

Treasures from Our Archives

Twenty Years Ago

Bulletin 23.1 (March 1989). Two main articles graced this issue. In “An Ethnomusicological Perspective in Folk Music”, Jay Rahn explained ethnomusicology in layperson’s terms, as the prospect of CFMS (as it then was) becoming the society representing Canada’s ethnomusicologists was on the horizon. Also, James Prescott’s “Unriddling ‘Came Ye O’er Frae France?’” made much clear concerning a song that had tended to puzzle me, among others. Two railroad songs were included—“The Founding of the Famous C.P.R.” (Powder River Jack Lee) and “The Hinton Rail Disaster” (Wiz Bryant)—as well as Rona Altrows’ topical comment on Ben Johnson’s Olympic scandal, “There’s Gold in Them Thar Pills”. Recordings reviewed were Eileen McGann’s *Elements*, Garnet Rogers’ *Speaking Softly in the Dark*, Archie Fisher’s *Sunsets I’ve Galloped Into...*, Faith Nolan’s *Africville*, Tom Lewis’s *Surfacing*, and *Magyar Nóta Gyűjtemény* by the Calgary Hungarian Senior Citizens’ Choir.

Fifteen Years Ago

Bulletin 28.1 (March 1994). The “newsletter” format was well and truly left behind by this issue, as CSMT (as it then was) shook off the financial crisis of that epoch. Lots about Stan Rogers in this issue: his picture on the cover, a review essay of the stage show *Rise Again* and reviews of Chris Gudgeon’s book *An Unfinished Conversation* and the concert recording *Home in Halifax*. Lots of housekeeping stuff, editorials, board members’ bios, 1990-93 Cumulative Table of Contents. Also Elaine Keillor’s “An Opinion and Arguments Against an English Name Change” and “Deux reels-à-bouche” from Sharon Berman. In addition to these tunes, we included the song “Kumanovo Bykso Oro” from the Toronto Bicycle Choir, an EthnoFolk Letter column from Judith Cohen, a Centrefold column on dance magazines from Michael Pollock, and

French versions of some material from the previous issue. Other reviews included books *The Storyteller at Fault* (Dan Yashinsky), *Songs of Labrador* (Tim Borlase), *Folksongs of the Maritimes* (Kaye Pottie and Vernon Ellis), various Catalan traditional music publications, and many recordings, including *A Celebration of Heritage: Songs of Labrador* (June Baikie and Kelly Russell).

Ten Years Ago

Bulletin 33.1 (March 1999). The issue had a memorial theme, as it contained two reminiscences of fiddler Graham Townsend, written by Al Yetman and Dorothy Hogan, and an obituary to songwriter Vincent Ierfino, by Stan Triggs. Two of Ierfino’s songs, “An Old Country Waltz” and “The Apple Picking Man”, accompanied the article. A couple of editorials prompted by a musician’s response to a review were also noteworthy.

Five Years Ago

Bulletin 38.1 (Spring 2004). An article by Zainab Jerrett, “Collecting Folksongs in Nigeria: A Fieldwork Journal”, was followed by “An Interview with Rick Fielding” by Lorne Brown (Rick had succumbed to cancer a few months previously). The Canadian Folk Festival Directory and a number of reviews of books (Dan Yashinsky’s *Suddenly They Heard Footsteps* and *Classic English Folk Songs*, edited by Ralph Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd, revised by Malcolm Douglas) and some recordings completed the issue.

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Reviews

Recordings

Mike Ballantyne. *Papa Wants a Cookie: Acoustic Blues, Hokum, Ragtime and Jug Band Songs of the 1920’s and 1930’s.* 7345 Seabrook

Rd., Central Saanich, B.C. V8M 1M9;
mike@folklore.bc.ca; www.mikeballantyne.ca

Who knew? Mike Ballantyne, who first entered our consciousness as a singer of English trad-

itional songs, latterly as a stalwart of the British Columbia Folklore Society (and a longtime Director of CSTM), started out as a blues singer in England. Now he has returned to his roots, and presents us with an array of offbeat songs from the early twentieth century.

This is an unpretentious recording, one solo vocal and guitar throughout, no glitz. Mike allows the songs to speak for themselves. The packaging is unpretentious as well. The songs are listed with their original performers and dates, and we're referred to Mike's website for further information, where we find the lyrics (in some cases with alternate versions), recording history, background of the performers where known, and sometimes explanations of obscure wordings. I learned about a "dead cat on the line" (referring to telephone party line snooping), "pick poor robin clean" (a gambling term not further explained), and "Bamalong" (the Second Alabama Infantry), among other terms. Where Mike doesn't understand the lyrics himself (such as "roll girl" in "Rats Been on my Cheese"), he tells us so, and sings it as close to the original as he can manage. In general, though, he doesn't adopt a phony accent or attempt to mimic the originals too closely, but sings in his own voice, except where the original dialect is inescapable.

Some of the original performers' names might be familiar, at least to blues *aficionados* (e.g., Leroy Carr, Blind Boy Fuller, Bessie Smith, Tampa Red), others less so. Even a couple of country singers, Gid Tanner and Charlie Poole, are represented. (The song "Goodbye Booze", recorded separately by both of them, later entered the blues tradition.) At least one song, Bessie Smith's "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," will be familiar to most of us. The rest are gems for our discovery. In keeping with the tradition, double entendres abound in songs like "Dead Cat on the Line", "Papa Wants a Cookie" and "Rats Been on My Cheese," at least.

This is a collection of offbeat songs presented in straightforward fashion by a person whose love and respect for them shines through. I'm hoping listeners will be moved to seek out the originals, and to add some of the songs to their own repertoires. I've started doing that already...

John Leeder, Calgary, Alberta

Celtara. *Until the Morning Light.* celtara@telus.net; www.celtara.ca

Several features of this album are immediately clear. First, these five musicians know how to play and sing. The musicianship is outstanding. Second, unlike many players in the Celtic tradition, Celtara has a gift for arrangement that allows the heart of the tune to flourish without being drowned in layers of pyrotechnics. Clearly, the band's credo is: It's not about us, it's all about the music.

The tracks range from traditional to original tunes and songs featuring some combination of flute, fiddle, accordion and harp, with stylish, understated support from guitar, piano, bouzouki and percussion, including bodhran. If there's any complaint, it would be that the vocal selections are overshadowed by the outstanding playing, especially by Bonnie Gregory's fiddle and Steven Bell's light touch on the accordion and piano. But that's not to take away from the other musicians, whose contributions include solid rhythm guitar that virtually dances with syncopation, some serious bass notes from either harp or bouzouki (hard to tell), and sweet harmonies from all, instrumental and vocal.

The arrangements are creative and interesting, without the "sameness" that can haunt some bands, perhaps because of the sheer number of players who all contribute more than one instrument or voice. Nevertheless, Celtara has a definite sound, and it's an exciting blend of traditional and contemporary. The band members come from a variety of backgrounds and other musical groups: Tami Cooper on flute and voice; Bonnie Gregory on fiddle, harp and voice; Steven Bell on accordion, piano, and voice; Andreas Illig on acoustic guitar and bouzouki; and Mark Anison on bodhran, percussion and voice. Together, these musicians have produced an intelligent, creative recording well worth listening to.

Jean Mills, Guelph, Ontario

The Kettle Valley Brakeman. *Train Talk.* Jack Godwin, c/o Gen. Del., Naramata, B.C. V0H 1N0; jgodwin@shaw.ca; www.kvbrakemen.com

This is a collection of lighthearted songs, all on a railway theme (as should be no surprise, given the group's name). Some deal with historical events ("Lady MacDonald's Ride", "The Frank Slide Saga", "Sea to Shining Sea", about the navvies who built the C.P.R.), some with specific railways ("The Famous P.G.E."), some with general railway folklore ("Train Talk", introducing specialized railway vocabulary), and some tell stories related to the railways ("Believin' is All

You Have to Do”, “Patches”). “Just Desserts”, rife with double entendres, seems to be the feature song on the album—it tells a story of a steward giving a female passenger extra services, but getting his comeuppance in the end.

All the songs on the CD are authored by Jack Godwin, and the group’s website (but not the CD booklet) describes him as the lead singer as well. The style is sort of country/folk, with a couple of guitars, bass, piano, harmonica and shaker, with extra vocalists as well. “Every concert is a rollicking history lesson,” according to a quote on the website, and I’m sure their live performances are a lot of fun. Even serious subjects like the Frank Slide are treated with humour. The songs focus on individual stories rather than any grand theme. Godwin’s singing style is on the edge of self-consciously down-home, which I expect works well on stage but I find a bit over the top for a recording.

This CD is a pleasant addition to Canada’s railway songs repertoire. The group have three other CDs (two of them in limited supply), and also present a Heritage Musical entitled “Kettle Valley Memories”. I’ll be keeping an eye out for their performances on future visits to the B.C. interior.

John Leeder, Calgary, Alberta

Paul Rumbolt. *SongSmith*. Sockfeet Music, 149 Cimarron Drive, Okotoks, Alta. T1S 2P3; paul@paulrumbolt.com; www.paulrumbolt.com

SongSmith (2008) is Paul Rumbolt’s fifth album. A native of Newfoundland, Rumbolt has spent the past 15 years living in the Alberta foothills while pursuing a career in music. Although his past albums have ranged in style from country to folk to inspirational, the twelve tracks included in Rumbolt’s latest collection are particularly eclectic, with blues, rock (think Santana), country, church (think Sunday morning services), Spanish and folk influences. The instrumentation is somewhat appropriate to the particular genre of each tune, including acoustic and electric guitar, fiddle, bass, B3 organ, accordion, bagpipe, tin whistle, trumpet, drums, keyboard, harmonica and flutes in various arrangements. Despite differences in genre and instrumentation, the tunes in this collection all foreground Rumbolt’s voice.

Rumbolt tackles a number of themes as the album unfolds, including a few songs that demonstrate his obvious identification with the working class. While one of these songs tells the stories of individual workers (a logger, fisherman,

and miner), others take a more general approach, using the broad theme of class conflict and revolt of the downtrodden; these themes emerge through lyrical statements relating to misused power and (in a theme that has a strong resonance with current concerns) the insatiable hunger of a few for too long as the earth “aches” from this misuse. Rumbolt also tackles love themes from a number of perspectives (including that of a war bride), and themes of regret and loss.

However, Rumbolt is most successful when he shares stories about large-scale events (such as the Battle of the Alamo) from the perspective of one or two individuals, encouraging the listener to identify with the individuals in the stories. He also has a knack for pointing to the underlying emotions that we all share, whether we are seen as outcasts or heroes (an idea that is most explicit in “Down in Austin”). The most memorable songs on this album all share the common element of storytelling focused on personal stories. Rumbolt’s relaxed, clearly articulated and uninflected vocal style is a perfect vehicle for highlighting the lyrics, and is therefore ideal for the songs that tell a story.

A number of the songs included in this album do not, in contrast, have clear narratives. These selections are, overall, well-arranged and feature good musicians, yet they are not as successful as those with clear narratives. In particular, Rumbolt does not achieve the vocal qualities expected in the blues and rock tunes—a little more “grit” and style-specific inflections would have added some much-needed interest. Furthermore, while the backing musicians sound good, they do not sound all that interesting. This is especially true of his final song (“Blessing”), which is reminiscent of Sunday morning church services—not in a particularly good manner—with bland flute solos and uninspiring and unimaginative lyrics.

Overall, this album includes some well-crafted and unique stories. The stories that touch on the lives of individuals within the context of big events are especially effective and memorable. However, Rumbolt also includes songs that—without a narrative—do not create enough musical interest to draw the listener back to those particular songs again and again.

Monique Giroux, Toronto, Ontario

Various. *These Times*. BCD191. Borealis Records, Borealis Records, 290 Shuter St., Toronto, Ont. M5A 1W7 (new address, different

from packaging); www.borealisrecords.com;
info@borealisrecords.com

This is a collection of fourteen songs on a range of relevant topics. They employ a variety of musical styles, and are performed by some well-known artists and some names that might be less familiar. The producer of this compilation is no stranger to the Canadian folk music scene. Bill Garrett has had a long career as a solo artist, has worked as a CBC radio host and producer, is the co-founder of Borealis Records (a unique, artist-friendly Canadian recording company) and has had great reviews for his duet performances with Sue Lothrop for the last ten years. Bill's idea behind *These Times* was to compile a selection of songs that look at some of the important issues of the day. Conceptually, *These Times*, to quote the album insert, "follows in the tradition of the broadside ballads that have been sung since the 16th century... The subject matter was most often in the form of a complaint against the crown or some other repressive authority. Broadside were posted on walls, in town squares, or in pubs for all to see and learn."

Lots of these songs have a quality of protest to them, or perhaps more accurately, a strong point of view. Some of them, like Ken Whiteley's "One World Dance" or Tom Lewis's "Radio Times", merely offer us some guidance, and ideas about how to make things a little better in the future. They range from serious (Tarry Tuft's "Dirty Little War" and Enoch Kent's "Some H'ae Meat") to humorous (Grit Laskin's "Soft and Round", Tanglefoot's "Empire and the Right" and Nancy White's "I Sweep the Sidewalk"). There are songs that talk about occurrences in our own back yard (James Gordon's "Another Big Box Store") and those that have happened far away (Eve Goldberg's "Streets of Burma"). The topics are old (Ron Hynes' "Get Back Change", which covers the ongoing need of people in this country to migrate to find work) and new (Evalyn Perry's "Bottle This!", a rant dealing with the absurdity and economic facts of bottled water). And what would a Canadian compilation be without a couple of blues numbers? Here we have Michael Jerome Browne with "Cancer Ward Blues" and Bob Snider's "Rusty Pail Blues".

And finally, so that I have mentioned all of the songs, my personal favourite on *These Times* is "No More Fish", written by Shelley Posen of Finest Kind fame and performed by Bill Garrett and Sue Lothrop. It is, in my opinion, one of the

best-written songs about the depleted Newfoundland fishery. With Bill's great guitar and the wonderful harmonies, it is the best version that I have heard.

Lots of talent on this CD... Songs worth learning... Make it part of your collection.

Blaine Hrabi, Calgary, Alberta

A Peak in Darien

Books

Johanna Bertin. *Don Messer: The Man Behind the Music*. Goose Lane Editions, 330 – 500 Beaverbrook Court, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5X4; (888) 926-8377; info@gooselane.com; www.gooselane.com

Recordings

Simon Budd. *Mother's Nature*. SBCD2002. 174 Bird Cres., Ft. McMurray, Alta. T9H 4T3 (no address on packaging); simonbudd@telus.net (different from packaging); www.simonbudd.ca

Simon Budd. *The Wait is Over...* (addresses above)

Clary Croft. *The Gift*. 5959 Spring Garden Rd., #1008, Halifax, N.S. B3H 1Y5; clary@clarycroft.ca;
www.clarycroft.ca

Maura Hagan. *Comin' Around*. GGM 75020-41912. info@maurahagan.com; www.maurahagan.com;
www.myspace.com/maurahagan

Lizzy Hoyt. *My Red Shoes*. LHCD-1001. Blue Crown Productions, Box 52051, Edmonton, Alta. T6G 2T5; info@lizzyhoyt.com; www.lizzyhoyt.com

Mel Hynes and the Kootenay Legends. *The Yellow Monster: Songs of the Logger for the Logger*. Mel Hynes, c/o Gen. Del., Harrowgate, B.C. V0A 1J0

The Irish Descendants. *Encore: Best of The Irish Descendants, vol. 2*. FNCD 5552; Beenthere-donethat Entertainment, 44 Charles St. W, Suite 1704, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 1R7; irishdescendants.com; michael.greggs@sympatico.ca

James Keelaghan. *House of Cards*. BCD198. Borealis Records, 290 Shuter St., Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; www.borealisrecords.com; info@borealisrecords.com; Linus Entertainment/True North Records, 991 Tennyson Ave., Mississauga, Ont. L5H 2Y9; linusentertainment.com; truenorthrecords.com

Le Vent du nord. *La Part du feu*. BCD199. Borealis Records (addresses above)