

Reviews – Books

Thomas Goldsmith, ed. *The Bluegrass Reader*.

University of Illinois Press, 1325 South Oak St., Champaign, IL 61820-6903, USA; <www.press.uillinois.edu>; Scholarly Book Services, 473 Adelaide St. W, 4th floor, Toronto, Ont. M5V 1T1; <orders@bookscan.com>

The aftershock of the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* continues. With the movie, there was the soundtrack recording, and then a series of concerts featuring many artists heard in the movie. That was worth another recording, and *Down From the Mountain* came to be. Never mind that most of the movie music was "old time" rather than bluegrass; it's a fine line, and is probably not overly important in getting people to listen to music. The combination of music, visibility and talent raised the consciousness of many, many acoustic music lovers, and that's always a good thing.

If *The Bluegrass Reader* finds a place in your bookshelf, it should sit next to *Bluegrass: A History* by Newfoundland's Neil Rosenberg. In those two volumes you'll find more information on bluegrass than you'll be able to handle in a short time. One connection is that both books are part of the *Music In American Life* series published by University of Illinois Press. Probably a more important connection is that Rosenberg provided a list to Goldsmith of bluegrass articles he was planning to work with. Instead, Rosenberg got involved with other interests after the very successful launch of *Bluegrass: A History*. Yet another connection is that both men are bluegrass musicians, although not on a full-time basis.

Thomas Goldsmith is a very well-regarded music writer of country music and bluegrass, and grew up listening to the latter in North Carolina. He started writing about bluegrass for a Nashville newspaper in 1985, and was soon a frequent contributor to the "bible" of bluegrass music, *Bluegrass Unlimited*.

Goldsmith has assembled a series of articles about bluegrass over the years. These have come from various publications, such as *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *Muleskinner News*, *No Depression*, *Sing Out!* and others. Some of the writers have been Marty Stuart, Jim Rooney, Rich Kienzle, Neil Rosenberg, Mike Seeger, David Gates, the late Hunter S. Thompson, and Ralph Rinzler: it's a lengthy list.

One of the important if little-known names is L. Mayne Smith. He attended Indiana University and wrote a Master's thesis on bluegrass. One of the truisms that stands out in one of his articles is his observation that "financial reward for bluegrass musicians is not generally substantial". I remember reading a comment years ago from great bluegrass fiddler Kenny Baker that we know people playing bluegrass are doing it for the love of the music, because they're sure not going to get rich at it! In a rewritten excerpt from his thesis, which appeared in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Smith defined bluegrass. Some of his main points are:

-Bluegrass is hillbilly music that is played by professional, white, Southern musicians, primarily for a Southern audience.

-In contrast to many other hillbilly styles, bluegrass is not dance music and is seldom used for this purpose.

-Bluegrass bands are made of four to seven male musicians, who play non-electrified stringed instruments and sing as many as four parts.

Smith doesn't insist that certain instruments are necessary to make this style of music, but does mention that the five-string banjo, mandolin, Spanish steel-string guitar, fiddle and string bass are the main ones. The resonator guitar began to be used in about 1955, when Burkett Graves ("Uncle Josh") began to be heard with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, but Bill Monroe never used a reso guitar in his bands. Some purists apparently thought little of the instrument, because if Bill Monroe didn't use it, it just wasn't a real bluegrass instrument. It must be considered that Monroe had a female accordian player in his band for a while, as well as a female string bass player. Other than those women, bluegrass was a male bastion for several decades.

A piece by Neil Rosenberg entitled "Into Bluegrass: The History of the Word" appeared in *Muleskinner News* in 1974 and makes up a section in *The Bluegrass Reader*. He states that it's certain that people were playing the music we now call "bluegrass" before anyone identified it as "bluegrass". A prosperous part of the state of Kentucky was particularly good for several agricultural purposes, including raising horses. It became known as "the blue grass". When many states adopted nicknames, it was easy for Kentucky to become known as "The Blue Grass State". Rosenberg feels that the word changed through common usage, although Bill Monroe always insisted that the proper name of his band was "The Blue Grass Boys". Rosenberg also stated that he feels "Blue Grass" is not only more

dignified, but is a proper tribute to the origins of the music.

Those who feel that women have been disregarded by bluegrass should be aware of several sections, including "Women In Bluegrass", "Little Darlin's Not My Name" and "Is There A Link Between Bluegrass Music and Sexuality?". If you love bluegrass, you need *The Bluegrass Reader*. It's a definite treat, and will come to be as highly regarded as *Bluegrass: A History* has become. See

<<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip048/2003019686.html>> for the impressive Table of Contents.

Laurie Mills, Calgary, Alberta

Patricia R. Schroeder. *Robert Johnson: Mythmaking and Contemporary American Culture*. University of Illinois Press (address above); Scholarly Book Services (address above)

This is a refreshing, intellectual examination of arguably one of the most powerful influences on blues, and to a lesser extent rock, since the 1960s. Johnson became a cultural icon long after his death, and even the most basic facts of his existence, such as his date of birth and how he died, are fragmented, incomplete and often contradictory. Much of what is reported about him is speculative and founded on myth, and interpretations of these myths, Schroeder argues, are strongly biased by particular reporters' own worldviews, which in turn is a function of their own culture and the time when they analyse Johnson.

The book explores a number of the Johnson myths in an examination of literary and film works, and Schroeder structures her work as a progression, beginning with an examination of attempts at factual biographical description, leading through Johnson as a character in works of fiction, followed by the recent proliferation of Johnson on the web, and finally culminating in a discussion of Robert Johnson and chaos theory. She uses power relations and semiotics as a framework for her examination. She examines contested facts and opinions about Johnson as a mythological icon from the perspective of the power that a particular reporter has and the power that different role players could exert in Johnson's own life. In so doing she examines and goes beyond the role of power in black-white race relations and cultural appropriation in the U.S.A. Semiotics is the study of signs and their meaning. People interpret signs differently, and the meaning attached to a particular sign may change over time. Schroeder likens a myth to a sign, and consequently stresses the importance of temporal and geographical context in

any examination of Robert Johnson the cultural icon. In performing her own analysis she recognises the bias resulting from her own time, place and culture.

The book is well written, and while it is intended as a scholarly work, it also makes absorbing reading for the layperson. It is a "must read" for anyone seriously interested in the blues and rock and roll. While some knowledge of Johnson's music is advisable, it is possible to enjoy this book without knowing much about Johnson's life history.

Mike Barry, Calgary, Alberta

Reviews – Recordings

Entourloupe. *Les choux pis des melons*. Minuit dans la cuisine MIN-ENT112000. VIZOU, 400 rang Saint-Joseph, Sainte-Béatrix (Québec) J0K 1Y0; <entourloupe@vizou.com>; <www.vizou.com>

<< Entourloupe : jouer des mauvais sorts. >> Quel nom pour un groupe qui est franc et qui résonne! Entourloupe lègue au Québec ce que ce groupe musical a su y puiser : ses traditions instrumentales, ses chansons à répondre et son style tout à fait digne de << trad. Québécois >>. *Les choux pis des melons* est le second album du groupe, mais ces quatre musiciens font depuis bien longtemps de la musique traditionnelle au Québec. Éric Favreau, Paul Marchand, Claude Méthé et Stéphane Landry sont issus de familles où la musique traditionnelle québécoise se jouait ou de milieux régionales qui embrassent cette tradition. Les arrangements mélodieux, les giges et reels québécois nous donnent bien l'impression d'être à un << party de famille >> dans une cuisine ou encore dans une cabane à bois rond. Si l'on croyait que le romantisme de la musique québécoise trop engloutie et exploitée par le secteur touristique ne puisse répondre à un marché critique, Entourloupe se permet d'offrir aux ethnomusicologues et folkloristes la chance de redécouvrir certaines (re)créations musicales du Québec. Les compositions instrumentales formées de violon, de piano, de voix, de guitare, de mandola, d'accordéon et de pieds semblent rechercher une partie de la mémoire musicale collective au Québec tant au plan des arrangements musicaux qu'aux choix de paroles transmettant les soirées de danses des colonisateurs, les efforts laborieux ainsi que les fondations familiales et patrimoniales des terres canadiennes. Quelques pièces ont aussi été choisies parmi un répertoire de gens provenant de diverses régions francophones du pays, dont << Le vendeur de boisson >> provenant de Roland Bédard de Sudbury,

Ontario. Les pièces poétiques de l'album nous racontent des histoires, telles << Le vendeur de boisson >> qui narre un exemplum médiéval à propos des problèmes qu'engendre l'adultère. << Tout le long du bois >> est plutôt typique d'une chanson à répondre style << set-carré >> racontant l'amour de deux courtisans. << Beau marinier. Le p'tit bonhomme de bois >>, une autre chanson à répondre ontarienne, met en vedette le chanteur qui se fait répondre ainsi qu'accompagné par l'accordéon. La chanson thème de l'album, << Les choux pis des melons >>, s'inspire de chants traditionnels de la région de Lanaudière et Victoriaville où les voix et les pieds sont maîtres jusqu'à ce que le violon et l'accordéon embarquent pour réveiller les sens à nouveaux. << Ah! Que nos pères >>, une chanson gaillarde française, nous ramène des souvenirs des colons qui ont emmené avec eux moults talents dont l'agriculture et la musique de paysans. Tout comme un musée, cet album, d'une certaine façon, nous offre la chance de découvrir les racines de la musique traditionnelle au Québec et dans le Canada francophone qui, malgré les belles créations innovatrices et les transformations qu'elle subit aujourd'hui, dévoile ses souches françaises et irlandaises parmi les notes et appoggiatures jouées par Entourloupe. S'il y a mauvais sort, ou << entourloupe >>, c'est bien que nous pouvons devenir adepte de ce groupe qui, je l'espère, continuera à produire des compilations recherchées et interprétées telles que nous le retrouvons avec cet album-ci.

Julie LeBlanc, St. John's, Terre-neuve

David Francey. *The Waking Hour*. JBM 0404. Jericho Beach Music, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.davidfrancey.com>

David Francey's *The Waking Hour* is suffused with a sense of melancholy like few albums I've ever heard. More than simply being melancholy, it contains the very state of melancholy, weaving it into its subject matter and its production. The title says it all: from its first strains, *The Waking Hour* captures the feel of six AM, as surely as (or so somebody once said) Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* captures the feel of three AM. It is not about staying up late, but rising early, past the other side of slumber into a sleepy-eyed morning, where the woes of the world come into sharp relief but provoke not anger but sadness . . . this is *The Waking Hour's* dominant mood. I found it hard to write about until I played it so much that it felt like a soundtrack to all of our lives, especially when played at that doleful dawn.

The major motif here is travel -- it is no surprise to read that many of the songs were written on, in or about trains, train stations, cars and foreign locales. But there is little thrill in the travel here, only sad-eyed determination (as in "Ankle Tattoo", a spy's portrait of the inhabitants of a train terminal) and sometimes grim fatalism (as in "Morning Train"). A curious number of songs concern a Canadian's reflection on places and events south of the border, an unusual subject in music, handled here with great depth and feeling, none of the approaches precisely anti-American, but all reflecting the full complex range of mixed feelings Canadians often hold towards our neighbours and their ways. "Highway 95" and "Ashtabula" are accounts of visits to the States in which strains of romanticism and pastoralism are undermined by a certain restless urgency (brought out wonderfully on the musical level), and there's also the compelling duology of "Wishing Well" and "Fourth of July", both about the aftermath of American national traumas. "Wishing Well" is a curious reflection on Timothy McVeigh's execution, and the fantastic "Fourth of July" is a reflection on September 11th through the motif of American festivities a year later. Political but not polemical, it paints a vivid tapestry of a wounded people addled on patriotism as an antidote to their own sorrow, with its narrator balancing a skeptical outsider's perspective with an honest sympathy:

The sabers were drawn from their scabbards;
They were rattling for all they were worth.
And I understand how that can happen,
I don't need to ask anyone why;
It's September but I can't help but think that,
It looks like the Fourth of July.

If there's a better song out there about September 11th and its surrounding issues, I sure haven't heard it. Somehow it's no shock that the song would come from Canada.

Then there are the love songs. I hope it conjures up the right image if I say that the overarching feeling of melancholy tempers both the happiness and the sadness they contain. "Wanna Be Loved" and "Tonight in My Dreams" both have a gentle jaunt to them, and are songs of careful romanticism. Both are about absence, not presence, riding a train back to one's lover and asking permission to dream about someone (a conceit worthy of a '60s teen love hit, but here given a mature coyness that lets it come across as a charming middle-aged pass). "Over You," a rejected lover's lament, is sad, to be sure, achingly so, even, but it reflects more clearly a temporary moment of weakness than a deeper quasi-existential suffering. "If I can't get over you," runs the refrain, but we

recognize that that's a big "if"; from Francey's voice you can sense that the narrator has dealt with such blows before and will survive this time too.

This album sounds terrific, nicely balancing a lush and skillful Nashville (!) production with a certain indefinable rawness, mostly in Francey's well-worn voice. The album's effects would be destroyed if it were much prettier. This is above all a well-measured album, carefully modulated and balanced in both musical and lyrical elements. It becomes deeper and richer every time I listen to it. Is that a criterion for a masterpiece? So get it. Listen to it, especially in the morning.

Murray Leeder, Ottawa, Ontario

Seanachie. *A Parting Cup*. SEAN003. Box 457, #100, 1039 17th Ave. SW, Calgary, Alta. T2T 0B2; <www.seanachie.ca>

This recording, the third from talented Alberta Celtic band Seanachie, is a delight from start to finish. Not only is there a perfect balance of original, traditional and contemporary tunes and songs, but every arrangement is crafted with care and skill. You want strong singer-songwriter material with a funky feel? Or a sing-along that sounds like it just arrived fresh from a Scottish pub? Gordon McCulloch not only writes a great song, he delivers it in a voice that is sometimes edgy, sometimes sweet. Or perhaps you want tunes played on pipes or violin or guitar: Annie Gray, guest musician Barbara Rose Olorenshaw, and Peter Mark deliver. All this is supported with some great drumming and percussion from Robin Tufts. The mix is magic.

I particularly enjoyed the traditional tune arrangements on the CD, including a gorgeous, lush, reverential take on the familiar hymn "Be Thou My Vision", as interpreted by guitarist Peter Mark. "The Rakes of Kildare" has never sounded better than when Annie the piper picks up her low whistle. And the final track features the entire band, with guest accordionist Gary Sylvester, on a compelling treatment of "Hector The Hero". But the contemporary, original numbers are terrific too. Highlights include Gordon singing Andy M. Stewart's "The Queen Of Argyll" and, even better, his "wee lullaby" for his youngest daughter, "Camille's Tune". Both songs showcase McCulloch's rich, melodic voice and both include just the right amount of backup from the band. This band not only knows how to write and choose material, it also knows how to perform and record it. I highly recommend *A Parting Cup*.

Jean Mills, Guelph, Ontario

A Peak in Darien

Blackfoot Confederacy. *Setting the Record Straight: Recorded Live in Browning*. CR-6382. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

Blackstone. *Back in the Day: Live at Twenty-Nine Palms*. CR-6373. Canyon Records (address above)

Chor Leoni Men's Choir. *Canadian Safari2*. CRR0401. Cypress Choral Recordings, 7061 Cypress St., Vancouver, B.C. V6P 5M2; <dloomer@telus.net>; <brucecat@shaw.ca>; <www.chorleoni.org/recordings/safari2.html>

Allison Crowe. *Tidings*. Allison Crowe Music Management, Box 227, Ganges P.O., Salt Spring Island, B.C. V8K 2V9; <management@allisoncrowe.com>; <www.allisoncrowe.com>

Bill Culp. *Roots 'n' Roll*. WDC1985. Box 54, Beamsville, Ont. L0R 1B0; <bill@billculp.ca>; <www.billculp.ca>

Enter the Haggis. *Casualties of Retail*. ETHCD504. 90 King St., Port Colborne, Ont. L3K 4E9; <info@enterthehaggis.com>; <www.enterthehaggis.com>

Bob Evans. *The Voice in the Grain*. ATCD002. Acoustic Tonic Music, 129 Douglas Ave. E, Regina, Sask. S4N 1H2; <www.BobEvansGuitar.com>

Finest Kind, with John D. Huston. *Feasts & Spirits: A Christmas Entertainment*. FAM 07. Fallen Angle Music, 285 Spencer St., Ottawa, Ont. K1Y 2R1; <ian@ianrobb.com>; <www.finestkind.ca>

Genticorum. *Le Galarneau*. GENT1202. Les Productions du Moulin, 7995, rue Foucher, Montréal (Québec) H2R 2L3; <www.genticorum.com>

Ann Gray. *Shouting at Magpies*. AGSM002. 2019 Ramsay St. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2G 4H9; <www.internode.net/users/anngray>

Dave Gunning. *Live*. GUNNING2002. P.O. Box 1742, Pictou, N.S. B0K 1H0; <dgunning@ns.sympatico.ca>; <www.davegunning.com>

Dave Gunning. *Two-Bit World*. WEE2004. (addresses above)

Pierre Imbert. *L'Age de Pierre: Crosière*. C2536-02. Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.festival.bc.ca> (no addresses on packaging)

Alan Jabbour & Ken Perlman. *Southern Summits: 21 Duets for Fiddle and Banjo*. Dr. Alan A. Jabbour, 3107 Cathedral Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008-3420, USA;

<jabbour@myexcel.com>; <kenperlman@aol.com>;
<www.kenperlman.com>

Klezmerovitz. KLEZ062004. Greg Rumpel, 19 Highwood Pl. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2K 2B9; <gregrumpel@shaw.ca>; <allanmerovitz@hotmail.com>; <www.klezmerovitz.com>

Latigo. Kansas in the Fall. LATIGO-KIF; 39 Riverview Close, Cochrane, Alta. T4C 1K7

The Laws. *Another Road*. JML003. The Laws, Box 58, RR#3, Seeley's Bay, Ont. K0H 2N0; <www.thelaws.ca>

Allison Lynch. 8 Midpark Dr. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2X 1T2; <pixiegurl@shaw.ca>

Frank Maher & the Mahers Bahrs. *Maherulous!* BCD168. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Troy McGillivray. *Boomerang*. TROLLEY-02. RR#4, Lanark, Antigonish, N.S. B2G 2L2; <troy@troymcgillivray.com>; <www.troymcgillivray.com>

Mae Moore & Lester Quitzau. *Oh My!*. PL 003. P.O. Box 135, Pender Island, B.C. V0N 2M0; <lesterq@cablelan.net>; <www.maemoore.com>; <www.lesterq.com>

Melwood Cutlery. *Campfire*. BCD167. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Nolan Murray. *Off the Beaten Path*. 4550 Birch Bay Lynden Rd., Suite #105, Blaine, WA 98230, USA; <nolan@tillersfolly.com>; <www.tillersfolly.com> (no postal address on packaging)

Nolan Murray. *Rough Cuts*. (address above)

R. Carlos Nakai Quartet. *People of Peace*. CR-7069. Canyon Records (address above)

Night Sun. *Drive*. BCD166. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>; Festival Distribution (address above); Big Daddy Music Distribution (address above)

Northern Cree & Friends. *Honoring Singers & Songmakers: Round Dance Songs Recorded "Live", vol. 3*. CR-6367. Canyon Records (address above)

Peters Drury Quartet. *Swing Into Christmas*. PDT 2421. Magnum Opus Management, 79 Ponderosa Dr., Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5C5; <info@magnumopusmgmt.com>; <www.petersdrury.com>; Festival Distribution (address above); Forward Music Co., 18/F, Asia Orient Tower, Town Place, 33 Lockhart Rd., Wanchai, Hong Kong; <forwardmusic.com>

Rosemary Phelan. *Stars and Stones*. 388 Indian Grove, Toronto, Ont. M6P 2H5; <blue_star@sympatico.ca>; <www.rosemaryphelan.com>

Gerald Primeaux, Sr. *A Tradition Continues...: Harmonized Peyote Songs*. CR-6377. Canyon Records (address above)

Earl Ray. *Traditional Songs of the Salt River Pima*. CR-6324. Canyon Records (address above)

Nathan Rogers. *True Stories*. Halfway0001. Halfway Cove Music, 137 Walnut St., Winnipeg, Man. R3G 1P2; <www.nathanrogers.com>; Festival Distribution (address above)

The Stoned Masons. *PLAH (Peace, Love & Happiness)*. CFA 009. Centrefire Music. Box 868, Turner Valley, Alta. T0L 2A0; <centrefi@telus.net>; <www.cowboyceltic.com>

Swift Years. *Three*. HUP-080403. Flaming Nora Records, 53 Deuxième Ave., Verdun, QC H4G 2W2; <www.swiftyears.com>

The Tiller's Folly. *A Ripple in Time*. TFCD12452. Knight Music, 1979 Ocean Wind Dr., Surrey, B.C. V4A 9P2; <knight9798@shaw.ca>; <www.tillersfolly.com>

Tha Tribe. *Best of Both Worlds: World Two*. CR-6371. Canyon Records (address above)

Le Vent du Nord. *Les amants du Saint-Laurent*. BCD 169. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Randy Wood. *There Are No Goodbyes*. CR-6375. Canyon Records (address above)

Young Bird. *Dedicated: Round Dance Songs Recorded Live at Ft. Lewis College*, CR-6376. Canyon Records (address above)

Young Grey Horse. *Loyal to Tha Old Man: Pow-Wow Songs Recorded Live in Browning*. CR-6379. Canyon Records (address above)

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