

## Words and Music: Reviews

Northern Cree Singers. **In Our Drum We Trust.** CR-6291. Canyon Records Productions, 4143 North 16th St., Suite 6, Phoenix, AZ 85016, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

The Northern Cree Singers, from Saddle Lake, Alberta, regularly win drumming contests across North America, and deservedly so. The voices are strong and have an exciting edge to them. They include so many extra sounds that the result is an official melody with an unofficial melody of grunts, "ho"s and whoops. Their songs are rhythmically energetic, with strong accents contributed by both the voices and hot beats on the drum.

This disk contains the original song composed for the motion picture **Grey Owl**, and also includes lighthearted songs such as "Ha-Ha", "Jive and Wail", "Baloo", "Little Roller", "Old School" and "Sweety". Despite the unusual song names, this is classic powwow.

*Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba*

Paris to Kyiv. **Prairie Nights and Peacock Feathers.** Alexis Kochan, P.O. Box 2877, Winnipeg, Man. R3C 4B4; <info@olesia.com>; <www.partistokyiv.com>

Listeners will immediately recognize the rich soundscapes of Paris to Kyiv as part of a larger world music phenomenon that embraces localized, "ethnically"-identified music. These "world musics" fuse capital, technical and musical elements from diverse origins while accompanying "ethnic" discourses -- Loreena McKennitt, The Rankins, The Gypsy Kings and Riverdance productions are only a few in a long list of successful artistic ventures. Alexis Kochan and Paris to Kyiv have joined this list of successes. Their newest CD, **Prairie Nights and Peacock Feathers**, draws upon multiple layers of Ukrainian traditions and incorporates the energy and experiences of multi-talented musicians.

The musics on this recording move fluidly through various textures and timbres, changing sonic worlds of fantasy and village, providing the listener with a cinematographic sound adventure. "Oj Kraseniu lasen" offers a contemplative and calm introduction to a CD filled with luscious and gentle, sometimes playful

series of songs and dances. In this first piece, Alexis' silky voice is met with the deep and warm voice of multi-instrumentalist Julian Kytasty (world-renowned for his bandura performances and recordings). Kytasty leads the next track, "Dance Five"; rhythmic play is driven by the bandura through lilting musical dialogue and exciting instrumental interchange.

The sonic space between the layers of sparse instrumentation and singing in "Bukovynska Koliada" conjures graceful images of ancient plains and powerful natural forces. An immediate contrast within this piece, achieved with a more lush instrumentation and pulsating rhythm, suggests an exploration of paganistic spaces that are remembered as simultaneously sacred and profane. "The Well/Comfort of Darkness" is an epic work that tells a story of travel with sonic content. The music moves from celestial sounds, to grounded Ukrainian folksong lyrics and the familiar woman's story of unrequited love, to a new age, new-world English-language, acoustic guitar-accompanied song we might expect to hear on light-rock radio. "Dance Six" entices the listener once more with a short bit of "village" fun. A medley of "Spring Songs" and "Polyphonic Songs" carry words that came from villages in times gone by, into the experimental sound-spaces we experience in our contemporary (post-)modern lives. In a recreation of the previously (and very differently) recorded "Pavochka", luxurious layering of musical sonorities warmly envelop and seduce the listener.

"Dance Four", the ninth of twelve tracks, briefly announces the final segment of this journey from Paris to Kyiv. An unadorned melody introduces a lament of a Ukrainian woman who has lost her child, in "Plach"; a newly-created and moving response from this same child is given in English in the second half of this piece. "U Lisku" is the last clearly danceable tune on the CD; new world aesthetics and old world lyrics proffer a final combinatory example of the music of Paris to Kyiv. The "Chumak Song" brings once more to mind the idea of travel, as the music bids a farewell. The Chumaks were salt-traders of Ukraine -- even mythologized to have secretly carried the gold of Cossackdom to England. Within the context of this CD, which journeys between the languages of Ukraine and England, this is pointed commentary. The song of these legendary travelers presents cogent issues surrounding borders, poignant

for the diaspora Ukrainians who are at the root of this musical venture.

In contemporary debates about modernity and transnational processes of globalization, people tend to reference mainly stylistic features --pastiche, conflation of elements from different time periods, etc. The choices we make in constructing postmodern senses of identity, vis-à-vis the artistic and musical productions such as those of Paris to Kyiv, are not made from a limitless range; these choices are made depending on issues of economics, politics and culture. The work of Alexis Kochan, which has enabled the collective musics of Paris to Kyiv, demonstrates an important development in the current politics of culture. It allows us to dismiss fears and worrisome predictions that globalization will produce one homogenous world culture. While multi-national media networks remain imaginary landscapes, here is material evidence that individuals and localized small groups and cultures can indeed reassert themselves within the global economy. The one-time Ukrainian "primitives", beasts of the Prairies, stalwart peasants, have now acquired new voices with which to sing. They sing about themselves, in their own tongues, across older and new languages, and are heard as part of a global culture, creating and re-creating explosive modern musics.

*Marcia Ostashewski, Toronto, Ontario*

Sheela Na Gigh. **Live by the Aire**. Arktos CD97024. Sheela Na Gigh, P.O. Box 52070, Garneau P.O., 8210 109th St., Edmonton, Alta. T6G 2T5; <sheela@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca>; Arktos Recordings Ltd., 10423 84th St., Edmonton, Alta. T6A 3R3; <arktos@compusmart.ab.ca>; <www.compusmart.ab.ca/arktos>

Based in Edmonton, Alberta, Sheela Na Gigh consists of Jan Henderson (vocals and percussion), Tami Cooper (vocals, flutes and percussion), Russ Baker (guitars and bass) and Mark Arnison (drums and percussion). Most of the songs on this album are traditional tunes, with only three being recently composed; all were arranged by Sheela Na Gigh. The resulting music is a cohesive blend of open vocal harmony and sparse accompaniment, Celtic traditional music with a hint of "new-age" flavour.

The experience of this ensemble is immediately apparent upon the first listening. Vocal harmonies are very well tuned, impressively so when both vocalists bend pitches simultaneously. Most of these harmonies are quite widely spaced, with Henderson

or Cooper singing harmony at the fifth, adding to the degree of difficulty. When combined with the simple-yet-solid percussion parts and ethereal guitar playing, **Live by the Aire** showcases a very effective use of simplicity and space, allowing the subtle details of voices and instruments to come shining through. Audio production is by Garth Hobden, and is consistently superb.

Several songs on this album are worthy of note. The disc opens with "Boys of Bedlam", beginning with very sparse percussion and flute and moving on to an open vocal section before the ensemble finally plays as a unit. I found this to be a very effective introduction to the content and interpretation found throughout **Live by the Aire**. "The Selchie" is the longest piece on the album, at 8'43", and features an extended instrumental consisting of flute, percussion and guitar. Guitarist Russ Baker makes excellent use of his guitar synth to fill in the piece with subtle pad chords without overpowering the melody, played beautifully by Tami Cooper. The final song on this disc is "Maids when You're Young". For those not familiar with this traditional song, it advises young maids not to wed an old man ("for he's got no fallorum, fallilum, fallorum"). A light and cheeky way to end the album.

Trying to find fault with this recording is a difficult exercise, as a great deal of planning and patience has evidently gone into the production. If the interpretation of traditional material in a traditional way is sacred to you, this recording may not be to your taste. If, however, you appreciate a subtle contemporary approach to traditional music, **Live by the Aire** is a very worthy addition to your collection.

*Paul E. Guise, Topeka, Kansas*

Mr. Mole. **From the Outside**. 623667-204217. The Moles, #101, 4500 39th St. NW, Calgary, Alta. T3A 0M5; <mary@mr-mole.com>; <www.mr-mole.com>

Now known as The Moles, this Calgary-based quartet has a wonderfully eclectic sound, combining folk, country, bluegrass and other styles. Eight of the eleven songs featured on this CD were composed by various members of The Moles. The group consists of Mary Cole (vocals, bass), Gary Kurtz (vocals, guitar, fiddle), Ward Morton (drums), and Mel Smith (guitar, mandolin etc.). This is their second CD, the first being **Silver Thin Lines** (see **Bulletin** 35.3-25 for review).

The Moles have a great reputation for their live performances, so it was nice to hear their enthusiasm carry over to this recording. The songs are all very catchy and have a tendency to stick in one's head for extended periods of time (out, damn song!). To me this is a sign of excellent songwriting. All members of the group are highly proficient players, which allowed me to focus on their refined interpretation and ensemble playing. This is a disc that stands up to repeated listening very well.

Production quality on this album is quite high. Liner notes include lyrics to the songs along with artwork and brief annotations. The disc itself includes a video for the opening track, "Take Me To Alberta", which is playable on most computers and features guest appearances by several Mole relatives (and Kim, playing the canine role of "Super Dog"). The second track, "Bat mitzvah", is a tip of the hat to certain Jewish music traditions, and is followed by a Mel Smith gem entitled "Fires of the Sun". This is an up-tempo yet relaxed piece about the simple joys of childhood. Further on is "Tom and Louise" (written by Gary Kurtz), which is a gentle waltz about playing to an audience at "a nursing home in Salmon Arm, B.C.". The remainder of the songs are equally enticing. One criticism: the lack of a MAPL label on the disc (a sign of Canadian content) may limit airplay.

One of the pleasures of listening to **From The Outside** comes from not knowing what to expect next. The songs are varied in their style but are unwavering in their spirit and craftsmanship. While the liner notes don't give much biographical or contact information, those interested in more information should look at The Moles' website, which gives a much more detailed look at the group and their exploits. And don't miss the Alpaca links!

*Paul E. Guise, Topeka, Kansas*

Cathy Miller. **One Stitch at a Time**. SWAK-CD08. Cathy Miller, 1464 Cranbrook Pl., Victoria, B.C. V8P 1Z7; <[www.patchwork.studio.com](http://www.patchwork.studio.com)> (Can.); 1-800-676-6543; <[info@quiltersresopurce.com](mailto:info@quiltersresopurce.com)>; <[www.equiller.com](http://www.equiller.com)> (U.S.); G.P.O., Box 645, Darwin, N.T. 0801, Australia

This CD liner wraps you up in a cozy quilt, and the first song invites you to take the "Extra Chair" and join the group gathered around a quilting frame. Cathy's voice and instrumentals are soft and comfortable, like a familiar quilt, "Because quilts last longer / Than princesses or kings or maple trees".

Her next song, "The Rajah Quilt", is based on the Elizabeth Fry organization and its attempt at reforming the British prison system. The song symbolizes different lives thrown together, this time on a convict ship, each life represented by a block of fabric, stitched and held together by a common thread. This is not a happy song, but does represent hope, in the form of bundles of fabric, given to anxious hands with the chance to create something valuable, to be exchanged or just to make the creator feel of value.

"Follow the Stars" is played and arranged similarly to a gospel song. In her notes Cathy mentions the book **Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad**. In this instance quilt patterns were created to convey messages to others seeking freedom. In "Time Flies", lovers have been torn apart, and the woman uses quilt blocks to let her new husband know that she is and will be all right. Freddy Bloom's book **Dear Philip** was the inspiration for this song. "Scrap Bag Polka", a lively tune, represents the beginning of quilt-making, scraps of material passed from mother to daughter, with stories attached to each piece. If you are fortunate enough to have a quilt somewhere in your life from a great-grandmother, grandmother, sister or friend, you'll have memories held together with stitches of your life. Cathy puts personality into the tune.

"It Ain't Finished Yet" could be a lament for all crafters, as there are always UFOs (unfinished objects) in their lives. "Names", a song by Cathy Fink, is about the Memorial Quilt, commemorating AIDS victims. "Toss the Cat" is a song of new lives together -- instead of tossing a bouquet at a wedding, Toss the Cat was played to determine who would be the next bride. "Just Look Up" reminds us to take time to look around and to smell the roses. Again, when people stop to look at a quilt, it represents many individual experiences, but all tied together, in this case back at Hobart. "100 Ways to Hide Your Stash" is another song not just for quilters, but for crafters of all kinds, whether in thread, fabric, paint, spinning wheels, wool or canvas. Having projects to complete seems to be a necessity in an artist's life -- always having something to do is a necessary step in creating.

"One Stitch at a Time": Is there anything we as people cannot accomplish if we take the steps together, in the same direction, to create a law, an object or a government? One step at a time, or, as in a quilt, one stitch at a time! "Patchwork of Life" likens life to the many pieces needed to create a quilt, with

each piece necessary to every other piece in order to hold it together.

Cathy, David K, and all the chorus and important friends have arranged and securely stitched this CD together as a craftsman lovingly creates a cozy, friendly quilt. I recommend that this CD be a requirement for all artist's bags: painter, weaver, knitter, or quilter. An ANO (Artist's Necessary Object).

*Carolyn Smith, Calgary, Alberta*

Grant Lamb. **Manitoba Fiddler**. VRCD 312. Voyager Recordings & Publications, 424 35th Ave. Seattle, WA 98122, USA; <info@voyagerrecords.com>; <www.voyagerrecords.com>

I remember meeting Barbara Lamb, the wife of the late Grant Lamb, on a trip to Manitoba in the mid-'80s, when I was 15 or 16 years old and had just started fiddling myself. I remember the awe with which I spoke to this friendly woman; "This is the wife of the man who wrote 'Grant Lamb's Breakdown'!" I kept reminding myself. I had just learned this tune, adding to my repertoire of a number of "traditional" old-time classics. To almost know the person who wrote one of my tunes seemed to be a big deal to me at the time. So I am especially pleased to see "Grant Lamb's Breakdown", played by the man himself, on this new release by Voyager Records.

The first 20 tracks on this CD were recorded in Seattle in 1974 and originally issued as VRLP 312; the last 10 tracks, previously unreleased, were recorded, also in Seattle, in 1978. Basic, solid accompaniment is provided by Vivian Williams on piano, Gordon Tracie and Richard Marvin on guitar, Phil Williams on bass and Stan Guernsey on tenor banjo. The banjo is an interesting addition, since I've never heard a banjo backing up musicians in Manitoba; however, it blends in easily, adding a slight timbral exoticness and fullness to the band. Grant Lamb himself wrote the liner notes for the original LP, with additions to this CD by producers Vivian and Phil Williams. Grant provides a brief biography, crediting his very musical upbringing (both his parents played in dance bands), and notes on the origins of the tunes in his repertoire. Not surprisingly, he learned many of them from his parents.

The names of the tunes can be confusing. As Vivian and Phil Williams point out, Grant didn't know the

names of a lot of his tunes, which is not unusual, and so he often named them after his friends, for example "Vivian's Polka" and "Davy McDonald's Jig". The nomenclature of the tunes also can be confusing. "Bagot Two-Step" and "Bob Leaders' Two Step" [sic] are in 6/8 metre, and therefore more properly called jigs. "Phil's Clog" and "George Nedderly's Clog" are played as reels, rather than with the slow tempo and dotted rhythms of a British Isles-derived clog or hornpipe. I've not come across these particular examples of "flexible nomenclature" before; the fact that they each occur more than once suggests that it is not a mere mistake on the part of Lamb or his producers.

Lamb provides a broad variety of repertoire in these 30 tracks, including: 12 reels, hornpipes, and clogs (all played as reels); five jigs; five waltzes; three two-steps (but two in 6/8, played as jigs); two polkas; one schottische; one four-step; and one minuet (alternating sections between waltz and two-step). Many of them are "good old tunes" that bring back to me hazy memories of 1970s fiddle jams in Ontario: "Gerrard's Favorite" (known in Ontario as "Elliott's Favourite"), "Opera Reel", and, of course, "Grant Lamb's Breakdown", written by Grant in 1952 and subsequently recorded by Don Messer.

Lamb's playing is quite plain, with not a lot of ornamentation and a few scratches and scrapes, but with a life and energy that beckons to dancers. There can be no mistake that this is dance music, intended to be danced to. One criticism often leveled at today's young fiddlers (and not always rightly so) is that they don't know how to play for dancers, that they're missing the right tempo and "lift" for dance music. Short of regular experience playing for dancers, which is not always so easy to come by in some areas these days, listening to recordings of some of the great old dance fiddlers, like this recording of Grant Lamb, is the best way to improve this (perceived) deficiency. Unfortunately, the tracks are not long enough to roll up the carpet and actually practice your dance moves!

This recording is important for fiddle scholars because it documents the fiddle repertoire and style in a particular time (1970s) and place (rural Manitoba); however, more importantly for fiddle fans, it contains a broad variety of dance tunes and about an hour of solid fiddling.

*Sherry Johnson, Toronto, Ontario*

Prairie Ceilidh. **A Prairie Ceilidh Christmas**. BAMC1002. Elisa Sereno-Jan, 2004 17th Ave. NW,

Calgary, Alta. T2M 0S6; <tjanz@mtroyal.ab.ca>;  
www.indiepool.com>; 1-888-884-6343

Ceilidh Friends. **The Spirit of Giving**. CF2. Ceilidh Friends, #208 Nordic Arms, Yellowknife, N.W.T. X1A 1E4; <moirakc@internorth.com>

Trilogy. **Two Thousand Years of Christmas**. DRGN-114. Cathy Miller, 1464 Cranbrook Pl., Victoria, B.C. V8P 1Z7; 1-800-676-6543; <www.patchwork.studio.com>; Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.festival.bc.ca>

I love Christmas music. I think it's unfair that the wonderful tunes and songs associated with that season are hauled out for such a short time, then stashed away again until next year's snow flies. There's nothing like listening to Christmas carols while pruning the roses.

These three musical Christmas offerings are certainly worthy of year-round attention. Each takes the familiar -- and in some cases, not so familiar -- carols and songs of the season and treats them with creativity and respect. Taking a seasonal chestnut and turning it into something original is not an easy task. Each of these musical groups manages to do just that, all the while offering up something old and something new.

Prairie Ceilidh, a quartet from Alberta, combines a few original songs with a strongly traditional seasonal repertoire. Their arrangements are energetic and rich, with a Celtic flavour. Particularly noteworthy are "The Wexford Carol", which starts with a hypnotic rocking rhythm set up by the percussion, and "Noel Nouvelet", with its rollicking whistle. The approach to each song is creative; even tired old "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" sounds new. Although most of the selections are traditional, there are a couple of original songs, including the delicately arranged "A Winter Wish (For Sarah)", written by band member Tim Janz. Overall, the instrumental arrangements are more interesting than the vocals, but this recording still offers an entertaining collection of Christmas music.

**The Spirit of Giving**, a Yellowknife Yuletide with Ceilidh Friends, is a delight from start to finish. This foursome, consisting of Moira Cameron, Steve Goff and Dawn and Steve Lacey, has put together an unusual repertoire of Christmas songs. With tight, lively vocal arrangements and just the right amount of instrumental accompaniment, the listener finds himself pausing to pay attention to what is going to

happen next. Some highlights include the unique (and frankly quite odd, although lovely) sliding harmonies of "The Orkney Wassail", an unusual setting of "The Cherry Tree Carol", and a charming original song which gives the recording its name, "The Spirit of Giving". The instrumental accompaniment, especially the guitar, is perfectly matched to each song, and the vocal harmonies are ambitious and well executed. This is not a new recording (1997), but it deserves attention.

Cathy Miller, Eileen McGann and David K. are accomplished musicians individually; as a group, they are dynamic. For several years, they have toured together during the lead-up to the Christmas season, calling themselves Trilogy and presenting their musical stage show "Two Thousand Years of Christmas." This recording is their "soundtrack", and although the song explanations, seasonal lore and antics of the performers are not present, this is still a wonderful musical accompaniment to the festive season. The songs range from the ancient to the contemporary, including the omnipresent "Gloucester Wassail", "Cherry Tree Carol" and "Down in Yon Forest", as well as originals by Cathy and Eileen, and the showstopper, "You're A Mean One, Mr. Grinch". The arrangements are exciting, the singing is impeccable. This is a wonderful Christmas collection.

The subject may be Christmas, but the performances and repertoire on these three recordings are definitely worthy of year-round listening.

*Jean Mills, Guelph, Ontario*

Randy Wood. **Round Dance the Night Away**. CR-6344. Canyon Records Productions, 4143 North 16th St., Suite 6, Phoenix AZ 85016, USA. canyon@canyonrecords.com <mailto:canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

Randy Wood has given an old form, the Round Dance, a new sound. Round Dances, less formal than the main dances of the powwow, are for socializing and for giving young people a chance to meet.

Randy holds onto all the traditional elements of the round dance, yet with his soft, crooning voice, the ten songs take on the quality of contemporary love songs. The words are in the usual English, with choruses in syllables. The words, such as "Don't try to rap me, rock n'roll me, country me to sleep. Just put on a little northern Cree," are clear and strong. The drum too is played gently. He keeps the traditional rhythm, but it rocks in lullaby fashion. Yet with the

percussive whoops and calls framing the syllables, one never loses interest.

The tunes are memorable, while adhering to the traditional contour of starting high and descending. In some of the songs there is a call-response pattern, and the blend is so perfect, it seems likely the composer has multi-tracked his own voice.

This is a noteworthy production: the song words are effective; the singer's haunting drumming and vocal quality have created an appealing work.

*Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba*

Medicine Dream. **Mawio'mi**. CR-7039. Canyon Records Productions (see above for address)

This recording is distinctly Native, yet the lead singer is the Mi'kmaq answer to pop singer Billy Joel; even the accompaniments are reminiscent of the Joel style. There's lots of percussion, such as rattle and drums, but the rhythms and synthesizer are cutting edge in the music world.

The form of the songs is traditional: usually a lead singer opens and is echoed by a chorus singing with syllables. One song, "Honour Song", is in traditional powwow style, with the usual high-pitched male voice responded to by a strong male chorus.

A variety of instrumentation and contrasting timbres is effective throughout the recording, and the use of traditional form contributes. For example, in the song "Msit Nokamaq (All My Relations)", the flute plays a gentle tune that is repeated immediately by the singer. Paul Pike, a Mi'kmaq, creates many moods with Native American flute. The song "Medicine Dream" ends with what sounds like wind chimes, and "Lightning Flashes the Sky" with thunder.

Spoken narrative is frequent and convincing. Indeed, the detailed jacket notes tell us the focus of each song. The themes about animals and land rights are Native American, such as in the song "If We Were Wolves" (We'd be on an endangered list)!

*Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba*

Sticks & Stones. **Tuning In**. W20233. Sticks & Stones, 6819 119th Ave., Edmonton, Alta. T5B 4L9; <sticks\_stones@yahoo.com>

This CD was recorded back in March/April of 1999 at Crowtown Studios in Alberta. All the music and

lyrics were written by the group members. They also produced it themselves, and did a good job at it too. I do have to admit that the first time listening to this CD was quite different. I was really not used to listening to this style at all, and was unsure about reviewing the record. On the second time around, my ears did an about-face, and I could really hear how good it was. Like many groups today, no matter how someone tries to put Sticks & Stones into a certain style or format, the group make it difficult. What comes to mind listening to Sticks and Stones is a swing sound, and they do it very well. There are jazzy songs too, that blend in very professionally.

The band members are Jim Malmberg, doing lead vocals, guitar, wonderful mandolin and harmonica. He also wrote five of the eleven songs on this CD. Some are tongue in cheek, like "My Not So Fred Astaire", some are a little more serious, like "I Wish You Were Here". Kevin Jacobson's bass drives a good beat and seems to hold the band together through the many twists and turns they make. Leo Compos' percussion also holds its own, with some beautiful and interesting sounds. Rod Olstad helps out on vocals and plays one mean fiddle, really making it work here. The other six songs are penned by Lloyd Litke. Like his fellow songwriter, Jim Malmberg, Lloyd can be quite serious in his songs, and has an original way at looking at life. Last but not least, a guest vocalist on the song "Tuning In A Signal" is Louise Dube, whose sweet yet haunting range gives the song a lot of color. The CD is a great piece of work, and I had to listen to it a few times until I was... **Tuning In**.

*Terry St. James, Montreal, Quebec*

Mike Stack. **I Need Wheels**. MS001. Mike Stack, 2605 26th St. SW, Calgary, Alta. T3E 2A8; <www.mikestack.ca>

This is Mike Stack's first solo record. It is a bit of a rocker, and also has the folkie flavour to it. If you're in the Calgary area and have gone to the Karma Local Arts House, maybe you saw Mike around there -- that's where he has been hanging for the past little while. That is where people like Kit Johnson saw him and knew Mike had something. Even Mike is feeling pretty good about what he's doing these days, and it shows on this CD. The CD opens with a hard and fast pace and from there on it is a tasteful journey. Some good time music and songs that pull at you from a fine songwriter who has learned his craft well.

Mike Stack has come a long way from his days with The Grift and The Burners, who had a good

following in and around Calgary. He even brought along some of those songs to this CD, such as "Highway" and "White Cross". A kleenex box could come in handy listening to other songs, like "His Mother's Face".

This is a super CD, and sheds light on a city that is putting out some of this country's finest music.

Mike also has some fine people helping out here, like Thom Moon (Amos Garrett Band/Ian Tyson) and "The Mandoline Kid", David Wilkie (Great Western Orchestra/Cowboy Celtic). Vocalist Billy Cowsill is there also. Tim Leacock, Ross Watson, Steve Pineo and Jane Hawley also lend their fine talents. They even go back with Mike to the days of The Burners.

Calgary is shining bright with the likes of Mike Stack around. He is proof that Calgary is putting out many good performers and music.

*Terry St. James, Montreal, Quebec*

David Greenberg & Doug MacPhee. **Tunes Until Dawn**. Narquis, 30 Kenilworth Ave., Toronto, Ont. M4L 3S3

Known as one of the few people from outside Nova Scotia to have an authentic grasp of Cape Breton fiddle music, David Greenberg showcases his skill and understanding of the genre on his latest co-release, with well-known New Waterford pianist Doug MacPhee. **Tunes Until Dawn** starts with a rousing set of a strathspey and reels, in true Cape Breton form, with the piano prominent in the mix and a healthy dose of signature "wild notes" (a note which purposely lands in between two pitches).

The entire recording has an open, gritty sound; one could say it has "lots of Gaelic in it". It is impossible not to tap one's foot while listening to **Tunes Until Dawn**, as the rhythm and energy put forth by Greenberg and MacPhee are highly contagious. Cut 5, "Whiskey in the Furag" is especially enjoyable, with the doubling of the violins (where one violin plays the melody an octave lower) giving the tune extra range and guts. "Kate's Fancy" features Greenberg at the pump organ, adding a darkly humorous tone to the set that works surprisingly well and makes the sound completely different from all the other tracks on the album.

Overall, the album is well done and adheres very closely to the "traditional" sound. The only criticism is the receded guitar in the mix. Guitarists Dave MacIsaac and Curly Boy Stubbs are both excellent

musicians, and deserve a more prominent role on the album. However, for fans of the Cape Breton sound, the album features an excellent selection of tunes and arrangements, and would satisfy even the strictest of purists.

*Keitha Clark, Shellbrook, Saskatchewan*

Jerry Holland. **Crystal Clear**. P-0200-CD. Junior Productions, 367 Johnson Rd., George's River, N.S. B1Y 3C1; <jerry@cranfordpub.com>; <www.jerryholland.com>

Master Cape Breton fiddler Jerry Holland's latest release, **Crystal Clear: Solo Violin by Cape Breton Fiddler Jerry Holland**, is a break from the usual fiddle, piano and guitar combination that one generally finds on traditional recordings. Holland made the entire album solo, on a violin which his father bought from a Chinese laundryman way back when Jerry was just knee-high to a fiddle bow. The fiddle turned out to be a rare old Austrian violin made by Leopold Widhalm, "the Stradivarius of Austria". Jerry decided to show off his childhood find, and so he recorded **Crystal Clear** in a home setting with natural acoustics, no compression, equalization or noise reduction. The *au naturel* sound comes across very well. The timbre of Holland's violin is truly exceptional; it has a sweet, soft sound that, when combined with Holland's powerful tone and bow arm, produces a clear and lilting resonance that is a treat to listen to. Especially enjoyable are tracks 10 and 14, where the instrument and room acoustics blend together ringingly, creating a listening experience that is open, deep and rich. While there are some tracks where compression would have expanded the tone while limiting some of the sharper frequencies, the overall sound on the album is remarkably even and very expressive.

Because **Crystal Clear** is a longer recording and a concentrated dose of the violin, it is best consumed like expensive chocolate, savoured a few pieces at time. If enjoyed in this manner, it is an excellent way to get a tasty violin fix, and is guaranteed not to make you gain a pound.

*Keitha Clark, Shellbrook, Saskatchewan*

Matapat. **Petit fou**. BCD133. Borealis Recording Co., 67 Mowat Ave., Suite 233, Toronto, Ont. M6K 3E3; <brc@interlog.com>; <www.interlog.com/~brc>

Those looking for an introduction to traditional music coming out of the contemporary Québec scene could do worse than to start with this trio's latest recording. Continuing in the same vein as their eponymous first CD, the members of Matapat -- Benoit Bourque, Gaston Bernard and Simon Lepage -- present a broad sampling of French-Canadian music, swinging effortlessly from instrumental reels and waltzes to tongue-twisting chansons à répondre and tragic complaintes. All the while remaining true to the traditional mode, the group is less interested in faithfully reproducing the archival material they have mined than they are in using it as a springboard to explore the rhythmic and melodic complexities inherent in the pieces.

In two words, eclectic and innovative, while still respecting tradition. That tradition ranges far and wide: helpful notes (in French and en anglais) cite sources from France, Québec, Acadie and Manitoba. The musical influences, however, come from even farther afield in space and time: tablas and the classic Indian vocals of guests Subir Dev and Vinai Bhide provide a fascinating musical journey from Québec to India and back on "La vieille galope" (somewhat reminiscent of some of Les Batinsés' much wilder ramblings); the liner notes describe "Sire le roi" as an "arabo-québécois arrangement". Other songs have a decidedly medieval feel to them. There are also generous helpings of the typical "podorythmie" (foot tapping) one has come to expect from québécois folk music, with Simon Lepage's trademark slap bass adding a decidedly funky groove to some of the tunes. The music, however far it wanders, is nevertheless always recognizably québécois, consistently returning to its fiddle/accordion/guitar base.

Those with a more than passing knowledge of the French-Canadian repertoire will appreciate the fresh versions of well-known songs such as "Le champ de pois", "Sire le roi" and "La jolie Rochelle", as well as the inclusion of rarely-heard jewels like "Par un dimanche au soir" (a dying-lover, Garolou-flavoured dirge, previously recorded only by the complainte-promoting Monique Jutras) or the widely-distributed but seldom-recorded "Charmante Sylvie". Matapat is always looking for a fresh approach to the music, finding unique ways to make old songs sound new. In a couple of instances ("La fille du géôlier" and "La Vendée"), they manage to meld two very melodically and rhythmically different versions of well-known songs into seamlessly-crafted new pieces. Their instrumental medleys are equally accomplished.

While technically accomplished and amazingly complex, the music on the album does seem to lack a

certain warmth (which I am assured is never the case in the group's live performances). One also sometimes gets the feeling of novelty for the sake of novelty. But the tendency is generally kept in check: the exotic elements seem less a nod to current fashions in world music than the result of a careful analysis of that which will best bring out the heart of each song. A delicate balancing act -- let us hope it is one Matapat can maintain, as I look forward to many years of enjoyment from this group.

*Marcel Bénéteau, Windsor, Ontario*

Barchois. **Encore!** HPP 4. House Party Productions, RR#1, Box 24, Wellington, P.E.I. C0B 2E0; <grady@barchois.com>; <www.barchois.com>

Those who have seen Barchois perform live know that none of their concerts ever ends without repeated shouts of the title of this, their second album. The Prince Edward Island quartet -- Albert, Louise, Chuck and Hélène Arsenault -- have been pleasing crowds at folk festivals and on CBC specials for years, and fans will not be let down by this 1999 release. (By the time you read this, the group's third CD will probably be out.) Musically, there is not much new ground broken here -- the arrangements rarely stray from the piano/guitar/fiddle/foot-tapping format (notwithstanding Chuck Arsenault's occasional tuba, sousaphone and French horn stylings) -- and it must be said that some of the antics that appear hilarious on stage fall a little flat on a strictly auditory level. But the music is lively and competent throughout and the choice of material is positively inspired.

If Matapat can be considered far-ranging and eclectic in their choice of repertoire, Barchois by contrast could be said to be restricted and inward-looking. This is by no means a negative comment: on the contrary, it is a fine example of what talented musicians can produce by delving deep into what they know best. All the songs on this album are from the Prince Edward Island Acadian repertoire, and one gets the impression that the band members have personally met each and every one of their informants. This is music learned and perfected over years of family gatherings and house parties. Both vocal and instrumental Island music are featured. Lyrics and notes (bilingual again) tell us about the singers and the players who passed the pieces on to the group. Two tunes from Sid Baglole, a Prince County fiddler, make one yearn to find out more about the musicians of this area.

The songs tend towards the upbeat, humorous and politically incorrect (husband- and wife-beating get about equal billing in the traditional repertoire). A notable exception is the soulful "Par un dimanche au soir" (same title, different song from the one on the Matapat album reviewed above). Built around simple piano arpeggios, the arrangement boasts some tasteful violin and French horn lines that sustain the beautifully-harmonized melody -- a perfect accompaniment for this tale of unrequited love. In spite of the somewhat classical arrangement, the song manages to keep its down-home, unpolished feel. I must admit I would like to hear more of this sort of thing from the group, showing more of a trust in the musical and lyrical strength of the material rather than an attempt to bolster the piece with a theatrical approach. Another very welcome addition to the repertoire is a satirical West Prince election song, composed in 1890 by Angèle Gallant. (In an area where "mixed marriage" refers to the union of a Liberal and a Conservative, there are probably still households in which this song would raise eyebrows.) The track leads off with an archival recording of a traditional singer, Madeleine Richard. Following a skillful jew's harp cross-fade, the group jumps in, turning a haunting and somewhat shaky vocal record into a full-blown foot/fiddle/harmonica stomp.

The album ends with one of Barachois' patented mock-Gregorian toe-tapping party tunes (see "Le p'tit moine" on their first CD). Taking advantage of "La p'tite bouteille de rhum"'s pseudo-latin chorus, the group treats us to an intro consisting of a full-length four-part a cappella harmony rendition (complete with foot tapping) of the catholic Credo. Take my word for it: it works. A great introduction to a long-neglected repertoire, and lots of fun to boot.

*Marcel Bénéteau, Windsor, Ontario*

Various. **How Music Came to the World and Other Stories.** Vancouver Society of Storytelling, c/o Granville Island Carousel Theatre, 1411 Cartwright St., Vancouver, B.C. V3H 3R7; <storytelling@netrover.com>; <www.vancouverstorytelling.org>

Twelve very talented storytellers encounter an equal number of similarly talented musicians, whose traditions and sources run from Celtic to Japanese, the First Nations of Canada to East Indian, and French to West African, to mention just a few; the result is this three-disc recording, one of the most entertaining, intriguing and excellent integrated music-story projects to come down the pike in a very,

very long time. How this project came into being is quite a tale in itself, beginning with the desire of Britannia World Music's Valerie Dare to bring world music units into classroom settings. From there it was her earnest wish to see public performances of traditional stories involving musical instruments from around the world, and with the help of multi-instrumentalist Randy Raine-Reusch, CBC host David Grierson and Vancouver storyteller Theresa Vandertuin, and a host of superb storytellers and musicians, the project soon took on a life of its own, and what came about is a set of very memorable stories told by a dozen tellers from the Vancouver environs, accompanied by a similar set of noteworthy musicians on a variety of instruments, that are simply breathtaking in diversity and scope.

They range from the familiar to the truly exotic and unusual, from fiddle, Celtic harp and the Indian sitar to the Chinese lute-like pipa, the Persian oud, numerous drums, the Vietnamese one-stringed zither-like dan bau, the French vielle à roue or hurdy-gurdy and the West African balafon. Such is the virtuosity of these musicians that each instrument is skilfully integrated into its own story, and the results are indeed memorable. Nowhere is this more evident than on Mary Murphy's Celtic harp accompaniment to Ginger Mullen's beautiful rendering of the Scottish ballad-story "The Twa Sisters", as this haunting tale unfolds in which sibling betrayal and murder are revealed through a harp enchanted by a dead girl's spirit. In a tale from France entitled "Léon", a young vielle player can literally charm forest wolves by playing his hurdy-gurdy in their presence; Tony Montague's recounting of this Auvergne legend is enhanced by the excellent *vielle à roue* accompaniment of the late Pierre Imbert. One of the finest and most dramatic of the stories is the tale from eastern Canada "The Magic Fiddle", retold by Yvon Chartrand, with excellent fiddle accompaniment by Sheila Allan, a variant of the "Devil at the dance" motif, in which the Devil regains his own fiddle. The listener learns a wealth of detail about beliefs, customs, traditions and daily life in 18th-Century New France. The story's end is a real stunner.

Several of the tales come under the umbrella of "why", or origin tales, as in the Cree story of the origin of the hand drum, the Aztec legend as to how music first came to the Earth, and the West African story, from the Senoufo of the Ivory Coast, which tells how the first jégbak, or balafon, came to those people, who still use it today in their very secretive rituals of male initiation. Because a good storyteller knows how to do such a transformation, it is possible to take a traditional tale set in one culture and skilfully transpose it into another setting, as does

Leon Bibb in his very poignant retelling "Dancy and the Talking Drum", taking a typical Anansi tale from Africa and resetting it into the American South during the Civil War, turning its tricksterish aspect into a tale of love, hope and eventual freedom from bondage for two escaped slaves. Such is also the case for Nan Gregory's beautiful retelling of "The Clay Flute", taking a Swedish literary piece and placing it in a Persian setting. Such is the talent of these Vancouver tellers that Yukiko Tosa can take the very fabric of history and weave it into a memorable Japanese legend, "The Drums of Noto Hanto", complete with various drum accompaniments, to tell a stirring tale of how a small village, through musical trickery, saved itself from takeover by an enemy warlord in 1576, and how this event is remembered and celebrated annually in a time-honoured local festival.

To be sure, not every tale is filled with tragedy or sadness, and two particular stories come to mind: a tale from Viet Nam in which an aspiring musician learns that outward reactions to his music may not be what he hopes; and a story from India in which three musical instruments help reveal a king's secret, i.e., that he has incredibly large ears. One tale of the dozen shows what music can do when it has a mind to accomplish needed results: the Chinese story "Pipa Ji", or "The Lute-Player's Story", stunningly retold by Melanie Ray with pipa accompaniment by Qui Xia He, a tale in which a humble peasant woman, through musicianship, shakes up the political establishment, helping to punish a prince for his mistreatment of her and her family and teaching a judge the true meaning of justice and fair play.

This recording succeeds on several very important levels. It brings together some of the best storytellers and musicians in and around Vancouver, to show what can happen when excellent storytelling is magically interwoven with great musical accompaniment. To the Vancouver Society of Storytelling go many cheers for proving that, where good storytelling and music are concerned, "all the world's a stage". From beginning to end, this recording sings, in every sense of the word, of the time-honoured magic which both of these venerable art forms can achieve when placed into skilful artistic hands. In years to come, I believe this recording will become a classic in its own right. May its music and stories always remain embedded in hearts and minds here, there and everywhere. Musically and story-wise, this is as good as it gets: no brag, just fact.

*Robert Rodriguez, New York, New York*

## A Peak in Darien

*Recordings received but not yet reviewed.*

Bill Hilly Band. **All Day Every Day**. BCD145. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>

Blackstone. **Around the Horn**. CR-6352. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

Michael Jerome Brown. **Drive On**. BCD138. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Radmilla Cody. **Seed of Life: Traditional Songs of the Navajo**. CR-6345. Canyon Records (address above)

Danú. **All Things Considered**. Shanachie 78049. Dialogue Communications, 345 Delaware Ave., Toronto, Ont. M6H 2T7; <tom@dialoguecommunications.ca>; Shanachie Entertainment Corp. <www.shanachie.com>

Thomas Duran, Jr. **Peyote Songs of the Blue Sky People**. CR-6343. Canyon Records (address above)

David Gogo. **Skeleton Key**. Cordova Bay Entertainment Group, Inc., 5159 Beckton Rd., Victoria, B.C. V8Y 2C2; <info@cordovabay.com>; <www.cordovabay.com>; PHD Canada Distributing Ltd., 1330 Main St., North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 1G4; <phdenq@phdcanada.com>; <www.phdcanada.com>

James Gordon with Sandy Horne. **One Timeless Moment**. BCD141. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Donna Konsorodo. **Skylines**. VR0201. Bobbie Blue, #321, 215 Oswego St., Victoria, B.C. V8V 2B5; <bblue@islandnet.com>; <www.donnakonsorodo.com>

Penny Lang. **Gather Honey**. BCD137. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Heather McLeod. **Bones**. BMP-2-4004. Vizou, c/o Dana Whittle, 400, rang St-Joseph, St-Béatrix, P.Q. J0K 1Y0; <dana@vizou.com>; <www.heather.vizou.com>