

Reviews

Book/Recording

Ivan Hicks. **Fiddle Tunes and Souvenirs, Originals, Volume II.** Moncton, NB: Percheron Press.

Ivan Hicks. **Connections.** ME1012. Ivan Hicks, 157 Sussex Ave., Riverview, NB E1B 3A8; <ivan@ivanhicks.com>; <www.ivanhicks.com>

New Brunswick fiddler Ivan Hicks's album **Connections** is a collection of 16 tunes, all but two composed by Hicks himself. Connections exist on a variety of levels; the most obvious, in the case of this recording, is amongst musical styles: Downeast Canadian fiddle (Ivan Hicks), Scottish guitar (Tony McManus) and American bluegrass banjo (Raymond McLain), all supported by the solid accompaniment of pianist Vivian Hicks, bassist Terry Poirier and multi-instrumentalist Gary Morris. Musical connections are given visual form in a fitting cover photo of the six musicians forming a tight-knit circle and holding their instruments.

At the beginning of the first track, Ivan creates a homey, casual mood, making us feel like we've joined in the middle of a jam session. Ivan counts the musicians in to the first reel, "one, two, one". When no one else begins to play, we hear some laughter, and Ivan starts again, "one, two, one". This time they're all ready, launching into the catchy tune of "Confederation Bridge Reel". The informal mood is continued at the beginning of track 7, "Out the Old Mill Way", which Ivan introduces as a "I'il ole timey tune". The last track, a short reprise of "Out the Old Mill Way", uses a fade-in effect; I imagine myself opening a door and walking into a jam session already in full swing. Maybe my imagination is working overtime, but it would make sense to me to begin the album with the fade-in as we join the "session", use a few of the verbal introductions throughout, and then fade

away, as we go home to bed and leave the musicians playing till the wee hours (as is normally the case, isn't it?). But perhaps this would result in too much structure, reducing the comfortable, relaxed mood the musicians have established to a mere gimmick.

The album provides considerable variation in genre, style and tempo: the smooth bowing, singable melody, and predictable structure A (a a') A B (b b') B of the downeastern-sounding "Bill Harmer's Reel" (albeit with some decidedly undowneastern-sounding banjo solos); the soothing 3/4 lament "Memories of Father James Smith", with broken chord accompaniment provided by guitar; the 6/8 march "MacDonald's of the Highfield", in which a "Celtic" sound is created by the tin whistle intro and snare drum rhythm; the American old-timey "Out the Old Mill Way". Ivan and his musicians demonstrate mastery of diverse musical styles, juxtaposed both within individual tunes and in the album concept as a whole.

Among my favourites are "Hardy's Reel", with its distinctive syncopated melodic rhythm and impressive guitar picking on bars 3-4 and 7-8 of the B section, and the simple, but lyrical, melody of the waltz "Anne from Downeyville" (particularly the relaxed feeling created by someone (is that you, Ivan?) whistling some of the repeats). The eight-bar C section or bridge of "Fiddler from Douro", full of double stops and glissandi, also caught my attention. Of course, the solos by the guest musicians are noteworthy, and too many to mention individually. Tasteful and subtle additions of wood block in the "White Pine Lodge Hornpipe", accordion in "Fiddler's Gala" and synthesized string background in "Memories of Father James Smith" demonstrate careful attention to balance, as does the effective foregrounding of banjo and backgrounding of fiddle, doubling each other on one of the repetitions of section A, in "Big Black Cat".

Less effective is the full, lush, almost orchestrated sound of “Madeline”, a slow waltz written by Gary Morris; although the melody is evocative, I find it gets lost in the synthesizer-heavy arrangement, which seems intended to create “atmosphere” rather than support the melody. Similarly, the arrangement of the second tune by Morris, “Connections”, is too stylistically different to fit convincingly on this album. In this case, it seems that the connections between nationally, ethnically or regionally located styles are easier to make than those across concepts of time (i.e., “old-time”/“traditional” to “new age”).

I am also unconvinced by “Bell Hawk Swing”. I was enjoying the first section, a neat little American swing tune, although lacking some of the “looseness” of the great American swing fiddlers, when all of a sudden the tune switched into an old-time, straighter style for the second section. I like each tune on its own, but they feel like two different tunes to me; they don’t fit together.

While the tunes are no doubt carefully structured so that each musician knows when to solo, add harmony or join the back-up, and in fact many of the arrangements are structured similarly (with the fiddle playing the tune through once or twice, then the other instruments being highlighted, taking solos, breaks, trading bars, etc., followed by the fiddle again to wrap it up), the majority do not sound overly arranged. There is a freshness and energy to the playing that one would more likely hear at a jam session than on a recording. I can picture the musicians sitting side by side, feeding the energy from one to another, encouraging each other to try out new licks, challenging each other’s considerable musical talents. That this feeling was achieved while they were most likely working separately, or at least separated, in a recording studio is no small accomplishment. Distinctive and appropriate intros, bridges, interludes and endings also attest to careful planning and practice.

Because these are original tunes, some of which I’ve heard Ivan and Vivian play in concert, but most not, I am curious about the stories behind the tunes and the tune titles. While “Confederation Bridge Reel” and “Fiddler from Douro” may seem obvious, at least to Canadian fiddle fans, I wonder about the inspiration for “Big Black Cat” and “Fiddler’s Roast”. Unfortunately, the liner notes, while they provide brief biographies of the musicians, list only the tune titles.

I enjoy this recording immensely for its catchy and memorable melodies, fun, relaxed mood and interesting combinations of instruments, and not least for the impressive abilities of some top-notch musicians. Fiddle fans of any number of styles are sure to find something of interest on this album.

The book **Fiddle Tunes and Souvenirs, Originals, vol. II**, includes 25 of Ivan Hicks’s original tunes: 20 are tunes published here for the first time, while five are tunes from the first volume with an added harmony part. (There are second fiddle parts provided for five other tunes as well.) All of the tunes from **Connections** are included here, with the anecdotes about the tune titles that I had wanted from the CD liner notes. Most tunes are named for significant people and places in the lives of Ivan and Vivian; however, my favourite is the “Big Black Cat”, named for the studio cat who “strolled across the console in the control room while this tune was being recorded and turned to gaze at us with his big black eyes as we played the final notes” (p. 11).

The purpose of the book/CD set is, of course, to allow fiddlers to learn the tunes by ear and/or by notation. For that reason, Ivan writes in the introduction, he has tried to record the tunes as closely as possible to the transcribed version; however, he notes that his tendency to embellish and vary the melody does result in some discrepancies between the tunes as written and as played. Ivan encourages fiddlers to use the transcriptions and/or CD to learn the melodies, but then to make the tunes their own by adding their own embellishments and variations. In

fact, I particularly appreciate these small discrepancies; I find that noticing and emulating some of Ivan's embellishments is good practice in extending my own repertoire of embellishments and learning how to vary a melody.

This collection is user-friendly: the notation is clear; accompaniment chords are provided; the first and second fiddle parts are printed on pages that face each other; and the CD plays in the same order as the book. The CD allows you to play along with both the fiddle and the accompaniment, or just the fiddle, or just the accompaniment, depending on how you set the balance on your CD player. Ivan's smooth, clear, clean fiddle playing is easy to follow, and the tasteful, straightforward accompaniment (various combinations of piano, guitar, and bass) does not get in the way. The tracks are short; the tunes are mostly played through only twice, and a couple of the longer waltzes only once. While I personally prefer a much longer recorded version when learning tunes by ear (I need to diddle around with the notes the first couple of times before they start to fall under my fingers), it is because Ivan has kept the tracks short that he has managed to include 25 tunes in this collection. So I'm happy with a greater number of tunes, even if I have to press play a few more times on my CD player. Unfortunately the harmony parts are not played on the recording, so will have to be learned only from the notation.

The tunes provide a nice variety of style and tempo: many reels, waltzes and two-steps, a hornpipe, a lament, a jig, a swing tune and a calypso number. Some of Ivan's best-known and -loved tunes are included here: "Gram Lee's Waltz" and "Purple Violet Waltz" (both with harmony); "Jim, the Fiddlemaker"; and "Sussex Avenue Fiddlers Two-Step". I think Ivan's two-steps are my favourites; the singable melodies and toe-tapping rhythms will stay with me for days. I am thrilled to see so many in this collection. Many of the tunes can be heard also on the CD **Connections**, and the book's accompanying CD cannot replace the tight

arrangements and full back-up of the full-length versions of the tunes found on **Connections**; others have been recorded previously by Ivan and others.

Fans of Ivan and Vivian will enjoy the six pages of photo collages, grouped around the following themes: Fiddles of the World (an international gathering of fiddlers held in Halifax, NS, in July 1999, of which Ivan was president); Friends in Music (great musicians, mostly fiddlers, with whom Ivan has played); Carrying on the Tradition (Ivan as a fiddler teacher in various contexts); Name that Tune (people and places for which Ivan has named tunes); Family Photos; and Memories (a miscellaneous collection of photos of Ivan and Vivian making music).

Anyone who wants to expand her or his repertoire to include some tunes from one of Canada's best-loved fiddlers should get a copy of this collection. It is suitable for just about any level of player, from those with just a few tunes under their fingers to champion fiddlers looking for new tunes. As Ivan exhorts in his introduction, have fun with them!

Sherry A. Johnson
Toronto, Ontario

Richard Thomas Wright & Cathryn Wellner.
Castles in the Air: Music & Stories of British Columbia's 1860s Gold Rush. Williams Lake, BC: Winter Quarters Press,

Richard Thomas Wright & Cathryn Wellner,
with Ken Hamm & The Wake Up Jacob Band.
Rough But Honest Miner. Winter Quarters Press,
Box 15 Miocene, Williams Lake, BC V2G 2P3;
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<http://grassrootsgroup.com>

Richard Wright and Cathryn Wellner have produced a CD, with its companion book, which together make a unique and entertaining contribution to regional history. The hour-long CD **Rough But Honest Miner** documents, through songs, music and readings, many

aspects of life from 1858 to about 1874 in British Columbia's Cariboo gold rush. In addition, the 96-page paperback **Castles in the Air**, while giving the words and contexts of the songs, also involves the reader in the social life of the period. The stories are enhanced with many contemporary pictorial illustrations.

Richard Wright's experience as a journalist and a Cariboo historian is teamed with Cathryn Wellner's editorial, research and design skills. Together they have generated many projects, this CD-book being but one of them. On the CD they individually lead the vocals on some ten songs between them. In their concerts, which include such BC parodies from gold rush days as "Chief Douglas's Daughter" and "Mary, Come Home", they accompany themselves.

The CD's music is headlined by "Ken Hamm and the Wake Up Jacob Band." With Wright, Ken Hamm is the producer of the CD. He arranges the music, plays guitar and sings lead and backup harmonies. Hamm co-ordinates the ten musicians who make up the band, and he assuredly played a major role in ensuring the professional polish of the performances.

All the songs and their music belong to the gold rush period; most sprang from actual events in Cariboo. In addition to the songs, the CD contains recitations and readings. These reflect the place of the spoken word in Barkerville, which in its Theatre Royal boasted both plays and concerts. A major contributor to this literary presence was the gold miner James Anderson, a native of Scotland. David Bell's Scots dialect brings to life two selections from Anderson **Sawney's Letters**, written in a Scots narrative verse tradition and locally published as a book in 1868. Bell also sings "The German Lasses", which again is found in **Sawney's Letters**. Two other readings are given by Cathryn Wellner. One gives voice to Native people involved in the gold rush, especially in transportation. The other, "The Old Red Shirt" was written by the laundress Rebecca Gibbs, one of a group of blacks who had come up from California. In it

Gibbs expresses concern about the destructively hard life of many miners.

The CD creates the illusion of one's being at a Concert Party of the early 1870s. At that time all the elements of the programme would have been part of the audience's recollections. In the year 2002, we are present in mind at the end of the Cariboo gold rush, taken there by the CD programme, helped by the CD's notes and the text of **Castles in the Air**. Both the CD and the book are clearly meant to be marketed to visitors to Barkerville Historical Town, the recreated centre of the 1860s gold rush. They are also highly recommended to all who appreciate excellent performances, and who at the same time would enjoy feeling part of a significant time in our 19th Century past.

Phil Thomas
Vancouver, British Columbia

Recordings

Various. **Coal Dust Grins: A Musical Portrait**. Cambria Publishing, Box 61083, Kensington P.O., Calgary, AB T2N 4S6; <publisher@CambriaPublishing.com>; <www.CambriaPublishing.com>

Coal Dust Grins contrasts with **Rough But Honest Miner**, reviewed above, in a couple of ways. The latter is a CD of traditional songs, with a book supporting them, while **Coal Dust Grins** is a collection of songs in the contemporary folk vein, written by various singer/songwriters, to accompany the book of the same name by Lawrence Christmas. (We weren't given a review copy of the book, a collection of photos of coal miners with accompanying text, but it appears that each songwriter was asked to choose a photo from the book and write a song about its subject. Photos were provided in the (quite handsome) liner notes along with the song lyrics – enough to whet our appetite for the book. My local library tells me it's unavailable, but you might be able to get it on an interbranch loan.

As might be expected in a CD which paints a portrait of a dying industry (at least in Western Canada, in its underground phase), the prevailing mood is bittersweet nostalgia at best, bitter loss at worst. The songs bring to life the photos, mostly of retired old-timers (“Three hundred miners lived here once, now he’s the only one” – Tom Wilson’s “Frankie”) or veterans working out the string (“I’m a shovel operator to the bitter end, I’ll close my eyes in Saskatchewan” – Steve Coffey’s “Shovel Operator”). The young miner harrowingly portrayed by Diamond Joe White in “Chinawhite” copes with his job by means of an addiction. Some cheerfulness (or at least lack of regrets) comes through in “The Ballad of Bill Cashin” (also by Tom Wilson – the only writer with two songs on the CD) and Robert Burton Hubele’s “Jenkin Evans” (“I was always lucky... I still got my pension and friends”), while Susan Kuelken provides the only feminine perspective, in “Miner’s Smile” (“I don’t want a man whose soft white hands, Haven’t seen their share of dirt” – some consolation for a life of back-breaking labour!). But in general, sadness is the prevailing tone here -- not much is upbeat. The men may be proud of their profession, but they are bewildered by the economics of mines closing when there’s still coal in the ground, or by inadequate rewards for their hard labour, or by their aging bodies no longer being able to do the job.

The songs pretty well all fall in the country-tinged “contemporary folk” genre (for want of a better term). Dave McCann’s “Surrounding Green” strays into bluegrass via dobro and 5-string banjo; “Jenkin Evans” has a country blues flavour from Hubele’s slide guitar and voice; Dick Damron’s vocals on “Shiny Black Coal” brand it hard-core country music; however, for the most part we’re in country folk territory. John Campbell’s “Page in Time” deals with men of Scots heritage leaving Cape Breton, but musically gives no hint of his Celtic roots. Other songs are by Rob Smith, Bill Werthmann and Ian MacDonald; most of the songs were recorded at Rob Smith’s studio in Calgary; the

supporting musicians (including such as Tim Williams, Ron Casat and members of Jerusalem Ridge) do a fine job throughout.

All the songs on **Coal Dust Grins**, like the photos they’re based on, create strong and memorable portraits of tough people. Lacking the book, I’m not in a position to tell how well the songs’ stories follow the lives of their subjects, but on their own, they ring true. If you’re looking for a CD to cheer you up, save this one for another time, but it’s certainly worth listening to on its own terms.

John Leeder
Calgary, Alberta

Eamonn Dillon. **Storm the Kettle**. 7 76127
0928 2 1. Eamonn Dillon, P.O. Box 16653,
Plantation, FL 33318, USA;
<molly@interpoint.net>;
<www.eamonndillon.com>; Bunnygee Music,
500 Avenue Rd., Suite 308, Toronto, Ont. M4V
2J6; <jmc@the.connection.com>

Apparently, we have to thank John McDermott for bringing Eamonn Dillon to a wider audience. McDermott heard this tremendous Uilleann piper playing in a pub in Florida, and invited him to join his band. Eamonn Dillon’s travels with McDermott brought him to Newfoundland, where he met musician and producer Jim Fidler. The two decided to produce Dillon’s debut CD together.

Eamonn Dillon is originally from Belfast, now living in Florida for reasons unknown. He is obviously from a musical family: sister Roisin Dillon is one of the guest musicians on fiddle, and she is no slouch herself. Both siblings have apparently won All-Ireland championships.

The CD features Dillon playing primarily traditional Irish tunes on pipes, whistles and low whistles. His playing sparkles throughout his versions of such well-loved tunes as “Colonel Fraser”, “Farewell to Erin” and “Scatter the

Mud”. Excellent guest musicians provide nice touches on bouzouki, tenor banjo and bodhran.

But, despite traditional instruments and playing styles, this isn’t a straightforward traditional approach to the music. Producer Jim Fidler is very much an equal musical partner in this project, and the CD really should be credited to both musicians. That the CD appears only under Dillon’s name either shows great modesty on Fidler’s part – or perhaps he muscled in on his friend’s project, giving his own accompaniments on guitar, synthesizer and percussion prominence on the final mix. Only they know.

The CD gets off to an unpromising start, with a syrupy low whistle version of the slow air “Ar Eirinn Ni Osainn Ce hi” (“For Ireland, I’ll Not Say Her Name”), with synthesizer wash in the background. Fortunately (or unfortunately, if you like that kind of thing), the New Age Celtic Mists feel is quickly dispelled by the second track, where Dillon brings both low whistle and Uilleann pipes to the only non-Irish track on the CD, “Jim Hodder’s Reel”, composed by Newfoundland fiddler Émile Benoit.

The rest of the CD marries first class playing by Dillon and his guest musicians with Fidler’s interesting arrangements and accompaniments. It works, and you never have the sense that the instrumentalists are hiding behind special effects. Some time I would like to hear Eamonn Dillon’s playing without all that heavy synth and percussion. But that’s for a future CD. Dillon and Fidler have done a great job on this one – so much so that I can almost forgive them for closing with a reprise of “Ar Eirinn Ni Osainn Ce hi”.

Nan Colledge
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Aengus Finnan. **Fool’s Gold**. SVP01. Shelter Valley Productions, 376 Nickerson Dr., Cobourg, ON K9A 1A9;
<info@sheltervalley.com>;
<www.sheltervalley.com>

A very promising debut CD from this young Ontarian singer-songwriter. Aengus Finnan seems to have packed many miles and many experiences into his first 30 years of life, providing rich material for his songs. He has been an art student in Victoria, an actor in Montreal, a research diver in Alberta and a teacher in Moosonee, on the James Bay coast. Now he is on the road as a singer-songwriter, and is attracting the interest and acclaim of audiences and concert promoters alike.

Finnan was born to a performing family in Ireland, emigrating to Canada as a young child. He has been surrounded by song all his life, and gives credit both to Gordon Lightfoot and to Stan Rogers for their influence. Like them, and latter-day songwriters like James Keelaghan, he explores the “lonesome lives of familiar strangers” both past and present: young lovers destroyed by war, a troubled young man scarred by his father’s desertion, a waitress who bears the brunt of small-town gossip. His autobiographical songs reveal a restless spirit, and even the traditional love song “Black is the Colour” is dedicated to “a snowy farewell on the Red River Road”. Clearly the man is not yet ready for a mortgage and RRSP contributions.

From the opening “Ballad of Marguerite de la Roche”, an apparently true story of young lovers marooned on an island and abandoned to their fate, to the closing song of a dreamer trying to revive an old theatre, the subject matter of Finnan’s songs is hardly cheerful. But we are not into Leonard Cohen territory here – there’s no bitterness or cynicism, just a wistful portrayal of small people leading lives of private joy and sorrow in a large land. Tenderness and compassion shine through, greatly helped by Finnan’s clear, sweet voice.

The CD features seven original songs, three traditional, and a version of Jenny Whiteley’s “John Tyrone”. Whiteley contributes some backing vocals to the CD, while father Chris joins an impressive roster of guest musicians, including David Woodhead, Loretto Reid and

Curly Boy Stubbs. Arrangements are tasteful, with a nice variety of pace and style.

A second CD is apparently in production. For more information about its availability, and Finnan's music, check out his excellent website.

Nan Colledge
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Slowdrag. *Ploughin' It Right to the Fence.*
Corvus CR 007. Corvus Records, P.O. Box 19655, Centre Point Postal Outlet, Vancouver, BC V5T 4E7; Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, BC V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.festival.bc.ca>

Once upon a time it seemed so much easier to place a specific identifying label on a recording containing some words and a flock of musical notes. This is "folk", that one is "Cajun", the one beside it is "traditional country" and the one in the corner is "bluegrass". Then we began to get hit from different directions with music from groups which did not fit conveniently into our little mental library sections. A great number of these "non-conformers" call Canada home, and Slowdrag is one of those groups. There are threads of half a dozen musical styles blended in the music of this trio from Vancouver, held together by "created in heaven" vocal harmonies and second-to-none instrument prowess. If you're looking for just one label, it might have to be "rural southern" – an old-time sound with a touch of country blues.

Koralee Tonack sings and plays rhythm guitar, Craig McKerron contributes the other part of the vocal harmonies section, along with mandolin and excellent lead guitar work, and Paul Bergman plays acoustic bass. All are well known in the acoustic music community of the West Coast, and the names of all three show up fairly regularly on a wide-variety of recording projects in and around Vancouver. On this CD, produced by mando-master John Reischman, John R plays mandolin and Nick Hornbuckle provides some tasty banjo work.

The music chosen for the first recording from Slowdrag comes from a great many sources. One of the songs given a fair bit of airplay was "Working Girl Blues" by Hazel Dickens, who also supplied "Scraps from Your Table", which has more to do with the pieces of a relationship than with a left-over lunch. There's straight-ahead bluegrass in Bill Monroe's "It's Mighty Dark to Travel" and a touch of rockabilly in "Open Door", which was written by Craig McKerron and old friend Ronnie Hayward. Two songs come from Koralee's mother, Frances Tonack; one is an easy-loping song called "Blues Don't Come for Me" and the other is a love song for Alberta, "My Alberta Prairie Home". A good job is done on the Louvin Brothers' mournful "Seven Year Blues", and there's an interesting bit of philosophy in the Butch Hancock song "My Mind's Got a Mind of Its Own". One of the recurring lines states "I've been getting into trouble without meaning to." Many will relate to that. One of my favorite songs from the recording is the final cut, "Crumple Faced Lover", written by Koralee. The harmony is as wonderful as on the other songs, the idea fits together, and I started thinking of the kind of music Gillian Welch writes – songs from a younger person which sound 40 years old. And that is meant as a compliment.

Slowdrag haven't travelled much outside BC, but did venture into Alberta on two occasions in August of last year. They did a concert in Red Deer while on their way to spend a weekend at the Shady Grove Bluegrass Festival in southern Alberta. The trio were undoubtedly the surprise hit of the festival simply because they were so good at what they did and had great rapport with the audience, and because they hadn't traveled outside BC a lot. Very few of the Shady Grove attendees had heard much, if anything, from the trio before. The lineup to talk to them and pick up a CD after each performance was lengthy. They will be welcomed back any time they can return.

While the work of Reischman and Hornbuckle does add to the sound on the recording, the trio

performing live leaves nothing of an “empty space” where a listener might feel something was missing from any part of the musical performance. And those wonderful vocal harmonies tie everything together.

Laurie Mills
Calgary, Alberta

Cuillin. 02 50839. Jones & Co., Suite 100, 5212 Sackville St., Halifax, NS B3J 1K6;
<jonesco@ns.sympatico.ca>

Another Celtic rock band comes bursting out of the thriving East Coast music scene. Young and energetic, they play the customary array of instruments: guitar, bass and drums supporting traditional fiddle, whistle and bagpipes.

The Celtic rock field is pretty crowded, so do Cuillin have anything to separate them from the pack? Well, for one thing, these guys (and one gal) can play. Too many Celtic bands rock it up to hide poor technique behind volume and bass lines, but Cuillin have plenty of musical ability between them. Both Mairi Rankin on fiddle and Matt MacIsaac on pipes and whistle are first rate. Stuart Cameron leads the vocals with a strong baritone. However, I note from their website that, at some point since this CD was released, singer-songwriter Dave Carmichael has taken his place in the band.

The addition of a songwriter may help Cuillin to find their own distinctive voice. The weakness of this CD is that there is little fresh material. They can't improve on the original versions of Archie Fisher's "Witch of the West-Mer Land" or Dougie Maclean's "Ready for the Storm". Most of the tunes are familiar in Scottish/Irish session circles, and the group don't produce a definitive version or a new take on any of them.

With that reservation, the playing is strong, and the material has a good variety of pace – "Ready for the Storm" is just guitar and vocals, while "Haul Away Joe" is in-your-face vocals and plentiful electronic effects, with several

traditional tunes woven into the breaks. I'm sure Cuillin would be a great live band.

This is a strong debut from a young band with plenty of talent. On this CD there is nothing much to make them stand out in the crowded world of Scottish Celtic/Rock, but they have lots of potential if they can find their own distinctive style.

Nan Colledge
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Virgo Rising. **Voices Entwined.** CDVR01.
Virgin Crab Productions, 1217 Montrose Ave.,
Victoria, BC V8T 2K3;
<yb379@freenet.victoria.bc.ca>

Virgo Rising is a Victoria-based quartet consisting of Karen Gillmore, Sharon Hazelwood, Sue Postans and Tracy Summers, all experienced musicians and well known in BC and beyond. The four play a wide array of instruments, from guitars and mandolin to Irish flute and Appalachian dulcimer, but it was their fine vocal harmonies that first drew this reviewer's attention. **Voices Entwined** is the first CD by Virgo Rising, and sports a range of traditional and contemporary songs.

This album is packed with fine arrangements which show off both the instrumental abilities of the members and their excellent ensemble vocals. The songs have been well chosen, and seem to reflect the beliefs and spirit of the ensemble; the delivery is consistently convincing, and made me wish I could hear the group in person (Virgo Rising does private "House Concerts" by arrangement, so those in the Victoria area should contact them directly for details).

What else is noteworthy about this album? A great sound! **Voices Entwined** has been very well recorded, especially for a live album. The extra few dollars paid for recording professionals was money well spent. This is one of the best live productions I've heard: very

little noise, excellent clarity and detail to the voices and instruments, and a well-balanced mix. Kudos to all involved.

Any criticisms are minimal. I might suggest putting “Valparaiso in a Rowboat” or “Where the Coho Flash Silver” first on the album, as either of those would make a stronger first impression than “Honey in the Rock”. It was also not apparent why the group decided to include applause at the end of every song. This abruptly changed the mood which had been so effectively created. Still, these details take little away from **Voices Entwined**, which is a fine debut CD and is highly recommended.

Paul E. Guise
Lawrence, Kansas

Gary Fjellgaard. **Grande Olde Ride**. SCR 11. Slim Creek Music, P.O. Box 323, Gabriola Island, BC V0R 1X0; <www.fjellgaard.bc.ca>

Gary Fjellgaard just keeps getting better. In his latest self-produced CD he has once again found his voice, focusing on his love and knowledge of the western cowboy culture that runs so deep in western Canada.

In writing this review I have to make a disclosure. Gary Fjellgaard is a friend of mine, and this latest CD was recorded at Jerry Paquette’s Studio in Nanaimo, the same studio we use for recording. We have hosted several concerts for Gary and hung out together at cowboy festivals. We have not ridden together, but we likely will. And I like his work. Objectivity, however, has not gone out the window.

Fjellgaard, now a grandfather in life and an elder in music circles, has become one of the most prolific and popular of the cowboy or western performers in Canada. On the way he has been a Juno award winner. He worked with Evan Kemp back in the old days of 1950s western music. Then he went logging to raise a family. He and his wife Lynn and his four daughters lived in a rough board shack outside

Prince George. Then he broke his back. Logging had to end, but he had to make a living, so he turned to his guitar, wrote a few more songs and went back to performing. While one would never wish a broken back on anyone, Canadian western music is the beneficiary of his accident.

The tradition in Fjellgaard’s music comes out of the songs the cowboys sang back in the 1880s or ‘90s. You will hear those themes reflected in Fjellgaard’s songs. To that tradition is added the sound of early silver screen “cowboys” and the “singing cowboys”, like Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, to use the two best-known examples.

There is now a niche for this music, and it is generally called “western” music. The traditionalist might correctly argue that these are not songs “the cowboys” would have sung, but they do have a tradition that dates back many decades. And Canada, then as now, has some of the best. Wilf Carter, known south of the Medicine Line as Montana Slim, is one, Evan Kemp and the BC Trailriders another, and the Rhythm Pals a third – all Canadian. It’s a tradition that is worth celebrating.

Over the last decade Gary has simplified his sound, getting further away from the Nashville sound so demanded by radio. This is not Big Hat country-and-western. With **Grande Olde Ride**, Gary has left that Nashville sound behind and let his own writing and voice come through, having clearly decided that there is another audience out there. This CD is the culmination of that refinement of his sound.

Like Diamond Joe White, David Wilkie and many other “cowboy” singers, Fjellgaard is not a working cowboy. But he has put in lots of miles in his saddle on cattle drives and mountain rides. These rides are echoed in his music, in songs like “Zane Grey”, “Reins of Glory”, “Grand Old Ride” and “Song of the Wagon”. The integrity of his writing shines through. One way to recognize this is to watch working cowboys and ranchers when Gary performs.

These folks are real quick to spot an interloper or a fraud. Gary is welcomed.

For **Grande Olde Ride** Fjellgaard has gathered together a great group of instrumentalists and background singers. His old trio partners are there, Peter Padden on drums and the fantastic voice of Linda Kidder, also on bass. Nathan Tinkham is on dobro and acoustic guitar, John Forest plays some bass, and on fretless bass and 5-string acoustic bass is a fellow named Valdemar Horsdal, better known as Valdy. (Valdy and Gary have been touring their “Still Contenders” concert for a couple of years now, to great reviews.) Then there is Marcelle Nokony on violin, Rob Reed on fiddle, Bill Hicks on drums and bluegrass great John Reischman playing mandolin. Tammy Fassaert does background on one track.

All the musicians know just when to come in with a phrase or a lick. There is no contest for air time, no banging, thumping drum track, but a subtle blend of sounds, led by Gary’s excellent guitar work and smooth clear voice.

Like so many Canadian musicians, there is little doubt that south of the line Gary Fjellgaard would be a household name, at least in western households. We’re lucky to have him as one of ours. We should celebrate this voice that draws the traditions of the western cattle trade into our time.

Richard T. Wright
Williams Lake, British Columbia

Cathedral Lakes Singers. **Live at Willow Rock.** CR-6296. Canyon Records Productions, 4143 North 16th St., Suite 6, Phoenix, AZ 85016, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

More good powwow music from Canyon Records, this time from the Navajo, who call themselves Dine, meaning, “The People”. The Navajo, originally a subarctic people, arrived in the southwest United States about 400 years

ago. During this time they have been influenced by the Pueblo, Spanish and American cultures, and now they excel at plains powwow music.

This large drum group of 11 singers was recorded live at the Navajo Nation Fair in Window Rock, Arizona. All but one of the songs are led by Jay Begaye, who has created some engaging melody lines.

The disk opens with a “Healing Prayer Song”; there are three intertribals and a Mother’s Round Dance, in keeping with the pivotal position of women in the society. Other songs are “Wellpinit Special”, “Songees Special”, “Red Lake Special”, “Litefoot Wedding Song” and “Cowboy Horizon”, perhaps created while on the job?

Lynn Whidden
Brandon, Manitoba

Celso Machado. **Varal.** SAF 002. Celso Machado, 863 East 14th Ave., Vancouver, BC V5T 2N5; Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, BC V5L 2X7; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.festival.bc.ca>

Los Morenos. **Moviendo Te.** LM2000. Eleanor Moreno, c/o 1942 Cottonwood Cres. SE, Calgary, AB T2B 1T6; <losmorenosmusic@home.com>; <www.losmorenosmusic.com>

There has been a virtual explosion in Latin and Latin-based music in Canada. Four of the five nominees for the “Best Global “ category of the 2000 Junos were Latin-based, as were the majority of albums accepted for consideration before the final five were announced. We should be extremely grateful to the Canada Council for supporting many of these CDs by creative and talented musicians who otherwise would probably have great difficulty in financing the recording of their music. Celso Machado’s CD, **Varal**, was published with the help of the Canada Council, and has excellent liner notes, full Portuguese texts and English summaries of

the texts, as well as a glossary. Mauricio Moreno, the lead guitar and composer of Los Morenos, self-published his CD, which was recorded in Calgary. Possibly because of the additional expense, there are no notes about the compositions or translations of titles. There is some information about the musicians on their website. Los Morenos consists of Mauricio Moreno (composer, lead guitar), who was born in El Salvador; Eleanor Moreno (vocals and some compositions), who was born in Ireland, Malcolm Lim (percussion) and Riza Cassam (bass). Mauricio's guitar work is very fine and the balance between instruments is good. I was pleased that the bass did not overpower the guitar, a problem I have noticed on other Canadian Latin-based CDs. This album has elements of fusion, some of which are more successful than others. I particularly liked the first two pieces, both composed by Mauricio. Numbers 2 and 4 ("Suenos Morenos" and "Guitar Arabe") add tin whistle to either flamenco or Arabic guitar elements, and the combined timbres work well. Number 6 ("Black Irish") uses bagpipes with guitar, and again provides interesting tone colours. I was not as satisfied with the pop/jazz fusions in numbers 3, 7 and 8, all composed and sung by Eleanor Moreno, which seemed too different from the rest of the album and perhaps would work better on a separate disc. Number 9 ("Bon Voyage"), with darbukka, is particularly virtuosic for the guitar. Mauricio Moreno is a fine performer and composer. On his next CD, I hope we have more information about the pieces.

The liner notes for Celso Machado's **Varal** are excellent and provide a wealth of information. Complete Portuguese texts are given, with excellent English summaries of the lyrics or their inspiration, in addition to full instrumentation and a glossary. All works are by Celso Machado. Recorded at Creation Studios in Burnaby, BC, the sound quality is excellent. I loved the opening piece, "Depois de Anos" ("After Years"), which is a gentle work, with lyrics that describe, in the poetic and economical English summary, "unconsummated true love

rediscovered, confirmed and transformed by maturity after a long separation". There is tremendous breadth in the themes and nature of the songs – from mature love to songs of the slaves to dance music. The disc title, **Varal**, refers to a genre of songs sung by slaves in Brazil as they washed clothes and created percussive effects by rhythmically slapping the clothes on the river banks. When I first heard number 7, "Corpo" ("Body"), I thought something was wrong with my CD player or the disc. It opens with what sounds like bees or a very large fly buzzing around. Then it moves to high, popping vocal sounds, almost like an avant-garde composition. On reading the liner notes, I learned: "There is a saying in Brazil that samba begins with the feet. In Celso's family that soon spread to bodies, mouths, tables, boxes, frying pans and pieces of paper with each brother and their mother imitating an instrument: surdos (bass drums), shakers, agogo bells and tamborins."

Celso Machado is also interested in fusion, and numbers 8, 9, 10 and 13 reflect this interest. Number 8 ("Que Fait Lie") has Moroccan rhythms, number 9 fuses elements of Moroccan and Afro/Brazilian rhythms and number 10 is dedicated to three tambourine/percussion players, from India, Italy and Brazil, respectively. In summary, this CD provides a wide-ranging musical voyage that is excellent from every perspective.

Further to my review of Pacande's CD **Por El Sol** in the March/June 2000 issue of the *Bulletin* [34.1/2, p. 50], I would like to note that Pacande's subsequent CD, **El Otro Lado**, returned to Diego Marulanda's acoustic roots. This is a superb CD, and would be an excellent addition to a traditional Latin collection. Diego Marulanda is to be commended for his continuing creative endeavours.

Leslie Hall
Toronto, Ontario

Ken Perlman. **Northern Banjo**. CCCD-0191.
Copper Creek Records, P.O. Box 3161,
Roanoke, VA 24015, USA; <CopCrk@aol.com>;
<www.coppercreekrec.com>;
<www.kenperlman.com>

Here is a recording that has full marks for presentation of instrumental ensemble music. The main lead instrument is the 5-string banjo played in the melodic clawhammer style.

With 14 items, including many medleys, this 53-minute CD of essentially an acoustic focus on fiddle music is a masterpiece. The title, **Northern Banjo**, refers to the old-time fiddle tune traditions found and customarily played in the northeastern part of the US and the eastern part of Canada, with a significant emphasis on tunes from Atlantic Canada.

Ken Perlman, an American musician, does the lion's share of the lead melody playing in his clawhammer banjo style, on almost all of the tunes. This gives the CD a unique flavour. The other instruments (mainly played by Canadian musicians) stay for the most part in the roles of complementing and backup. These other instruments include Uilleann pipes, tin whistle, flute, mandolin, Irish bazouki, bass, bodhran, guitar, viola, caxixi and resophonic guitar.

To break up the banjo and ensemble action, Ken delivers three solos of fingerstyle guitar and also includes an original banjo piece called "Road to Mexico". Some cuts include many instruments all at once, but there is never a cluttered, overbearing or overproduced result on any tune.

Ken's banjo is stretched to get all the notes of a particular tune with clarity and good phrasing, but never at the expense of a solid rhythm so necessary for this kind (or most kinds) of music. On this CD you'll find assorted reels, jigs and hornpipes, and music that is fast, slow or of medium tempo – a healthy variety.

Perlman's banjo playing style, combined with his own instrument sound setup, is sometimes reminiscent of a four-string plectrum banjo flavour blended with the five-string drone and melody quality.

Ken's intricacies cover his banjo neck from stem to stern – from first position up to very high registers on the fingerboard – and he is a master at arranging both the tunes and the medleys to create changing moods.

Realizing that Perlman couldn't do it all on one recording, this reviewer would have appreciated one or two solo tunes with just banjo. Perhaps on the next CD.

It is very appropriate to have Ken Perlman's music reviewed in a Canadian publication on a number of counts, including the Canadian content of his music. Perlman's respect for the fiddle traditions of Atlantic Canada should not go unnoticed, nor should his particular field work in PEI. All of this shines through on the recording. In conclusion, this work has delightful power and a unique collection of fiddle music – unique in that the 5-string banjo played the clawhammer way takes the lead!

Barry Luft
Calgary, Alberta