

## Reviews

### Recordings

**David Francey. *The First Set: Live from Folk Alley*.** LAKR 1005. Laker Music, 2998 Elphin Maberly Rd., RR#1, McDonald's Corners, Ont. K0G 1M0; [laker@davidfrancey.com](mailto:laker@davidfrancey.com); [www.davidfrancey.com](http://www.davidfrancey.com); Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; [fdi@festival.bc.ca](mailto:fdi@festival.bc.ca); [www.festival.bc.ca](http://www.festival.bc.ca)

A live recording presents a number of challenges and opportunities for a performing artist. For every benefit gained by capturing the spontaneity of the moment, there is also a risk akin to that faced by a trapeze artist swinging without a net: away from the controlled environment of a recording studio, there is no "second take".

In some genres, folk and jazz in particular, this absence of clinical perfection is appreciated. Done right, a live recording offers the listener the chance to be in the front row, a chance to be part of that energy that exists in a live show in the relationship between the audience and performer. David Francey's album *The First Set* is a live recording done right.

Francey appeared as part of the Kent State Folk Festival on November 11, 2005, a performance broadcast live by WKSU and simulcast over the internet on [www.folkalley.com](http://www.folkalley.com) as part of the *Live From Folk Alley* series. This show was heard by thousands of people worldwide as it was being recorded.

David Francey is one of the most talented singer/songwriters to grace the Canadian stage, and it is his special gift to be able to translate the ordinary into the extraordinary, to convey his perspective, which suffuses the commonplace with an aura of wonder. On reflection, perhaps it would be more precise to say that David Francey is able to remember the times in his life when the commonplace was wonderful, and is able to jog our memories of the same with his songs.

Francey writes from the heart about everyday occurrences that speak to the everyday experience of the listener. A poet, he is able to lead us to see what he sees, the beauty and romance in an industrial landscape, the heartache and depth of feeling that a 14-year-old is capable of, the extraordinary adventure that can be found in delivering newspapers. His songs

are simple and straightforward, yet not simplistic. His tunes are easy and accessible, and yet not commonplace. His words are succinct, cutting right to the point, almost always leaving the listener wanting more, more of the story, more of the melody, more of the truth.

"You may have gathered [that] I don't exactly write from my happy place," David says in his introduction to one of his songs. It's the only thing that does not ring completely true on this album. With his gentle self-deprecating humour, Francey belittles his own muse. No, David Francey may not have a "happy place", but his songs come from somewhere profound, intimate and authentic.

David Francey's poetry can present contradictory and conflicting images between songs. We recognize in one song that "the heart that's breaking never makes a sound", and yet understand when he sings, "when you hear a sound like broken glass, that's my heart every time that girl walks past" in another. Both images ring true.

David's spoken introductions are as engaging as the songs themselves, providing context and weaving a seamless whole of words and music. It is difficult to single out any song on the album for praise—they are all gems—but I will mention three.

"The Waking Hour" rides a haunting melody straight into the dark recesses of one's heart. It's a song about the fear of a potential lost love. Yes, you read that right.

I wake to the radio morning news  
Just as the day is dawning  
And I watch from the window  
While a passing cloud  
Dulls the hopeful morning  
And I wonder will the girl I love  
Come back with the morning  
But the omen crow at the waking hour  
Has given me fair warning.

Words that leave the listener breathless because we've been there. The song is never maudlin, never wallows in self-pity.

"Fourth of July" is a song written a year after the terrorist attacks of September 11th.

I returned to the States one year after  
The towers returned to the earth.

If the personal can truly be said to be political, then this is a protest piece, albeit a gentle one. Francey writes with a perspective gained from observations filtered through the heart.

Now there's flags flying on every lamp post  
Red white and blue 'gainst the sky  
It's September and I can't help but think that  
It looks like the Fourth of July.

And finally, "Torn Screen Door", one of Francey's oldest songs, performed here *a cappella*. The song is a perfect example of what I mentioned about Francey leaving the listener wanting more.

Nothing left they can call their own  
Packed it in under leaden skies  
With just the wheat waving them goodbye.

In just a few brief verses, David paints a compelling picture of a farmhouse and a life abandoned.

Scott Simpson is a gifted guitarist who also sings backup on several tracks. His accompaniment to David's songs, whether picking or strumming or even as percussion, is masterful, and at times reminiscent of early Bruce Cockburn in its artistry.

I'll confess to never having heard David Francey perform prior to listening to this CD. Oh, I've heard some of his songs performed by others, and have even sung some myself as part of singing circles, always with the intention of hearing the author himself, some day. If you're in the same boat, I'd like to offer up another benefit of live albums: they provide a compendium of some of the best pieces in a performer's repertoire and a good starting point for exploring an artist's work. This album has only served to whet my appetite for David Francey's music. I highly recommend it.

*Stephen Méthot, Calgary, Alberta*

**Paddy Graber. "The Craic Was Great": Irish Songs & Stories From My Home.** Celtic-Palatine Records, 9177 147A St., Surrey, B.C. V3R 3V9; Stewart Hendrickson, 11557 Palatine Ave. N, Seattle, WA 98133, USA; [hend@stolaf.edu](mailto:hend@stolaf.edu); [www.stolaf.edu/people/hend/paddygraber](http://www.stolaf.edu/people/hend/paddygraber); [www.cdbaby.com/cd/paddy](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/paddy)

As my young and vibrant body is unceasingly eaten away by uncaring old age and disease, it is comforting to know that a fellow musical traveler, over 20

years my senior and an octogenarian, can still set the pace as we shuffle home from the Folk Traditions Song Circle in Vancouver—held on the last Thursday of every month in the downstairs room of the Friends Religious Society of Quakers hall, 1090 W. 70<sup>th</sup>. Ironically, Paddy Graber's good health in retirement, after his war service, mining experience and, finally, 35 years as a remedial gymnast at a veterans' hospital, probably owes much to the eye he lost during the Italian campaign in World War II and his subsequent choice of self-propelled and public transport, rather than the mobile-couch culture so prevalent today. He has managed to bounce back from a variety of ailments to continue his various volunteer activities about town, participate in the Irish dance society and develop his singing and storytelling repertoire. Now, thanks to the tasteful production of Stewart Henderson, part of Paddy's vast musical knowledge has become available on a compact disc, "*The Craic Was Great*".

When Paddy, born in 1924 on a farm just outside Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, harks back to the good old days at the beginning of this album, it is as much an invitation to an earlier, pre-electronic era as it is to the memories of his boyhood in Ireland. Before the advent of recordings and motion pictures and the transformation of entertainment into a mass consumer item, the common people looked more within their own family and amongst their neighbours for story and song. Paddy credits his mother, Eileen (née Mead), as being the main source of his Irish repertoire, her Sephardic family having lived in Ireland since shortly after the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Catholic Spain in 1492.

Eileen was a very good singer, and in addition to the tunes passed on to her within the family, she learned many songs from the community of migrant farming and fishing workers she laboured with as a young woman, in both Ireland and Scotland. Now Paddy has revived her songs, the lyrics reflecting the legends and landscapes of the sea and soil. Here are the mythological silkie in "The Silkie of Sule Skerrie" (Child 113); seals that shed their skins to take on human form in "The Song of the Sea Maidens"; and the legend of "The Arbutus Tree", one of which Paddy remembers growing on the Mead family farm in Kilkee, by the River Shannon, and common to the southwest coast around Skibbereen, where his grandparents lived.

It is this legendary and mythological land of enchantment into which we are drawn as the album begins. Here are the stories of faeries, the banshee and the merrow, and warnings about making deals

with leprechauns; magic spells woven and broken, incantations and pishogue. In a fine example of his own songwriting in this genre, Paddy provides us with the delightful “The Hen that Became a Hare”, which he wrote for his children, Kevin and Eileen, and their school Easter play. This song blends Teutonic and Irish mythology, and is set to the traditional tune of “The Good Ship Calibar”. Borrowing an old tune for a new song is part of the folk tradition, as Paddy often explains, there being so many more song ideas than good tunes available.

Except for a short harmonica instrumental on the chorus of the *chanson* “Auprès de ma blonde” (“Beside My Sweetheart”), remembered from a French-Canadian farm labourer who worked for the family in Kilkee, Mr. Graber performs all the songs without accompaniment, *a cappella*. Such sparseness could become tedious, but storytelling overcomes this, as Paddy weaves into the tapestry of the music some background as to the song’s origins and variants, or some insight into the culture and history behind it. For example, the sparkling Irish humour in “Daniel O’Connell and his Steam Engine” is introduced with a look into mid-nineteenth-century social and political realities, and some doubts are cast on O’Connell’s voting record in the British Parliament about the time of the Great Starvation, or, as the English call it, the Potato Famine, of 1845-46.

Now Paddy Graber has a very pleasant and well-developed voice, which is somewhat of a surprise, considering that he had already met and married his wife, Phyllis, and was busy raising a family before he ever took up performing in the early 1960s. Hilda and Phil Thomas told me how they had to coach him to stay in key, when he first began singing, as he had a tendency to raise the pitch higher and higher with each verse and chorus. That problem long solved, Paddy sings his mother’s songs as I imagine she would have sung them while doing chores or knitting, or in a *ceilidh* setting—very softly, sometimes with just a breath of falsetto. This production brings out those subtleties and the drama in his voice, which often couldn’t be heard in the large unamplified folk gatherings where I saw him perform many times.

The first time I really heard the art in both his singing and his songwriting was when Paddy was interviewed by Sylvia Tyson on the folk show *Touch the Earth*, broadcast nationally on CBC Radio in 1979. Similarly, on amplified stages, where Paddy’s voice level could be adjusted to fit the song, there was no difficulty in hearing him, and for several summers in the 1970s, while the nascent folk festivals still depended on many semi-professional tradi-

tionals to grace their workshop stages, he performed at the Mariposa Festival in Toronto and at several of the early Vancouver Folk Festivals. Here he shared stages and stories with such notables as Liam Clancy, Pete Seeger, Jean Ritchie and Margaret Christl, among others.

It should be stressed here that this discussion of volume is an attribute of the artistic approach to certain material, and not a reflection on Paddy’s vocal power or range. I have heard him belt out sea shanties or some of the Irish nationalist songs from his father’s repertoire where the microphones could well be set aside. This is the male assertive voice, and it can best be heard here in the reading of the ancient poem “The Mystery of Amergin” and in “Jim Mead the Cooper”, a poem written by Paddy’s great-grandfather.

In retrospect, Paddy feels that this album doesn’t reflect enough of his father’s legacy of songs, especially those of the labour movement. Hershl “Harry” Graber, a first-generation Irishman of Ashkenazi, East-European descent, was an active member of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union when he was a young man. Probably the only reason he survived the Easter Rising of 1916 was that he had previously become a victim of what James Connolly, in his *Manifesto to the British Working Class*, described as “cold-blooded systematic arrests and ferocious prison sentences” following the lockout, by the Dublin Employers Federation, of 25,000 workers in 1913. Paddy’s parents met during Harry’s long incarceration, when Eileen visited the prison as a volunteer nurse. I would hope that this working class perspective, which was part of his dad’s gift to his children, gets more recognition in another release, Paddy himself having written songs about his work experience in British Columbia mining, such as “The Copper Mountain Raise”.

The CD opens with Paddy singing a verse from “The County of Mayo”:

Far from the land of the shamrock and heather,  
In search of employment, as exiles we roam.  
But whenever we happen to gather together,  
We sing of a land where we once made our home.

The changed political realities of Ireland during the 1920s eventually led to work opportunities overseas, and the Graber-Mead family moved to China for several years, and then to England, where Harry (and, soon after, an underaged Paddy), cognizant of anti-Semitic Hitler, joined the army during World War II.

It is a testament to the strengths of both Jewish and Irish culture that songs like these are preserved,

giving historical glimpses into past societies whose moral values can then be contrasted with our own, that we might see our social evolution, and have a bit of fun.

*David Querido, Victoria, British Columbia*

**Eileen McGann. *Light*.** DRGN 117. Dragonwing Music, P.O. Box 163, Mill Bay, B.C., V0R 2P0; [mcgann@candisc.com](mailto:mcgann@candisc.com); [www.eileenmcgann.com](http://www.eileenmcgann.com); Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; [fdi@festival.bc.ca](mailto:fdi@festival.bc.ca); [www.festival.bc.ca](http://www.festival.bc.ca)

Eileen McGann's new CD is a retrospective with a theme. The songs recollected here are ones that move the heart to hope, with an emphasis on healing and on the "journey of the spirit". Many songs are familiar from previous recordings, but there are three new ones relevant to the theme, "Look Up In Hope", "Bless This House" and "Love and Light Surround Me".

Apart from Aileen Vance's "Waterfall", and one arrangement of traditional material, "There'll Be More Joy", from the *Heritage* CD, all the tracks are original to Eileen; her splendid new "Bless This House" is suitable for any house blessing, and includes a variation for the New Year. Since most of the songs have previously been published and are simply republished here, the interest of this CD is that it gives a conspectus of Eileen's songs that relate to a specific genre.

Eileen is accompanied on various tracks by a stellar cast of musicians. David K co-produced the album, and he sings harmony on most tracks and plays guitar, slide guitar, bouzouki, bass and mandolin. Other players include Stephen Fearing, Oliver Schroer and David Woodhead. There are two additional fiddlers (Calvin Cairns and Anne Lederman, who appears on piano as well) and four cellists (Lesley Atherton, Ron Harry, Kathy Stacey and George Koller, cello and bowed bass) who have been involved in Eileen's various projects. René Cusson plays Scottish smallpipes and Cathy Miller, Aileen Vance and Ken Brown offer harmony vocals. The cast is completed by Mary Anderson on harp, Ben Grossman on percussion, Duncan Cameron on whistles and Sean Mulrooney on high-string guitar. Such breadth of talent provides a true complement to Eileen's music and songs.

It is nowadays all too easy to invoke the power of music to improve the mind, but there is no hint of that here. Rather, Eileen has responded to requests from people who have already found these songs

helpful. This is a collection founded on the experience of healing. Obviously the power of the songs to evoke thoughts and feelings that listeners find speak to their own reflections and suffering is what will eventually decide on the success of this album. So I will look at some of the various strands of thought present in the songs given here. As a poet as well as a musician, Eileen writes for those who listen with attention to words and thoughts. The titles give a clue to the depth of spiritual reflection. Two new songs begin and end the tracks: "Look Up in Hope" comes first, and the last track is "Love and Light Surround Me".

Healing songs are among the oldest recorded songs: the psalms of David are still offered as aids to healing, and the Pythagorean harmonies are today again touted for their restorative power. Charms and chants are a staple of many cultures. Both words and music change the soul, to encourage its restorative powers and so help it restore the body. A song accompanies the headache cure that Socrates offers a youth in Plato's dialogue *Charmides*. Socrates tells Charmides that:

[Zalmoxis the Thracian] said that everything good and bad for the body and the whole person springs from the spirit ["psyche", often translated "soul"]; and so one must first and most of all attend to the spirit, if the head and all the other body parts are to be well. He said that the spirit is healed by songs and these songs are beautiful words. From the fine thoughts, good sense comes to the body and when this is present, the head and the rest of the body readily become healthy. (Plato, *Charmides* 156e-7a, reviewer's translation)

It is indeed worth studying the fine words that fill this disc as well as the fine music. The choice of ideas illustrates some philosophic themes. The presentation appeals to a kind of emotionally charged understanding that is largely ignored today, but properly belongs in the history and practice of reflective thought. Eileen's words promote reflective understanding, not some enforced non-rational change of view or the adoption of a "philosophy" in the corrupt sense sometimes used by politicians and the media. Listening to the songs, one becomes reflectively aware that emotions, including painful ones, can be shared and understood, and this promotes the sympathetic response that helps to reduce suffering.

Songs contribute to spiritual relief and growth in several ways. They can ease the spirit in suffering by sharing and consoling. They can promote hope. They can give a space for celebration to be shared with friends and neighbours as well as family. Songs are

not cures that work only on the physical level, although we should not forget the way that harmony eases the soul by changing the body, a point sometimes forgotten in the history of medicine. Most of all, perhaps, they can promote the resonance in the sufferer that shows he or she is not alone. Eileen's songs contribute in all these ways.

"Reservations", first recorded on *Journeys*, is a song written to express the feelings of First Nations in their lives in non-Native society. It was written in response to a request from a First Nations man, who asked Eileen to write a song about "An Indian boy on a journey" (this phrase is quoted in the liner notes). The song is dedicated to all oppressed people. The metaphor of life as a road, which recurs in the songs, can help those in pain to turn their thoughts towards what comes next. Many share the fear of suffering and a sympathetic recognition can help to lighten the load of oppression and depression and bring the means to raise the spirit.

The chorus from "Sands" expresses one basic theme:

The waves keep rolling on the beach like the  
years keep rolling over  
And each one makes a small change that will  
shape our destiny  
For what the new one brings, that the old one's  
made the way for  
God help me make the changes that will let my  
soul be free.

*Janet D. Sisson, Calgary, Alberta*

**Northern Cree and Friends. *Long Winter Nights: Round Dance "Live!"*, vol. 5.** CR-6401. Canyon Records Productions, 3131 West Clarendon Avenue, Phoenix AZ 85017, USA; [can\\_yon@canyonrecords.com](mailto:can_yon@canyonrecords.com); [www.canyonrecords.com](http://www.canyonrecords.com)

Northern Cree and Friends' vol. 5, titled *Long Winter Nights*, was recorded live on April 2, 2005, at Louis Bull Reserve, Alberta, Canada, and features the vocal talents of Northern Cree, Whitefish Jr's, Big River Cree, Ken Pooyak, Jack Bull, Perfect Storm, Arnold Pete, and Bear Creek. Once again this prolific group has produced a very strong album that will find a wide audience.

The brief explanatory notes provide an excellent overview of the round dance tradition in Saskatchewan and Alberta, as well as the differences between round dance and powwow events. The result is that the songs included on the recording are very well contextualized, which enhances the listening experience. Additional information regarding the singing

roles of males and females would be welcome, as on some recordings the strong nasal timbre of women singing an octave above the men is quite prominent (for example Track 2, "Life Must Go On", by Whitefish Jr's). Notes directing one to listen for the women as they sing overtop the male voices on the second half of a phrase would make the liner notes even stronger for educational purposes.

*Long Winter Nights* includes two types of round dance songs, those with text and those that are composed entirely of vocables, termed "straight songs". It is assumed that the listener will already know that a track titled "Straight" is referring to a song with vocables rather than the title of the song. Some delineation of these two types of songs would aid the listener. For songs which include humorous and sentimental English texts, it can sometimes be difficult to hear the words clearly. However, a careful listen will leave the listener chuckling at the metaphors employed in such songs as "You're Just an Old Song" by Big River Cree, the text of which is, "I am sorry, you're just an old song I don't sing anymore."

Finally, one of the strengths of this live recording is the inclusion of the emcees' voices as they introduce the groups. Each emcee's style is unique and constitutes an important aspect of the round dance event, as in the powwow. While two emcees are listed on the liner notes, they are not identified for each track—something that would have permitted comparison of style and added to the overall experience of music on this recording, as well as its usefulness as a resource.

Once again, Northern Cree and Friends have delivered an enjoyable recording with *Long Winter Nights*. Sure to find a place in the libraries of dancers and singers, *Long Winter Nights* will also make for an excellent addition to a novice's collection because of its superb liner notes. For Northern Cree, there appears to be no end in sight—while this is their fifth recording with other groups, they have also recently released their 22<sup>nd</sup> group album, titled *Stay Red*, on the Canyon Records label (CR-6406), and you can be certain there are many more to come.

*Janice Esther Tulk, St. John's, Newfoundland*

**The Polyjesters. *Ka-Chunk!*** CVCD003. Chateau Valteau Productions, c/o Live Tour Artists, 1451 White Oaks Blvd., Oakville, Ont. L6H 4R9; [ja\\_son@polyjesters.com](mailto:ja_son@polyjesters.com); [www.polyjesters.com](http://www.polyjesters.com)

And now for something completely different...*Ka-Chunk!* is the fourth album by the Polyjesters, an enigmatic Alberta-based quartet consisting of broth-

ers Jason and Sheldon Valleau (upright bass/tenor, guitar/voice, and ukulele/voice, respectively, as well as songwriting credits for both), Scott Duncan (fiddle/mandolin, and Rob Vulic (percussion). This album also features the guitar and “carney banter” of Frank Schaap, as well as Rob Vulic’s stunningly smooth tenor sax. Making brief appearances are Barry Valleau (trumpet), Andrea McCulloch (“sinister angel of doom”—voice), and harmonies by Tim Tamashiro, who co-produced the album. The CD was recorded at Shotgun Shack, southwest of Calgary, and is presented in a boldly-coloured Digipack with extensive lyrics and notes.

Some music fits neatly into a particular category, but that is not the case with *Ka-Chunk!*, which serves as both the album title and the group’s chosen stylistic label (evolving from their earlier “Swingin’ Folk Chunk” descriptor). The music displays strong shades of Django Reinhardt, perhaps mixed with a dash of Moxy Früvous. Indeed, Reinhardt is acknowledged as an early influence, with the Valleau brothers starting out (musically) in Amsterdam in 1999, busking with voices and upright bass (also used as percussion) to help fund their European adventures. The lyrics are quite atypical of most any genre, covering the life of a Mafia Don in “Don Of A Family”, how to “dispose” of a jeep to collect the insurance money (albeit to buy another jeep) in “Jeep Song”, the line between admiration and obsession (“Be What It May”), and other such delights!

While this all may seem rather strange, negative first impressions do not stand a chance when exposed to the frisky, enormously musical performances throughout *Ka-Chunk!* Several of the songs are real ear worms, so catchy you’ll find yourself singing them for days after even the briefest of exposures; this is a testament both to the quality of songwriting and to the inherent drive of Swing music. I personally found myself drawn to the lyrical saxophone playing of Vulic, which left me at a loss to explain the near-disappearance of saxophone from much of today’s music (although others may not share this nostalgic view). Scott Duncan is equally up to the challenge with his virtuosic fiddle playing, particularly in the ever-accelerating “Fast”. But at the core of The Polyjesters are the brothers Valleau, whose quirky lyrics and infectious tunes infuse every single song on the disc.

As the ultimate test of the disc, I played it for my 14-month-old, who bopped away to vast portions of the disc with a big smile and regular giggles (his highest form of musical approval). Likewise for lis-

teners of all ages, *Ka-Chunk!* is sure to put a smile on your face. Highly recommended.

*Paul Guise, Winnipeg, Manitoba*

**Nathan Rogers. *True Stories*.** Halfway 0001. Halfway Cove Music, 137 Walnut St., Winnipeg, Man. R3G 1P2; [www.nathanrogers.com](http://www.nathanrogers.com); Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7; 1-800-633-8282; [fdi@festival.bc.ca](mailto:fdi@festival.bc.ca); [www.festival.bc.ca](http://www.festival.bc.ca)

It can’t be easy being Nathan Rogers, but his CD *True Stories* is a confident, varied collection that establishes a distinctive performer quite apart from his lineage. It bursts into life with an energized version of the standard “Duncan and Brady”, with an immaculate vocal and enlivened by Dale Brown’s jaunty fiddle-work. From there, it’s downcast to “Mary’s Child”, a sombre ballad of Jesuits’ attempts to minister to plague-ridden Hurons. A religious studies student, Rogers fills the songs with authentic and vivid details, and it’s lovely melodically, but I’m afraid I find a rhyme like “conversions/perversions” distractingly unwieldy. My major misgiving about this album is a sense of plodding seriousness that runs through quite a lot of it, and I find that such lighter numbers as “The Packhouse Blues” and “Can’t Sit Still” come across as welcome danceable interludes. Any album that contains a song about Jesuits, one about 9/11, one about a downtrodden mining town (glorious song though “Hibbing” is—more on this in a moment), a WWI number and a cover of “Three Fishers” may be just more serious than it can handle—even before the closing track, “Kill Your TV.”

“Don’t you think it’s possible you could be happier if you killed your TV?” the song asks. Could be, could be, but the song doesn’t give me any reason to think so, not as I (the implied “you” of the lyrics) am accused of being a sheep, having the wool pulled over my eyes, being unable to think for myself . . . am I to assume that doing like Elvis did and shooting the TV out would change all this? This song confuses me mightily. Take this verse:

Sudden exposure, the shock and the shame  
 Innocent children that point to the fathers in blame  
 Where stands a priesthood when the proof of their guilt is revealed?  
 When the wounds of the past go untreated and never come healed?

So what do pedophile priests have to do with television? Is Rogers saying that we’d be better off in ignorance (having killed our TV and all)? Or simply

that the media has sensationalized these events, or led to fabrication of false charges (not likely, considering the reference to “proof of guilt”)? I can’t tell. I suspect that Rogers is simply constructing a tapestry of things that are wrong with the world, but for a song that demands that you THINK (the liner notes do indeed use all-caps), it seems remarkably ruled by emotion over rationalism. This song is full of anger and revolutionary gestures (“Tonight we turn our backs against the cold and we blaze a path or join the fold”), but is so shapeless and muddled that I feel by the end like I’ve swallowed a rant and, what’s worse, a rant specifically about how stupid I am, which I’m sure we can agree is not the most effective variety of protest song. And Rogers comes dangerously close to positioning himself as the sage or guru who’s to lead us away from all this blindness and moral confusion. The song finally resorts to the hoary device of using media coverage of the war in Afghanistan to close out—Simon & Garfunkel did something like this with “Silent Night/7 O’Clock News” 40 years ago, and it was too easy then.

But I love “Hibbing.” It makes no overt reference to the town’s most famous son (and I don’t mean Roger Maris—he doesn’t get mentioned either), and this seems very significant to me, coming from this particular songwriter; actually, “Hibbing” alludes more strongly to another of the town’s claims to fame as the birthplace of Greyhound. Rogers’ vocals are at their most tender and subtle conjuring the pit-scarred corner of the North Country where labourers work their lives away and are disposed of by layoffs and trapped by inertia and age in a town that no longer has a place for them. A common enough subject, but it’s the song’s evocation of the landscape that sets it apart, with the line “Uncle Sam’s strip mine gonna swallow Hibbing down”, perfectly written and delivered, tipping off an apocalyptic canvas that matches physical desolation with economic depression.

An odd case is “The Ballad of William and John Gibson (Part One: Spark of Life)” (in contention for the longest title I’ve ever seen). It concerns two brothers, one of whom is struck by lightning and begins to age at double the speed of the other. It resembles an Ambrose Bierce story. The subtitle promises a follow-up, and perhaps that will make it all make sense; as it is, I rather wonder what the point is.

On the whole, I find this to be an uneven but quite worthwhile album that is never less than satisfying on the level of production, and especially the sometimes astonishing vocals. It whets my appetite for a follow-up by an artist who is sure to make a

major impact on the Canadian scene for quite a long time to come.

*Murray Leeder, Ottawa, Ontario*

**Terry Tufts. *the better fiGht*.** BCD 172. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; [info@borealisrecords.com](mailto:info@borealisrecords.com); [www.borealisrecords.com](http://www.borealisrecords.com)

Terry was just in town, at the Yellow Door. It is great to see performers like Terry coming into our city. The one main reason: he really has something to say. His CD *the better fiGht* hit the public in October 2005 on the Borealis label, a label that is, true to its word, “the best in Canadian Folk Music”.

Tufts has become a great songwriter, with masterful guitar playing and a wonderful tenor voice that complements his writing. He is becoming known as a triple treat; that’s exactly what you are getting. The passion is there, as Terry explores various idioms like folk, slips into jazz and gets your feet going with pop. This CD has earned Terry his place alongside people like Gordon Lightfoot.

Terry is a true topical writer who highlights his views, Canadian views, about our shrinking green space and our distaste of war. Like a troubadour from the 1960s, Tufts is a threat, but a threat for a good cause.

Produced by Bill Garrett and recorded in Ottawa and in Almonte, *the better fiGht* features some of Canada’s best: Mark Ferguson (keyboards), John Geggie (bass), Ross Murray (drums) and Rob Graves (percussion). Even Jesse Winchester appears, on “Black Velvet Elvis”. With a lineup like that, what you get is a great CD. Take a listen to relax . . . take a listen to find a cause . . . take a listen to be inspired. *The better fiGht* is the sweetest CD I have heard in a while.

*Terry St. James, Montreal, Quebec*

**Randy Wood. *Our Love Will Never Die: Round Dance Songs*.** CR-6388. Canyon Records Productions, 3131 West Clarendon Avenue, Phoenix AZ 85017, USA; [canyon@canyonrecords.com](mailto:canyon@canyonrecords.com); [www.canyonrecords.com](http://www.canyonrecords.com)

This album is outstanding for its creativity, both visually and aurally. The attractive cover indicates the synthesis of contemporary and old sounds to come, but why is a bass drum pictured when the hand drum is featured on the recording?

Randy Wood is becoming known for his round dance songs, and in 2002 was nominated for a Grammy award for Best Native American Album. His style is a pleasing mix of old plains song form with his unique vocal timbre. His soft drumming and gentle voice, with a crooning quality, fit well the theme of love that runs through the recording. His vocals are enhanced with imaginative vocal effects (often syllables, both voiced and unvoiced), so appropriate that they seem to be comments on the song content. Although they are called “round dance songs”, I suspect most people will want to listen, rather than to dance, to these songs.

Many of the songs are in the form of “49ers”, or the Dakota *kahomeni*: they are sung with syllables and then English words, with a long-short drum accompaniment. Some have the typical plains descending melodic contour, drop-offs on final notes, and vocal pulsations on long notes. Wood negotiates the demands of this style well with his large vocal range, which, combined with his ability to sing legato (smoothly), results in an unusual sound that in some places evokes the wide expanses of the northern plains. The words too echo this feeling, for example, “The coyote sings all night, Where did all the flowers go?”

Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba

**Randy Wood with Will Clipman. *My Heart and Soul*.** CR-6389. Canyon Records Productions, 3131 West Clarendon Avenue, Phoenix AZ 85017, USA; [canyon@canyonrecords.com](mailto:canyon@canyonrecords.com); [www.canyonrecords.com](http://www.canyonrecords.com)

Randy Wood of Saddle Lake First Nation recently released his fifth album with Canyon Records. *My Heart and Soul* combines Wood’s unique vocal stylings with the world music sounds of Will Clipman. Both artists have been honoured with GRAMMY nominations, and Wood’s album *There Are No Goodbyes* (CR-6375) won a Native American Music Award (also known as the NAMMYs) for Best Traditional Album in 2005.

While the songs, vocal techniques and production effects included on *There Are No Goodbyes* seemed to suggest Wood’s potential for cross-over into worldbeat or even techno music (see my review in *CFM* 40.2, p. 39), the present album fails to meet one’s expectations for this sort of fusion. The same driving rhythms, rich vocal timbre, and low tessitura are present on *My Heart and Soul*; however, the world instruments included play a limited role, and come across more as “new age” embellishments than

an integrated element of the music. Listen, for example, to “I Need You So” (Track 12), in which the percussion instruments are barely present and the repeated use of chimes does not seem to be particularly well integrated with Wood’s heartfelt lyrics.

Perhaps the most successful of the songs is “Breathless” (Track 6). The interplay between Wood’s voice and Clipman’s drum and shakers works particularly well in terms of timbre and rhythm. Further, the rhythmic drive of Clipman’s percussion truly adds to the breathless feeling of this song, which will likely find play on world-beat radio programs.

Overall, however, *My Heart and Soul* is mediocre at best. With a CD case proclaiming a musical style “infused with the spirit of [Wood’s] Plains Cree heritage and propelled by the world beat rhythms of Will Clipman”, I would have anticipated a higher degree of integration and fusion between the two musical styles. This is not to say that Wood shouldn’t pursue such a synthesis in the future, but rather that the two styles need to be integrated to a greater degree to be truly successful. The fusion of First Nations music with other musical styles such as electronica and flamenco has been impressively accomplished in the past, for example with Canyon Records’ *Enter>>Tribal* (CR-7043) and *Native Flamenco* (CR-7033) respectively, and is a growing area of musical experimentation and invigoration.

*My Heart and Soul* by Randy Wood and Will Clipman will find a home in the collections of fans of both artists. Each is extremely prolific and successful in his own right and will surely release new material in short order.

Janice Esther Tulk, St. John’s, Newfoundland

**Keri Lynn Zwicker. *Rich & Rare*.** HH-02. 10931 122<sup>nd</sup> St., Edmonton, Alta. T5M 0A7; [harpchickcanda.com](http://harpchickcanda.com); [harpchick@hotmail.com](mailto:harpchick@hotmail.com)

In the past, too many Celtic harp and voice recordings were predictable, falling into three categories: there were recordings of the standard repertoire with repetitive accompaniments; recordings of good singers with rudimentary harp skills; and recordings with “soothing” as a major aim. But lately (and happily) things have been changing, and unless the recording is specifically designed for therapeutic purposes, harpers have come to think of “soothing” as a little too close to “boring” (note to reader: when talking to harpists, calling their playing “soothing” might not necessarily be considered a compliment).



Keri Lynn Zwicker's *Rich and Rare* is definitely not one of those soothing Celtic harp and voice CDs. This lively, complex and interesting recording is an example of harp and voice at its very best. Zwicker briskly dispenses with all the clichés—her harp is a rhythmic dynamo, and her voice has the traditional ornamentation and timbre of Scotland and Ireland. Here is a really competent harpist as well as a skilled singer, and in each of the varied and complex arrangements the balance between the two is the result of a high level of skill with each. There are also excellent technical production and beautiful graphic design. The instrument used on almost all of this recording is also out of the ordinary: a carbon fiber-bodied and fiber-strung harp made by John Dorman of Leduc, Alberta, which, besides having a big, rich tone, also possesses the amazing feature of folding down for airline transportation.

In this recording the tradition of vocal ornamentation as a rhythmic accent is used to great effect, especially in the older Scots tunes on the CD, such as “Willy MacIntosh” and “Highland Mary”. These two cuts, which are often sung in a mood of mourning, here come crackling with life. Sometimes the ornamentation obscures the words, but the overall effect, that of anger in the first and cheerful recollection in the second, is riveting. Zwicker also has control over her vocal style—in tunes where her concept of the piece is more flowing, so is her voice, and in ballads, where the story is the song, her singing has the conversational quality of a teller of tales.

Another intriguing aspect of this CD is the skilful use of guest musicians. Some are Zwicker's bandmates from Cowboy Celtic, some are other excellent Alberta musicians. All are used to add interest in just the right places and with just the right lines. It is easy for a harp to be swamped by other instruments, but here the harp always carries the arrangement, with the other instruments adding colour, but never obscuring the rhythm on the harp. Can a harp provide as much rhythmic intensity as a guitar? I think it does on this recording.

Zwicker is also an expert at weaving in extra rhythmic and melodic material, on her harp and from her guest musicians, to transform the tune and intrigue the listener. She displays what an imaginative harpist can do with a traditional song, and the listener is surprised again and again. For example, in “Willie MacIntosh/Glen Livet”, the “Glen Livet” fiddle tune is so seamlessly inserted between the verses that it is well launched before the listener hears that it is not just going to be a countermelody to a new verse. Also, when the list of tracks has a slash between two

named tunes, the listener might expect one tune after the other. But in “Flying Cloud/Guilty as Charged”, the harp accompaniment to the voice is itself almost a quote from the “Flying Cloud” fiddle tune, so that the two tunes sound layered over one another. The verses tell a hair-raising tale of slave trading and piracy—surely this subject matter must be a first for a harp and voice recording! So, I think, would be “Dark as a Dungeon”, in which the harp suddenly sounds a bit like a banjo, the chorus has full bluegrass harmony from Denise Withnell and David Wilkie, and then, just when the listener relaxes into bluegrass mode, Graham Tait adds his accordion.

Equally arresting is the arrangement of “The Lone Shanakyle/Wishful Walk”. The second tune is written by the artist to introduce the track and provide an interlude before the last verse of the older song. The two tunes, though very dissimilar, seem somehow to blend into one another, but it takes a second hearing to notice the cleverly-shared bass line. Then, in case the ear tires of the repeated bass, each chorus ends in a tumbling melody, eventually doubled by whistle and fiddle. This track is one of the most beautiful on the CD. But the title cut is also gorgeous. Again, something unexpected: several of the tracks include Christine Hanson's beautiful cello lines, so the listener might expect another one here. Instead we hear David Wilkie's understated mandocello, which provides exactly the right ground for the twisting, flowing harp accompaniment that Keri Lynn has devised for this gem of a song.

There are also two tracks of harp alone, displaying crystalline technique combined with Zwicker's characteristic rhythmic intensity, and also her version of Alfredo Orlando Ortiz's “Milonga para amar”, complete with Paraguayan variations and some very unusual staccato whistle playing.

In fact, every time I listen to this recording I hear something more. There is no fog of vibrating harp strings here: everything is clear, intricately fascinating, and energetic, and any listener who is “soothed” must not be really listening. If you want to hear what a Celtic harp and singer can really get up to, then add this CD to your collection.

*Joanne Meis, Calgary, Alberta*

