

Reviews – Recordings

Andrews + Lawrence. *old time gospel*. GRASS 002. 4045 Livingstone Ave. N., Victoria, BC, V8N 3A7; <www.andrewsandlawrence.com>.

Andrews + Lawrence is a Victoria, BC-based bluegrass gospel duo made up of Andy Ruszel and Larry Lawrence. Ruszel sings lead and plays rhythm guitar, as well as writing three of the disc's ten songs. A native of Toronto, Ruszel's songs have been performed by such artists as The Rovers and Charlotte Diamond. Lawrence, originally from Kansas, plays lead guitar and sings tenor, and is an experienced producer, arranger and choral singer. The disc was recorded at 3rd Lake Studio, Victoria, BC, and produced by Lawrence. In addition to Ruszel's contribution there are five traditional works and one each by I. & C. Louvin and A. Brumley.

old time gospel is a lesson in simplicity. Liner notes are minimal, and the clean layout and toned black-&-white graphics give it a very streamlined look. All songs were recorded live in the studio, in the spirit of "the great traditional records of the past". With no more than two voices and two guitars, the arrangements are deliciously sparse, giving the listener direct contact with the essence of the songs. Three of these, "Ezekiel Saw The Wheel", "Down In The Valley To Pray" and "Old Dirt Road" (composed by Ruszel) are presented as unaccompanied vocal tracks with ringing vocal harmonies. The remainder add acoustic guitars, but the lyrics are prominent throughout the album. This is the sort of disc that invites the listener to sing/play along.

Despite all these positives, there is one major flaw with the CD, and that is its duration, around 26 1/2 minutes. Given the choice between adding second-rate filler and keeping the CD short, brevity was the right choice. Having said that, Andrews + Lawrence might have been well advised to wait until a few more songs were ready in order to issue a full-length release. As it stands, listeners may not be willing to pay full price for such a short disc, something reflected in (and somewhat mitigated by) the \$12 price.

Andrews + Lawrence have put together a collection of well-chosen, cleanly recorded and beautifully performed material. The CD is a treat to listen to. If only there were more!

Paul Guise, St. John's, Newfoundland

Autorickshaw. *Four Higher*. Tala-Wallah Records, TW 002. Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <www.festival.bc.ca>; <www.autorickshaw@autorickshaw.ca>.

This is a Toronto-based World Music ensemble, integrating the South Asian tradition with jazz and other popular music forms. It comprises vocalist and pianist Suba Sankaran, whose origins are in South India, tabla player Ed Hanley, bassist Rich Brown and percussionist Debashis Sinha. The attempt is clearly to appeal to an Asian as well as to a western audience. The CD includes a booklet of words (transliterated Asian text as well as English translation) as well as brief notes on each track. During the last two years, autorickshaw have appeared at jazz festivals in Toronto, Guelph and Halifax, at Vancouver Folk Festival, and at other venues in Toronto, Owen Sound, Winnipeg, and in B.C. and the Yukon.

The tracks range from the serene, slow "Saraswati", featuring the voices of Suba and two bass vocalists, tabla, percussion and bass in a number based on a prayer to the East Indian goddess Saraswati, to the quick, rhythmic "Purvi Tillana", inspired by South Indian classical dance music and based on the Indian raga "Purvikalyani". Some tracks are more or less heavily influenced by jazz; for example, Suba's "scat"-type, jazz-inflected singing in "Unjalur", composed by Suba for her mother, who came from the Indian village of Onjalur to Toronto, and "Chennai five-o", the last section of a four-part suite which has guest George Koller on dilruba joining the group and some attractive vocal improvisations by Suba. I don't know if the note "departing from the traditional Hemavati raga" means that this section of the suite is based on that raga, or that the musical journey here departs from the raga to follow other musical influences – the wording could have been clearer. Some tracks owe even more to jazz: for example, Suba's arrangement of Dizzy Gillespie's jazz standard "A Night in Tunisia". Incidentally, the instrumental backing on this track includes multi-kit, doumbek, riqq, bass drum, sudo, daouli, bass, tabla and udu, and it would have been nice if the booklet notes had "explained" some of the more obscure of these. The last two tracks on the CD feature a very short bass solo by Rich Brown, "Across the Sands", leading into the jazz standard "Caravan" (Duke Ellington/Mills/Tizol), which is here arranged by autorickshaw and sung by Suba in a distinctly jazz-vocalist style.

Suba has the voice to sing both numbers inspired by East Indian classical music and jazz. It is chiefly an

indication of my own musical preferences that I got more enjoyment from the tracks with East Indian roots than the jazz-inspired offerings. My favourites were “Ganamurthy” and “Ragam” and “Tanam”, the first two sections of the four-track Hemavati suite based on South Indian ragas “Tanam Pallavi” and “Hemavati” of which “Chennai five-o” is the concluding section. “Ganamurthy” is an 18th century South Indian classical composition, and a showcase for Suba’s flexible, controlled voice. Lovers of Kiran Ahluwalia’s singing may find Suba’s style a little too “westernized” for their liking; for others it may be exactly what they need to bridge the gap between East and West.

This group performs well together; the instrumental playing is imaginative, tight and crisp, Suba’s voice, though not to my mind exceptional, is very musical and pleasant to listen to. I would like to hear them live, when I think they would generate more fire. My overall impression of this CD is that it would make excellent background music for a candle-lit South Asian dinner date, but I don’t know that I would be choosing it frequently to play at home.

Rosaleen Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta.

Kim Barlow. *Luckyburden*. CRCDD018. Caribou Records, Box 31471, Whitehorse, Y.T. Y1A 6K8; <caribou@yknet.ca> (no addresses on packaging); <www.caribourecords.com>; Festival Distribution (addresses above).

This recording celebrates Keno City, the centre of Yukon silver mining from 1914 to 1989. After the boom came the shutdown and the population dwindled to 14. The entire CD is an evocation of Keno City, its inhabitants and their ethnic diversity. Kim Barlow provides the vocals, plus banjo and guitar, and there is an assortment of accompanying instruments including electric guitar, drums, bass, accordion, harmonium and back-up vocals. Kim’s clear enunciation makes the absence of the words to the songs not such a big deal, although it is always nice to have them, especially since Kim has a deceptively simple but often striking way with words, for example in one of her best numbers, “Butterflies and drunk men”, where she describes the butterflies and drunk men “leaning and weaving all together” down the early morning road, “not a single straight line” as “all the good men getting loaded after work” stagger back to their homes. This absence of a judgmental voice, just humorous, loving observation, is a feature of the CD. More than once it made me think of Stuart Maclean’s *Vinyl Café* or the short stories of Alice Munro; there is the same sense of place, a love/hate relation-

ship, bringing out the characters of the people who stay and those who leave.

Kim’s pleasant, warm voice starts the CD with “Preamble” (live at Keno City snack bar, where most of the partying in the town seems to take place), a musical introduction to the “rugged little resource town”, where, amongst others, “Milos from Yugoslavia grows the prettiest flowers around”. At the end she gets lots of applause and whistles from an appreciative local audience. The second track, “Madonna mia” (aka the “Italian wedding song”), throws a speculative but unsentimental glance at the plight of the young bride fresh from sunny Italy who finds herself in “a desolate, windblown, frozen and empty space” but finally develops the courage to make it feel like a home to raise her children in.

And so the impressions continue; simple, evocative lyrics supported by good melody lines and understated instrumental accompaniments, through the bush pilot (“The forest here goes on for ever”, “it’s not a very smooth ride, but usually she gets there”), to the young woman in “Lonely Mountain”, “No-one here to talk to but my babies, no-one here to braid my hair...the wind is always howling”, whose common sense prevails over her temporary desire to do something crazy like throwing knives across the room to break the monotony of a lonely life. In “Silver under the ground” a driving rhythm evokes the silver miners without fuss or sentimentality, and there are further vignettes of Keno City merrymaking in “Dancehall” and “Snackbar piano”, the closing number, in which Justin Haynes carries us away from Keno on the notes of an old honky-tonk piano.

I found this CD very appealing. The images it evokes of Keno City are honest and direct, whether it is describing those who stay or those who leave. “Keno City Blues” celebrates those who stay, admitting that the Keno City blues “never go away”, but for the singer who “sits up all night in the shack, look(ing) at the snow” “this is the only place that I belong – I gotta stay”. Others, though, don’t want to stay; apart from “Fires”, a goodbye song with a dark tinge to it, the most somber track on the CD for me is “Get in the car”, a song about teenagers after their graduation piling into a car and trying to get to L.A. – “they fish-tailed down the dusty road, fresh out of high school and leaving”. There’s “nothing left to stay for, everyone we know is crazy; they just drink and work and fight”. They nearly hit a moose and start thinking of their mothers, stop for a pee and nail their graduation notices to the roadside sign. What happens to them? We aren’t told, but despite the deceptively light ambience of the song it’s hard not to think of the Davis

Inlet youth and their heavy toll of teenage substance abuse and suicide.

The simple production on *Luckyburden* is an asset, not a defect. My only criticism is that we only get 38 minutes of music. I hope there is a sequel.

Rosaleen Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Beyond the Pale. *Consensus*. BCD165. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>; Festival Distribution (address above); Big Daddy Music Distribution, 162 North 8th St., Kenilworth, NJ 07033, USA.

Beyond the Pale is a Toronto-based ensemble that has enjoyed considerable acclaim for its virtuosic and far-ranging treatment of klezmer music. Consisting of Bogdan Djukic (violin), Bret Higgins (bass), Milos Popovic (accordion), Eric Stein (mandolins) and Martin van de Ven (clarinets), the quintet enjoys the addition of Josh Dolgin (voice/piano) and Yeva Medvedyuk (voice) for their latest recording. *Consensus*, Beyond the Pale's second album, was recorded live in concert (over two nights) at the Al Green Theatre, Toronto. It showcases the flexibility of the group and of klezmer itself, with strong hints of east-European folk music and such diverse styles as bluegrass, funk, jazz, and reggae.

The liner notes state that Beyond the Pale's sound is characterized by an "impulse to create intricate contemporary acoustic roots music". This is confirmed throughout the disc, as the songs deny easy categorization and yet proudly display their connection to musical traditions of the past. "Oy I Like She" and "Sha Shtil" are both classic Yiddish songs, convincingly sung by Dolgin and Medvedyuk, respectively. Unlike other tracks on the disc, these pieces show an obvious connection to their traditions. Harder to place are works such as "Enosereh" (read it backwards) by van de Ven, an exhilarating 11/8 display of the group's enormous virtuosity. Based loosely on a Bulgarian *Kopanista*, this is sure to become a favourite in the group's repertoire.

Many other tracks deserve mention, including "Tarrastaman", a grooving "Jew-Maican" blend of reggae and klezmer, the lively Romanian-bluegrass fusion of "Calusari Dance", and "Reunion", an epic of shifting time signatures (3/8, 5/8, 7/8, 12/8 and 6/4) with fragments of klezmer tunes and Romanian rhythms. The last track, "Mesecina", is apparently an adaptation of a Serbian-Gypsy tune usually played by large Balkan brass bands. This is the normal show closer for Beyond the Pale, and serves its purpose well on

the disc. Particular mention should be made of the immaculate recording by Danny Greenspoon/The Audio Truck, whose live work puts many studio sessions to shame.

Consensus is a testament to the creativity and skill of the members of Beyond the Pale, and I would place them firmly in the first tier of "world" musicians, were they not so much more. The group is truly cosmopolitan, and their artistry will appeal to listeners who like excellent music regardless of genre.

Paul Guise, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Blackstone. *Round Dance Singin' with the Logan Alexis Singers*. CR-6239. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>.

This is a collection of round dances recorded at Alexis First Nation, Alberta, on April 5, 2003. Both Blackstone and the Logan Alexis Singers were previously featured on a round dance collection by Northern Cree titled *Round Dance Songs Recorded 'Live'* (CR-6350).

The quick rhythmic patterns and spirited vocal style of the group make for a lively recording. The buzzing timbre characteristic of Cree round dances is audible on many tracks, and is particularly enjoyable. Of the eleven tracks, "Honey" by Eric "Grandpa Bear" Bearhead stands out with an attractive melody and playful balance of vocables and English text.

The cover art of *Round Dance Singin'*, with its yellow background and black silhouette, has a graphic quality, while the traditional group photo appears on the back. The patriotic image of the red maple leaf appears on the CD itself, signifying the Canadian roots of this group. As with many Native albums, however, *Round Dance Singin'* does not provide liner notes, which might have quenched the listener's thirst for more information about the group and their music.

Janice Esther Tulk, St. John's, Newfoundland

Michael Jerome Browne & The Twin Rivers String Band. BCD163. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>.

I first heard of Michael Jerome Browne some years back as a multi-instrumentalist blues singer. Some may be surprised that he has in recent work turned his hand to old-time mountain music, but let's face it, white boys have been playing the blues since the

blues (and the white boys) were in knee pants, and black blues singers, from rural cats like John Jackson to urbane guys like Earl Hooker, have been poaching in Nashville country for years. Remember: Chuck Berry wrote "Maybelline" as a *country* song! This is not to support the idea that the idea of genre isn't useful, only that musicians can be multilingual, as well as multi-instrumental. Montrealer Browne is comfortable *en français*; and he's certainly comfortable with Cajun French. There are four Cajun items here, not counting the pastiche of the Ray Price honky-tonk number "You Done Me Wrong". I wonder if he also does French Canadian material?

The CD consists of generous helpings of songs and dance tunes, with the full band (and some helpers), as well as solo pieces by Browne. There are 19 items in all, although it's not clear to me why the final five are referred to on the cover as "*un petit extra*". The Twin Rivers Band comprises Jordan Officer, fiddle and guitars, Michael Ball, fiddles and bass, Mary Gick, banjo, and Jody Benjamin, *ti-fer* (triangle – essential for the Louisiana numbers!), guitar, yodelling and backing vocals. Browne himself plays fiddle, mandolin and various guitars and banjos. One hopes that the band will have its own recording before too long.

Two cuts stand out for me. The first is a tune written by Browne and his friend B.A. Markus, entitled "Arlington Town". It's a ballad account of an abused wife, sung to a low-strung gourd banjo. I'm not ready to say that this could be mistaken for a song written in an earlier century, a claim I've heard made rather foolishly for songs by Tom Paxton and Steve Earle (and see my comment on "May You Come And Stay"), but it does demonstrate something more important, namely, that the old genres can help us to express contemporary concerns. The other standout is Browne's guitar rendering of the banjo tune "Rambling Hobo". He's replaced the bass E string with a lighter, unwound string, so he can frail it like a 5-string. Why not use a wooden banjo? The guitar's larger body provides some beautiful resonance, not only to the deep notes (the tune is often played with a low bass on the banjo), but also for a few harmonics, which really do ring out.

Some years ago, I was thinking about the truism that the most admired instruments in a tradition will be those which are said to resemble most closely the human voice. What puzzled me in the late 1970s and early 1980s was how the banjo fitted into this. I never quite fell into that trap of thinking of the banjo as exclusively a happy instrument, but I was hearing its clipped, unsustained sounds as very non-vocal. Right about then, fortunately, I put a Roscoe Holcomb LP

on the turntable, and I suddenly could hear the relationship in his high and aggressively lonesome sound. As did his banjo, he sang notes that were stinging, pointillist needles, as brief and sharp as freezing rain blowing in your face. I thought of all of this recently when I listened to Michael Jerome Brown's new disc. I don't why this didn't occur to me before; I'd been telling people for years that my favorite banjo sound was not the lively brightness of the picked instrument, but the husky warmth of frailing (or clawhammer, choose your term). Tex Ashley turns me on more than does Earl Scruggs. And somewhat like Ashley, Browne sings in a warm, smoky register that blends quite nicely when he frails – especially when he plays on the fretless minstrel banjo, but also on a standard five-string. Do listen to his version of "The Coo Coo". (And listen to Tex Ashley and all the old-timers, too!)

I'm not entirely comfortable with the packaging, which I find rather garish. But then, "*de gustibus* ain't what it used to be", as the man said. More important, a couple of notes cranked me a bit. When, for example, Browne says that he and Markus are "complimented" that some people think that "May You Come And Stay" is traditional; well, they should bite their tongues: it *is* traditional, a revision of the "Lay The Lily Low"/"Which Side Are You On" family. It's a very cool revision, but not a new tune. And Browne's swell gourd banjo version of Mississippi John Hurt's "Pay Day" doesn't need the implication that he's finally worked out the banjo roots of the song. John McCutcheon and Bob Carlin did it a couple of decades back. But these are quibbles: I don't have any complaints about the music, and I'd recommend this CD to anyone.

George Lyon, Calgary, Alberta.

Heather Dale. *May Queen*. AM9610. AmphisBaena Music, 275 King St. E, Suite 29, Toronto, Ont. M5A 1K2; <info@AmphisMusic.com>; <www.AmphisMusic.com>.

This CD was very difficult to review, but well worth putting some thought and effort into. It includes a booklet, glossily but attractively produced, with jewel-coloured images in a stained-glass leaded window setting alternating with shots of (presumably) Heather in various outfits (some vaguely medieval, others definitely modern), unfortunately rather reminiscent of a fashion shoot, but attractive nonetheless. Full marks for providing all the words to all the songs, and explaining what each song is about. These are inspired by Arthurian legend, in which Heather Dale has clearly immersed herself, thinking the stories through as if they were part of her own life. Her

poems do that courageous and foolhardy thing – they seek to tell the Arthurian legend in contemporary language, using colloquialisms and twentieth century psychology to universalize the characters and bring the past into focus. Some people will be uncomfortable with this, but I think Heather has succeeded and deserves much credit for attempting to do a difficult thing without sinking into bathos, archaism, anachronism – all the pits into which historical novelists and other imaginative recreators and interpreters of the past sometimes fall. But they don't always – sometimes the intuitive leap works and we are enriched. And Heather Dale is, in any case, dealing with legend, not history, so some licence is permitted.

So how well does it work – and for some people, more importantly, what is the music like? For a start, these songs are not sung *a cappella*; there is much instrumental backing, including some quite un-Arthurian instruments such as piano, violin, cello, drums, guitars (electric and acoustic), ukulele, bass, as well as Irish flute, tin whistle and uilleann pipes. At first I confess I was troubled by the unashamedly modern treatment, the vocalizing, the sometimes over-produced, jazzy or new-Agey effects, even while conceding that Heather Dale has a good voice, excellent diction, and has written lyrics which are compelling in their own right, each starting from the viewpoint of a particular Arthurian character and pinpointing a particular moment in the Arthurian story. In the end I was definitely won over, finding these songs grow on you the more you hear them.

My personal favourites are “Kingsword” (although it goes on too long), “Lady of the Lake”, which showcases Heather's warm, rich, tuneful voice admirably, bringing out the lyrics and surrounding them with an atmospheric, gentle, water-lapping accompaniment and rhythm, “Tristan and Isolt” (Irish flute and tin whistle on this one, of course, and a beautiful melody), and, especially, “Prodigal Son”, which has more bite than most and is expressively sung from the standpoint of the manipulative Morgan le Fay to her brother, with whom she has (deliberately and incestuously) conceived the Arthurian villain Mordred, and whom she is now taunting in trenchant words supported by a sharp, driving rhythm. “War Between Brothers” features expressive flugelhorn solos by “jazz legend” Guido Basso (though I think the gentle, rocking rhythm is wrong for this meditation on a battlefield covered with the bodies of the dead); “Three Queens” features Deborah Quigley's uilleann pipes and is new-Agey but nice. “May Queen” (Lancelot's rueful musings on his reluctant journey to fetch back for Arthur the woman he himself longs for) and “Exile” (Lancelot again, now musing from a self-

inflicted exile on the anguish his relationship with that same woman has created) make a strong verbal statement less effective by a musical treatment which is too prettified, polished and amorphous.

This CD is too lush and over-produced, and the songs are sometimes not easily distinguished from each other, being given the same over-orchestrated treatment (especially from the percussion). But I really like Heather's voice and her lyrics. I would love to hear her treat this kind of subject-matter in a much leaner, sparer way. I have no problem with her conceptual treatment of the Arthurian legends, which she recreates with intelligence and respect. There is no vulgarization here – this is a lady with “class”. But she does her own lyrics less than justice by swamping them with all that instrumentation and turning them into just something pleasant to listen to. With just voice, melody and minimal instrumental backing she might produce something really powerful. I think she needs to bring her voice, which is strong, true, and unaffected, out from under all that unnecessary accompaniment, eschew vocalizing, and concentrate on words and melody, with some instrumental breaks, that's fine, but, believe me, in this case, less is more. Buy this CD anyway; it is flawed but definitely distinctive.

Rosaleen Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta.

FolQuébec. Vol. 1-2. Amtech Disc et Ozone, Montréal, QC; 1-800-777-1927; <ozone@amtechdisc.com>; <www.amtechdisc.com>; <www.amtechdisc.com/ozone>.

Attachez-vous tuques avec de la broche, ces volumes contiennent de talentueux artistes et de la musique québécoise variée qui vous surprendra! Comme il est indiqué sur les pochettes de ces albums, *FolQuébec* présente la scène folklorique du Québec dans tous les sens du terme. Des artistes tels que *Entourloupe*, *La vesse de loup*, *Les crapaudes*, *Tess*, *Matapat*, *Rapetipetam*, *Norouet*, *Mort de rire*, *Les chauffeurs à pieds* et *Jean-Paul Guimond*, qui sont identifiés comme étant “traditionnels” dans l'album, partagent ces traits de la musique folklorique du Québec francophone que l'on reconnaît immédiatement. On peut savourer les “tappeux-de-pieds”, les chansons, les rythmes et les instruments habituels comme on les entend chez *La Bottine Souriante*, *La volée de castor*, et *Ti-Jean Carignan*. *Polly-Esther* ressemble aux artistes ci-haut, mais le groupe marie les sons contemporains et la poésie urbaine. Ressemblant aux *Colocs*, *La-Ré-Volt* et *Le Kitchose Band* livrent des chansons “folk-rock” à la francophone, évoquant les sons éclectiques que l'on peut retrouver au Québec, tout comme on les

retrouve chez *Les Batinsés* et *Hart-Rouge*. D'un côté plus traditionnel, les membres de *Montcorbier* démontrent leur talent minutieux en adaptant de façon experte une symphonie mélodieuse à leur flûte, violon et piano. D'inspiration plutôt irlandaise et déteignant sur la musique québécoise, *Tüna* regroupe des musiciens qui enchaînent parfaitement les "jigs and reels" alors que *Michel Faubert* représente élégamment la tradition narrative du Québec dans ses chansons.

La musique "traditionnelle" du Québec d'aujourd'hui doit aussi rendre hommage à son côté multiculturel. *Perdu l'nord* représente bien l'influence du "world beat" sur la musique contemporaine québécoise. Parmi les influences multiculturelles, nous retrouvons des rythmes africains, latins et perses comme les percussions et la basse électrique de *Skalène*, la guitare de *Juan José Carranza* ou encore le tango interprété par *L'ensemble Montréal Tango* et le sétar de *Norwrouz*. De plus, les artistes comme *Carlos Placeres* qui joue de la musique "afro-cubaine" et *Joaquín Díaz*, un dominicain qui interprète une pièce merengue avec son accordéon endiablé, suivent les courants latins tout en y ajoutant leur cachet exotique personnel. Le chant francophone, la guitare et le violon Gipsy électrifiant et secouant de *Ivy* est un bon exemple de ce que le mélange culturel peut faire sur un artiste.

Ces tendances au métissages musico-culturel au Québec sont aussi retrouvées dans le jazz, le blues et le country. *Heather McLeod*, artiste originaire de l'Alberta, explore ses qualités vocales d'une manière non-conventionnelle, nous rappelant bien l'intérêt important attribué au jazz dans la province du Québec. Son genre musical est en fait une preuve de ce qu'on peut qualifier de "tradico-jazz" à la fois expérimental et "mellow". De la même manière, l'interprétation blues de *Ray Bonneville* est riche, fluide et plein d'âme, ce qui nous permet d'examiner une partie du cœur de la musique traditionnelle: l'essence de communiquer les émotions, l'entourage, et la vie en général. Quant à *Jordi Rosen*, sa ballade urbaine accompagnée d'accordéon et de percussions résonne d'une partie de ses racines polonaises. Cette vague d'artistes féminins comme *McLeod* et *Rosen* inclue aussi des artistes comme *Mirika*, connue pour son son "folk-pop", comparable aux *Indigo Girls* et, en partie, avec *Holly McNarland*. La sensualité vocale d'*Annabelle Chvostek*, le "folk-blues" de *Penny Lang*, et le chant de *Connie Kaldor*, similaire à celui d'*Anne Murray*, démontre que ces artistes au féminin contribuent amplement à la scène musicale "folk" québécoise.

On ne pourrait pas faire une telle compilation de musique folk du Québec sans inclure du blues et du "croon" comme on le retrouve dans le *Susie Arioli Swing Band*, du country-blues d'inspiration cajun de *Michael Jerome Browne* ou encore du cajun-blues, jazz-boogie, rock d' *Alan Gerber*. Un peu plus sobre, par comparaison aux artistes çï-haut, on retrouve la guitare acoustique de *Denis Phénix*. Pour ce qui est de *Rob Lutes*, à la guitare et au chant velouté, on le compare à *Leadbelly*, *Mississippi John Hurt*, *Mose Scarlett* et *Chet Atkins*. Si on pouvait créer une catégorie folk, bluegrass et ballades rock, on retrouverait *The Echo Hunters* et *The Whereabouts*.

D'un côté plus expérimental, le violoncelle dramatique et le chant de *Jorane* justifie sa popularité grandissante au Québec et ailleurs dans le monde. Alors que *Jorane* crée des sons plutôt contemporains, *Calica* semble trouver son essence dans l'ancien chant traditionnel languedoc, interprétant *a cappella* une pièce de puissance éblouissante. Toujours avec ces airs d'époque, *Strada* interprète de la musique médiévale dont la sélection bretonne du second volume de *FolQuébec* reflète une partie de leur répertoire européen varié.

Si j'ai une critique à faire, c'est la manière dont on a déterminé l'ordre des pièces. Compte tenu du but de ces albums, ce qui est de faire découvrir les artistes folk du Québec, la sélection de pièces par les interprètes me donne bien le goût d'en connaître davantage. Par contre, j'aurais préféré une compilation organisée en sections plus fluides. Le second volume tente de réparer le chaos du premier volume mais certaines interprétations pourraient bénéficier d'une continuité de genre musicale. Le jazz et le blues se retrouvent entremêlés avec le traditionnel francophone, ce qui brise la continuité de l'album. Entre les deux volumes, le second est un album double qui répète dix-sept des artistes du premier volume, dont seulement *Jorane*, *Tess* et *Matapat* interprètent des pièces différentes. Parce qu'il est une compilation plus élargie et variée, le second volume est un meilleur exemple de la scène musicale québécoise. Reste-t-il que les artistes manquantes du second volume, *Polly-Esther* et *Calica*, valent bien la peine d'être écoutées.

Julie LeBlanc, St-Jean, Newfoundland

Ruthie Foster. *Stages*. BCM2 70403. Blue Corn Music, 1114 Barkdull, Houston, TX 77006 [no website on packaging].

This is Ruthie Foster's first live album; fourteen tracks with partner Cyd Cassone from a number of different venues in Texas and Massachusetts. A good

half are Ruthie Foster originals or arranged by Ruthie; others are songs by a variety of writers and performers including Billie Holiday, Stephen Foster, John D. Loudermilk and Brownie and Ruth McGhee.

Ruthie is well known for her driving rhythm and powerful voice, which resonate in numbers like "Ocean of Tears", with its mixture of blues, gospel, R & B and folk influences, and the final track, "Full Circle", full of joyous whoopings. Ruthie's voice has tremendous technical virtuosity, but unlike some performers, she seems to use it without ego, the vocal acrobatics signaling joy, spontaneity and playfulness, just another manifestation of that warm, embracing stage presence which makes her live performances such a celebration of life and living. She can sing softly, too – witness the expressive dynamics of her song "Crossover", which is supported by Cyd's backing vocals. Hard to pick favourites in such an attractive and varied bunch, but for me two numbers stood out; Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child", which has sensitive instrumental breaks interspersed with the melody line, and Ruthie and Cyd's arrangement of the traditional song "Death came a-knockin'" (also known as "Travelin' Shoes"), where guitar, percussion and wonderful vocals testify to a readiness for, and no fear of, death, a steadfast strength in faith.

Overall, the CD uses a wide selection of backing instruments, guitar, percussion and voices in harmony together with violin, viola, piano, cello, bass and trumpet indicating the variety of songs included, even a spoken vignette of Sunday service ("Church"), in which Ruthie describes a Sunday gathering, drawing on her memories of growing up in the missionary Baptist Church in Austin, Texas and enlivening the account with musical illustrations. My other favourite tracks were "Another Rain Song", a number "in Sam Cooke style" which actually made me think of Bob Marley, "Lost in the City", Ruthie's meditative, introspective evocation of doing gigs in New York, "Prayin' for Rain" ("and it looks like the end of the road's comin' up again"), and the last but one track, Stephen Foster's "Oh Susannah", which Ruthie gives a unique treatment, singing it in a gentle and wistful manner supported by strings and muted trumpet, very different from the usual cheerful, hokey renditions that song attracts.

Ruthie's message is all about affirming life, acting now rather than later or not at all, as she says in her song "Get out of my way", "tomorrow may never come around" – and in the closing track ("Full Circle"), "The secret of life is knowing when to compromise – or not". She's been likened to Tracy Chapman, which apparently tickled her no end, but

Ruthie Foster can stand on her own, any day. Great value – go out and buy it!

Rosaleen Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta.

Marie-Lynn Hammond. *Pegasus*. VM7884-2. Vignettes Media, 1515 El Rito Ave., Glendale, CA 91208, USA; <rlh@marielynnhammond.com>; <www.marielynnhammond.ca>.

I've long considered Marie-Lynn Hammond a national treasure; part of the legendary folk group Stringband, she started her solo career in 1978. She has hosted programs on the CBC, written short stories and four plays, and continues to write a wide variety of songs. She does not do a lot of traditional music, but one of her songs, "The Temagami Round", has entered tradition. There are so few songwriters who can claim that a song of theirs has entered tradition; Wade Hemsworth, of course, comes to mind with his "Black Fly Song". Still, Hammond's background ("Half English, three-eighths French, one-eighth Abenaki") makes her a living representative of our three founding peoples, and perhaps explains why so much of her music is grounded – or seems grounded – in tradition.

If you know Hammond's work, you know that it is breathtakingly honest and self-revealing. *Pegasus* is no exception. In it are songs about the loss of her sister, her mother and her father. Songs about her love of horses and cats. About snow and bits of string. And a beautifully sung traditional French ballad.

The title song, "Pegasus", is a retelling of the Pegasus myth of the flying horse; Hammond still vividly remembers a book about it that she read at age 6. PEI's beloved storyteller David Weale tells of a woman, a typical Islander packrat, who died. People clearing out her house discovered a box on the top shelf of the kitchen cupboard, very neatly labeled: "Pieces of string too short to be saved". It's a great line, and I've told the tale many times. New England poet Donald Hall wrote a book called *String Too Short to be Saved*, where the same story shows up involving his grandparents. It's no doubt an urban legend, and it inspired Hammond to write a song, "Bits of String", although she got the quote slightly mixed up. Themes like this and the aforementioned Greek myth help give her music a traditional feel.

In English folklore, a raven or crow or any large black bird sitting on a tree and looking at you is a harbinger of death. This is the genesis of the very beautiful Child ballad "The Three Ravens", which crossed the Atlantic and morphed into the children's

song "Billy McGee McGaw". Hammond's "Great Black Crow" captures this folklore, perhaps unconsciously, as it tells of her mother's death.

Great black crow in a white birch tree ...
Great black crow looks down at me
Mama's spirit has flown away.

Canadians are fond of saying that the Inuit have no word for "snow". "Snow Song" gives literal translations of the various Inuit snow words. When I heard it, I wondered why no one else was creative enough to write a song or poem about this before.

"The Canadian (Le p'tit cheval de fer)" is a song about the breed of horse called the "Canadian", the horse they say the Sun King sent over to New France in the 1600s.

They were there on the Plains of Abraham
Carrying men fighting under Montcalm
They were prized by the Yanks as trotters,
And mounts in their Civil War
They were ridden by the North West Mounted Police
In that sad campaign against the Métis
And they stood their ground in World War I
Through the battle's bloody roar ...

Designated by an Act of Parliament as Canada's National Horse, the noble *cheval canadien* has come back from the "critical" list to a population of perhaps 4,500. Marie-Lynn Hammond is now the proud owner of a Canadian. Her song incorporates a chorus in French which makes the song seem almost traditional. The whole song is a lesson in Canadiana, and includes this memorable line, worth the price of the album alone:

Now ain't that just the Canadian way it goes,
To have something special and no one knows.

"Isabeau s'y promène" is a great traditional French ballad. Probably originating in Normandy, it came over to Canada early on, and was duly noted in Ernest Gagnon's *Chansons populaires du Canada*. It is a sadly beautiful song about a girl – Isabeau – who lives by the sea. Walking one day in her garden, she meets 30 sailors on a ship. (You can tell it's a French ballad – 30 sailors! An English ballad would have had her meeting one sailor.) One of them sings a beautiful song, and Isabeau would like to learn it. The sailor invites her on board, but soon she is crying because she has lost her golden ring. Or, as Marie-Lynn says, "I think we're deep into symbolism now, folks!" The sailor says he'll dive for it; he does, three times (of course three times), but the third time he dies. The *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin* (30:2) published Marius Barbeau's favourite version of this bal-

lad, a lively dance tune which the great Alan Mills liked to sing. I prefer the haunting original.

Marie-Lynn sings it beautifully. If I ever compile a collection on CD of the outstanding versions of outstanding traditional Canadian songs, this is the version I'd select for "Isabeau s'y promène". David Woodhead provides a subtly sparse accompaniment with guitar, accordion, mandola and bass, but it's Hammond's vocals (harmonizing with herself) that grab the listener. Those who are familiar with the ballad know that it, like many French-Canadian songs, provides an unchanging structure into which two new lines per verse are added. Hammond is a creative musician, and she changes the structure occasionally to allow her to condense two verses into one. This is particularly effective in her last verse, where her one voice hits a high, keening note while her other voice is telling of the third dive of death. Chilling, and so musically creative.

This CD is also a CD-ROM; stick it in your computer and you can hear two extra songs: "Computer Cowboy" and "When Leonard Cohen Sings". You can also hear some songs she wrote for Stringband, along with some readings from her play *Beautiful Deeds/De beaux gestes*. You can also read various stories and the whole play. Quite an added value!

Lorne Brown, North York, Ontario

Martin Joseph. *Don't Talk About Love: Live 92-02, Vol 1*. Pipe Records PRCD 003. ***The Great American Novel*.** ASC CD010. War Child/Startled Chameleon (no address given). <Josephmar@aol.com> <www.martynjoseph.com>.

Martin Joseph is a Welsh singer-songwriter who has played a number of Canadian folk festivals in recent years and who just completed a tour of Western Canada. Athabasca was included on that tour, and a colleague of mine was heard to say, on leaving the Performing Arts Centre, that Joseph's performance was the best he had ever heard at the local theatre. I wasn't surprised by what he said, although we've had hundreds of fine artists play there over the past twenty years. Joseph is an exceptional figure, a political singer-poet in the tradition of Phil Ochs and Dick Gaughan. We've twice published interviews with him in *Canadian Folk Music*, the first by James Prescott and more recently, at the 2004 Calgary Folk Festival, by Rosaleen. That's an indication of how important we think his work is. Almost single-handedly Joseph has revived the 'protest' singer tradition that was so strong in the sixties and early seventies but regrettably waned thereafter. He is an artist you should hear

in person because no recording can really capture the power and intensity of his live performances.

Don't Talk About Love, Vol 1 is an attempt to do just that, however. It comprises fourteen live recordings made between 1992-1993 and 2000-2002. At the Calgary Festival I asked Martin which of his many CDs had the best selection of his finest songs, and this was the one he chose. So it is a sort of 'greatest hits live' compilation. There appear to be two versions of the album in circulation: a single CD (the one under review here) and a double CD which perhaps also includes Vol 2. I don't think you could go wrong in buying either one.

There are too many good songs on Vol 1 for me to discuss them all, so I'll just mention a few that stood out for me. "Dic Penderyn" evokes the memory of a Welsh Chartist who was wrongly hanged for allegedly injuring a soldier during the Newport uprising. Its subtle, understated, imagery of sacrifice and redemption reminded me of the true message of the Gospels, that same vision of the People's Christ that motivated the English peasants in 1381 and the practitioners of Liberation Theology in Latin America today. "Cardiff Bay" is one of Joseph's most lyrical songs, about the joys of home and family in a place one loves. In "Working Mother" we hear the anguish and determined pride of a single mother forced to resort to part-time prostitution to pay the rent and feed her children. "Let's Talk About It In the Morning" captures the pain of a marriage disintegrating because the partners are too overworked and too busy dealing with their own issues to communicate any longer. "Please Sir" is one of Joseph's masterpieces, depicting through the eyes of a child the tragic consequences for miners and their families of the sudden abandonment by businessmen and government of the Welsh coalmining district of the Rhondda. I could go on – there is not a song on this CD that is not worth listening to several times over – but perhaps I have already said enough to suggest that Martin Joseph is a major song-writer to whose work you should pay attention, if you haven't already. *Don't Talk About Love* is an unusually important CD that stands way above the crowd. Don't miss it.

The Great American Novel is an EP of five songs recorded in 2003. Three of them – "Arizona Dreams", "Swansea" and "The Good In Me Is Dead" – are Joseph's own compositions, while the other two – "The Great American Novel" and "War Baby" – are by Larry Norman and Tom Robinson respectively. They are all, in one way or another, political songs, but there is more than anger here: a sense of hope, an attempt to point the way through the dark-

ness, a recognition of personal bravery and the resilience of the human spirit. I'm a big Tom Robinson fan, so you won't find me objecting to a cover of "War Baby", and "Arizona Dreams" is one of Martin's most appealing lyrics.

This is protest folk, if we have to put a label on it, but it is also fun music, most enjoyable to listen to. Even uplifting at times. To quote Joseph himself: "We need to be reminded of the greater good and a bigger picture occasionally. I think that's here, the refugee seeks community in the end and puts down the gun of revenge, in the sunsets of Arizona another voice calls, and the bravery of soldiers in the front line finds a human voice in the longing for the mundane of an ordinary life. We need stuff that comes along sides and tells us to keep going, [and] this is such an offering..." It's an offering that is at once a protest against the invasion of Iraq and an attempt to raise money for the Third-World NGOs with which Joseph is associated. Buy it if you get a chance.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Gordon McGilvery. *All in the Family: Old-Time Cree Round Dance Songs*. CR-6368. Canyon Records (addresses above).

Round Dances are taking the plains, both North and South, by storm. Closely allied to "49ers" and the Dakota *Kahomeni*, people of all ages enjoy these informal, evening-long socials. The basic dance pattern is a large circle in which people join hands and step clockwise in time to the beat (long-short) of the hand drums. In recent years the circle around the seated hand drummers has become a complex of shapes as people move around the floor joining hands and meeting new people. The dance, always drug-free, is viewed as an opportunity to bring wellness and healing through social interaction. The lyrics are often humorous or teasing. It is also viewed as a sacred event; the drums are blessed, and prayers are said to the Creator. Above all, the dance creates good feelings among the participants.

The featured artist on this recording, Gordon McGilvery, is a Plains Cree from Saddle Lake, Alberta. He sings and plays for round dances and powwows across North America. Gordon was encouraged to sing by his father, and these songs date back to his great-grandfather. Fittingly, they are sung by Gordon and his brother and nephews, who achieve a good unison sound both vocally and instrumentally. All the songs are round dance and in typical plains form that descends in pitch throughout: the lead sings out the tune, the group responds, and all continue to the long level tail. These tunes, sung entirely with syllables,

have undulating musical contours, and some feature considerable pulsation on prominent notes. The drumming too is smooth and fluid-sounding.

Gordon's songs are more than music; they are part of the spiritual teachings that he has been fortunate to learn. The songs heal, they communicate with the Creator, and they must be used with respect. Mr. McGilverly is continuing a long family tradition, and it is hoped that future generations will continue his inspired song.

Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba

Norouet. *Spirale*. Minuit dans la cuisine MIN-NOR0 42001; VIZOU, 400 rang St-Joseph, Ste-Béatrix (Québec) J0K 1Y0; <vizou@vizou.com>; <www.norouet.vizou.com>.

Plusieurs critiques du trio québécois Norouet ont fait l'éloge de la musique éclectique du groupe traditionnel, influencée par les sons de l'Europe occidentale et de l'est. Nommé "néo-trad" par la Gazette de Montréal en 2001, Norouet et leur premier album, *Spirale*, nommé au Gala Mimi en 2002, est un excellent exemple de la reconstitution et de la transformation du son québécois. Le trio est composé de jeunes artistes talentueux, à savoir Stéphanie Lépine au violon, Éric Beaudry sur la guitare, le bouzouki, et le banjo, et Patrick Graham sur les percussions. Quelques combinaisons de "world beat" démontre cette vague toujours présente dans la musique multiethnique empruntée de diverses régions géographiques. Les influences culturelles dans ce genre de musique sont insérées, transformées, et réinventées à maintes reprises tout en soulignant la puissance des notes québécoises. Un exemple de leur emprunt culturel est retrouvé dans leur version acadienne de "Marguerite", leur arrangement breton dans "Spirale", les rythmes de "Tsuchi no ashi", la lamentation irlandaise "Air d'autre part", ainsi que l'improvisation "world beat" dans "Pignon Rue Marquette". Le groupe a aussi incorporé des chansons de leurs régions et de leur patrimoine familial. Nous trouvons ces particularités dans la chanson à répondre "Vaut ben mieux", une chanson qui fut transmise à Éric Beaudry par son père à St-Côme. Les autres exemples sont "Mon cher amant", les reels "Beaudoin-Boudreault" et la pièce originant de Petite-Vallée en Gaspésie, "La plainte du forgeron". Les contributions originales de Norouet sont aussi énergétiques que les autres sélections dans l'album. Enfin, cette production fut bien agréable à écouter, reste à voir quelle autre influence culturelle ils adopteront pour leurs prochains albums. Un groupe à suivre!

Julie LeBlanc, St. John's, Newfoundland

Northern Cree. *Rezonate*. CR-6369. Canyon Records (addresses above).

This CD was recorded live at the 2003 Powwow in Saddle Lake, Alberta, and, true to Northern Cree style, is an energetic addition to their discography. A popular powwow group with numerous recordings to their credit and two past Grammy nominations, Northern Cree sets the standard for live powwow recordings.

The visual presentation of *Rezonate* is striking, with colourful photographs from the Saddle Lake Powwow. The group, individual members, and even dancers at the powwow are featured in a collage of pictures that makes the album as visually pleasing as it is aurally pleasing. The liner notes are extensive, providing loose translations of Cree lyrics where necessary. Notes regarding the making of songs and their meanings are a welcome addition; however, the songs containing vocables only would also benefit from such notes.

With their dynamic drumming and singing style, Northern Cree is sure to please. Whether singing Cree text or vocables, the songs are expressive and animated -- it is easy to envision the group performing, as well as the dancing that would accompany this music in a live context.

Surprisingly absent from this live recording is the sound of the event itself. The emcee is heard introducing only the first and eighth tracks, creating a "cleaner" album than a live recording might normally suggest. Nevertheless, the album *Rezonate* will be appreciated by Northern Cree fans and powwow fans in general.

Janice Esther Tulk, St. John's, Newfoundland

The Old Sod Band. *Grass Roots*. FAM04CD. Fallen Angle Music, 285 Spencer St., Ottawa, Ont. K1Y 2R1; <ianrobb@sympatico.ca>; <www.ianrobb.com>; <www.storm.ca/~oldsod/OSBand.htm>.

Dance bands sometimes make recordings that are intended for those who wish to dance but have no access to a band; in these cases, the tracks must be of dance length and the tempos must be appropriate for dancing. Music for contra dancing suffers in this regard both because a dance-length recording will involve at least eight and probably closer to a dozen repetitions of a tune, and because the appropriate tempos for contras fall within a fairly narrow range. Although such recordings provide a valuable resource for dancers or for callers wishing to practice,

they have limited appeal to a more general audience, being somewhat tedious for listening. The Old Sod Band, who play for contra dances in the Ottawa area, have wisely chosen a different path for this recording, ignoring the usual constraints.

An excellent example of their relaxed approach is provided by the very first track, a well-chosen medley of reels that are popular as session tunes. A dreamy introduction hints at the first tune without quite giving it away, until a dramatic bass slide heralds a change to more typical reel tempo. As soon as you hear the tune, you realize just how cleverly it was suggested by the introduction. This type of introduction would be confusing at a dance but it is very effective here. Such devices are typical of the arrangements on this recording; they are effective and impressive without being too slick or giving the listener the impression of having been manipulated.

Because most members of the band are multi-instrumentalists, the melody lines for the tunes can be given a wide range of tone-colours. (The rarely-heard nyckelharpa on "Johsefins Dopvals" has a particularly haunting quality.) Indeed, nearly every repetition of a tune involves some change in instrumentation. Such changes, combined with the clever arrangements, hold the listener's interest and prevent the music from fading into the background. At least by my reckoning, there really aren't any weak spots on this recording. The standout track, however, is a medley of French-Canadian reels; the tunes are well-chosen, they flow nicely together and there is just enough of a different flavour to the three tunes to provide interest without creating a discord. It's a good thing this album is on CD, because I'd have ruined a tape with the number of times I have played this track over and over while driving!

Michael Pollock, Calgary, Alberta

Steve Pineo. *Around the Horn*. STAMP 001. Stamp Recordings (no address or website given).

I really enjoyed listening to this CD. Mind you, this is a style of music that you don't hear often these days, so it was a treat to find a contemporary musician playing it with such enthusiasm and expertise. I'm not even sure if we should be reviewing it in the magazine: notwithstanding the inclusion of an interesting cover of Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright", *Around the Horn* doesn't have much to do with folk music. It is an album of mainstream jazz. Pineo, who sings and plays guitar and mandolin, is accompanied by a small band of jazz musicians, and is occasionally helped out by jazz vocalist Laura Jackson.

The reference to a horn in the title of the CD has nothing to do with the southern tip of South America but rather to the trumpet, trombone and saxophones for which Pineo has written charts. His arrangements are effective: melodic and swinging, with a goodly dose of Swing era riffs. Nothing really original, but nicely done all the same by a Canadian musician who, I believe, makes Calgary his base. This is a band I would love to hear live, and I'll be looking out for their second recording, which is apparently going to include some calypsos and klesmer to provide a change of sound and pace.

Well, I'm not so fond of klesmer, but I'm all for a calypso revival as well as a mainstream jazz revival. No reason why these should not become Canadian musical traditions. Perhaps they already are. In any case, multiculturalism allows us to be thoroughly eclectic when we want to be, doesn't it? So, on second thoughts, I don't see why we at CFM shouldn't broaden our musical horizons a little and include older styles of popular music among the many that the good members of CSTM 'officially' study and also play themselves. And I'm glad I received this CD to review rather than JL consigning it to the "Darien" section. Thanks, Steve, your album is fun to listen to, and I hope you don't take too long to record that sequel.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

The Prairie Higglers. *From Door to Door*. PH001. Prairie Higglers, c/o Joe Mink, 11 Weir Cres., Saskatoon, Sask. S7H 3A8; <jmink@sk.sympatico.ca>; <jmink@sasktel.net> (new address, not on packaging); <www3.sk.sympatico.ca/jmink/higglers>.

Some groups are formed by seeking out players of a particular style and putting them together to play a particular kind of music. Other groups coalesce when musical friends of different backgrounds get together and unite their musics to form a whole; sometimes the results are innovative, and occasionally they give birth to a new genre. The Prairie Higglers fall into the latter category. They are essentially a session group who play music together for the love of it, sometimes performing, and occasionally recording. Their previous release, a two-cassette set entitled *The Prairie Higglers Over Twenty Years*, which I wrote about almost ten years ago [29.2, p. 45], was a memorial to founding group member Hugh Hendry; *From Door to Door* unintentionally serves the same function for the late Bill Sarjeant, a former president (back when it was the Canadian Folk Music Society) and longtime stalwart of CSTM. Bill's deep Yorkshire voice takes the lead on six songs, and he pops up elsewhere on harmonica, drum and spoons. Lead singers on other

tracks are Lois Wooding and C. Hunker (unfortunately the group members are identified only by initial and surname, and I don't know those who are recent additions to what is a longtime group which has had numerous personnel changes over the years). There are six instrumental tracks as well, often led by fiddler Joe Mink, who now seems to be the keystone member of the band – at least, his address is given on their website.

This is by no means a “Celtic” recording (Bill would have been at pains to point this out). By far the predominant flavour is English, with several Antipodean songs as well, several Irish tracks, and one each from Shetland and the U.S.A. A few of the songs might be called “warhorses” (by me at least), but most will be fresh to all but the most folk-jaded listener. In particular, the instrumentalist likely will find new tunes here, worth adding to the repertoire.

I described the Higgler's previous recording as “a monument to music-making as an expression of friendship”, and that description holds true for *From Door to Door*. To continue to quote myself, the group has not lost the “warm, cozy feel of a gathering of friends”. Lack of slickness is part of the CD's charm, and occasional (but only occasional) flirtation with pitch by the singers, and cluttered arrangements by the musicians, do not seriously detract from the overall ambiance. It reminds me of the various session groups in which I take part, if one of the most rewarding of these gatherings were recorded for posterity. (Maritimers would likely immediately understand if I described the CD as having a “kitchen party” ambiance.)

The Prairie Higgler, established in 1975, have survived many changes, including the deaths of two focal members, and are still going strong. Their website shows a recent release, *Wot Stuff!*; we hope to be able to review it soon for you.

John Leeder, Calgary, Alberta

Raylene Rankin. *Lambs in Spring*. 210982. Lazy Eye Music, PO Box 2593 Halifax Central, Halifax, NS B3J 3N5; <www.raylenerankin.com>.

Raylene Rankin needs no introduction to readers of *CFM*. *Lambs in Spring* is a collection of songs, some traditional, like “Banks of the Lee”, “Singing Bird”, “Life of a Country Boy”, “Alasdair Beag” and “Oran Chalum Sgaire”, others by various singers and songwriters, including two each by David Francey (“Highwire” and “Flowers of Saskatchewan”), and George Antoniak (“Scent of Roses” and “Someone like you”), as well as the CD's title song, John Morris

Rankin's “Lambs in Spring”, Kenneth Leslie and Stewart Calvert's “Cape Breton Lullaby” and Andy M. Stewart's “Heart of the Home”. Given Raylene's expertise in this area, it would have been nice to have had more Gaelic offerings than just the one.

I confess I find Raylene's voice a bit too sweet, and the musical arrangements, especially of traditional numbers, rather self-conscious, though I like her treatment of “Singing Bird”, familiar to me from the singing of the McPeake Family, the sleeve notes to whose 1962 Topic LP tells me the words are actually by the Irish poetess Edith Wheeler, while the melody is a Munster folk tune. “Life of a Country Boy”, though, is for me an example of what June Tabor meant when she talked about “a twee way of singing folksongs”. However, I can say without reservation that Raylene does a very good job on David Francey's moving “Flowers of Saskatchewan” – and I remember David himself saying as much during a concert in Athabasca. The same is true of “Cape Breton Lullaby”, which is a lovely vehicle for Raylene's voice.

None of the songs on this CD are sung *a cappella*; in fact, some of the musical arrangements are quite sophisticated – for example, the accompaniment to Raylene's jazz-style singing on the last track, “Someone like you” (George Antoniak) is very smooth. Musicians featured on the CD include Michael Francis (acoustic and electric guitars, dobro, mandolin, mandola and walkabout dulcimer), Brian Barlow (percussion and drums), Tom Szczesniak (piano and accordion), Ray Parker (keyboards), Scott Alexander (upright bass), Don Reed and Mairi Rankin (fiddle), Mac Morin (piano), Gordie Sampson (rhythm guitar) and Raylene's sisters Cookie and Heather Rankin providing background vocals on Raylene's version of David Francey's song “Highwire” (which has a sort of Joni Mitchell feel).

Raylene Rankin is a highly professional person, and you can be sure that whatever she does on *Lambs in Spring* she intended to do. Myself, I prefer my traditional music a bit plainer, with less frills, but I enjoyed listening to this CD as I enjoy anything by the talented Rankin family.

Rosaleen Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Kathy Reid-Naiman. *Tickles and Tunes*. M9701cd. ***More Tickles and Tunes*.** M9702cd. ***Say Hello to the Morning*.** M9901cd. Merriweather Records, 109 Crawford Rose Dr., Aurora, Ont. L4G 4S1; <rugged@interlog.com>.

Songs, rhymes and bounces for youngsters and their parents or caregivers: Kathy has some tried-and-true familiar nursery rhymes and songs, but also some that are original or not so well known. The musical accompaniment is not overwhelming, and the choice of instruments fits the songs. Children will enjoy the nonsense rhymes, and gradually knowledge will be reinforced for colours, body parts and actions, nature and pets, animal sounds and movements, tools and jobs, musical tempos and rhythms, and just basic general knowledge. Folk dances are included, e.g., "Little Brass Wagon" and "Skip To My Lou", along with the occasional lullaby, such as "Morningtown Ride" and "Bye Baby Bye". There's lots of room here for parent interaction and discussion of the topics presented, including the variety of musical instruments used on "Say Hello To the Morning". For this, Kathy has gathered together some of Canada's well-known musicians to accompany her.

Kathy's vocals are clear, and a lot of thought has gone into the selection of the material and the pacing of each CD. They are all well produced and serve a niche in the market not covered by other children's performers. Although Kathy says that the songs are aimed at children 6 months to 6 years old, I'm sure older children will enjoy many of the songs, especially if they have younger siblings with whom they can share their enjoyment of music, song, and movement. The length of each selection ranges from 10 seconds to over 3 minutes. Full lyrics are enclosed, along with notes and/or instructions -- especially for the bounces, tickles and action songs. Each CD contains approximately 35 tracks.

Dave Foster, Calgary, Alberta

Mose Scarlett. *Precious Seconds*. BCD146. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>

This CD is an entertaining, studio-polished product, with lots of soul. Mose pairs himself with several renowned guitarists: Jim Condie, Amos Garrett, Jeff Healey, Colin Linden, Tony Quarrington, Margaret Stowe, Ken Whiteley and David Wilcox. Each duo offers up a pair of recordings, with the exception of only one track with Ken Whiteley (who incidentally also produced the album). That one track, "Don't Go Lookin' for Trouble", is nicely delivered. While it was written in 1975 by Steve Goodman, and Mose's own "Muscatel Tale" (performed with Colin Linden) is dated 1978, they both feel totally sympathetic with the rest of the album, which is based on popular tunes from the late 1920s/early 1930s.

The most synergistic energy is in the recordings produced by the combinations with Jeff Healey ("Darktown Strutters' Ball" and "He's In the Jailhouse Now") and with David Wilcox ("Bye Bye Blues" and "Good Liquor Gonna Carry Me Down"). These are my favourite tracks, especially the hopping interplay on Big Bill Broonzy's "Good Liquor" and on Blind Blake's "Jailhouse". With Jim Condie, Mose performs "I Used to Love You But It's All Over" and "Anytime", both of which feature very nice sprightly guitar solos. The guitar recording is excellent – the sound is rich and sparkling – kudos to the engineer and producer.

As much a feature of the recordings as the guitar playing is Mose's voice. It's like a good wine, a full-bodied Burgundy to be sipped and swirled around the palate. While my only criticism would be that I find the vocal vibrato a little overdone on "Sweet Lorraine" (with Amos Garrett) and "All of Me" (with Colin Linden), I can forgive this, as his voice effuses a wealth of experience.

Mose's nicely written, almost poetic autobiographical notes re his musical life complete the package. There is a relaxed maturity in this recording, and all in all it is an excellent offering.

Peter Johnson, Calgary, Alberta

Kristin Sweetland. *Root, Heart & Crown*. AVCD001. Arbora Vista Music, 1-519-319-5239; <kristinsweetland@hotmail.com> <www.kristinsweetland.com>

Root, Heart & Crown is packed with ideas, finding its inspiration in sources as disparate as the medieval love story of Heloise and Abelard, alchemy, American Civil War battles, Hopi dwellings in the Arizona desert, Vancouver Island, Greek mythology (Hero and Leander), refugees in Eastern Europe, forest fires in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Clementine (Oh my darling), Emmy Lou Harris and Bach. I don't want to label Kristin Sweetland pretentious, because I applaud anyone who is open to beauty and imagination whatever its origin. But I have to explain why I think this CD doesn't work, and I think the centrifugal force engendered by trying to deal with all these satisfactorily has something to do with it.

The CD contains a booklet of lyrics and explanatory notes (though these are sometimes a little hard to read due to the artwork which covers every inch of space). The first evocation (and one of the most successful) pairs two numbers – "O Quanta Qualia" and "The Abbess" – dealing with Abelard and Heloise. Of these, the first uses Peter Abelard's own 12th Century

Latin words sung by Kristin and backed by the drone vocals of George Koller and Ken Whiteley to give a Gregorian chant-like effect. This is not hard to do, but it is more effective than the bouncy accompaniment (including acoustic guitar, string bass, darbouka, shakers and udu) which supports Kristin's singing in "The Abbess".

The same jarring effect pursued me throughout most of the rest of this CD; lots of accompanying musicians and catchy rhythms in "Copper Kettle" didn't succeed in making me think of alchemy; even Stephen Fearing helping with the vocals couldn't stop "Battle Hymn" (about Manassas, Virginia – the site of an American Civil War battle on July 21, 1861) from sounding contrived; "Fall Down the Ground", a celebration of Vancouver Island, is marred by artificial phrasing and little, breathy phrases; "O Leander" (inspired by the Greek legend but actually celebrating landscapes of the U.S. and Canada) had more catchy rhythms but was hard to connect with Leander other than through the oleander plant, which I suppose grows in some of the places named. And although Kristin Sweetland is a good guitar player – her acoustic guitar solo in "Above Hotevilla" (where the Arizona Hopi dwellings are) reminded me of the best of Davy Graham – I really couldn't see how the lyric connected to its alleged theme.

The best numbers on this CD are "Black Lavender", inspired by a dream of escape from a war camp in Eastern Europe, where the total musical sound, rhythm, and Spanish(?) chorus lend the song a gypsy atmosphere reminiscent of Lhasa, and "Creeping Jenny", a country, blue-grassy rhythm number where the Blue Ridge Mountains, forest fires, Creeping Jenny (the plant), and Kristin's own friend Jenny come together with Anne Lindsay's excellent fiddle playing to achieve a more centred result – here the words fit their musical envelope well. Anne Lindsay's fiddle is featured also on "Ladybird", Kristin's song in praise of the road and her guitar, Lady, and on the closing number, "Chaconne", based on an excerpt from Bach's "Chaconne – Partita no.2 in D minor", where Kristin's acoustic guitar gets help from Anne's fiddle (now called a violin) and Roman Borys on cello. And Kristin does a nice version of the traditional country song "Bright Morning Stars", though I felt it could have had a bit more "oomph".

Kristin's song "Clementine" is inspired by childhood memories of "O my darling Clementine" and features a nice mandolin solo by Ken Whiteley and some felicitous turns of phrase – "dead in the river that runs/from the quicksilver moon to the slow Georgia sun" – as well as some less serendipitous – "her/his

body fell into the brine". (Perhaps I should mention that Clementine's transplanting from the California Gold Rush to the savannahs of Georgia is due to Kristin being in Georgia when the song came to her!) Once again though, it seems to me that Kristin is still finding her true creative voice, and is hampered by not being able to decide what that voice really is.

So why doesn't this CD work? Heather Dale's *May Queen* is equally ambitious and it does, perhaps because the themes (derived from Arthurian legend) are more connected and consistent. Kristin Sweetland has lots of interesting ideas, but the total effect is too scattered; the music often doesn't fit the lyrics (technically it does – the CD has a nice, clean sound and the playing isn't ragged) – but thematically tune and words don't fit – except in "O Quanta Qualia", "Black Lavender" and "Creeping Jenny". Otherwise these songs could be about anything – idea, words and tune don't meet. It seems you can't just take some romantic or dramatic situation like the love stories of Abelard and Heloise or Hero and Leander, or the concept of transmuting base metals into gold, or even the sad fate of the miner's daughter Clementine, write verses which may include some felicitous images and turns of phrase but sometimes barely relate to the supposed song title, compose a melody which, however driving and catchy, doesn't really "go with" words or theme, and expect throwing it all into one big pot will work.

I'd like to see Kristin Sweetland tighten up her writing, decide if she wants to be country or New Age-y or what her real voice is. I don't think she's found it yet – she's being pulled too many different ways and needs at the very least to focus on fewer ideas per CD.

Rosaleen Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

James Thurgood. *Handy Little Rig: Celtic & Old-Time Harmonica from the Maritimes.* Box 1655, Wabasca, Alta. T0G 2K0 (new address, different from packaging); <jthurgood@yahoo.com>.

This CD contains 12 tracks performed by James Thurgood on Hohner diatonic harmonica, accompanied by Kevin Roach on guitar. All tracks were recorded on one hot day in August 2002, in a friend's house in Nova Scotia. The arrangements are Kevin's, leaving James to concentrate on playing the tunes. He is undoubtedly a harmonica player of some experience, which is immediately apparent from his breath control. He has a nice clean round tone when playing single-note melodies, but it is obvious that he is most comfortable with the seemingly less constrained rhythmic old-time dance tunes. His ability in

this respect is probably most amply demonstrated on "Fisher's/MacNab's (hornpipes)". Kevin's role as accompanist is simply that – his guitar playing is adequate but never is there any threat of any real solo – that's all left to the harmonica. In fact, I find the guitar's sound somewhat thin. That's no slur on Kevin's undoubted competence, but more a commentary on the recording conditions. Kevin betrays the greatest amount of virtuosity on O'Carolan's air "Si Bheag Si Mhor", and on the one track where James lays his harmonica aside and sings the ballad "My Gallant Brigantine", which is neatly delivered.

The first track, "Boys of Bluehill (reel)/Sweeney's Polka/Road to Boston (reel)" typifies James' style of playing. It recurs in tracks such as "Laird o' Drumblair (strathspey)/Angus Campbell/Lord MacDonald's (reel)" and "Whiskey Before Breakfast/Drowsy Maggie (reels)", and underpins all of his music. James' style is predominantly 'old-time' (as he describes it), and it is apparent that this is where it all started for him – he expanded into Celtic tunes later. The 'old-time' style is basically straight harp playing that's heavy on tongue-blocking. In simple terms, that is to say that James is playing a G harmonica against a song in the key of G and that the melody is carried on the higher notes of the harmonica, while at the same time the tongue is pushed on and off the harmonica on the lower register to create a rhythmic vamp. This is a very simplistic description, and James is quite the virtuoso at this technique.

There are copious textual notes enclosed, including background notes to each track and remarks on the recording session itself. We are given some autobiographical notes and then a somewhat verbose and rambling treatise on 'old-time' versus Celtic tunes and 'old-time' versus Celtic harmonica playing styles. The difference is easier heard than explained (at least as explained by James). He intermingles the two styles best on his epic 8-minute medley "Bovaglie's Plaid (slow air)/Traditional Strathspey/Braes of Mar (strathspey)/Maid Behind the Bar/Jenny Dang the Weaver (reels)" – not recommended to be attempted by any faint-of-heart harmonica player.

Considering that it was recorded "live off the floor" in a single day, the CD is an impressive achievement, apart from a few minor fluffs. It is a down-to-earth recording that will likely sell well wherever James cares to perform, and wherever he plays a good time will be had by all.

Peter Johnson, Calgary, Alberta

Norman Walker. "T" Time -- Time Tested Tales, Tall and True. PPM01. Norm Walker, 2235 Robinson St., Regina, Sask. S4T 2R1; <normwalker@accesscomm.ca>; <www.normwalker.com>.

Sometimes I like watching *Urban Legends Revealed* on The Learning Channel, where Natasha Henstridge walks about a cardboard set introducing badly-acted dramatizations of urban legends. My favourite is certainly a version of "The Mexican Pet", the one where a hapless traveller smuggles a chihuahua in from Mexico only to find that it's actually a (usually plague-carrying) rat. The only way the show could represent this was to have two different animals play the same pet, leaving us with the impression that an actual chihuahua has somehow metamorphosed into an actual rat. "The Mexican Pet" is supplied a perfect punchline in Norman Walker's "T" Time – *Time Tested Tales, Tall and True*, with a subtle escalation accompanying the phrase "He's also carrying bubonic plague", and a delicate pause before the narrator retreats to the desperate jollity of the chorus.

This album features many songs inspired by urban legends and other comedy numbers, sitting next to songs of utter sincerity. There's a lot in the stew here, and "T" Time goes through a number of changes in tone. Occasional songs for Christmas and Groundhog Day (!), numbers celebrating the prairies, sci-fi, songs about electricity, the dominant urban legend theme, and even a tribute of sorts to Elizabeth Cotten – this album has it all, even things you didn't realize you needed.

"T" Time is a long album, at 71 minutes and 18 tracks. This is probably longer than it needs to be, for the length requires several jarring changes in tone. In the first three tracks, it is odd to segue from a jaunty piece of 'neo-filk' called "Interstellar Cowboy" to the heartfelt "Diamonds and Gold", about apartheid and the inexorability of human greed, and on to a version of an urban legend concerning budgies and flooring. Sandwiched by two comedy numbers, it's impossible for "Diamonds and Gold" to possess the weight it should, or provoke the reflection it must. The dominant mood of the album is comic; this is apparent from the alliterative title on, but this leaves the serious numbers seeming out of place, their sincerity perhaps even undermined by uneasy placement, but this is a scant complaint against the pleasures the album contains.

Walker is a terrific melodist. "Lament for the Prairie Giants", an elegy for the vanished grain elevators of Saskatchewan, is impeccable in its meld of vocals and guitar, building a surprising emotional charge in

its unadorned simplicity, with a tune as stately as the buildings it commemorates. "Rosa", the urban legend of a couple's ill-fated visit to a Hong Kong restaurant with their poodle, probably the album's standout track, benefits from a comically askew scheme of timing. "Interchange Two Phases", the meeting point of the album's preoccupation with urban legends, black comedy and electricity, is also a terrific pastiche of the "teen death songs" of the 1960s (drafting in an intro from "Teen Angel" to demonstrate the point), with a lavish production to match the songs to which it pays tribute.

This is an album that demands to be listened to carefully. The lyrics stand above all else. The comic numbers are full of splendid wordplay, well-chosen rhymes and amusing non sequiturs ("I can tolerate those Klingons, with their smelly fancy cars, They leave a trail of Lone Star beer cans everywhere they are"). I would almost prefer that this be two albums – it's practically long enough to be – for that would allow a little more cohesion. But as it is, I'll revisit "T" *Time* in all of its multitudinous modes, and no doubt discover new depths each time. It's even more fun than that show on The Learning Channel.

Murray Leeder, Ottawa, Ontario

A Peak in Darien

Recordings

Jon Bartlett & Rika Ruebsaat. *The Green Fields of Canada: Our Singing Tradition, Volume 3*. CFW 01; <www3.telus.net/jonbartlett-rikaruebsaat/index.html>.

Jon Bartlett & Rika Ruebsaat. *Songs and Stories of Canada*. [CR Rom, with sixteen 26-minute audio programs in MP3 format, plus a 125 p. *Teacher's Guide* in PDF] (address as above).

Kim Beggs. *Streetcar Heart*. Caribou Records CRCD 019. (address as above).

Bill Bourne. *Voodoo King*. Second Story Records. <www.secondstorey.com>; <www.billbourne.com>.

Rodney Brown and the Northern Roots Band. *The Big Lonely*. Starsilk Records, 347 Pearl St., Thunder Bay, Ont. P7B 1E9; <rodney@rodneymbrown.ca>; <www.rodneymbrown.ca>.

Steve Coffey and The Lokels. *East of East Coulee*. SCOF20651. Whoop-de-do Records (no address given); <www.steve-coffey.com>.

Steve Coffey and The Lokels. *32 Below Sessions*. SCOF20988. (as above).

Maria Dunn. *We Were Good People*. MARCD03. www.mariadunn.com; distributed by Festival 1-800-633-8282; <www.festival.bc.ca>.

David Francey. *The Waking Hour*. JBM 0404. Jericho Beach Music, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.davidfrancey.com>.

High Noon. *The Way It All Began*. CR-6374. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85017; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>.

Pierre Imbert. *L'Age de Pierre: Crosière*. C2536-02. Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; <fdi@festival.bc.ca>; <www.festival.bc.ca>.

Lewis & Royal. *Ampersand*. LFRS 01. Rosebud Creek Records, Box 630, Rosebud, AB. T0J 2T0. 1-403-677-2433.

The Polyjesters. *Ka-Chunk!*. CVCD003. <www.polyjesters.com>.

Sue Malcolm. *Highbury Lonesome*. Lynn Canyon Music LCM2004. <www.suemalcolm.com>.

Andy Northrup. *Slow Burn Avenue*. ANCD001. New House Up North Publishing, Edmonton, AB. T5B 4A6. <upnorth@shaw.ca>; <www.anorthrup.com>.

Andy Northrup. *Cardboard Logic*. ANCD 002. (as above).

Po' Girl. *Vagabond Lullabies*. NETTWERK 06700 30386 2 1; Nettwerk Productions, 1650 W 2nd Ave, Vancouver, BC. V6J 4R3. 1-604-654-2929; <info@nettwerk.com> <www.nettwerk.com>.

John Reischman & the Jaybirds. *The Road West*. Corvus Records 012. 2030 Nootka St., Vancouver, BC. V5M 3L9. <www.johnreischman.com> Festival Distribution 1-800-253-2662.

Garnet Rogers. *Shining Thing*. SGSCD 1131. Snow Goose Songs, distributed by Valerie Enterprises, Woodburn Road, R.R. # 1, Hannon, ON. L0R 1P0; <www.garnetrogers.com>.

A Tribute to Jimmy Martin "The King of Bluegrass". KOC-CD-9819. Koch Records, 1709 19th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212; <kochrecords.com>.

Tim Williams & the Electro-Fires. Cayuse 005. Cayuse Music, 833 17th Ave. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2G 1J2; <ctwcayuse@shaw.ca>; <www.go.to/twilliamsblues.com>; Festival Distribution (address above).