A Peak in Darien

Book
George W. Lyon. Community Music in Alberta: Some Good Schoolhouse Stuff! University of Calgary Press, 2500 University Dr. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2N 1N4

Recordings

Press, 2500 University Dr. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2N 4N6; <heatherbishop@aol.com>; <heatherbishop@pangea.ca>; <bome.ican.Det/-mabl.d>

Balkan Journeys Close To Home. GHP 004. Golden Horn Productions, PO Box 5776, Walnut Creek, California USA 94596; <www.goldenhorn.com>

The title of this anthology echoes Thoreau’s claim that he had travelled the world on Walden Pond. In neither case should we mistake geographical restriction for parochialism. The truly provincial person doesn’t really understand that the rest of the world exists—and I’ve met some thoroughly provincial folks who have managed a considerable amount of geographical locomotion without having their eyes opened! Balkan Journeys Close To Home presents a Toronto community, whose members may or may not have been around the world, but who have certainly seen it.

Performers here appear (with a great deal of overlapping) in four ensembles: Staro Selo, Neda Voda, Mastika, and Altin Yildiz Orkestar. Producer Brenna MacCrimmon sings in three of the groups. Readers will perhaps recall that Judith Cohen referred to MacCrimmon in a review in our last issue as a former student who has “outstripped her teacher”—considering the source, this is high praise! Indeed, while I would not call the present recording a showcase for MacCrimmon—as I’ve said, it’s a showcase for the community—her voice is the most prominent. (She also plays a variety of plucked strings and percussion instruments.) It’s a strong and extremely affecting voice: whenever the recording crosses my mind or I notice it sitting on a counter, her plaintive "Yo, yo..." from the final track, "Feryad," rings in my ears.

The community of what MacCrimmon refers to as "Toronto, Macedonia" in the amusing and informative liner notes apparently includes musicians for whom Balkan music has become a full time passion, as well as others whose interest in the area is temporary but growing and some who labor in adjacent gardens but happily cross the wall from jazz, klezmer, or Irish music. There are too many players to list them all; only a few of their names suggest ancestry from the east side of the Adriatic. (It’s still a bit of an eyecatcher to see MacCrimmon—a hoary name from Scottish classical music—attached to this project?) Nevertheless, they have absorbed the music into their lives, to the degree that one group, Neda Voda, was created to perform at the wake of a