

Reviews

Books

E. David Gregory. *Victorian Songhunters: The Recovery and Editing of English Vernacular Ballads and Folk Lyrics, 1820-1883.* Scarecrow Press Inc., 4501 Forbes Blvd., Suite 200, Lanham, MD 20706, USA; custserv@rowman.com; www.scarecrowpress.com

This massive (447 pages, large format) book gives an overview of the published and unpublished collections of folk and vernacular songs and poems in England prior to 1884. The main focus is on the late Georgian, early Victorian, and middle Victorian times.

The book is organised around the songhunters and their publications, with occasional brief biographical details about them. There is some discussion of their motivations and of their own class priorities, but less than I would have wanted.

Most of the songhunters got their material from manuscript or printed sources and did their hunting in libraries, bookshops and private collections. Only towards the end of the period was there a general realisation of the importance of also hunting for songs in their native lower-class oral settings, whether rural or urban. I was fascinated to learn that a high proportion of the field collectors who emerged late in the period were women, and to learn (since I'm a dancer) how many tunes had been preserved in Playford's *The English Dancing Master*.

The book gives good coverage of the trend during this period from exclusive attention to the lyrics towards a realisation of the importance of collecting melodies as well. It also explores the dilemmas that the songhunters, many of whom were clergymen, faced when dealing with songs containing controversial lyrics such as explicit sexual content.

The background and context for the core material of the book is well covered. About one-seventh of the book is an introductory discussion of the book's aim and academic context (especially the definitions of "folksong", "vernacular song", and "national song"), an overview of song collecting prior to 1820, and an afterword and appendix discussing recent academic issues. In addition, each section begins with up to a dozen paragraphs setting out the general political and

industrial background, and touching on highlights in the art music of the time.

While the book is "intended for a general audience, not for the handful of specialists in the field", members of the general audience may find it a dry slog at times. Many paragraphs have a high proportion of song titles or book titles, making it sometimes hard work to follow the discussion. To take one example, a paragraph on page 205 has 33 song titles in its 13 lines. The single-column layout makes for difficult reading. The pages are wide enough that a double column layout could have been used.

There is material on poems and on non-song publications by the songhunters that could have been omitted without detracting from the main focus of the book. For example, starting at the bottom of page 328 there is quite a long discussion of a volume of poems. Likewise, some of the introductory material that does not serve to explain or motivate the songs or the songhunting could have been dropped.

I realize that the focus of this book is on the collectors and editors, but I found myself wanting to know much more about how songs entered the lower class culture, what roles they served within that culture, and exactly how and why they were preserved and transmitted within that culture. A fascinating example that I wanted more of is the description on page 170 about broadsheet vendors. I would also have liked to learn something, however brief, about comparable song collecting activities, if any, that were going on in Europe at the same time.

The reader of *Victorian Songhunters* is rewarded by the inclusion of a generous number of song lyrics and melodies. I suspect that I will be returning to the book most often for these.

James Prescott, Calgary, Alberta

Recordings

Sarah Burnell. *Sarah'ndipity.* SFM-001; *Return Ticket.* SFM-002. Linda Crawford, 115 Pleasant Creek Dr., RR#2, Carp, Ont. K0A 1L0; manager@sarahfiddle.ca; www.sarahfiddle.ca

Sarah'ndipity is the debut album by Sarah Burnell, an Ottawa-based fiddler and singer. Recorded when Sarah was 17 years old, *Sarah'ndipity* features the singing and playing of Burnell along with six supporting musicians: Jim Hunter (piano), D'Arcy McGuire (percussion), Paul Mills (guitar), Dennis Pendrith (bass), Jeremiah McDade (winds), and Greg Weeks (cello). The disc was recorded and mixed at Mills' The Millstream studio in 2006, and co-produced by Burnell, Mills, and Linda Crawford.

Inside the CD case are basic liner notes, featuring large photos of Burnell, song credits, brief program notes, lyrics for the non-instrumental songs, and performance/production credits; there is also one page devoted exclusively to thanks. The songs are mostly attributed as "trad.", although several named composers are also featured, with individual tracks featuring up to six different tunes.

Right from the first track, "Terri's Tunes", the band is in full swing and performing as a unit. That said, there is no doubt as to the leader: Sarah Burnell's finely-nuanced fiddle playing is at the centre of each piece, both acoustically and aesthetically. Her tone is rich, her ornamentation precise, and there's energy in every note. I found the band particularly strong when playing the more driving, up-tempo numbers such as the latter half of "In Dispraise of Whisky", "The Contradiction", "Paresis" and "Won it at Bingo" (incidentally, these all end up at the same tempo – Burnell's natural resonant frequency?). As usual with Paul Mills' productions, the quality of the recording is excellent, with all instruments captured cleanly and clearly. My only production quibble is the recording of Burnell's voice, which seems too "close" in the mix, and thus stands out more than is necessary (to my ears).

Following up two years after her successful debut, Burnell's second album, *Return Ticket*, features more of the same – in a good way! The band has changed very little (although the album is now by "The Sarah Burnell Band", not just "Sarah Burnell"), with the exit of Pendrith and McDade and the addition of Ellen Gibling (harp), Graham Lindsey (percussion) and Niel McDaniel (guitar and mandolin). Once again there are 12 tracks, the tunes are mostly traditional, and the arrangements are by The Sarah Burnell Band.

The music on *Return Ticket* is very much an evolution of that on *Sarah'ndipity*. The arrangements are more detailed, the tempi more varied (between pieces – there are no problems of tempo drift), and the musicians have further elevated their performances. Burnell has also taken her performances to another level, with more of an edge to the faster numbers

("Les reels tziganes", "L'alouette et le pinson") and a warmer sound in the more expansive pieces ("The Galician Set", "Stirling Castle"). Her duet passages with cellist Greg Weeks are particularly well done, and I found that the worldly "Trip to Pakistan" really showcases the versatility of The Sarah Burnell Band.

Quibbles this time around? The same issue with the recording of Burnell's voice that's stated above (indicating that it was a production choice, not an accident—we'll have to agree to differ), and a whiff too much noise at the beginning of "Cape Breton Lullaby", which features the beautifully-played harp of Gibling. Fair enough, as harps are tough to record cleanly (which is why so much "Celtic Harp" music is drowning in reverb and special effects).

Both of these albums display excellent musicianship, and serve to announce the arrival of a major new talent in Canadian folk music. While Sarah Burnell has received accolades as Young Performer of the Year (Canadian Folk Music Awards, 2006), she is far more than a talented *young* musician: Burnell can hold her own with musicians of all ages. Both albums are highly recommended.

Paul Guise, Winnipeg, Manitoba

David Francey. *Rights of Passage*. LAKR 1007.

Laker Music, 2998 Elphin Maberly Rd., RR#1, McDonald's Corners, Ont. K0G 1M0; laker@ davidfrancey.com; www.davidfrancey.com

I was really looking forward to hearing this CD (winner of the Juno Award for Roots & Traditional Album of the Year), David Francey's first collection of new material since his 2004 release of *The Waking Hour* [reviewed in *CFM*, 39.1, p.31]. For all of you Francey fans, you know how successful he has been since his songwriting career began in 1999. He has released seven CDs in total, five with original material, one live CD and one Christmas compilation. In a relatively short period of time David has become an important figure in Canadian roots music, garnering three Juno Awards. If this is your first taste of David Francey, it will give you an excellent idea of what his music is all about. His songs have the kind of memorable melodies that stick with you long after the music has ended. His stories are real and well told. They are about relationships: personal and spiritual relationships and relationship to place. Each album has some comment on the state of world affairs.

I began to enjoy *Rights of Passage* even before I put the CD in my player. The packaging, with its great photographic images, includes David's usual

brief comments preceding the lyrics of each song. The 13 cuts on this CD include 12 new songs and one instrumental piece. Songs like the story of a memorable character, Bowser MacRae, and the song, "All Lights Burning Bright", are inspired by time spent on the MV *Algoville*, a Great Lakes freighter. These songs tell about what it's like being away from family and friends while working at sea, what keeps you going and what you miss. There are personal songs that tell of his love for his wife Beth ("Under the Portland Weather"), reflect on his relationship with his homeland, Scotland ("Promised Land"), and talk of his parents' 80 years together ("The Gate"). Other topics range from the simple feelings shared by the meeting of two people who are far from home ("Kansas") to the present state of affairs in the Middle East ("New Jerusalem").

David is accompanied by the very talented multi-instrumentalist Craig Werth (guitar, bouzouki, mandolin, dulcimer, shruti box and backing vocals). Craig's playing is delicate, clean and meticulous. Several pieces are arranged very simply, with one instrument, David's voice and moving harmonies. On a few selected tracks, we are treated to the fiddle and mandolin playing of veteran bluegrass musician Geoff Somers. The arrangements create a wonderful variety of mood, helping David tell his stories and connect with the listener.

David Francey doesn't describe himself as a writer of happy songs, but his music is uplifting, singable and memorable. I guarantee that if you listen to this album all the way through you will be singing the chorus to the final cut for the rest of the day. This is a good CD to sit down with. Find your favourite chair, take out the CD booklet, feast your eyes on the beautiful images and enjoy listening to one of the best songwriters we have in this country.

Blaine Hrabi, Calgary, Alberta

James Hill. *A Flying Leap*. BCD174. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; info@borealisrecords.com; www.borealisrecords.com

This CD consists of ten tracks, seven of them being Hill's own compositions. The basic impression is that of virtuoso ukulele music rather than of folk music. However, several of the tracks have enough folk feel to merit review in this journal.

Despite the common perception of the ukulele as a novelty instrument, and despite the "wild man" cover photo chosen for the CD, Hill is a serious virtuoso upon the instrument. To my ears, the high point

of the disc is Hill's "One Small Suite for Ukulele" in three movements (Allegro con brio, Largo cantabile, Vivace giocoso), in which Hill is joined by Anne Davison on cello and himself on violin. The suite is a virtuoso composition and has, to me, no folk feeling whatever, yet is an extremely striking piece of music. With the combination of violins and cello, the suite sounds as though a string quartet were playing behind the ukulele. It stands in sharp contrast to the novelty-song past of that instrument.

Of the tracks that have some folk feeling, the first track, "Uke Talk", by contemporary Nova Scotia musician J. Chalmers Doane, has at once a blues and a ragtime feel. Hill's "Song for Cheri" consists of a quite beautiful and slow theme, stated at the beginning and end of the track, separated by a much faster central section with the feel of a banjo tune. Hill's "Skipping Stone" is a ukulele-spoons duet played at a fast tempo.

Other tracks with less folk feel include Jimi Hendrix's "Little Wing", done as a double-tracked duet between an acoustic nylon string ukulele and a solid-body steel-stringed electric uke, both played by Hill. There is also an interesting rendition of Manos Hadjidakis' "Never on Sunday".

Except for the cello played by Anne Davison in "One Small Suite for Ukulele", all instrumental parts are played by Hill. Although it lacks folk content, *A Flying Leap* presents some truly amazing performances on the ukulele.

Jim Grabenstetter, Calgary, Alberta

Michael Joseph & The Ridges. *Taraba*. HB0018; michaeljoseph_taraba@yahoo.ca; www.michaeljoseph.ca;

This is an unusual CD. It is short (only 31 minutes), and the nine items on it are, in the main, not so much songs as poems set to music. One's response to the CD is determined in part by how much one connects with the poetry, in part by how well one judges the settings to have enhanced the verse. My own reaction was mixed. On the positive side I really liked "Night Sigh", which evokes the sadness of conflict-torn Jerusalem. Another of the more interesting tracks, "Honeycomb", is a sort of free-form ballad with a storyline about a teenage girl discovering that her father is not dead but serving a twenty-year jail sentence for dealing drugs. And several of Michael Joseph's more contemplative poems, such as "My Summer", "Nomad", and "On the Radio", have an evocative beauty that is gently underlined by the rather New Age acoustic accompaniments. On the other hand Dante

Gabriel Rossetti's "The Woodspurge" is given an up-tempo bluegrass treatment that seems totally inappropriate for a poem about the solace for grief that may be found in contemplating the contingent details of the natural world. All rather hit and miss, but definitely out of the ordinary and worth a listen.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Penny Lang. *Stone + Sand + Sea + Sky*. Borealis BCD176. Borealis Records, 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; info@borealisrecords.com; www.borealisrecords.com

Penny Lang has an attractive, slightly husky, voice that works very well for relaxed, bluesy numbers such as "Careless Love" (one of the stand-outs on the album) and "High Muddy Waters". I also really enjoyed her version of the spiritual "Let Me Fly", and I wondered if she was familiar with the young Elvis Presley's similarly rocking interpretation of the song. Her early Dylan cover, "One Too many Mornings", is nicely done too, although I thought the accompaniment was a little over-fussy. Another highlight is Lang's careful but moving treatment of the Rosalie Sorrels song "My Last Go Round". The theme of aging and imminent death recurs on the album, which culminates with the title song, a beautiful evocation of a seascape, on which the flutes and flugelhorn conjure the sound of whales and waves. On other songs, such as "You Fool" and "Room to Move", Lang's vocal technique is akin to jazz singing, and she reminded me of Billie Holiday, which in my book is praise indeed. All in all, this CD, which is actually quite varied in its choice of material, projects a unity of vision and an honest simplicity that make it very appealing. I had the impression that Lang, who began her career in Montreal in the late sixties, regards this CD as her swansong. I hope it is not, and that there will be more to come.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Garnet Rogers. *Get a Witness LIVE*. Snow Goose SGS 1133CD. Valerie Enterprises, 905-692-4020.

I nearly didn't purchase this CD, despite attending an excellent concert by Garnet at the Heartwood Folk Club in Athabasca. I've already got a number of his other CDs and I noticed that most of the songs on this one already appear on earlier albums. It's not quite a *Greatest Hits* compilation because the performances are different, but there isn't much that's really new here. But one thing that intrigued me was seeing that Garnet had recorded a cover of one of brother Stan's

songs, I believe for the first time ever. So I was curious to see what he did with "Northwest Passage". It turns out to be a rousing end-of-the-night singalong, following an electric version of his own reflective song about Stan, "Night Drive". I actually prefer this version of the latter song to the one on the 1996 album titled *Night Drive*.

The Garnet Rogers you get on this CD is not always the contemplative, poetic songsmith and performer featured on many of his recordings. Rather this is often Garnet the folk-rocker, complete with a high-energy band that features Dave Matheson on keyboards, Eliot Michael on guitar, and drummer Cheryl Reid. It was recorded in Wakefield, Quebec, over three days in July 2007. It's also a more political album than we've come to expect from Garnet. "Junior", for example, is a hard-driving repudiation of George W. Bush and his policies, and the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan is addressed in the moving "Beyond This Wall". "Good and Faithful Servant" is a rocking gospel song performed with full band and a clutch of backing vocalists. And "Night Drive" combines a tapestry of electronic sounds with an insistent beat that echoes the sound of car wheels.

On the other hand, the quiet "Summer Lightning" is one of the most beautiful love-songs I know, "Empty Glass" is a sad and thoughtful tribute to a lonely country singer whose music has been forgotten by Nashville, and "Get a Witness" captures the joy of a perfect day when the sun shines and the natural world reveals all its splendor. So both sides of Garnet Rogers are showcased here, the selection of songs is well made, and the performances are exceptional. I am glad I changed my mind about buying it. Rogers fans will not need any encouragement to pick it up, but if you happen to be someone who hasn't explored Garnet's music yet, this would be an excellent place to start.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Bob Snider. *Caterwaul & Doggerel*. Borealis BCD178; ***Stealin' Home*.** Borealis BCD149. Borealis Records, 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; info@borealisrecords.com; www.borealisrecords.com

Released in 1995, *Caterwaul & Doggerel* was Bob Snider's debut CD (preceeded by two cassettes—remember those?). Snider provided the voice, guitar, songs and illustrations, and was joined by several prominent musicians, including Dave Bidini (electric guitar), Bob Wiseman (accordion & piano), Don Kerr (drums, cello, piano, acoustic bass, arranging, pro-

duction/engineering...), and numerous others. The recording took place at The Gas Station studio in Toronto in 1994. The current offering is a lightly revised ten-year-ish re-release by Snider's new label, Borealis.

The CD booklet includes the lyrics to every song, credits, line illustrations, and a few paragraphs of notes by Snider; these are specific to the re-release. One thing that he focuses upon is the definitions of "caterwaul" and "doggerel", terms that don't get much use these days. Doggerel is "the lowest form of poetry", something that is in no way reflected in the quality of Snider's lyrics—they're witty and poignant, the work of a master songwriter. So, what of the caterwaul ("noise, cacophony, off-key singing")?

In Bob Snider's unaccompanied numbers, namely, "Parkette", "If I Sang It Pretty" and "Darn Folksinger", the performances are fantastic. The tone and delivery match the lyrics perfectly, and the guitar accompaniment gives just the right amount of support. Little surprise that these are his most highly acclaimed pieces! However, I found the other songs on the album much harder to enjoy. The lyrics are still excellent, and Bob Snider's performances are good, but there's simply too much of everyone else, and this distracts from the core appeal of the songs. Still, if you can focus on the core songwriting and ignore the caterwaul (I found Wiseman's "look at me!" piano parts particularly troubling), there's some great material to be found.

The other Bob Snider album reviewed here is *Stealin' Home*, released in 2002. For those keeping track, that's four years before the re-release of *Caterwaul* (but seven years after the original), after *Words and Pictures* (1997) and *The Street Takes You In* (2001, USA release), but before his latest, *A Maze In Greys* (2007, not reviewed here). Now you're up to date. For *Stealin' Home*, the band was reduced to four supporting artists, David Baxter (guitar and vocals), Bob Wiseman (piano, accordion, melodica), Terry Wilkins (bass) and Michelle Josef (percussion), plus a few guest vocalists on the final track, "Enthusiasm". Arranging and production was by Baxter, and the recording took place at The Rogue Studio in Toronto.

As with *Caterwaul*, this album clearly shows why so many people cover songs by Bob Snider. The songs are little jewels, often showing vignettes of everyday life in a novel way. "Granny 1" and "Granny 2" follow Granny through the day, making bread, humming to herself, thinking about family, having a nap, and more. It's simple content, and something to which we can all relate.

On a slightly more unusual (and practical) plane is "How to Build a Fence". From digging a hole to beveling the edges, everything you need to know is here! The performance is as successful as the lyrics; if you've read this far, it will come as no surprise that the track features Snider's voice and guitar, and nothing else. The other tracks use larger arrangements, and the results are a mixed bag; some, like "This Is Just To Say" and "On My Own", use a few instruments to enhance the song, while others (such as "Tonight") tend towards caterwaul again. The final track, "Enthusiasm", takes the caterwaul to new heights intentionally, and this time the lyrics match the performance in over-the-topness.

Some people seek florid beauty in lyrics; others prefer subtlety and wit. For those in the latter category, Bob Snider is a master songwriter, and his lyrics are a treasure trove of material for performers (or aspiring songwriters). Now what I'm looking forward to is a truly solo Bob Snider album—here's hoping.

Paul Guise, Winnipeg, Manitoba

A Peak in Darien

Some of these will be reviewed in upcoming issues; some are outside our purview, but are included as a courtesy to the people who sent them to us, and to inform our readers.

Books (with CDs)

Vera Johnson. *That's What I Believe: The Recorded Songs of Vera Johnson*. British Columbia Folklore Society, 7345 Seabrook Rd., Central Saanich, B.C. V8M 1M9; info@folklore.bc.ca; www.folklore.bc.ca

Marian Rose. *Step Lively 2: Canadian Dance Favorites with CD recording of Canadian music*. Community Dance Project, Box 56078, First Avenue RPO, Vancouver, B.C. V5L 5E2; sales@communitydance.ca; www.communitydance.ca

Recordings

Jay & Tiinesha Begaye. *Night of the Northern Lights*. CR-6440. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; can_yon@canyonrecords.com; www.canyonrecords.com

Black Lodge. *Spo'Mo'Kin'Nan: Pow-Wow Songs Recorded Live at Swan Lake*. CR-6435. Canyon Records (address above)

Enoch Kent, with Pat Simmonds & Kelly Hood. *One More Round*. BCD190. Borealis Records, 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; www.borealisrecords.com; info@borealisrecords.com

Julie Kerr. *Deeper Still*. SR1009. Sadiebird Records, 3437 6th St. SW, Calgary, Alta. T2S 2M5; www.juliekerr.com

McClellan, Robedeaux and Stoner. *Blessings: Peyote Songs*. CR-6399. Canyon Records (address above)

Donnie Munro Live: *An Turas, Recorded Live at Celtic Connections 2008*. CDTRAX 323. Greentrax Recordings Ltd., Cockenzie Business Centre, Edinburgh Rd., Cockenzie, East Lothian EH32 0XL, Scotland; www.greentrax.com; greentrax@aol.com

Northern Cree. *Red Rock: Pow-Wow Songs Recorded Live at Muckleshoot*. CR-6434. Canyon Records (address above)

Jake Peters. *First Christmas: A Musical Journey*. Box 897, Didsbury, Alta. T0M 0W0; journey_3@shaw.ca

Jake Peters. *Journey*. JP01. (address above, different from packaging)

Gerald Primeaux, Sr. *Into the Future: Harmonized Peyote Songs of the Native American Church*. CR-6441. Canyon Records (address above)

Verdell Primeaux with Terry Hanks. *Stories Told: Harmonized Peyote Songs*. CR-6432. Canyon Records (address above)

Scouts. *III Warscout: Pow-Wow Songs Recorded Live at Stanford*. CR-6437. Canyon Records (address above)

Cheevers Toppah and Kevin Yazzie. *First Light: Harmonized Peyote Songs in Diné and Kiowa*. CR-6436. Canyon Records (address above)

Various. *North to Ontario*. COOT Music, c/o Gen. Del., Udora, Ont. L0C 1L0; tjmccreight@aol.com

Various. *North to Ontario, 2007*. (address above)

Various. *North to Ontario, 2008*. (address above)

David W. Watts. *Connections/Passages*. Canadian Specific Enterprises, Box 958, Lamont, Alta. T0B 2R0; www.canadianspecific.ca; info@canadianspecific.ca

Phyllis Wheaton. *In Harm's Way: Soldiers' Songs*. 2621 46th St. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2B 1L1; www.phylliswheaton.com; phylliswheaton@shaw.ca

Corrigendum

The reviews of Cowboy Celtic's *Saloon Sessions* at p. 32 of issue 41.4 and of Enter the Haggis' *Casualties of Retail* at p. 35 of issue 42.1 were both written by Julie LeBlanc; due to a computer glitch, her name disappeared somewhere between the galleys and proofs.

The image shows the cover of Penguin Eggs magazine. At the top, the title "penguin eggs" is written in a red, lowercase, serif font. Below the title, the subtitle "Canada's Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine" is printed in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The central focus is a large, black and white, stylized illustration of a penguin, designed to resemble a musical instrument, possibly a fiddle or a similar stringed instrument. Below the illustration, the text "Subscribe Now!" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Underneath this, there is a table of subscription rates for different regions and durations. At the bottom of the cover, the publisher's contact information is listed, including the address, telephone number, email address, and website.

Region	Duration	Price (CDN)
Canada	2 years	\$46.50
USA	2 years	\$62.00
UK & EU (air)	2 years	\$126.00
UK & EU (regular)	2 years	\$86.50
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UK & EU (air)	1 year	\$63.25
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