



Words and Music

Books/Recordings

Scott Macmillan. **Scoobie Tunes (A Family Fiddle Frenzy): Cape Breton Style Fiddle Tunes Composed by Scott Macmillan.** Scojen Music Productions, 5543 Sebastian Place, Halifax, N.S. B3K 2K5; scojens@ns.sympatico.ca

Scott MacMillan et al. **The Minnie Sessions, Vols. 1, 2, 3.** Scojen Music Productions, 5543 Sebastian Place, Halifax, N.S. B3K 2K5; scojens@ns.sympatico.ca

Recordings

Julian West. **Acadia Nights.** JGW012000. Julian West, 1758 Cambridge St., Halifax, N.S. B3H 4A9; juliangwest@yahoo.ca; <http://geocities.com/juliangwest/>

"CSS Acadia is a former Canadian hydrographic survey ship [...] now permanently berthed at The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax harbour. If you listen through a porthole on most Friday nights you'll hear a fine bunch of folks sharing some of the sweetest music played."

From this setting comes the debut recording by Julian West, *Acadia Nights*. Born in Belleville, Ontario, West travelled the country before choosing Halifax as his new home. Since his arrival in 1998, he has been steadily cultivating his musical skills, working with talented local musicians and furthering his knowledge of Maritime culture. It seems to have been time well spent, as *Acadia Nights* is a fine debut, displaying well-crafted songs and warm, friendly voices. West's voice in particular is warm and relaxed without being over-processed (all to often a problem these days), and shows hints of the singer being a Stan Rogers and Gordon Lightfoot fan (is it true, Julian?).

The performances are good throughout, but not without a few flaws. The tuning is a bit rough in a few spots, especially the group ending to "Acadia Nights". I suspect, however, that this would probably be quite acceptable aboard the CSS Acadia on a Friday night... Also, my first impression was that the tempo on the instrumentals ("The Rain Dance" and "Sea Saw") may be a bit slow. After several listenings, I'm warming to the slower, more purposeful interpretation.

The arrangements show a good understanding of texture; the rhythms in the various instruments work well together, and the parts rarely reveal their multitracked heritage. The production is quite good, although it is not up to fully professional standards; for example, some fades are quite abrupt, and the reverbs on various instruments do not always match up. This shouldn't be seen as a criticism of this particular album, more a commentary on the cost of putting a professional product together these days; more money for retakes and mastering would help many artists' products.

Two settings in particular stand out for me, "Margaret's Lament" and "The Liner She's a Lady". The first is an original composition, inspired by the critically-acclaimed film *Margaret's Museum*, and makes use of acoustic guitar, cello, whistle and West's vocals. The setting is clean, simple and effective, and shows that the artist has studied other East Coast musicians extensively over the past few years. The second noteworthy song, "The Liner She's a Lady", is an original setting of words by Rudyard Kipling. The music is beautifully evocative of the elegant, chugging little cargo boats seen in every harbour, often overshadowed by larger ships yet essential to any seafaring society. This song is a real gem, and deserves attention from other artists.

All in all, *Acadia Nights* is a very impressive debut recording. Any problems are small and easily fixed with time, practice and a bit more production money, and are easily outweighed by the passion exhibited throughout the album.

*Paul E. Guise,
Red Deer, Alberta*

Arnie Naiman & Chris Coole. *5 Strings Attached — Vol. 2*. M02CA. Merriweather Records, 100 Crawford Rose Dr., Aurora, Ont. L4G 4S1; ragged@interlog.com; www.interlog.com/~ragged

This CD, in my view, faces three challenges. It features the instrument that people love to make fun of — the five-string banjo. The style of playing is "old time", a much less known style of the five-string banjo than the more popular bluegrass style. And the artists are Canadian. But this CD is a real winner. Whether the listener is familiar with old time banjo music or not, you will end liking this recording. The music is lively and enjoyable, and just plain fun.

The CD is a continuation of their a previous volume, called *5 Strings Attached With No Backing* (which is just as good) [reviewed 34.1/2, p. 62]. Volume 2 has a wide collection of songs, consisting of many of their own compositions and some of their own renditions of traditional "gems". All feature the five-string banjo in the old time style of clawhammer, with a few songs featuring finger-picking. The instrumentals are broken up with five vocals, also featuring the banjo as the main backup instrument. The banjo playing is melodic and smooth. The music sounds very natural, relaxed and effortless, which means that these two artists really know what they are doing, as this style of playing is not easy to produce well.

Old time banjo music predates modern bluegrass. The modern version of this is called "melodic" clawhammer, because the banjo plays the melody line most often played by the fiddle. Arnie and Chris are both masters of this style. I have heard both live and in recordings some of the more widely known artists of melodic clawhammer (e.g., Ken Perlman; Bob Carlin), and Chris and Arnie rank, in my books, right up there with them. It is a real treat that so many of the songs on this CD are original and reflect something of their own lives, but nevertheless follow the old time banjo style. What a great way to keep a tradition going!

*Don Deines
Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia*