Reviews

Book

Alan R. Thrasher and Gloria N. Wong. *Yuegi: Chinese Musical Instruments in Performance*. 2011. 175 pp. ISBN 978-0-9877201-0-8. BCCMA (British Columbia Chinese Music Association), #303, 8495 Ontario St. (Kent Ave.), Vancouver, B.C. V5X 3E8; mail@bccma.net; www.bccma.net

When I was 10 years old, I was introduced to Benjamin Britten's *Young Guide to the Orchestra*, one of a handful of life-changing experiences that set me on the career path I now walk upon. Thanks to the sounds of those glorious music instruments in that thrilling orchestral setting, I entered the world of Western Art Music.

Now we have a book that can accompany people on the same journey into the world of Chinese traditional music, *Yuegi, Chinese Musical Instruments in Performance*.

The principal author, Alan Thrasher, and his equally knowledgeable associate, Gloria Wong, are perfectly suited for the job of assembling the book. Old-time CSTM members will recognize Alan's name from his time in the '90s and early zeroes when he was active in the association. Others will know him from his long and illustrious history of research in traditional Chinese music. In some ways, this book follows in the wake of his earlier book, *Chinese Music Instruments* (Oxford University Press, 2001), but it expands the latter by peppering the text with brief music instrument tutorials and highlights of his music research in Chinese music theory and performance practices. The tone of the writing is somewhat academic yet thoroughly engaging, and for those who are deep into the subject, the book has many tidbits to discover. For example, students of the Japanese shakuhachi , like me, will be particularly intrigued with the description of the earlier Chinese version, the xiao.

Within its pages is an engaging introduction to nine music instrument types, arranged according to common practice rather than esoteric organology. It is his description of "common practice" that really excites the imagination. Readers with eyes wide open will recognize the common attributes of Chinese musical common practice with the Canadian, and especially Maritime, "fires in the kitchen", where a small group of musicians gather together to blast their way through well-loved tunes between drinks of their favourite beverage. The description gives a whole new meaning to "tea-house". Readers may even recall the epic visit of the Chieftains to China in 1985, when they collaborated with Chinese musicians. They were thrilled to discover that their traditions shared the pentatonic scale (albeit in slightly different configuration), which allowed both traditions to engage in worry-free jam sessions.

As one proceeds from the Sheng to the Zheng, basic facts of history, construction and performance practices are introduced with a light touch. I suspect that the book would make an excellent primer for a Chinese music ensemble filled with beginners, such as one find in ethnomusicology departments and amateur Chinese orchestras like the group that sponsored the book.

The one small regret I have is the lack of alternate, everyday pronunciation of the words. For those in the know, the consonants used in the book conform to the slightly confusing Pinyin system of pronunciation; "zh" for example, as in "zheng", is pronounced "ts". Similar oddities are equally enigmatic, which I find irritating. I suppose I'm expressing the cranky opinion of those of us who are accustomed to the Wade-Giles system of pronunciation. On the plus side, readers of Chinese character(s) will find that every Chinese word has been scrupulously transliterated, I'm sure to the delight of sinophiles and Chinese language speakers. Chinese music scholars will be particularly impressed with the bibliographies, which include copious references to prime documents written in Chinese, no less. The rest of us revel in the multitude of photographs and images from historical artifacts. One last and important thought: you'd be very hard-pressed to find this information conveniently available on the internet. In your face, Google!

The final chapter is worthy of its own monograph. It is a discussion of Chinese musicians in Canada as they have adapted to local conditions and thrive. It is contrasted with the current situation in the P.R.C. (mainland China), where traditional music instruments occupy an uncomfortable ambivalence within the minds of the Chinese middle class (zhōngchǎn jiējí 中產階級) and their overwhelming devotion to Western Art Music.

There are several important reasons for owning this book. First, the Chinese presence in Canada has moved from a fear and ostracized minority community a century ago to a substantial, crucial and equal member of the modern Canadian multicultural landscape. It behooves every Canadian to explore the sounds of traditional Chinese music, in addition to the tried and true sounds of Western Art and Folk Music. Secondly, Canada will inevitably move out of multi-

culturalism and into the brave new world of transculturalism, where musics and musical instruments will be mixed and matched with ease by young musicians and composers. Those who don't keep up to date with the new panoply of musical sounds will be left behind. Thirdly, and a favourite of mine, is the limitless possibilities for triangulation between Western music, Eastern music, and young receptive minds in the classroom.

Now that I have whetted your appetite for this book, I would recommend having a look at two companion volumes that are equally inexpensive, breezy yet informative, and loaded with images: *Reading Chinese Music and Beyond*, edited by Joys Cheung and King Wong (2010), and *Chinese Music*, by Jin Jie (2010). Of course, if you want to "go deep" into the subject of Chinese music, the river of information runs deep and wide.

Norman Stanfield, Vancouver, British Columbia

Recordings

Barney Bentall. *Flesh & Bone*. TND572. True North Records, 14 - 3245 Harvester Rd., Burlington, Ont. L7N 3T7 (no postal address on packaging); felicia@truenorthrecords.com; www.truenorthrecords.com; www.barneybentall.com

Barney Bentall is a Toronto-born musician who has enjoyed much success throughout his long career. He might be familiar to readers for previous projects, such as *Barney Bentall and the Legendary Hearts* and *The High Bar Gang*. He has also worked with many artists like Shari Ulrich, Angela Harris, Wendy Bird, Colin Nairne, Eric Reed, and Rob Becker, who, among others, can be heard on his fourth solo studio album, *Flesh and Bone*.

This album showcases Barney Bentall's ability for great storytelling. He has written every track on the album, and plays guitar and harmonica, along with singing vocals. Each song has its own distinct sound and story to tell, from being in love, "St. Valentine's Day", to traditional-style folk ballads, "The Ballad of Johnny Hook",, and stories about living in Canada, "4 Went to War". *Flesh and Bone* is a mixture of many different song styles, including folk roots, blues-rock and pop, all the while maintaining his own traditional Celtic style throughout.

If you're a sucker for simple yet beautiful harmonies, this album is for you! Eight of the eleven tracks are sung with accompanying female harmonies; this adds an additional texture to the sound that is reminiscent of an organic, wholesome feel because of the sultry tones in the female voice. One of my favorite tracks on the album is "Outskirts of Buffalo", because it truly creates an established homegrown Canadian feel, with traditional instruments like the banjo, piano and fiddle playing together. The mixture of these instruments, and the predictable melody line that often repeats, displays elements of a traditional Celtic style. The piano provides a steady musical line of simple chords repeating over again. When the chorus is heard, the drums provide a bass that is reminiscent of being home, surrounded by your roots. The melody, combined with the story line, creates a feeling of growing up in Canada and feeling like there are endless possibilities in the world.

The album is truly recognizable because of its sound. This album has been stripped down to the simplest form of incorporating instruments and Barney's voice. This essentially creates truth to the album title, *Flesh and Bone*. On this album Barney Bentall presents each track by using ordinary and traditional instruments like the banjo, fiddle, harmonica and many more, in which we can hear the bare bones of each track. It is important to note that the album was recorded at The Warehouse Studio in Vancouver, which is the result of the organic and wholesome feel of the album. The traditional and natural sound is created not only from Barney's instrumentation but also from the audio mixing and production that the engineer has used.

I would definitely recommend this album to any Barney Bentall fan because of the true craftsmanship of each track through its simplistic story-like lyrics and traditional Canadian instrumentation that incorporates Celtic styles. For the same reasons I would also encourage anyone looking for new music to pick up this album as well.

Samantha Alonzi, Toronto, Ontario

Bill Bourne. *Songs from a Gypsy Caravan*. LINUS 270156; True North Records, 14 - 3245 Harvester Rd., Burlington, Ont. L7N 3T7; felicia@true northrecords.com; www.truenorthrecords.com; www.linus entertainment.com; www.billbourne.com

The solo singer-songwriter domain has been inhabited by many, though conquered by only a few. The obvious examples that come to mind are Neil Young, Bob Dylan, James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, and Donovan, all of whom also have ample experience playing with bands. The case of Bill Bourne is a similar one.

While Bill is no stranger to the electric 12-bar blues form vis-à-vis his Free Radio Band, the music found on 2012's *Songs From a Gypsy Caravan* is certainly reminiscent of a more traditional folk style. For this album, Bourne's sound is comprised solely of a single acoustic guitar, recorded acoustically

throughout most of the album. The two exceptions, "We Animal" and "Queen of Hearts", also feature a single acoustic guitar, albeit one that was recorded through an overdriven amplifier and played with a steel bottleneck slide.

Occasionally, songs are embellished with guitar overdubs ("Scent of the Bloom") or feature Bill accompanying himself with a simple wooden stompbox. "We Animal" features some of the most impressive and aggressive slide playing one can expect to hear from anyone, from any period, anywhere.

The album concludes with an unusual, but impressive, flamenco-style arrangement of the traditional "Ode to Darlin' Cory", featuring a side of Bourne's playing that is noticeably absent from the rest of the album. "Ode to Darlin' Cory" serves as a nice contrast from the predominantly folk and blues styles heard on the rest of the album, and perhaps best embodies the "Gypsy" theme the album title might suggest. Easily the most exciting aspect of *Songs From a Gypsy Caravan* is Bill's guitar playing, which can be quiet and subtle on one track ("Boulevard of Broken Dreams"), then loud and aggressive on the next ("Queen of Hearts"). Needless to say, fans of Bill Bourne's visceral guitar playing won't be disappointed.

At 42 minutes, *Songs From a Gypsy Caravan* is hardly a demanding listen, though it – at times – can seem like a chore. The album consists of eight new and original songs by Bill Bourne and two arrangements of traditional songs. The music is great for what it is. Mediocre seems like too harsh a criticism, per se, but the melodies, progressions, rhythms, and sounds are all too familiar. To Bourne's credit, however, his blend of folk, blues, introspective songwriting, and idiosyncratic guitar-playing is distinctly his. Whereas artists like Dylan and Young were able to balance their acoustic, "folky" material with more visceral and revolutionary sounds that helped shape the soundscape of popular music forever, Bill Bourne sounds like a man who just loves to play his songs, and his songs succeed at demanding that the listener take a closer listen.

Stephan Paterra, Woodbridge, Ontario

Rosaleen Gregory. *Serpent's Knee*. Lane End Records, 4907 54th St., Athabasca, Alta. T9S 1L2; davidg@athabascau.ca; www.rosaleengregory.ca

Whenever I am asked what kind of music I listen to or what my favourite albums are, my usual response is something along the lines of preferring field recordings of elderly men or women singing a cappella ballads in quiet voices that are slightly off key. I say this for effect, but it is nonetheless completely true. I love these albums because they sound genuine, and totally from the heart. I can feel bored with the "produced" and "marketable" sound of most recordings because, while it may be musically perfect, it often lacks realness. Don't get me wrong – as a musician, I cannot help but appreciate technical quality in other singers when I hear it. However, when I listen to a CD like Rosaleen's, I breathe a sigh of relief and relax, as if I have just come home after a long trip.

I have seen and heard her sing in person and have always delighted in her steadfast approach to ballad singing. A couple of years ago Rosaleen told me about her idea of archiving some of her ballad repertoire. I was thrilled, because I am a big believer in archiving ballads, keeping the tradition of ballad singing alive and making them available to others. So it was with great anticipation that I awaited the final result of her hard work. I know how difficult it is to duplicate the spirit of a live performance in the studio. Not only has Rosaleen accomplished that task quite well, she has made it seem effortless, as though she has simply sat down in one's living room and started singing.

I sense that it was a bit of a juggling act for Rosaleen to balance her traditional performance style (I have only ever heard her sing unaccompanied) with a product that might be better accepted by a public not acquainted with the ballad tradition. In her liner notes, she expresses hope that, through this and her other recording, *Sheath and Knife*, her love of ballads will be transferred to as many people as possible. This is a sentiment I recognize all too well. I am sure that, in making decisions regarding the arrangements and accompaniments of her ballads, Rosaleen had this hope very much in her thoughts. How does one remain true to the integrity of the ballad while attempting to make it appealing to a wider audience? It will remain to be seen whether this album will be as fully appreciated as it deserves to be by all music lovers, but it will certainly appeal to those of us already "converted".

The CD begins with a version of "Dives and Lazarus" (Child 56). Like all of the tracks on her album, I had heard other renditions of this ballad, but was immediately grabbed by the life infused in her particular arrangement. The blending of singing with a variety of instrumentations sets the stage for most of the tracks to follow (all but two of the twelve tracks are accompanied). John Leeder delightfully supports the ballads and Rosaleen's voice, alternating between octave mandolin and banjo. Other instruments – an Irish flute, hurdy-gurdy, whistles and pipes – are supplied by Derek Lofthouse.

Although I am generally fonder of a cappella ballad singing, the accompaniment for most of her material is well done and is careful not to detract from the ballad stories. The only real exception to this is "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow" (Child 214). I would have preferred hearing this ballad unaccompanied, as she sings it somewhat arrhythmically, making the mandolin and intermittent border pipes sound at times awkward and distracting. Perhaps she felt the length of the ballad would make an a cappella version sound too unvaried. However, I think the story of this ballad is quite enough to engage the listener. And when, in comparison, you hear her unadorned rendition of "The Daemon Lover" (Child 243), you know that some ballads simply do not need anything more than the voice.

I think my favourite track is "Queen Elinor's Confession" (Child 156). I would never have imagined a banjo accompaniment for this ballad, but wow – it works! Unlike in "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow", the pattern of periodic instrumental insertions, this time using the hurdy-gurdy, enhances rather than detracts from the spirit in this jaunty trickster tale. It certainly is an interesting combination of sounds!

Rosaleen's love of each of these ballad gems clearly comes through in her voice. I know from experience how difficult it is to choose what will make it onto a CD (or into a performance), but I believe she has come up with a well-rounded variety of her favourites. She has done the ballads justice, and I highly recommend that this CD be included in every ballad lover's collection. And if you are relatively unfamiliar with this genre of folk music, give this a listen. You may find that the power of the traditional ballad will grow on you.

Moira Cameron, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Rosaleen Gregory. *Sheath and Knife*. (addresses above)

It is noticeable that when singers who are new to folk discover the "Child Ballads", they are knocked sideways by the grand themes, the mysterious characters, and the romantic panoply of lords, ladies, outlaws and fairies, and for a while they can become obsessed with them. Rosleen Gregory is no newcomer to the scene, and will be more than familiar to readers of this magazine, but her two new CDs demonstrate that the ballads' fascination does not fade after 50 years' familiarity. It is clear that this is a project which has been dear to her heart for a long time.

Sheaf and Knife presents 12 ballads, including "The Gypsy Laddie" and the "Trumpeter of Fyvie", and lesser-known items like "The Burning of Auchindoon", although one of them, "The Lowlands of Holland", is only distantly related to anything in Child.

Roseleen sings them straight, with no frills or affectation, and the accompaniments include her own guitar, plus otave mandolin, banjo, hurdy-gurdy, flute, whistles, Border pipes and Northumbrian smallpipes. The musicians rarely play ensemble, and they have resisted the temptation to which some modern bands succumb, who thrash away at a tune as if to bludgeon it to death. Indeed, the instrumentation is simple to the point of being sparse, and the arrangements have a curiously old-fashioned sound. This is not a criticism; the simplicity allows the song to speak for itself and the singer's voice to carry the story and set the mood, and this is clearly a deliberate decision. Rosaleen's diction is also very clear, and there is never any difficulty following the words.

But there is a small personal quibble which I have with ballad singing in general, which is relevant here, and which concerns what performers choose to do with accent and pronunciation. Many of the songs are of Scottish origin, but if the singer is not Scottish, there is a potential problem. The worst crime of all is a full-blown fake accent, which Roseleen does not attempt, thank heaven, but it can also grate when certain words are left in for effect – people *gang* places, sometimes *hame*, have *dochters,* and blood trickles *doon*, while in the rest of the song the pronunciation is how the singer speaks. In the old days, an English singer learning a Scottish song would have naturally anglicized it, and vice versa, and I suggest that that is still the best way.

Compilers of Child-based projects often feel beholden to the great man's memory, and provide copious scholarly notes, but again Gregory takes a simpler route. The CD notes comment briefly on the songs' plot lines, but do not give information as to sources or influences, and the website gives the words of the songs, but little more.

If you like your Child ballads sung ably but simply, this is a CD for you.

Steve Roud, Maresfield, East Sussex

Cara Luft. *Darlingford*. BCTCD349. Blue Case Tunes, Box 68045, R.P.O. Osborne Village, Winnipeg, Man. R3L 2V9; cara@caraluft.com; www.caraluft.com

Songwriter and chanteuse Cara Luft celebrates the release of her Juno-award winning third solo album, *Darlingford.* Already well established and critically acclaimed in the Canadian music scene, Luft's newest collection of songs stays comfortably in the domain that earned her these accolades.

The 13 tracks are cushioned in a flawless bed of production, featuring pedal steel guitar, mandolin, upright bass, piano, cello and banjo. The light aesthetic is anchored by the use of foot stomps, handclaps and drums, and includes acoustic and electric guitars.

The track list consists of two traditionals (arranged by Luft), three solo-penned, six co-writes and two songs from writers Mike Scott and Derroll Adams. From a songwriting standpoint, Luft works best in collaboration with other writers. An example of this is the last song on the album, "Charged", which was recorded live and co-written with Lewis Melville (Rheostatics). This humourous singalong song, about an incident that occurred at the U.S. border, is the brightest, most honest moment on *Darlingford.* It is evidence that Luft's artistry translates best in the live performance arena, as she jumps right out of the speakers. Luft is playful with the audience, and demonstrates a command of both her material and the room.

The cover and liner note design are fittingly rustic, charming and art-intricate. Only three photos of Luft are scattered amidst the 22-page liner notes, otherwise filled with lyrics, thank-yous and inspirational quotes from social psychologist H.A. Overstreet, Swiss naturalist Konrad von Gesner and English writer G.K. Chesterton. Fans of Cara Luft can rest assured that the music they already know and love is what they will find on her newest album, *Darlingford,* available on iTunes at https://itunes.apple.com/ca/artist/cara-luft/id64819249.

Linda M. Moroziuk, Toronto, Ontario

Erynn Marshall. *Calico*. M04EM. Merriweather Records, 109 Crawford Rose Dr., Aurora, Ont. L4G 4S1; arnie@merriweather.ca; www.merriweather.ca; hickoryjack@sprint.ca; www.hickoryjack.com

Fiddler Erynn Marshall's first solo album draws heavily on the research she completed as a graduate student in the ethnomusicology programme at York University, Toronto. Although originally from the west coast of Canada, Marshall learned to play and sing in the southern American old-time style during her field trips to the South. She cites her biggest influences as fiddlers Melvin Wine, Lester McCumbers, Leland Hall, Art Stamper, Clyde Davenport, and J.P. Fraley, and singers Phyllis Marks, Rita Emerson and Linda McCumbers. While many of the tunes included on this album were learned directly from the tradition-bearers listed here, others were learned via archival recordings. For this reason, Marshall's album can be considered 'traditionalist', for it works, largely, to recreate and preserve (or pass on) the fiddling and singing style performed by the older generation of southern American folk musicians (in particular, musicians from West Virginia). *Calico* garnered Marshall some recognition, winning a Porcupine award (Gem of Canada: Album of the Year), and being nominated in the Best World category at the TIMAs. Marshall has since continued her work promoting the southern old-time style as a performer and instructor, and is in the process of releasing an instructional DVD featuring eight tunes from Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia.

The liner notes included with *Calico* are beautifully laid out, drawing on a sense of nostalgia via the inclusion of sepia-toned photos of Marshall's great-grandparents, a black-and-white cover photo, taken in 1900, of twin girls playing fiddles, and a black-and-white image from 1930 of Marshall's great-uncle's band, The 100F Installation Orchestra. Appealing to the organologist in listeners, Marshall also includes images of three of the banjos, the banjo-ukulele, and the two violins used in the recording, as well as a list of all of the instruments used in the making of this album (noting when they were made and who made them, when possible). This attention to detail is extended into the tracing of tune origins. Marshall includes a brief paragraph about each track, letting listeners know how she learned the tune, what attracted her to the tune, and any other information of relevance or possible interest to the listener. Marshall's attention to detail points to a preservationist approach, insomuch as it highlights the authenticity of certain tunes (via her emphasis on how she learned the tune); yet her inclusion of two original compositions and willingness to change some tunes (e.g., altering the original tuning and instrumentation, or adapting tunes from other traditions) indicates that this album is rooted in the American old-time tradition without being limited by the tradition.

Musically, Marshall has created an album that is both unified and varied, with tracks featuring fiddle, banjo, and guitar; tracks with beautiful vocal harmonies (provided by Marshall and Doug Paisley); and tracks with harmonica, among other instrumental combinations. This carefully produced album balances the melodic and accompanying instruments, with the latter providing interest without overpowering the fiddle or voices. Particularly compelling is the tune "Boat's Up the River", which features Marshall and Paisley as vocalists, and Marshall playing a fiddle line that flows seamlessly from soloing to accompanying. Her own composition "New Coat of Paint" has a contemporary edge with addition of a bowed bass. The tuning she has chosen for this tune (DDAD) creates a fantastic resonance, assisted by her impeccable tuning. Marshall's careful

use of ornaments (in particular subtle slides), her relaxed yet strong and steady pulse, and her "clean" execution points to her skill as a fiddler. If I have one criticism, it is that the album sometimes feels too carefully produced, an effect that diminishes the excitement created when an album stretches musicians to their limits, beyond their comfort zones. Yet *Calico* remains an excellent album for newcomers to the American old-time tradition, and for the long-time fan. At just over one hour, the album has plenty of material, both old and new, to keep listeners' attention from start to finish.

Monique Giroux, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Five Stan Rogers Re-releases from Borealis

Borealis Records has recently released remastered versions of Stan Rogers' main studio recordings; they are reviewed by five writers below. Also available from Borealis are ***The Very Best of Stan Rogers*** (reviewed in *CFM*, 45.2, p. 38), ***Home in Halifax*** (reviewed 28.1, p. 30), ***From Coffee House to Concert Hall*** (a collection of songs not released on Stan's studio albums, including studio outtakes and live performances), ***Poetic Justice*** (two radio plays broadcast on CBC radio) and ***A Matter of Heart*** (a stage play based on Stan's songs). Another stage play, ***Rise Again: The Songs of Stan Rogers***, was reviewed 28.1, p. 18. Another of Stan's recordings, ***For the Family*** (consisting of traditional songs and songs by other writers, including family members) was reviewed 18.2, p. 44, was re-released on CD in 1996 on the Gadfly label, and is available from various sources. A definitive biography of Stan Rogers has yet to be written; a somewhat hagiographic book by Chris Gudgeon, ***An Unfinished Conversation: The Life and Music of Stan Rogers*****,** since re-released as ***Stan Rogers: Northwest Passage***, was reviewed 28.1, p. 26**.**

Other writings by and about Stan Rogers can be found by searching the Cumulative Table of Contents on the Society's website (http://www.yorku.ca/cstm/publications.htm); some of these can be accessed via the "full text articles" feature, others may be ordered as back issues. [John Leeder]

Stan Rogers. ***Fogarty's Cove*****.** BCD213. Borealis Records, 290 Shuter St., Toronto, Ont. M5A 1W7; info@borealisrecords.com; www.borealisrecords.com; Linus Entertainment/True North Records, Unit 14, 3245 Harvester Rd., Burlington, Ont. L7N 3T7; truenorthrecords.com; linusentertainment.com

I hope I can be forgiven a bit of a personal dimension to this review, but then I think that for many people, Stan Rogers' music is a personal thing. Raised in what you might call a "folk household", I absorbed his music by a process of osmosis, and certainly heard others playing his music many times before I ever sat down and listened to one of his albums from beginning to end. Later in life, I realized that plenty of Canadians feel a strong connection with Rogers. One revelation moment, which I can date precisely to May 1997, when I was 15, took place at the *Star Trek* fan club I attended in my teens. An invocation of the historical Northwest Passage in an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager* ("Scorpion", if anyone is curious) led to an impromptu singalong in our discussion that left me reeling with a revelation: normal (i.e., non-folkie – I am aware that "normal" is a strange descriptor for members of a *Star Trek* fan club) people know who Stan Rogers was? Apparently, they do.

His music is well enough known, one might say institutionalized enough, that "Northwest Passage" can be used prominently on the television show *Due South* and be cited in speeches by both the Prime Minister and the Governor General. And yet, people feel personally connected to his music: the best example I encountered is when the father of an ex-girlfriend opined that Rogers was a greater songwriter than Gordon Lightfoot, and framed this as an insider-ish, minority opinion. To me, the knowledge that Rogers held me as an infant (I being the infant, not Rogers!) is little more than a point of trivia, but others tend to think of it as a major event.

His widespread popularity in Canada contrasts with the pronounced regionalism of much of his music, perhaps on his first album, *Fogarty's Cove*, most of all. We are told almost from the first lines of the first track, "Watching the Apples Grow", that Ontario is an undesirable place to live: "Your scummy lakes and city of Toronto don't do a damn thing for me/I'd rather live by the sea" (a tongue-in-cheek citation of an Ontario tourist slogan of the time, "Is there any place you'd rather be?"). One wonders about the fact that Rogers was in fact born and raised in Ontario, though often spent summers with relatives in Nova Scotia; one wonders if the romantic view of the Maritimes on display reflects more the position of semi-outsider locating authenticity in an older culture and an ancestral home. But no matter: the album rings with the Maritimes, with the sea and shore, and the people. It is a record of economic depression and the changing fishing industry. Some of the songs are melancholy, like "The Rawdon Hills" and "Make and Break Harbour", if not outright dour and sad, like "Fisherman's Wharf", but there is a real anger beneath it all. "Giant" is among Rogers' songs explor-

ing the Celtic roots of Maritime culture, but with a nationalist edge: " 'Twas the same ancient fever in the Isles of the Blest/What our fathers brought with them when they went West/It's the blood of the Druids that never will rest/The giant will rise with the moon." Do these mythological evocations of the Irish hero Fionn mac Cumhaill dream of a time when he will emerge from his cave to deliver Nova Scotia from its economic oppressors?

One of Rogers' signature songs, "Barrett's Privateers", is an example of his interest in Canada's history and fading musical traditions (here, the sea shanty), which mixes accurate details of 18th-Century privateering with plenty of poetic licence (notably mentioning Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia, in a narrative that takes place decades before it was founded). Another of Rogers' best-loved songs, "Twenty Five Years From Now", is such a clear-eyed treatment of mature love that it seems a wonder that it was written by a man in his mid-20s. As a matter of fact, to listen to *Fogarty's Cove*, it seems almost inconceivable that this is a man just shy of his 27th birthday. Did Stan Rogers ever sound young? His voice feels lived-in, his material knowing and world-weary. It helps his songs sound timeless.

Stan Rogers was an uncommon mix of skilled melodist, lyricist and vocalist (even underrated on that count; the slow and weighty songs glow with rich baritone, and the elocution lesson that is "The Wreck of the *Athens Queen*" would be a challenge for many singers, but feels effortless). His writing has armed the Canadian folk scene with a slate of great songs, and it is no mere quirk that I internalized many of his songs through other people's performances. But the originals are well worth revisiting. These remastered reissues sound clear and beautiful, and are long overdue.

Murray Leeder, Ottawa, Ontario

Stan Rogers. ***Turnaround***. BCD215. Borealis Records (addresses above)

As I sit here typing, I'm listening to *Turnaround* on my home stereo, with the volume perhaps louder than my wife would like. Until now I had heard the re-released version only on my car stereo and on the computer. The experience is superb – it sounds like the album was recorded yesterday, using all the latest equipment and techniques.

Even if you have *Turnaround* on LP or an original CD, it's well worth buying the 2012 re-release from Borealis. Each song has been meticulously re-mastered. Stan Rogers was capable of incredible dynamic range, and this work has captured his voice exceptionally well. Paul Mills, who produced and performed on the original recordings (as Curly Boy Stubbs), was brought in to oversee this project, ensuring that the material remained true to the source.

The CD case includes two fold-outs, allowing more space for liner notes. Inside the front cover is an introduction by writer Rick Salutin, and inside the back cover are insightful notes by Stan's wife, Ariel Rogers, and producer Paul Mills. There's also a beautifully-designed insert, with the original introduction by Stan and the song lyrics.

Many fans of Stan Rogers wonder what he might have achieved had he been given a longer life. *Turnaround* shows us several possible directions. This album was a project that allowed him to rove further afield than he'd gone with *Fogarty's Cove*. He continued to maintain his connection to his East Coast roots, but as a restless soul, Stan clearly felt the need to explore.

Several pieces stand out as examples of Stan experimenting with new directions. "So Blue" has a sound more urban than usual for him, in a nod to Joni Mitchell. A ride on a train in the rain, written on a train. He's in love, he's "known it a while...". "Front Runner" has a very country sound, with a guitar part that would be at home on a 1980s Ian Tyson song, while "Try Like The Devil" has a bluesy barroom sound. It seems autobiographical – Stan's got a "smell of success..." but he's trying to ignore the "demons on my shoulders..." that are pushing him to conform.

Other songs would have been quite at home on *Fogarty's Cove*. "Dark Eyed Molly" is a tender tale of a young man's longing. It was written by Archie Fisher, who later toured and recorded with Stan's brother Garnet. "Second Effort" is a tale of failure and how "it's harder to try again than it was to begin", perhaps including some autobiographical thoughts as Stan attempted to recreate the success of *Fogarty's Cove* while following his passion in new directions. **"**Bluenose" is a lament for (and yet also a celebration of) the great Grand Banks schooner, and is a powerful performance highlighting Stan's dynamic and evocative vocals, with Garnet's haunting violin. "The Jeannie C" is the wrenching tale of the loss of a fishing boat "named for my mother".

Two early pieces were brought out of the vaults for this album. "Song Of The Candle" was written in 1972. Another autobiographical song, about the struggles of writing. "One more simple song has swiftly taken wing, and I'm left alone...". And "Turnaround", written before Stan's 20th birthday, is about a friend who left for "the open road, the bitter song, the heavy load...".

If I were to choose a favorite, "Oh No, Not I" stands out for me. It's a traditional piece done in a style Stan himself called "punk folk". A tale in the

Child ballad mode, but with a sound that might be heard on stage today with a group such as The Navigators or Oysterband. Stan had been absorbing new ideas from groups such as Steeleye Span, and took some flak from traditionalists for his interpretation.

The first time I heard Stan Rogers was while driving out to my father's farm in the summer of 1983. I recall that the song was "Field Behind The Plow", and that I was mesmerized. And I also recall my feeling of loss when the DJ announced that Stan had died the day before. I felt as though something precious had been handed to me, and then stolen away.

The re-release of Stan Rogers' albums by Borealis Records won't bring back that wonderful talent, but it lets a new generation hear "...99% of what I heard in my head when I wrote the songs", and that's a very good thing.

Joel A. Weder, Calgary, Alberta

Stan Rogers. ***Between the Breaks … Live!*****.** BCD216. Borealis Records (addresses above)

I own original vinyl copies of all of Stan Rogers' first five albums. I'm not sure where they all are, but each one was my favorite at one time or another. However, *Between the Breaks ... Live!* is the Stan Rogers that I know the best. I'm old… and lucky enough to remember how amazing he was in concert. Whether in a tiny coffee house like Smale's Pace in London (where I first saw him in 1974) or at the Rebecca Cohen in Halifax (the last time I saw him), I never left a concert without being moved and awed by his presence and precision as a performer.

As the story goes, Stan and the band worked their butts off getting ready to record *Between the Breaks*, and every song on it is perfect. There is a great deal of care and attention put into every arrangement, from a simple a cappella song like "White Collar Holler" to the moving layers of a song like "Harris and the Mare". What I like in particular about *Between the Breaks* is the choice of material, as it highlights Stan Rogers' versatility as a performer. I can still get riveted to the emotions in songs like "First Christmas", and just try to keep quiet during the chorus of "Barrett's Privateers"! He had an incredible capacity and commitment to engage his audience, and that capacity is captured in all its strength on this album.

An obvious element of this review has to address the quality of this reissue. This, along with five others of Stan Rogers' albums, have been remastered and rereleased. This new CD is worth buying for a number of reasons. If you have a copy of the album, tape or earlier CD issue, I think you should take an opportunity to compare the sound. I have listened to these songs on all the former formats, and I have to say that I am very impressed with the sound quality on this CD. How do they do it, I ask -- make it sound so crisp, with amazing stereo effects and incredible clarity in every instrument and voice, and still retain the live, "almost there" quality? Put this on a high-end stereo system, turn it up to your own preferred volume, and you will have no choice but to pay attention. Do this for the full 43 minutes and 22 seconds as many times as you want. It will be time well spent, and will likely add years to your life.

Blaine Hrabi, Calgary, Alberta

Stan Rogers. ***Northwest Passage*****.** BCD217. Borealis Records (addresses above)

This is an iconic Canadian album. The title track, "Northwest Passage", is the most renowned, but in my opinion, every song on this album is a winner. Sometimes I find reading the lyric sheets to songs a disappointment, as the poetry will seem weak or vague when stripped of its music. This is not the case here. These moving and evocative songs have something to say, or a story to tell, and they do it brilliantly. There are songs to make you smile, songs to make you cry, and songs to make you sing along, for they are excellent music too. Each track has a distinctive tune and arrangement that suits the content. It really is a perfect CD.

In *Northwest Passage* Rogers speaks with his own voice, invoking the sweep of Canadian history. Seven of the remaining nine tracks are ballads of individual blue-collar Canadians – farmers, ranchers, oil rig workers displaced from the East, a Yukon renegade – all based on people Rogers met and conversations he had while travelling the north and west of Canada. Appropriately for the western motif, there is a countryish flavour to several of the songs. The last track brings the theme back to Rogers' own experiences as a musician, losing friends and colleagues to sunnier pastures in the States. All except "Northwest Passage" are performed accompanied by various combinations of an eight-musician band which includes Garnet Rogers on violin.

This is a remastered reissue of the 1981 album. Is there a noticable difference compared with the original record to CD issue? Yes. The remastering has brightened the sound, and made Stan Rogers' voice more prominent in comparison to the background vocals. However, only the most hardcore of Rogers fans really need to purchase this if they already have the older version. If you don't, this is a classic piece of Canadiana, and the price from Borealis is reasonable at $15. Nevertheless, I would have preferred that they had taken the opportunity to do their Stan Rogers reissue project two albums to a CD.

The liner notes include a booklet of lyrics, a review by Canadian writer Rick Salutin, and a few paragraphs of reminiscences from Ariel Rogers (Stan's wife) and Paul Mills (producer).

Fiona Gregory, Edmonton, Alberta

Stan Rogers. *From Fresh Water.* BCD219. Borealis Records (addresses above)

The material for this collection of songs in *From Fresh Water* ("*FFW*" for short) was recorded shortly before the untimely passing of Stan Rogers in the 1983 Air Canada flight 797 fire. The final mixing and mastering of the album began only a couple of weeks after that tragedy, and the album was released more than a year after that. Unknown to anyone at the time was that many of the songs of *FFW* would endure in fond memories, influence and remain in active repertoires of more than a generation of performing artists, and receive widespread radio play for decades. This is not even mentioning the thousands he has influenced. For any songwriter to achieve that for more than two or three songs in a lifetime is often a great legacy and achievement. But to have several such songs from only one CD is more than remarkable. This is a testament not only to the songwriting but also to Stan's captivating baritone singing and overall performance delivery, the musicianship of Stan and others, the production, and the artistry that guided the project from birth to fruition. So, while he didn't do this all alone, *FFW* is essentially Stan Rogers at his best from start to finish.

Stan Rogers had a long term plan of writing and singing about Canada from coast to coast. He had realized that he couldn't do this on just one album so set out to do this over the course of five album recordings. *Fogarty's Cove* dealt with the Maritimes region and *Northwest Passage* mainly covered parts of Western Canada. *FFW* was the third in that series, and it focused mainly on his home province of Ontario, and in particular, the Great Lakes regions figure most prominently in the song settings. Many pieces are in the story-song genre; the most memorable and effective ones are spoken in character and in the first person, something Stan was perfecting to a high degree. It seems that in many ways the stories were metaphors for Stan's life right to the end. No doubt Stan, like many songwriters, was gifted (or cursed) with awareness that metaphors were pursuing him relentlessly.

Two of the historical songs are aptly appropriate for now, 2013, as we are still in the period of the 200th anniversary of the war of 1812-14 between Britain (Canada) and the U.S.A. "The Nancy" is about a wartime skirmish on the Great Lakes, from the perspective of a doggedly determined and defiant schooner captain who triumphs in the day. "MacDonnell on The Heights" tells a story of a lesser-known Major John MacDonnell, who, serving under the much more famous General Isaac Brock, is engaged in the Battle of Queenston Heights in October of 1812. Brock is killed in a losing battle, and so Major MacDonnell leads a nearly successful counterattack. He too dies, is buried beside Brock, and is all but forgotten in history, unlike his grave-mate. In Stan's words, "So you know what it is to scale The Heights and fall just short of fame, And have not one in ten thousand know your name." Ironically, Stan too would scale the Heights and fall far short of his likely potential, but unlike MacDonnell, at least a few million people still remember his legacy, or rediscover him daily, and will continue to do so for a long time yet to come.

Another song about falling short of fame is "Flying", a song that could have appeared on any of the Stan Rogers' Canada-themed albums, since it is not directly connected to Ontario or the Great Lakes, except perhaps in the story that inspired the song. On the surface it's about hockey, "Canada's national game" and the annual struggle of thousands of prospective young players to gain access to the high ranks in the NHL (a league dominated by American teams). But the quest can be applied to any number of occupations and endeavors where you're "Dreaming of that miracle play, And going up flying, going home dying". So this song's appeal is fairly universal, but is especially meaningful to anyone in Canada who knows someone who had a brush with fame in the NHL or in another comparable high-level sport. There are many in Canada and elsewhere who fall into that category alone.

FFW opens with "White Squall", a powerful and tragical story-song from the perspective of an old-time seasoned Great Lakes seaman who cautions all his young sea-mates, "Don't take the Lakes for granted, They'll go from calm to a hundred knots, so fast they seem enchanted". One of the magical things about this song, and many other Stan Rogers songs, is that, although "White Squall" is a song about a Great Lakes maritime tragedy, it is also a story with many parallel life or workplace situations. Any dangerous occupation will likely have an older and experienced journeyman-status worker who will try to pass on the awareness that danger is ever-present and death or permanent injury is often only a heartbeat away. This is something that tradespeople, factory workers, police and military personnel and many others know all too well. In this way, Stan probably speaks to more people than he ever imagined.

"Man with the Blue Dolphin" tells a true story about a man who expends most of his life's resources and energy to salvage the *Blue Dolphin*, a sunken wooden sailing ship that was a sister to the famous *Bluenose*. This type of story was a recurring theme in Stan Rogers' writing, the most famous example being "The Mary Ellen Carter" from the albums *Between the Breaks* and *Home in Halifax*. The characters in these songs, like Stan, put everything they have into what they believe in. They don't always succeed in their mission but, dammit, at least they tried.

Having chosen a musician's life at an early age, it seems that Stan Rogers never really had a regular "real day job", but he certainly came from long lines of hard-labouring working-class people on paternal and maternal sides of his family. These roots seem to have instilled in him some very working-class values. This is most evident in songs such as "Tiny Fish For Japan", "Lock-Keeper" and "The Last Watch".

The first of the three, "Tiny Fish For Japan", is from the perspective of inland fisheries workers who note the many injustices of the industry: "What kind of fisherman can't eat his catch, Or call what he's taken his own?".

"Lock-Keeper" is about a worker on the locks of the St. Lawrence Seaway who every day encounters sailors who have traveled the world round, had exotic adventures and have amazing stories to tell, all of which is exciting and enticing. And yet the lock-keeper, in love with his wife and knowing the comfort and security of home life, replies, "And I wouldn't trade your whole life for one hour of home". In a way, perhaps this was Stan talking about his own life of "on the road", pursuing a dream of fame and adventure but at the same time wishing he could just be at home with his family much of the time.

In "The Last Watch" the speaker is a nearly retired night-watchman assigned to guard an old lake steamer that is about to be disposed of, just like the night-watchman himself. This is a sad statement on how our society sometimes treats its older workers, who are considered to be all used up, subsequently to be stripped of their dignity and discarded like scrap metal. But the reality is that some people are ready to retire well before age 60 and others are energetic, able and willing, and still going strong at 80. At the time this song was written in the early '80s, retirement in Canada was mostly mandatory at age 65. Fortunately, those laws have since been changed. Maybe this song helped to change that.

The two songs that perhaps depart from the main Ontario and Great Lakes theme of *FFW* are "Half a Heart" and "The House of Orange", although there are tentative links to Ontario in both. The first, "Half a Heart", is kind of a sociological look at the personal politics of a bar or lounge environment, effectively an ongoing scene of predation and seduction. Unlike most of the rest of the body of Stan Rogers' material, this one is easily forgettable and uncompelling.

The second, "The House of Orange", is the one (and maybe the only) overtly political song that Stan wrote and recorded. It's not clear whether he is talking from his own experience and viewpoints or if he is speaking in character (or both). The song is a condemnation of the violence resulting from the "troubles" in Ireland at the time the song was written, the early '80s. This ebb and flow in relations between England (Britain) and Ireland has been going on for centuries, and the early 1980s was one of its peaks of tensions, with unspeakable violence being perpetrated by both sides. The inspiration came from the severe injury of Stan's friend as a result of one of those bombs in London, England. While the song-craft and delivery are still very strong, his mastery of the political song genre was not perfected to the degree it might have had he lived longer.

The overall production of *FFW* is much more lush and full than the other Stan Rogers album recordings. This was a fully intentional directional choice to create a bigger sound, often emphasizing the dramatic presentation of the story material. There was a desire to expand (but not lose) his fan base at the time beyond just the folk clubs and festivals that had embraced him so heartily. Making the songs more radio-friendly was greatly assisted with the help of CBC Toronto, with no small thanks to Stan's producer and good friend, Paul Mills. The addition of an 18-string orchestra with two French horns, an oboe and conductor Don Gillis all took things up a notch or two in that direction as well.

The other musicians and singers on board are all first-rate and carefully chosen. The two regular sidemen, Garnet Rogers (fiddle, electric guitar, 12-string guitar and flute) and Jim Morison (electric bass) provide a solid foundation, tasteful and often understated except when required to be otherwise. Claude Desjardins provides percussion, drums and drum synthesizer; Ray Parker is on keyboards (acoustic and electric pianos and synthesizer); Curly Boy Stubbs (a.k.a. Paul Mills) provides some leads on six- and twelve-string guitars as well as some percussion; Grit Laskin plays long-necked mandolin, Northumbrian smallpipes and pennywhistle (he's also the luthier who hand-built Stan's guitars); Holly Arntzen and David Dobbs fill in some background vocals.

The result of all this is a landmark recording. It likely would have been so even if Stan had not been taken so early in his breaking career. As heartbreaking as it was to lose such an artist, a singer, a songwriter, a husband, a father, and a proud Cana-

dian, it would have been a much greater loss had this album not come to fruition. The current 2012 CD is nicely presented, with lots of liner notes (some original, some updated) and there's an insert booklet with more notes and lyrics. You could probably just download the songs, but holding this piece of Canadian history in your hands and reading the words and admiring the graphic layout is a much better experience. You'd actually be holding something significant and of lasting value.

Norm Walker, Regina, Saskatchewan