

Reviews

Alberta Society of Fiddlers. *64 Fiddle Tunes Commonly Played in Alberta*. ASF-001.
Alberta Society of Fiddlers, 2005;
fiddlealberta.net/firms.com

This two-CD set is a remarkable accomplishment. Designed primarily as a pedagogical instrument, it is also a documentary record of the basic corpus of popular fiddle tunes extant among practitioners of traditional fiddle playing in Alberta at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In both respects it is an exceptionally valuable initiative.

Anyway, there are indeed sixty-four tracks here, featuring sixty-three different tunes (“Turkey in the Straw” is given in two different keys, D & G). We begin with “Angus Campbell” and end with “Whisky Before Breakfast”. Most tunes are traditional (or at least anonymous) but a dozen are credited to composers, among them Don Messer and Wade Hemsworth. They are played by four fiddlers: Heather Bourne, Bonnie Gregory, Bruce Blair, and Rod Olsstad, each responsible for sixteen tunes and each discreetly accompanied by guitarist Cam Neufeld. I’m sure they have somewhat different styles—and, yes, you can hear some differences if you concentrate hard—but they each play the tunes impeccably and quite straight, so that you can easily hear the difference, for example, between a jig and a reel.

Obviously this is not a collection one sits down to listen to at a single session, and of course the best way to use it is to check on individual tunes as needed. Now, just a minute, how does “Red River Jig” go? And what about “Maple Sugar” or “Joys of Quebec”? And so it goes...I had a hard time thinking of a fiddle tune I really like that isn’t here, but I did come up with “The Keel Row”. Perhaps that isn’t played much in Alberta these days, or perhaps it never has been. I guess it’s really a pipe tune in any case. Well, I must ask Rod Olsstad if he knows it, next time I see him at an anti-government demonstration or a Kubasonics concert. I believe he was the mastermind behind this project, and he deserves our admiration and thanks.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Asani. *Rattle & Drum*. AR 12. Ann Arbor Records Ltd., 49 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, Man. R2L 1K9; www.arborrecords.com; Asani, c/o 1671 Tomlinson Common, Edmonton, Alta. T6R 3E2; spocklin@telus.net; www.asani.org

Exciting singing from this trio, Sherryl Sewepagaham (Cree), Sarah Pocklington (Cree Métis) and Debbie Houle (Métis). The three musicians from northern Alberta all have vocal training that they use in the service of the unique sound they have created. Some of the songs are sung in Cree, some with vocables, and all the themes derive from Native culture and history, evidenced by titles such as “Bill C-31 Blues” and “Rez Sister”.

All three voices are robust and flexible. They can do most everything with their voices: produce snappy rhythms as well as the melody. In the song “Little Angel” they negotiate beautifully the large intervals characteristic of Plains music. The alto voice is particularly effective in “Maskawiwin”. In “Bill C-31 Blues” the low voice creates a walking rhythm bass for this blues-style song, and in “Iskwesis” (“Little Girl”) they have captured the rhythm, albeit with a quicker tempo, of the northern Tea Dance. The vocal rhythms are frequently augmented with various hand drums, rattles, finger-snapping and other sounds (such as *sssh*). There are tasteful touches of traditional flute in “Goodnight Song”.

The focused and intense vocal timbre is reminiscent of northern powwow singing, and at the same time, the sound tells us that they are modern women who are not afraid to be heard. Their letter-perfect diction adds to the strength of the message. Outstanding is the fluidity of their singing and the blending of the harmony the three have achieved. They don’t always adhere to Western harmonic traditions. Occasionally their musical bridges move via unexpected chords, yet they stay absolutely together and convince us that these new sounds are just right.

One of my favorite songs is “Maskwa’s Journey”, the first song they created together. It uses call-response form, and the three voices, singing with syllables, build waves of sound. I hope we will hear more from Asani..

Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba

The Buccaneers. *Road Trip, vol. 1*. BMG001. Big-note Entertainment Inc., 87 Tuscany Springs Way NW, Calgary, Alta. T3L 2N4; jim@bignote.net; www.bignote.net; www.buccaneers.ca

The Buccaneers are a Calgary-based trio consisting of Rodger Leeder (vocals, mandolin, bass guitar, guitar, and a familiar last name), Seán Sabraw (vocals, guitar, bass guitar, bodhran, mandolin) and Jim Samuelson (vocals, saxophone, pennywhistles, tambou-

rine, bones). Originally formed as a busking sextet in Winnipeg in 1997, The Buccaneers celebrated their first decade with a new album, *Road Trip, vol. 1* (presumably there will be more!). The CD was recorded at Ma-Me-O Recording Studio and produced by The Buccaneers and Miles Jackson, who contributed vocals, piano, keyboards, accordion and all the engineering and mastering. As a note for those who prefer their music live, The Buccaneers tour extensively in Canada, and have performed at over 150 schools across the country.

Half of *Road Trip*'s eight songs are traditional, including "The Klondike Gold Rush", "L'Arbre Est Dans Ses Feuilles" and "I'se the B'y". These last two feature rollicking performances, and hold up well to repeated listening—this is particularly impressive for "I'se the B'y", which sometimes seems too well known. More recent compositions include the opening track, "Our Own Backyard" (written by the band members), "Saskatchewan Sea" (J. Summach), James Keelaghan's "Red River Rising", and the sixth track (see below). "Red River Rising" struck me as the tightest performance on the disc, with a wonderful drive to the drums and bass and some fine guitar solos and fills. The vocal harmonies are crisp on this track, as they are throughout the disc.

One of my first impressions upon hearing the disc was that it seemed kind of—well, juvenile. It wasn't until a visit to the Buccaneers' website that I discovered that *Road Trip* is intended "specifically for children and their families, but enjoyable for all" (an informal, haphazard study confirmed its effectiveness—a shame it's not mentioned on the CD itself). On a related point, the arrangements are pitched rather high for most adults to sing along with (presumably they are for younger voices, but perhaps it's a vestige of the group's busking days, or simply a comfortable range for the singers). Finally, the Buccaneers' website doesn't mention *Road Trip* at all under Music—instead, click on Shop, where it appears above a notice for the upcoming (and pre-selling) Buccaneers EP and their two earlier discs.

In the interests of full disclosure, I must mention that track 6 of *Road Trip* ("The 'Segwun' is Steamin' Again") was written by Rodger Leeder's father, *CFM* Reviews Editor (and in this context, my boss) John Leeder. It may not be the politically correct thing for a reviewer to say, but here goes: nice work, John!

Paul Guise, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Clinton Denny with Gerald Primeaux, Sr. *Prayers for My Father*. CR-6427. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; canyon@canyonrecords.com; www.canyonrecords.com

This sound recording represents the story of a family's life in the Native American Church ("NAC"). Three generations of the Denny family have worked to establish and develop this peyote-centered church on the Rocky Boy Reservation, Montana. The NAC stresses both song and eating of the peyote to achieve deep religious experience, and the songs are central to the spread of the ceremony across North America.

The CD notes tell the story of how their family efforts to spread the NAC often faced opposition from other community members. Other traditional music and beliefs live on, such as the well-established Plains music traditions embodied in the Sun Dance and the powwow. Indeed, the Rocky Boy Reservation has a well-known powwow drum group. After initial reluctance to record the songs, the Denny family realized the value of recorded song to carry the NAC message.

In contrast to the detailed information on the family, there are no notes on what makes this music so mesmerizing. It consists of a small water drum and rattles. Both are played with a light rapid beat, and the beating of the two instruments is synchronized.

Melodic contours, sung with easily remembered vocables, undulate around a fixed pitch. After a "call" by lead singer Denny, he is joined in harmony by Primeaux. Denny and Primeaux have achieved a pleasing blend, and sing with ease. Because NAC services continue throughout the night, this effortless vocal production is necessary. There are four sets of songs during the service: opening, midnight water, dawn water, and the closing song. Each song is sung four times.

Whether you are a member of the Native American Church or not, this recording is worthwhile for its intrinsic music value as well as its deep roots in North American Native music history.

Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba

The David Grisman Experience. *DGBX*. ACD-65. Acoustic Disc, P.O. Box 4143, San Rafael, CA 94913. www.acousticdisc.com

David Grisman is a well-known figure in the world of American bluegrass, and it's hardly surprising that this, his most recent recording, contains a wealth of expertly-played, vibrant music with that characteristic sound of blended mandolin, five-string banjo, fiddle, guitar and acoustic bass. As one would expect from Grisman, there is plenty of skilful mandolin playing, and the younger musicians accompanying him are no slouches either. Keith Little's banjo is accorded a number of instrumental breaks, as is, less frequently, Chad Manning's fiddle.

The songs are fairly standard bluegrass fare, although this group does seem to have its feet firmly in

the hillbilly music of the interwar era and in the early recordings of the post-war pioneers. The traditional material includes the carefree "I'm Rollin' On", which makes a promising opener for the album, and "Reuben's Train", which turns out to be a rollicking version of "Five Hundred Miles". The gospel side of the hillbilly tradition is reflected in the rather repetitive "Are You Afraid to Die?", while the hazards of working in a coal mine are underlined in "Dream of the Miner's Child", a quasi-narrative song which rather irritatingly lacks an outcome, since we are never told whether the foretold future (a disaster) actually comes to pass.

One of the best tracks is a Flatt & Scruggs piece, "Down the Road", while another is a well-crafted version of the Carter Family's "Engine 143". Also of considerable interest is a cover of Charlie Poole's disaster song "The Baltimore Fire", although the original had a rougher immediacy that is lacking here. Two tunes are Grisman originals: "Old and in the Way" (a rather maudlin meditation on old age), and a fast and furious instrumental, "Dawggy Mt. Breakdown".

All in all, this is a thoroughly professional, well-recorded and most enjoyable album, although I have to admit that, for me at least, it lacks that something special that would make it stand out from the crowd. Nonetheless, *DGBX* will certainly delight fans of this style of music.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

John Wort Hannam. *Two Bit Suit*. BHM-CD-957. Black Hen Music, Box 74661, Kitsilano, Vancouver, B.C. V6H 4P4; info@blackhenmusic.com; www.blackhenmusic.com; John Wort Hannam, Box 1904, Ft. Macleod, Alta. T0L 0Z0; www.johnworthannam.com

At the time of this review, former full-time school-teacher John Wort Hannam's third CD, *Two Bit Suit*, comes with a complement of accolades. Mr. Hannam has already won the 2007 New Folk award put on by the Kerrville Folk Music festival, was nominated for two Western Canadian Music Awards, won first prize at the Calgary Folk Music Festival Songwriting Competition, and has just recently been nominated in the category of "Best Traditional Artist" for the 2008 North American Folk Alliance Awards. All of this means that Mr. Hannam has achieved what is often referred to as Critical Acclaim. But this review is written for those who take industry accolades and awards with a grain of salt. After all, what do awards really tell us about the quality of the material? Particularly when everyone with even a marginal association with roots/folk/country music seems to be starting awards.

Two Bit Suit is a richly and at times densely produced CD. Steve Dawson (of Zubot and Dawson fame) produced the album for Mr. Hannam and brought together quite a collection of musicians and sounds. As a producer, Mr. Dawson seems to position himself somewhere in between Daniel Lanois and Rick Rubin, but without the beauty of the ragged edge that Lanois brought to Willie Nelson's material or Rubin brought to Johnny Cash's American series. While on a first listen the production seems to fall into a safe and often typical groove, with subsequent listens one can appreciate it better. I listened to the album in my car and then on my stereo and then finally with headphones, and I was really struck by my final close listen to the whole album. Mr. Hannam's voice, Steve Dawson's guitar work, and John Reischman's guest appearances really stand out. However, the real beauty of Dawson's work requires a very close listen to the album. The odd and haunting textures of mellotron, dark organs and electric guitars would otherwise be lost. Dawson doesn't push the organs to the front to compete with Hannam's voice, the way Rubin often does to elicit a darkness and tension. Dawson leaves the tension to sit in the background, little eerie sounds that, once noticed, add to the enjoyment and dramatic appeal of the material. Listening with headphones felt like I was hearing a different version of the same album. Hannam's well-crafted songs with country/roots instrumentation stand out in front of an emotionally-charged clutter that invites you to dig in, to explore, and to let your ear fall on a moment and chase it through the rest of the song.

The artwork for the album provides a perfect visual partner. For anyone who is into artwork any more, it is obviously by 'A Man Called Wrycraft', the Toronto-based, Juno Award-winning mad genius of roots/country/blues album production. If you have in your collection a couple of roots albums from the last ten years with exceptional artwork, Michael Wrycraft was probably the designer responsible. *Two Bit Suit* is a visually a sepia-toned delight. The CD cover prominently displays a second-hand brown suit hanging in a junk-store jungle. While listening to the album with headphones, noticing the little details in the sound production, I read through the liner notes booklet tucked snugly inside the cardboard packaging (only the CD tray is plastic), and my eyes kept jumping to the front and back of the packaging. Small details caught my attention, and in one place I noticed a man's portrait on the cover of a book. Although this was a very small detail, I felt an immediate rush of discovery: I had found John Wort Hannam. The human brain seems sometimes to be able to construct sense out of seeming nonsense, discerning organization and connections within apparent chaos.

Just this past summer I spent a week in Fort Macleod, Alberta, and met Mr. Hannam at the South Country Fair. Now, as I am sitting in my kitchen in the middle of an Edmonton winter, the hot and dusty winds of Southern Alberta play through my speakers. *Two Bit Suit* is a work of fiction, but it is one that is placed firmly in the Canadian landscape. Too often country songsters attempt what Hannam successfully reconstructs, the real life world of the West. Some of the songs are nostalgic and sentimental, but that is life in a place like Fort Macleod, a small town in southern Alberta that was competing with Calgary and Lethbridge until the CPR moved its operations out of town. Two hundred jobs went with it, and in 1924 the town declared bankruptcy. The province loaned the town money, but on the condition that there would be no growth for 50 years. By 1974 the town looked very much like it did 50 years earlier, and growth was very slow. So now, in 2008, one drives into the living museum of Fort Macleod.

If Hannam is overly sentimental and nostalgic, if there is more loss than gain in his songs, if there is a smoldering bitterness and at times the feeling of being trapped, and if the songs seem at times old-fashioned, it is because his songs are all of these things. They are not reconstructions of a past time, but songs from a place that in many ways too often gets left out. After listening to Hannam's songs, you feel like wiping the dust off your face, turning your cap down, and heading for the shade near the river that snakes alongside town, just to see something that is both free and moving forward.

Michael MacDonald, Edmonton, Alberta

Ivonne Hernandez. *In Time*. PM14102. Pacific Music Marketing Ltd., 3117 Delta Ave., Victoria, B.C. V8Z 1A6; info@pacificmusic.net; info@islandviewcreations.com; ivonne@ivonnehernandez.com;

In Time is Ivonne Hernandez's second recording. Playing fiddle since the age of 3, and currently studying at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Ivonne has an impressive resumé of fiddling performances and experiences. Her technical expertise and clean style are evident in some of the challenging tunes she has chosen to play. It will come as no surprise to the listener that Ivonne is a veteran of the fiddle contest scene across Canada. She has won a number of contests in her home province of British Columbia, has been a finalist multiple times at the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Championship, and is a four-time winner of the Grand North American Fiddle Championship.

One of the strengths of this album is its variety. While the majority of the tunes will be familiar to

fiddle fans in Canada, there are a few lesser-known tunes, such as "Runaway Fiddle" (Keith Coleman) and "Amy's Request" (Kelli Trotter), to catch the ear. Even the most well-known tunes are played in interesting arrangements and demonstrate Ivonne's ability to make them her own. I was particularly impressed with the "Tennessee Waltz", a tune played so often that you really have to do something special with it to make it stand out. Ivonne's use of ornamentation, variation and double-stopping kept me interested throughout.

The mix of Irish, Scottish, Shetland, American, Cape Breton and Canadian old-time tunes showcases Ivonne's versatility as a musician, and they are played in stylistically appropriate arrangements. For example, the Cape Breton and Shetland sets are played with pipes and piano, while Kenny Baker's "Festival Waltz" has guitar accompaniment and features a steel guitar solo. Another strength of the album is Ivonne's cast of supporting musicians: Adam Dobres (guitar), Leigh Grisewood (bass), Ryan MacDonald (smallpipes), Adrian Dolan (piano) and Doc Jenkins (pedal steel). Several steel, guitar and pipe solos demonstrate the impressive talents of these fine musicians and, again, provide evidence of the careful arrangement of each of the tunes.

Some of the tunes lack the drive that is apparent in Ivonne's live performances (not the jig sets, though – her jig sets made me want to get up and dance), and understandably this is harder to achieve in a studio setting than on a stage or in a jam; however, the variety of tunes, their careful arrangement, and strong ensemble playing with the back-up musicians make this an album that will grab and hold the listener's attention through many listenings.

Sherry Johnson, Toronto, Ontario

Pied Pumkin. *Pumkids: Tuneful Tales for Kids and Kin*. SQ-9. 58 Pirates Lane, Nanaimo, B.C. V9R 6R1; valley@rickscott.ca; www.piedpumkin.com

Pied Pumkin members Rick Scott (dulcimer, trombone, vocals), Shari Ulrich (mandolin, violin, flute, vocals) and Joe Mock (guitar, piano, bass, vocals) have been performing as an ensemble for the past thirty years—well, sort of. Formed in the mid-70s, the group became Pied Pear after Ulrich's departure in 1976. In 1984, Scott and Mock split to pursue solo careers, and for the next 20 years the three followed different paths (with the occasional reunion, such as the acclaimed 1998 retrospective, *Plucking DeVine*). Now Pied Pumkin is back together (okay, Mock lives in Paris, and they all have solo careers, but they're back). Their new release, *Pumkids*, is subtitled "Tuneful Tales for Kids and Kin", and is presented in

a multi-fold case with colourful drawings, lyrics and a few notes.

Pumkids is already an award-winning album, having received 2007 Canadian Folk Music and Western Canadian Music awards (Best Children's Album and Outstanding Children's Release, respectively). As you would expect, several of the songs are excellent. Joe Mock's "Amandine" combines nonsense (or are they?) French lyrics and a great tune into a hugely singable gem. "Upside of Down" is presented in English and French ("Le Bon Côté De Down", track 13), and was written for the 2006 World Congress on Down's Syndrome. Another gem is Ulrich's "Annabelle's Fiddle", which tells the tale of a little girl who hears a fiddle and decides to learn how to play. Annabelle tries to play, scares the cat, scares the dog, practices, practices, practices, and... well, you'll have to buy the CD to find out how it ends.

A few small things detracted from the overall experience. There's a lot of spoken dialogue throughout the songs, which made it difficult for my sample of young listeners to sing along. (The lengths I go to for a CD review!) I also felt the album to be lacking in continuity: it's more of a mosaic than a continuous story. Having looked through the Pied Pumkin website, it seems that their live shows are the best way to gain the full *Pumkids* experience. But for those who are unable to see Pied Pumkin live, the CD is still very good, and recommended.

Paul Guise, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Ragged But Right. *Down Harmony Road*. MRR07; Merriweather Records Ltd., 109 Crawford Rose Dr., Aurora, ON L4G 4S1; info@merriweather.ca; www.merriweather.ca

Ragged But Right is the duo of Kathy Reid-Naiman and Arnie Naiman, both of whom have been involved in the folk music community of the Toronto area for decades, Kathy being especially known for her children's recordings and Arnie for his clawhammer banjo playing. *Down Harmony Road* is their first recording as a duo. The fourteen tracks on the CD include ten from the old-time string band tradition, two in jazz style dating from several decades back, and two contemporary songs, including Rick Speyer's "Harmony Road", from which the CD draws its name. On two tracks, including "Harmony Road", Ragged But Right are joined vocally by Finest Kind (Ann Downey, Shelley Posen, Ian Robb), and on a few more they are joined instrumentally by several musicians, including Ken Whiteley, but on fully nine of the cuts Ragged But Right perform by themselves. The duo takes its name from a raucous Riley Puckett record-

ing, the duo's interpretation of which is included on the CD.

The CD is built around the duet harmonies of Ragged But Right, drawing from the Delmore Brothers (two tracks), Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, Riley Puckett, the Boswell Sisters, Uncle Dave Macon, and others. The harmonies on most of the original recordings were not male-female duets, and Ragged But Right do not aim at recreation of the originals (as the New Lost City Ramblers sometimes did), but rather at reinterpretation in a manner consistent with the spirit of the originals. This is illustrated in their renditions of the Delmore Brothers songs, in which the male-female split causes the voices to be farther apart than in the Delmores' versions. In "I Ain't Got Nowhere To Travel", with the female voice singing the melody, this worked extremely well; in "Blue Railroad Train", in which the female voice sang the harmony, to my ears it seemed that the harmony dominated the melody. Their rendition of the Boswell Sisters' "Dinah" is noteworthy for the transformations that went into its arrangement: first the Boswell Sisters' jazzy trio harmonies were learned from the recording, and then these were adapted as male-female duet harmony.

To anyone who is fascinated by the sound of two-part harmony, this is an extremely welcome issue, and it is to be hoped that there will soon be more than one Ragged But Right CD to listen to. They are definitely down Harmony Road, and not up Harmony Creek.

Jim Grabenstetter, Calgary, Alberta

Ted Russell. *Tales from Pigeon Inlet: Original Recordings by Ted Russell as Uncle Mose*. PIP-7336 (three-CD set). Pigeon Inlet Productions, P.O. Box 461, Bell Island, NL A0A 4H0 (different from packaging); kellyrussell@nf.sympatico.ca; www.pigeoninlet.com

In his nearly three-quarters of a century, Ted Russell's life took on many extraordinary aspects: teacher, magistrate, politician, legendary CBC broadcaster and, perhaps most important of all, a true master storyteller and writer. To hear Russell's own voice relating these delightful and enchanting chronicles of Uncle Mose and Pigeon Inlet is like entering a narrative time machine and winding up in another time and place far removed from the contemporary world. We are transported back to a way of life that, according to Kelly Russell and Elizabeth Miller, has virtually disappeared, and whose legacy is that of its own magical originator, Ted Russell himself.

Using modern digital technology, Kelly Russell has chosen 30 classic tales from Russell's hundreds of broadcast scripts, transferring them from quarter-

inch tapes found in a warehouse in Halifax in the 1980s, and digitally remastering them into the present CD format. Once more the fabled and memorable community of Pigeon Inlet magically comes to life, with all the wonderful and beloved characters whom CBC radio listeners heard between 1953 and 1962. Such is the authenticity of this recording that on Disc 1, even before we hear Russell tell the first story, “Aunt Sophy’s Predicament”, Kelly has managed to include CBC broadcaster Harry Brown’s regular weekly introduction to the broadcasts, as well as Bob McLeod’s theme music, played on the organ.

In the words of a noted Irish storyteller, even if it never happened, it’s always true. The community of Pigeon Inlet can be found nowhere on a map of Newfoundland, but in every sense of the word “community”, Pigeon Inlet is as real as the soil and the cultural traditions that have been the bulwark of this Canadian province for nearly half a millennium. In his many years as both a teacher and a magistrate, Ted Russell knew countless outports and isolated locales up and down the rugged Newfoundland coast, places such as Harbour Breton, Pass Island, Coley’s Point and Fogo, which would collectively become the embodiment of Pigeon Inlet.

What comes across in these tales is the deep and abiding love and respect Ted Russell had for the people who lived in these isolated communities and for their way of life. He knew and respected the ways, manners and customs of those who made their living primarily from the sea, and it was to them that his weekly broadcasts were aimed. He admired and understood the makeup and behaviour of the characters who inhabited Pigeon Inlet, and, in the guise of his *alter ego* Uncle Mose, he was a perfect conduit between them and the audience who first heard these delightful, often witty and humorous, stories from a place that both did and did not exist.

Listeners to this recording can once again enter Pigeon Inlet and meet its original inhabitants, including Grampa Walcott, the community’s master storyteller, Aunt Sophy, his daughter, Skipper Lije Bartle and Skipper Joe Erwin, the loveable and ornery goat known as King David, and of course Sol Noddy and his son Jethro, who could be said to come closest to villains within the community. No subject is too deep or unusual for Uncle Mose to comment upon, whether it be if it was John Cabot who actually discovered Newfoundland, the pros and cons of modern television, the unlooked-for pitfalls in the seemingly simple task of babysitting, or arguments concerning the need for vitamins in one’s diet. Even a simple matter as to the ownership of two holes cut in the ice to catch herring can take on the character of an unusual legal proceeding, Pigeon Inlet style. But, as Uncle Mose puts it, even the trout in Pigeon Inlet are both

cuter and cleverer than on the mainland, as evidenced in the tale “Trouting 2”. And this of course leads to the telling of tall tales, which is said to be the province of the American storytelling experience; be that as it may, Newfoundlanders can more than hold their own in this regard, as evidenced by stories such as “Geese”, “Cold Winters” and “Bull Moose”, among others in this comic genre. A personal favourite, the recording’s last cut, is the tale of the marvelous squid catch, told in rhyme, “The Smokeroom on the *Kyle*”, told at a farewell gathering before Uncle Mose left Pigeon Inlet for the last time. Other personal favourites include “Alcoholic Liquor”, “Algebra Slippers”, “Robinson Crusoe” and “Jonah and the Whale”, the final two proving that even literary classics and the Bible are not immune to Pigeon Inlet commentary and down-home philosophical observation.

And so the legacy of Ted Russell certainly more than lives on in these classic recordings from more than half a century ago. Again and again, part wit and humour, part deep love and respect for a way of life that had yet to deal with the intrusion of the modern world and nevertheless more than held its own, the stories from and about Pigeon Inlet still live on and resonate a wonder and magic all their own. Thanks to Kelly Russell, who produced this remarkable document in words and images, and thanks to Elizabeth Miller, Ted Russell’s daughter, who prepared the booklet that is part of this recording, a master storyteller once more comes to life, and what we have is a verbal testament to narrative excellence of the highest quality. This recording comes highly recommended.

Robert Rodriquez, New York, New York

Le Vent du Nord. Dans les airs. BCD189. Borealis Records, 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; www.borealisrecords.com; info@borealisrecords.com

The phenomenon of a ‘super group’ is quite common in the realm of popular music, especially in Rock, but much more of a rarity in the folk music genres. Though all still young, the four members of Québec’s Le Vent du Nord draw on a wealth of experience that qualifies them as a traditional music ‘super group’.

Nicolas Boulerice (hurdy-gurdy, piano, accordion) began his career with Ad Vielle Que Pourra; Réjean Beaudry (accordion, acoustic bass, piano) was a member of La Bottine Souriante; Olivier Demers (violin, mandolin, foot percussion) has collaborated with a number of traditional artists and groups over his career; and Simon Beaudry (guitar) had a career as a solo artist before joining Le Vent du Nord.

Together since 2002, the group has generated quite a following and has earned much critical acclaim, while winning several awards, including a

Juno in 2004 for Best Roots and Traditional Album of the Year for *Maudite Moisson*. Part of Le Vent du Nord's appeal is their ability to weave traditional pieces, skillfully interpreted, with delightfully-crafted new material. Taken together, Le Vent du Nord's repertoire reveals a depth of understanding and appreciation of the idiom, and a masterful blend of the old with the new.

Le Vent du Nord's latest offering, *Dans Les Airs*, does not disappoint. The traditional tunes presented are not museum pieces; indeed, they are given new life with modern interpretations that honour the music's roots while allowing contemporary perspectives to take wing. New material isn't conspicuous, it is woven into a seamless, harmonious blend with the traditional. We see this harmony in pieces like "Les larmes aux yeux", which features traditional words set to music by Nicolas Boulrice and joined with a reel by Fiona Cuthill. "Le beauté du mariage" is a call and response song paired with a Réjean Brunet reel. "Le piastre des États" offers a traditional song stitched to a delightfully whimsical reel (with an off-the-wall piano accompaniment) by Olivier Demers.

There is much to commend in this album. The musicianship is superb, the selection of music interesting and varied. The album offers up some gems that might have been lost had it not been for some assiduous research. "Le vieux cheval" stands out in this regard, a strange and haunting song from Cape Breton in praise of a loyal work horse. The song is presented *a cappella* with foot percussion. It left me wanting to hear the song performed live, apart from the confines and hermetic perfection of a recording studio. In fact, this is my one criticism of this very good album. *Dans les airs* (a punning double-entendre which translates as "In the breeze/draft, or "In the tunes/airs") is perhaps too much a studio effort. "In the tunes" there is a spirit that needs to be heard "in the breeze" and experienced live. Le Vent du Nord has proven that they know that spirit; I look forward to hearing a live album from them where it can shine forth.

Steven Méthot, Calgary, Alberta

David Wilkie and Cowboy Celtic. *The Saloon Sessions: 10th Anniversary Instrumental Collection*. CFA 010. Centrefire Music, Box 868, Turner Valley, Alta. T0L 2A0; centerfi@telus.net; www.cowboyceltic.com

Saloon sessions, wagon-hauling, trail-blazing prospectors of the Old West, all this romantic depiction of Western Celtic tunes is evoked in this tenth anniversary CD. Perhaps it is this very romantic appeal that reminds the listener of the mid- to late-19th-century Celtic immigrants settling in America, with their mu-

sic reverberating off the mountain slopes. Perhaps it is the mandolin and flute that give the Celtic "feel" to old cowboy classics such as "Buffalo Gals/The Old Chisholm Trail/The Blacksmith's Reel" or even "Lorena/The Yellow Rose of Texas/Field of the Yellow-Haired Lad". One thing for sure, David Wilkie's arrangements return towards the Celtic roots of old cowboy melodies.

Centrefire Music's website tells us that *The Saloon Sessions* reveals "Scottish and Irish origins of various well-known traditional cowboy tunes", and it does so through instrumental renditions only. Along for the ride in this commemorative compilation from founding members David Wilkie (mandolin) and Denise Whitnell (guitar) are Keri Lynn Zwicker (harp), Scott Ring (whistles) and Joseph Hertz (fiddle).

This is a lovely compilation of old-timers' melodies, reflecting a time where the Scots and Irish would have intermingled in the "Ol' West", where they would have shared and created musical traditions that echoed in the collective memory of settling migrants in the American continent. The "cattle connection" that Wilkie mentions as part of the Scottish and Irish heritage found in Western America is in fact one of the dominant images conjured by the music on this CD. If only for a moment, I felt transported to the days of cattle-driving and wagon-hauling that was part of the Western American landscape. I could almost see the Celtic immigrants fiddling tunes or whistling what they knew and modifying it to fit a reality they were living; "The Water is Wide (O Waly Waly)" does this perfectly.

Wilkie writes on the website that the tunes on this compilation from *Cowboy Celtic*, *Cowboy Ceilidh* and *The Drover Road* were played at gigs and in Irish pubs or cowboy saloons "for a session and a pint or two". I say this CD is best enjoyed with a glass of whisky next to a blazing fire.

Julie M-A LeBlanc, St. John's, Newfoundland

Correction

The address included with the reviews of Marcel Bénéteau's CDs last issue (41.3, pp. 29, 30) is no longer extant; the current address is: Disques Petite Côté Records, c/o Marcel Bénéteau, Folklore Dept., University of Sudbury, Sudbury, Ont. P3E 2C6.

