

Reviews

Books

Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat. *Dead Horse on the Tulameen: Settler Verse from BC's Similkameen Valley*. 2011. 293 pp. Canadian Folk Workshop, Box 2451, Princeton, B.C. V0X 1W0; jonandrika.org; princetontraditional.org

This is a welcome addition to B.C. popular culture. Following in the steps of P.J. Thomas, whose collection *Songs of the Pacific Northwest* [see *CFM*, vol. 41, no. 1 (Spring 2007), p. 1 et seq.] was enriched by delving into newspapers and other archives, Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat have sifted through such sources as the *Similkameen Star* and the *Coalmont Courier* to make a nice little anthology of “settler verse”. The fact is that an idea of the temper of the time, what was considered important as well as what was deemed amusing or worthy of satire, can be gleaned from popular poetry (or even the output of earnest poetasters) more than official history. Ballads have their origin in this urge to comment on a happening, and broadsides give a good indication of the taste and opinions of the folk in the street. Obviously one needs some guidance through a thicket of verse whose contemporary significance is long past. The compilers do this essential work in excellent style, giving an introduction to each section explaining what might be obscure and setting the poems in context. There are also separate notes for a good few of the poems and references.

The arrangement of the material is partly chronological (“The Coming of the Car”, Prohibition”, “The Second World War”), and partly thematic (“Sports”, “Mining”, “The Natural World”). The book concludes with a list of Sources, primary and secondary; Song, Poem, Movie Index, including items only mentioned; Index of Names; General Index. Many of the poems and songs appear on the CD *Now it's Called Princeton: Songs and Poems of B.C.'s Upper Similkameen* [reviewed in *CFM*, vol. 42, no. 3 (Fall 2008), p. 35], obtainable from the Princeton Traditional Music Society (princetonfestival@telus.net).

I must say that some of the information is treated naively, in that there are explanations of things that “every schoolboy knows”, but it’s probably better to err on the right side, with too much info rather than insufficient. There are many good things in the book, and each reader will as usual have his/her own preferences. I was myself taken with the last two chapters, “Just for Fun”, with “A Latin Romance” (Boy-

ibus kissibus sweetum girlorum, etc., which has interesting parallels) and (Chapter 17), “The Dead Horse Transformed”, an extended analytical note on the poem of the book’s title. I may as well also say that I regret the omission of even a reference to “The Banks of the Similkameen”, a grand little song in the Thomas collection that has interesting origins. (It is, however, included on the above-mentioned CD.)

All in all, an enjoyable book that gives fascinating insights into the lives and interests of a small B.C. community; it’s an educative sourcebook for folklife, and I thank Bartlett and Ruebsaat for their archaeology.

*Murray Shoolbraid, Salt Spring Island,
British Columbia*

Janice MacDonald. *Hang Down Your Head*. 2011. 364 pp. ISBN 978-0-88801-386-6. Ravenstone/Turnstone Press, Artspace Building, 206-100 Arthur Street, Winnipeg, Man. R3B 1H3; www.TurnstonePress.com

This book was a surprising Christmas present for me: a murder mystery set in Edmonton, with the folkwaysAlive! Centre and the Edmonton Folk Festival as its two main sites of action. Who would think to write a mystery set here? Janice MacDonald, former University of Alberta lecturer in English and avid folkie, writes compellingly about her hometown.

Hang Down Your Head is the third in the Randy Craig mystery series, a set of stories that feature a young academic sorting her way through contract positions while she helps her cop boyfriend solve mysteries around the city. This time, Craig has been hired by the not-so-fictional head of the folkwaysAlive! Centre and Collection, Dr. Fuller (quite obviously Regula Qureshi). Settling into a job whose multiple functions include devising content for the Collection’s website as it transitions from the Centre for Ethnomusicology to its new home in the Arts Building and assisting with the programming of the new recordings being made at the Smithsonian Folkways Stage at the Folk Festival, Craig suddenly finds that her job and her life are at risk. Angry heirs to a fortune that was left as a bequest to the Folkways Collection harass Craig and her colleagues, making no secret of their hatred of folk music.

Soon, the dead bodies start appearing, with references to folk songs left as clues. As Craig prepares for the upcoming festival alongside a handsome, mysterious Smithsonian employee, she tries to solve

the mystery herself. Unfortunately, this often leads her to a soon-to-be crime scene, and she's quickly and unwittingly at the top of the suspect list. Her strained relationship with a boyfriend who is trying to keep his fellow detectives off her trail, the stress of potentially losing her job, and the impending festival all culminate in an exciting climax that takes place at the festival site.

At times, protagonist Randy's thoughts can be tangential, but her point of view is understandable if you're sympathetic to her uncertain position as a U. of A. sessional lecturer or if you share her ideas about folk music. The mystery plot itself doesn't dominate the book, although it resolves in a satisfying way; instead, the reader is drawn in by the characters MacDonald creates and their interactions with the broader academic and folk communities of Edmonton. If you've spent any time in the Whyte Avenue/Saskatchewan River/U. of A. campus areas, you'll be delighted with MacDonald's vivid descriptions of local hangouts and the beauty of the river valley.

I was particularly taken with the book as a former volunteer in the Centre for Ethnomusicology, and as someone who lived in the building next to Craig's apartment. It's rare that a novel can so specifically evoke a time and place familiar to your own experience, so it was a great nostalgic treat to revisit the places I loved as a Masters student.

More importantly, MacDonald captures the spirit and idiosyncrasies of folk festival culture perfectly. Craig's anthropological commentary on the behaviours, dress and interactions between folk festival audience members will elicit a knowing nod from anyone who has been privy to that community. Furthermore, her balance between amused observation and enthusiastic participation will remind any ethnomusicologist of why we are drawn to our field. Overall, it's a fun read for anyone interested in Canadian folk music, Folkways Records, or the constant internal reflective analysis brought about by life in academia.

Gillian Turnbull, Toronto, Ontario

Recordings

David W. Settles. *Stretching the Goat: The Bodhrán*. 148 Franklin Dr. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2H 0T9; dsettles@shaw.ca; www.daveydrums.com

I was immediately intrigued by the idea of a recording dedicated to the bodhrán. While certainly unusual, there is value to the idea; in many musical traditions, the contributions of accompanists are too often overlooked. This Irish frame drum has become

ubiquitous at traditional Irish sessions around the world, and deserves attention as an instrument in and of itself. Countless albums feature an individual melody player with a revolving rhythm section, but this is an interesting role reversal. It is somewhat similar in concept to the Buddy MacMaster album *The Judique Flyer* (2000), where each track featured a different piano player or guitarist, showcasing the variety of accompaniment styles found in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. This CD, on the other hand, positions the accompanist as the front man in a sense, as the one musician who is the focus of the recording.

The album consists of thirteen tracks, and has a fair bit of variety. The majority of the tracks are instrumental sets led by various instruments (fiddle, guitar, flute, whistle and smallpipes). Five of the tracks are led by three stellar fiddlers (Scott Duncan, Barbara Rose Olorenshaw and Fiona Coll), and play a significant role in the tone of this album. There are several gorgeous songs sung by Katie McAllister and Allison Lynch as well; simply put, their performances are effortless, stunning, and definitely a highlight of the recording for me. In regard to repertoire and arrangements, things are relatively straight-ahead, featuring common Irish session tunes, in a trio format with guitar and bodhrán. Middle of the road, however, does not mean boring. There are also some interesting original compositions by Scott Duncan and Barbara Rose Olorenshaw. Most importantly, the musicianship is first-rate. Guitarist Jonathan Daniels showcases his skills with interesting, modern accompaniment ideas and lead playing reminiscent of guitar great Tony McManus. He is the glue that holds much of the CD together, and is integral to the overall sound of the recording.

David Settles' playing is solid and does not distract from the other musicians. While his playing is interesting in the instrumental sets, his ability is most noticeable on the songs, where he is able to showcase his subtle accompaniment at slow tempos. Sometimes, however, he is overwhelmed by the more aggressive musicians on the album, and takes on a more passive role. Unfortunately, these more intense moments reveal some minor engineering issues with the recording. While not so much of a problem as to be off-putting, the low end is a little muddy, with the guitar and bodhrán fighting for the same sonic space at some points.

The liner notes are particularly interesting, explaining that all of the drums on the album were made and by Settles. They give an effective introduction to the CD, and feature several photos of the drums themselves, some of them with unusual designs. For me, however, this introduction falls short; it raises more questions than it answers. While allud-

ing to the various types of his handmade drums, it is unclear which drums are used for which tracks. Moreover, there is no attempt to explain the reasoning behind his various designs, like which shapes are associated with unique tonal qualities or technical advantages. An extra page of elaboration on these instruments would have been a welcome addition.

Overall, I found this to be a very enjoyable recording. A veritable who's who of the Calgary Celtic scene, the musicians featured on this album come from prominent bands, both past and present. With a constantly-changing lineup, the recording is able to retain a sense of cohesion. Rather than sounding like a collection of unrelated performances, it sounds more like a number of sets performed by a very large band.

One thing is clear – David Settles loves both making and playing bodhráns and is passionate about traditional music. It's an interesting concept for an album, and his enthusiasm is evident from the very first notes.

Ian Hayes, St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador

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.

Recordings

Jon Brooks. *Delicate Cages*. BCD220. Borealis Records, 290 Shuter St., Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; www.borealisrecords.com; info@borealisrecords.com;

The Doll Sisters. *The Road*. Box 842, Rocky Mountain House, Alta. T4T 1A6; dollsisters@yahoo.ca; www.dollsisters.com; www.facebook.com/thedollsisters; www.twitter.com/thedollsisters

Louis Gonnig. *Pathway to Destiny: Songs of Healing and Contemplation*. CR-6497. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; canyon@canyonrecords.com; www.canyonrecords.com

Evie Ladin Band. EDR002. Evil Diane Records, P.O. Box 3408, Oakland, CA 94609, USA; info@evieladin.com; www.evieladin.com; Make It Bigger Mama Publicity, 216 Jersey St., San Francisco, CA 94114, USA; Stephanie@MakeItBiggerMama.com

Northern Cree. *Dancerz Groove: Cree Round Dance Songs*. CR-6503. Canyon Records (addresses above)

Wayne Silas, Jr. *True: Round Dance Songs*. CR-6486. Canyon Records (addresses above)

Le Vent du nord. *Tromper le temps*. BCD214. Borealis Records (addresses above); Le Vent du nord, C.P. 284, Calixa-Lavallée (Québec), JOL 1A0; lev-entdunord.com

Elena Yeung. *Dandelion*. 1036 Huscroft Rd., Creston, B.C. V0B 1G2; chickwhopicks@gmail.com; www.myspace.com/elenayeung

Elena Yeung. *The Gravedigger's Daughter*. EY2008CD (addresses above)



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