Pacific," Uncle Gordon’s "Canadian Railroad Trilogy," and Dave’s own "Kettle Valley Line"* (on both recordings)—but there are also others such as James Rankin’s "Orangedale Whistle," a song particularly suited to Dave Baker’s obvious love of country music. My own favourite would (of course) have to be the emotive, a capella harmony version of the traditional "Prairie Harvester Song."

All in all, perhaps these reviews say more about the reviewer than the reviewed—something I abhor when I read such myself. However, the albums are offered, sincerely, by a man who obviously writes, plays and sings from the heart—and nothing I or anyone else might say should obscure that reality.

—Tom Lewis
Salmo, British Columbia

*This song should not be confused with another using the same title, which was collected by Phil Thomas (see Songs of the Pacific Northwest) and has been recorded by Stanley Triggs (Bunkhouse and Forecastle Songs of the Northwest) and Tim Rogers and Barry Luft (Songs of the Iron Trail). I’d like also to take this opportunity to let readers know that Songs and Sounds of Canadian Steam also includes John Leeder’s "The Hudson Bay Line" (Bulletin 16.2, 1982) [GWL]
Anyone interested in the Newfoundland music tradition will find a real treasure trove in this 1997 release from Bristol’s Hope. The selection of musical styles is quite eclectic, ranging from the traditional accordion-driven opening cut of square dance tunes, through ballads ("The Female Drummer"), pure music hall ("Canoodle Doodle"), Rufus Guinchard tunes and a lovely waltz, the Irish song tradition as popularized by groups like the Clancy Brothers and the Dubliners ("Rubber Boots"), to a cut that could have been taken from the classic Morris On album by Ashley Hutchings and company ("King William and the Jolly Lads").

The performances are terrific throughout, but especially outstanding are Anita Best’s vocals and Baxter Wareham’s delightful button accordion playing. Because of the wide variety of styles, the album feels more like a collection of various artists than a cohesive recording by a group, but don’t let that put you off. Recommended to fans of Piggy Duff and anyone else interested in Newfoundland music. People who enjoy UK groups such as Fairport Convention and the various Albion Bands will also appreciate these Newfoundland takes on the English and Celtic music traditions.

—Charles de Lint

Paddy Tutty. In the Greenwood. PA04. Prairie Druid Music, 219 11th Avenue E, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0E5; <wuidland@sk.sympatico.ca>; <ww3.sk.sympatico.ca/wuidland>

It is always a joy to welcome another recording by Patty Tutty. Quite apart from her ability as a musician and singer, she has endeared herself to her audiences through her downplayed humour and generally pleasant manner both on and offstage. Her latest recording has 13 tracks, covering a broad spectrum of songs and tunes, mainly from the British Isles and the Celtic traditions of France and Ireland, with the addition of an original tune by Paddy and her personal stamp on the arrangements. As with her previous recording, Prairie Druid, this one was produced by Ian Tamblyn and recorded in Ottawa with some of the same crew and backup musicians.

The font size in the liner notes is pretty small and difficult to read, but otherwise they give sufficient details of each of the 13 tracks. The reader might be interested in a few added notes.

The first song, "The Four Seasons" by Brian Pearson, was a shoo-in for her repertoire; it has distinct echoes of one of Paddy’s most popular performance pieces, "The Dancers of Stanton Drew." Track 2, "The Gypsy Laddie (Child 200)," is a particularly good vehicle for Paddy’s voice. The song is haunting and sung with ease, and is a Scottish form of the ballad most commonly thought of as being Scottish but found throughout the British Isles and North America. The 3rd track, "Sui Sios fá mo Dhidean," is an Irish harp tune transposed to and played on the harpsichord.

"We Be Soldiers Three" follows and is coupled with (and complimented by) a French bourée. The song retains its 16th-century character, when presented this way, but might lend itself particularly well to being sung a cappella, in the 19th-century style of English country songs.

Track 5, "Knight William and the Shepherd’s Daughter," was learned from the singing of The Young Tradition, a group that was led by the late Peter Bellamy. It is on their self-titled 1967 album on Vanguard, and is undoubtedly better left in this version, which has 15 verses. The version in Sharp’s One Hundred English Folksongs For Medium Voice has 17 verses, but the 15th verse,

The dog shall eat the flour you sowed,
And thou shalt eat the bran;
I’ll make thee rue the day and hour
That ever thou wast born.

appears out of place and only adds ambiguity to the story. "William Glen" is a ballad of the supernatural that goes off into extensive realms of folklore, with the motif S264.1 (Man thrown overboard to placate storm), which was the fate of William Glen. The ballad is a version of Child 57, "Brown Robyn’s Confession," which has Brown Robyn, a ship’s master, giving himself up to the Virgin Mary and the Boy Jesus (giving up his life to save his crew) for having committed acts of incest with both his mother and his sister. The inquiring mind will perhaps wonder why it took the time for him to father seven children in this manner before having to answer for his misdeeds. The original ballad was probably imported into Britain from Scandinavia, where a number of ancient versions of it exist. It is also common in Russian folk literature. For the interested folklorist, apart from the incest motifs, see also, D2072.0.3 (Ship held back by magic) and N271.10 (Ship will sink if murderers aboard).

"Thousands or More" has a familiar ring to it. It is particularly popular as a chorus song in folk clubs, and is a very good example of a written work becoming a folksong. The song was written by Samuel Arnold (1740-1802) and was recorded by Peter Kennedy from the Copper Family, of Sussex in 1951. For more on this one see Ballantyne 1994, pp.58-59. The recording ends with a rather melancholy, Irish version of "The Cuckoo", a bouncy version of which was part of the school curriculum in England in past generations. The song shares honours with "The Wagoner’s Lad" as ultimately being the mother of the American folksong "On Top of Old Smoky": see Belden (1940) pp. 473-476.

-Mike Ballantyne
Cobble Hill, BC
Eve Goldberg has had a significant role in the production of folk music events in Toronto, from The Woods Music and Dance Camp to Borealis Records, but I'll admit that until this disc came over the transom I'd never heard of her as either performer or organizer. Given her role in Borealis, it's a bit of a puzzle why this wasn't released under that rubric, especially since some significant Borealizers (Ken Whiteley and Bill Garrett) loaned their hands to it.

Never mind. It's a good disc under any handle. Goldberg, who is obviously as young as it's possible to be and still have been conscious during the 60s, claims Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Jim Kyeskin's Jug Band among her mentors. The present outing demonstrates nicely how she developed a light but serious approach, gathering songs from Bessie Smith, Mississippian John Hurt, Cathy Fink, and John McCutcheon, along with several by herself and a handful of other writers. Among the standouts by guest writers are Shelley Posen's "Having a Drink With Jane," and John McCutcheon's labor anthem "Know When to Move." Warning: "Waiting for a Train" is not the great Jimmy Rodgers classic, but one of Goldberg's own songs. It's a good 'un, but perhaps it might have been a good idea to put author credits on the outside of the box to prevent misunderstandings.

Another favorite song on the album is Goldberg's gently swinging blues, "Let's Throw a Party For Ourselves (The Birthday Song)." Perhaps, with a little luck, you'll even see it in a future issue of the Bulletin! —GWL

Judith Cohen. Dans mon chemin j'ai rencontré.../On my way I met... TRCD 6503. Transit Productions Sonores Québec; Interdisc Distribution Inc., 27, Louis-Joseph-Doucet, Lanoraie, Québec J0K 1E0

Judy Cohen's newest recording is subtitled Chansons traditionelles d'ici et de là-bas/Traditional songs from here and there, which just about covers it. Rosalie Sorrels notwithstanding, our Society's Past President is a genuine travelling lady, and it is appropriate that she should choose the highway as her connective metaphor for this musical memoir.

The lengthy disc includes 21 songs, of which three offer different versions of the same song or motif from different regions or nations, so the number of bands is actually 32, and the number of nations or territories represented is 15 (more or less—I suppose it depends on how you count 'em), and, as for centuries, well, there's a lot of time covered here. Some of the more frequently returned-to areas are renaissance France, Acadia, Moroccan and Bosnian Judeo-Spanish, Spanish Galicia, and Yiddish Europe.

Many of these different turfs Judy knows well, for she covers these grounds as an ethnomusicologist and traveller. We might say that she's singlehandedly wiping out the idea that ethnos don't do anything with music they study but sew it up into some tedious academic bag. Chief among the areas that have enriched her songbag are the Iberian Sephardic communities, and her best singing (to my taste at least) always carries some of the rhythmic tension and fluidity of that complex microcosm. Judy is comfortable in her intensity and makes a listener feel comfortable, even with unfamiliar musical turfs.

I myself find her renditions of two old English songs, "John Riley" and "Blow the Candles Out," relatively flat by comparison. Not that I'm necessarily going to eliminate them when I tape this CD for my personal listening, but my favorite versions of songs like these offer more of the grain of field recordings. I do wish that she'd left off or lessened the reverb on the unaccompanied songs; I don't know how other people feel about this any more, but whenever I can detect the presence of reverb (and I do not go out of my way to listen to the "sound" of recordings), I feel as though someone is trying to pressure me into an emotional response—sort of a nonverbal equivalent to the creeps who come to the mike at concerts and ask, "Is everybody having a good time?" This is the only criticism I have of the disc, and I should add that I have certainly encountered more troublesome examples of the practice.

There are two primary pitfalls for such an eclectic recording. On the one hand, potential listeners with no background in many of the musics presented may be afraid that this will be a dense and forbidding cultural experience. All them modal songs with no chord changes sound alike, right? Wrong. In addition to Judy's pleasant musical personality, the songs are varied by the variety of instruments played by Cohen and her accompanist, Robert Simms. These range from the American dulci-
mer (itself, of course, the near descendent of a zither widely known in Europe for centuries), recorders and other wind instruments, a variety of drums and other percussion, guitars, and the distinctive oud, a fretless ancestor to the lute. In addition, Judy’s daughter Tamar enlivens the mix on ten cuts, reminding us that there are societies in which children sing as a matter of course, that the presence of a childish voice is not a novelty (in all the worst senses of the word), but a natural event.

On the other hand, a recording like this might be criticized as a cultural hotchpot, in which the particularities of each society are diluted in an attempt to please an outsider taste. Certainly Dans mon chemin does not pretend to offer definitive recapitulations of the various traditions delved into on the disc. As the subtitle indicates, these are songs that have meant something to the singer, and they are offered as such. "The sound" of the disc may be more Judy Cohen than it is Galician or Bosnian per se, but what else could it ever be? An alert listener will surely hear how these cultures have affected the singer, as a human being and performer, not merely as an academic, and even determined middlebrows will surely note that there is no attempt here to drown the original traditions in popfolk treacle.

Dans mon chemin was recorded in 1994 for the Des Musiques en Mémoires series on Radio Canada. It was awarded the Prix Marcel Blouin for meilleure émission musicale/best musical program.

—GWL


Voici un disque certainement promis à un brillant succès dans le milieu de la musique traditionnelle canadienne et qui, je le pense, restera un classique du genre. Ce bel Hommage à Alfred Montmarquette est dû à l’initiative d’une figure importante dans le domaine de la musique traditionnelle québécoise: Gabriel Labbé, harmoniste renommé dans la belle province et collectionneur de disques folkloriques, dont la collection représente de véritables archives sonores couvrant plus de 80 années d’enregistrements discographiques de musiciens traditionnels québécois.

Parmi ces derniers, Alfred Montmarquette fait figure de pionnier. Virtuose de l’accordéon diatonique à une rangée de boutons, populièrement nommé au Québec «la petite accordéon» ou encore «l’accordéon canadienne». Montmarquette, dont l’activité de musicien a particulièrement couvert les années 1920 et 1930, a laissé une empreinte indélébile sur la musique traditionnelle québécoise pour accordéon.

Gabriel Labbé, qui a toujours éprouvé une grande admiration pour ce maître de l’accordéon, a tenu ainsi à lui rendre un brillant hommage en enregistrant ce disque uniquement consacré à la musique de Montmarquette. Pour cela il s’est entouré d’excellents musiciens réputés au Québec: Sabin Jacques à l’accordéon, Richard Forest au violon, Mario Loiselle au piano et Benoit Bourque aux percussions. Cette formation musicale inédite nous gratifie d’une excellente interprétation de 18 pièces et suites instrumentales représentatives du répertoire d’Alfred Montmarquette. Valses, marches, polkas, clogs, reels et gigue se succèdent dans un bel équilibre et viennent souligner la subtilité, la richesse et la diversité du répertoire de musique de danses traditionnelles québécoises.

Le livret en anglais et en français qui accompagne le disque est riche en informations. Outre des notes biographiques sur la vie musicale de Montmarquette, et un texte de présentation consacré à chaque musicien du groupe réuni autour de Gabriel Labbé, on y trouve un précieux lexique des formes musicales composant le répertoire instrumental entendu sur le disque. Bref, un disque que tout amateur de musique de danse traditionnelle canadienne se réjouira d’avoir dans sa collection personnelle.

—Yves Le Guével
Ste-Foy, Québec

Tickle Harbour. Battery Included. 02-50750. Singsong Inc., P.O. Box 6371, St. John’s, Newfoundland A1C 6J9; <singsong@nfld.com>; <www.singsong.nfld.com>

How to design a Celtic CD cover: A photo or painting of a scenic spot graces the front. On the back, the band, dressed in jeans and black leather jackets, stand in the same scenery looking thoughtful, brooding, or suffering from hangovers.

Tickle Harbour’s Battery Included seems to fit the mold, with a painting of The Battery, a community at the eastern end of St. John’s Harbour, on the front. Flip it over and, lo! here is the band in front of the same scenery in the customary jeans and leather. But what’s wrong with this picture? They’re all smiling, grinning even, and look like they enjoy each other's company and the music they create.

As well they should. Fears that the smiles may herald an end have been dispelled by the first few bars of the opening set, a solidly-played arrangement of two fine session standards, "The Teetotaller" and "Ships are Sailing."

This CD presents a mix of Irish and Newfoundland music, mostly traditional though with a couple of lovely tunes contributed by band members. The playing is fully acoustic, with great drive and energy, and there’s a nice variety of pace while keeping a cohesive “band” sound.

Much of the instrumental material dates from the 70s session repertoire, when bands like Planxty and the Bothy Band introduced a whole new generation to traditional Irish music. Is this material that Tickle Harbour have rediscovered (as Arcady did on their Many Happy Returns album)? Or have they never left it? The latter, I suspect. Playing tunes that are firmly lodged in everyone's First 100 Tunes lists gives them a dated feel at times. But these tunes have enduring popularity for good reason, and they are treated with respect.

It is hard to strike a balance between playing traditional music "straight", which has limited audience appeal, and the
urge to "do something" with it. Too often this becomes an excuse to hide behind volume or gimmicky. Tickle Harbour manages to strike the right balance, with interesting arrangements and some nifty instrumental flourishes that add interest without distracting from the melodies.

The band makes effective use of the cello to provide bass lines. Touches of trumpet and sax enhance some polkas and an unusual slide inspired by a trip to Crete. The star performer on lines. Touches of trumpet and sax enhance some polkas and an unusual slide inspired by a trip to Crete. The star performer on

Daniel Thonon. Trafic d'Influences. MCRS 003. Daniel Thonon, 180 Des Prés, St-Marc-sur-Richelieu, QC JOL 2EO; <saltef@quebec.net>

This very fine solo CD from Daniel Thonon, released in late 1997, explores a range of influences from the Ottawa Valley to France to jazz, with taste and imagination. Thonon was born in Belgium, and spent his years as a young man travelling around Europe and North Africa, with, somewhere in the middle, time to earn a high school diploma in Montreal. He's studied musicology, the harpsichord and early music, and played everything from folk and jazz to rock-and-roll. He plays many instruments, including the bagpipes, the recorder, the hurdy-gurdy and, most prominently, the diatonic button accordion.

We know him best as one of the founders of Ad Vielle Que Pourra, the excellent Quebec band that writes and plays "new French folk music" (captivating new tunes in the style of the traditional regional musics of France).

Trafic d'Influences refers to the trade (trafficking) of the many musical influences that fill Daniel Thonon’s life. It’s more wistful than Ad Vielle releases to date, its traditional offerings seasoned with jazz and the popular musics of France (30s to 50s). There’s also more synthesizer, giving the album a sound reminiscent of European bands like La Ciapa Rusa, Baraban or early Malicorne. The overall mood is gentle and evocative, even "easy”—this could be high quality dinner music as well as an engaging listening experience.

The CD begins with a well-synthesized, almost melodramatic "Breton March." Then the title track, which mixes three of Thonon’s own French-flavoured reels with Ottawa Valley fiddler Jean Duval’s infectious "Peveril Lasses." As the 14 cuts of the CD spin out, we’re treated to French bal musette waltzes, Django Reinhardt-styled jazz, a Klezmer-flavoured schottische, a samba that sounds a bit like "The Teetotaler," lush romantic tunes that transport you to the world of French cinema, and a catchy 40s-style song. There’s even an arrangement of Baroque composer Louis-Claude Dacquin’s harpsichord piece "Coucou."

I warmly recommend this CD, and I hope that Daniel Thonon continues to explore and traffic in his many musical influences.

—Jim Hiscott Winnipeg, Manitoba

Nobbody You Know. IMM 0797. Snarling Pika Records, 3274 LaSalle Boulevard. Verdun, PQ H4G 1Y9; <jshowman@odyssee.net>

Formerly known as The Immigrants, this Montreal-based folk trio is back with their (I think) seventh recording, their first under the new name (made necessary when another group copyright-ed the name The Immigrants). Like their live shows, this disc is a mix of Celtic, bluegrass, gypsy and singer-songwriter musics combined into one of the most seamless fusions in the over-slash-ed-and-over-hyphenated, fusion-happy world of what is called "folk music."

Guitarist, dobroist, principal songwriter and lead vocalist John Patrick Greider makes the most of a limited voice, but when you write songs this good, and when the ensemble playing

Connie & Paul. My Father’s Songs. Paul R. McGraw, <mirprod@nbnet.nb.ca>; <www.mibc.nb.ca/mrp/connie>

Paul McGraw and Connie Doucet are fine singers, and they harmonize nicely. Paul’s voice is robust, while Connie’s singing reminds me a lot of the late Marg Osborne. They have produced an album consisting partly of songs written by them, partly of "Celtic" pub favourites, plus one New Brunswick traditional song.

The "old favourites" are performed in a straightforward

and harmony singing (Bob Cussen, mandolin, banjo and vocals; John Showman, fiddle and vocals) is this fine, the lack of an outstanding voice really isn’t a big problem. I guess what I’m trying to say is that his very competent vocals are outshone by the extraordinary playing and writing. Personal favorites were "New Shoes" and the John Hartford-ish "The Mean Old Man." The roots of the band (American southwest, English, German and Hungarian) combine into a music which truly is the voice of the immigrants: do yourself a favour and get to know Nobody You Know as soon as you can.

—Tim Williams Calgary, Alberta

56 Mirview Dr., Miramichi, New Brunswick E1N 3A2; fashion, with five-string banjo sometimes joining the guitar and bass to add a bluegrass flavour which is not out of place, surprisingly enough. Connie’s whistle playing fills out the sound on the slow numbers. Fiddle, mandolin, bodhran and "everything else imaginable" are credited, but are mixed low enough not to be prominent. Sounds like Keven Evans is a tasteful as well as versatile backup musician—I wish he were allowed to step for-
ward more. I have to assume that many listeners, as presumably audiences at Connie and Paul’s performances around the Miramichi, don’t share this old fogey’s fatigue with "Danny Boy" and can handle one more version of "I'll Tell Me Ma."

The original material mines the "Celtic" vein, well crafted, dealing with fairly standard themes. In "Sail to the Sea," a husband tells of his love for sailing, while his wife is jealous; she sees his ship as her rival for his affections, a rival with whom she can't compete, and begs the vessel to bring her husband safely home to her. "The Leprechaun Song" is a bit of whimsy worthy of the Irish Rovers’ TV show, overly silly and clichéd for my taste, but certainly providing a change of pace. We have emigrant nostalgia ("Highland Hills of Home"), the sea’s danger along with its beauty ("Heave Ho! The Wind") and the city girl discovering the charms of rural life as an act of "self-sacrifice in the name of love" ("Home Once Again").

The title song, "My Father’s Songs," is a tribute to New Brunswick traditional songs. Connie sings a nice counterpart on the chorus. A number of songs from the Louise Manny collection are mentioned in the lyrics, but I find it odd that only one, "Peter Emberley," appears on the CD. Is it that Miramichi audiences aren’t interested in Miramichi songs, so Connie and Paul don’t include them in their performance repertoire? I hope not! In any event, maybe sometime Connie and Paul will treat us to a real album of "their fathers’ songs"—I’ll be the first to line up for a copy.

—JL

Christina Smith and Jean Hewson. Like Ducks. BC108. Borealis 3E3; <brc@interlog.com>; <www.interlog.com/~brc>

Christine Smith and Jean Hewson are highly competent Newfoundland musicians. Christine is by profession a cellist, but she is also a first-class fiddler; Jean Hewson is a talented guitarist, and was formerly the lead singer of the band Barkin’ Kettle. Together they have produced a recording whose especial interest lies in their choice of unusual instrumentals and unfamiliar lyrics.

The instrumentals include four of the great fiddler Emile Benoit’s compositions—"Steve Neary’s Waiting for This," "Kelly Russell’s Reel," "Joe Smallwood’s Reel" and "Waltz in the House". The first and third are named after Newfoundland politicians, the second after a notable Newfoundland fiddler and the last perhaps named after the Newfoundland legislature; if so, it is perhaps inappropriate that it is an especially haunting tune! Another is by Jean herself, "Scotty Macmillan’s G. Minor Jig," which is likewise curiously haunting. One of the songs, "Broken Down Girl with No Money," was written by Jean but, in theme and handling, it might well have been traditional—and that, from me, is praise!

The song "Jolly Jack Tar" is familiar—yes, the one about the sailor overhearing the lady’s promise of an assignation to the squire, but the sailor being the one who pulls the string (in all senses of that phrase). However, this version is unusual, and even ends with a respectable church wedding! "The Liar’s Song" was altogether unknown to me—a real oddity, and well worth hearing. "The Pride of the Season," with its effective viola accompaniment, tells a familiar tale of seduction and betrayal, but this is again an unfamiliar version. So is the ballad "Lady in the East," this being especially well sung and very sensitively accompanied on guitar. "The Mallard" was the only disappointment: songs sung so fast require unusually clear articulation, and this one did not get it. (I do sympathize; singing clearly at such speed is an art I also cannot master!) Fortunately, the J-card gives the words of all their songs in full, so that other singers can benefit even from this one.

Indeed, that is the special charm of this recording—its choice of so much unfamiliar material. Other folk musicians should listen and learn!

—William A.S. Sarjeant
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Recording Co., 67 Mowat Ave., Suite 233, Toronto, Ont. M6K 46... BUUElln de musique jolklorique canadienue 33./ (1999)

Although born in Manitoba, George Wade was thought of as a New Brunswick boy, but hired fiddlers [for the Cornshakers] from the Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario including Jean Cartignan and the three Cormiers: Bill, Laury and Francis.

Anne Lederman Bulletin 19.3. (September/september 1985)
James Gordon. More Hometown Tunes. SGB30. SGB Productions, Box 714, Guelph, Ontario N1H 6L3; <gormorse@sentex.net>

James Gordon appears (or rather is heard) on CBC radio throughout Ontario, and makes occasional appearances as well on national CBC radio. Not being from Ontario, I had heard him only a few times, and was not familiar with his general style. Judging from this recording, James is in the business, not of creating "real" folk music—memorializing local traditions. old and new. Most of the songs are ballads about the inevitable crooks, shipwrecks, eccentric characters, tragedies (mostly) and triumphs (a few). Most of the songs on this CD are about things that happened a generation or more ago. Hilarious exceptions are a wedding song written for a fan, a "fairly remarkable person, pretty nice guy," and Mussie, "the recession-fighting monster of Muskrat Lake!"

As befits this kind of music, the fun is in listening to it a few times, finding out what happened a long time ago, reflecting a bit and shedding the odd tear. The vocal production is pleasant, though somewhat imprecise in the patter songs. The instrumental accompaniment is nicely done. Most of the songs put the emphasis on the words, with the inevitable result that there are always a few extra syllables stuck in here or there to make singing along a bit of a pain. The tunes are fairly predictable, mostly major key; nothing I found myself humming after the CD was finished. I don't see any songs here that are going to be sung around a campfire in 50 years, but if Gordon continues to produce a large repertoire, inevitably he will create a few that will rise to that status.

It's nice to know that someone is out there producing this kind of music. It would be even nicer if every region of the country had somebody like this bringing local history to light and reflecting on the meaning of events. Even though Idoubt I'll be listening to this CD very often for musical enjoyment, it would be nice to take along on a long drive, or to pull out to illustrate a point in a conversation about the Good Old Days. I even know of a century-old poem about freezing to death in a prairie "thaw" that James Gordon just might like to set to music. Maybe I'll send it to him and see what he can do for another part of the world.

Jim Layeux. Earthlings. ST0004.

-- 18 Miles West of Renfrew and other songs. ST0003. Both available from Stemwall Records, 149 Medland Street, Toronto, Ontario M6P 2N4; <edwardla@netcom.ca>; <www.netcom.ca/~edwardla>

Jim Layeux, originally from Bell’s Corners, Ontario, is a product of the Ottawa and Toronto coffeehouse scenes. His first outing on Stemwall, Jim Layeux (Stemwall 001, 1987), is represented with three tracks reproduced on the 18 Miles West of Renfrew disc, released in 1997. Layeux accompanies himself on guitar and banjo throughout, with the backing of David Woodhead (bass), Buddy Weston (banjo) and Ron Sellwood (accordion) on the 1987 tracks. His voice is a unique mix of scratchiness and warmth, well suited to the contemporary folk genre.

On 18 Miles West of Renfrew, half of the disc’s 18 songs are originals, ranging from bluegrass-derived to balladry, while the other half consists of coffeehouse warhorses like "Un Canadien Errant," "Deep Blue Sea" and "The Whistling Gypsy." Although obviously heartfelt, this disc would really only make a great souvenir of a fun evening at a folk club somewhere; the original melodies would benefit greatly from the occasional bridge or dominant chord, and the vocals are mannered, wandering from bogus Irish accent on traditional tunes to a pale Woody Guthrie/Bob Dylan/Bruce Springsteen nasal troubadour persona on the originals. A capable songwriter and storyteller, Layeux drifts off the mark at times here.

However, Earthlings, bearing a 1998 copyright and sporting production by Paul Mills, is a great leap forward. The vocal mannerisms are gone, leaving only Layeux’s natural voice spinning tales of the land and the people. The songs are far more focused, both melodically and lyrically, than on the prior disc, and only two of the 14 tracks are non-originals. The backing musicians are excellent here: Victor Bateman, string bass; Jeff Barnes, fiddle; Loretto Reid, pennywhistle; Grit Laskin, concertina; and Curly Boy Stubbs, guitar, mandolin and shaker. They serve and propel the songs while never overpowering them. From folkie-country-pop ("Back to Oklahoma") to cautionary warnings of environmental danger ("The Earth Has Sent A Message") to story-song ("Tales Of Old Cheyenne"), this is a good CD filled with fine examples of mainstream contemporary folk music. Sort of a kinder, gentler Fred Eaglesmith, minus the grit and the Rust-Belt twang. This disc is tailor-made for folk radio programmers.

Tim Williams

Herald: And who be ye?

First Minstrel: We be also of the Minstrels; we be Apprentices of the Muses; Secretaries of Love; Slaves of Beauty; Apostles of Desire; Disciples of Truth; Children of Nature; Followers of Aspiration; Servants of Song. We be uncrowned kings and queens in the realms of Music, coming to claim and win our sceptres. Crowns have been won and worn by others. Admit us.

Arthur J. Lockhart. from The Masque of Minstrels (Toronto)