

Reviews/Comptes-rendus

Books

Dan Yashinsky. *Suddenly They Heard Footsteps: Storytelling in the Twenty-First Century*, 2004. 317 pp. ISBN 0-676-97592-5. Knopf Canada, c/o Random House of Canada Ltd., 1 Toronto St., Unit 300, Toronto, Ont. M5C 2V6

1978 was a most pivotal year for the storytelling scene in Toronto, for in that year, a series of events occurred whose echoes are still being felt today and will be felt for many years to come. In that year was begun the weekly institution known as "The 1001 Friday Nights of Storytelling", which has continued each Friday evening, without fail, and still continues even as this is being written. Shortly after this, in 1979, was held the first annual Toronto Storytelling Festival, which has continued each year since. Finally, the Storytellers School of Canada was also initiated, and its activities throughout the years have become the stuff of narrative legend. One of the individuals who was involved in all three important events has himself become a hallmark of the Toronto storytelling and cultural scene, and has become almost synonymous with the best of contemporary storytelling both within Canada and around the world. I refer of course to author, world traveller, critic at large, anti-establishment gadfly extraordinary, and master storyteller Dan Yashinsky, who has been described as a master bard and a friend to rabbis, griots, shanachies, tribal elders, mullahs, medieval innkeepers, ancient Greek poets, troubadours and all other members of the worldwide fraternity of raconteurs, yarn-spinners and tale-tellers, past and present.

One of the many hats worn by Yashinsky these many years has been as an author, editor and story collector. This is in fact his sixth book to date, most of his others having been collections of stories told by some of the best tellers found in Canada today and representing the best of the contemporary Canadian storytelling renaissance. As for this latest effort, it is almost impossible to review it in a strictly conventional manner, so perhaps it is best to do so otherwise, in a manner unconventional.

This is a book of stories and about stories; this is a book about storytellers past and present; and

perhaps most importantly, this is a book about the dreams and visions of and the road taken by one particular teller, Yashinsky himself. This is a book about thunder beings and firebirds, tribal elders and storm fools, Hassidic masters and a hodja from Turkey, new myths dreamed in today's uncertain world and old myths revived and remembered. This is a book dedicated to the memory of legendary and famous story hosts who were there when the great tales were spun, from Homer's King Alkinoos, who heard Odysseus sing his tale of the Trojan War that would become part of the classical *Odyssey*, to innkeeper Harry Bailey, who would accompany the pilgrims on the road to Canterbury along with Chaucer and would be there when those wondrous narratives were spun that future ages would call the *Canterbury Tales*, to the Lady Pampinea, who would host a group of noble folk outside the city of Florence during the Black Death and would listen to a hundred famous tales that would become the *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio, to Toronto's own bard, Dan Yashinsky, who would be host to many of The 1001 Friday Nights of Storytelling since its 1978 inception.

It is no accident that the book's first quotation is from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, itself one of the finest examples of the storyteller's art ever composed or written. If Homer, Scheherezade, Chaucer and Tolkien were the master raconteurs of past ages and times, then the recent storytelling masters and elders with whom Yashinsky met in friendship and story-sharing sessions also left much impact upon his career of these past 30 years and his attitudes towards what storytelling should be all about. These would include Ireland's Alice Kane, who was a legend among Toronto tellers for half a century, Joan Bodger, also a master storyteller, and Tagish elder Angela Sidney from the remote Yukon Territory; tragically, all three women tellers are no longer with us, but their spirits enfold much of what Yashinsky says in this extraordinary volume.

And as if all of the above were not enough, Yashinsky has included seven stories from his own repertoire, all skillfully crafted and created by Yashinsky himself from much older traditional tales and tale genres, including stories that pay homage to the Arabian Nights, the Brothers Grimm, First Nations creation myths, the legend of Dr. Faust, the Jewish traditions of Eastern Europe, and a whole host of world

folktales too numerous to mention. Of the seven tales here included, personal favorites are "The Devil's Noodles", "R. Globus and the Laughing Boy", "Why Human Tongues are Red", and the longest and most elaborate tale of the seven, "The Storyteller at Fault". Yashinsky is a firm believer in the old Tuscan proverb which says, "A story is not good unless something new is added." In his wonderful retellings, he certainly adds more than just a little to tried-and-true golden folktale chestnuts, and the results are truly wondrous and magical to behold.

This book is filled with so much wonder and magic and narrative joy that even the appendix and the annotated bibliography are a plethora of gems and priceless treasures, listing as they do so many sources and citations that are among the most important and meaningful tales and collections that have impacted on Yashinsky's development as a teller these many years. Even the book's title has behind it a story of its own, involving a summer camp, a local bogey-man, a young and avid listener, and a story lover and explorer whose road was determined by telling tales to eager campers around a nocturnal fire one memorable summer. This is a book that belongs on the bookshelf of every story lover and explorer, and if it is true that God loves stories, then the celestial host will truly take this volume to their hearts and souls. In the end, Dan Yashinsky is what the very best of storytelling in Toronto and throughout Canada is all about, no brag, just fact.

Robert Rodriguez, New York, New York

R. Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd, eds. *Classic English Folk Songs*. Selected and edited by R. Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd, revised by Malcolm Douglas, foreword by Martin Carthy. London: EFDSS & South Riding Folk Network, 2003

I bet a lot of us have (or wish we had) a well-thumbed copy of *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* tucked away on our music shelves somewhere. The collection by Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd is a classic, first published in 1959 (just after Vaughan Williams's death) and regularly reprinted for 30 years. It is now out of print. So it is welcome news indeed that the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and The South Riding Folk Network have teamed up to republish it under a new title. The notes about the 70 songs have been revised, with much new information, and biographical

details of the singers from whom the songs were noted have been added. There is a new foreword (by Martin Carthy) and an updated bibliography (by David Atkinson). As Carthy says, "Because this collection was such a long way ahead of its time, it has stood up so well over the years."

Why is a songbook of 70 songs so important? I suspect that this was one of the first songbooks aimed at the general public which presented the songs in their "real" state, not prettied up or edited to expunge the un-genteel bits. Vaughan Williams and Bert Lloyd had remarkably light hands as editors, and remarkably profound knowledge of the material available.

Is this collection important to traditional Canadian musicians? Aside from the importance of having good collections of songs from other cultures as part of a well-rounded collection, it is obvious that many of our traditional songs came from England, and it is important to see many of these songs in their pre-Canadian stage.

The 70 songs are presented alphabetically, in the common format of the voice line, with the full text following. Each song also identifies the singer from whom the song was collected, and the collector. There are no chords, appropriately enough, since these were traditionally sung a cappella. The notes concerning each song fill 44(!) pages; they include the original notes and updated information. The (new) biographies of the traditional singers are very interesting.

In this collection are many well-known songs – "The Banks of Newfoundland", "Benjamin Bowmaneer", "The Cruel Mother", "The Golden Vanity", "The Greenland Whale Fishery", "John Barleycorn", "Long Lankin", "Lucy Wan", "The Red Herring", "The Trees They Grow So High", and "Young Girl Cut Down in her Prime". There are also many unfamiliar to me; I always love finding "new" old songs. I particularly enjoy the version of "The Mermaid" (Child 289). We're so used to the rollicking – and to me highly inappropriate – version of this song, with the line "Three times round spun our gallant ship and she sank to the bottom of the sea" sung with great glee and gusto. The version in this book, sung by a 67-year old labourer, Mr James Herridge of Twyford, Hampshire, in 1906, is appropriately sad and tender without being sentimental. A real gem! Comparing the note in my old (1968) edition to the 2003 edition, I learned that Mr. Herridge omitted the second line of verse 4; this

was added by the collector, E.T. Sweeting. Verses 6 to 8 have been added by the editors. An ancestor of the song may be a 17th-century broadside, "The Praise of Saylor's Here Set Forth". Very useful and interesting information, that.

I can't resist giving you the delightful quote from Bert Lloyd's daughter Caroline Clayton that's printed in the book: "I have an image in my mind of Ralph Vaughan Williams and my dad in the sitting room of our house in Greenwich many years ago. Vaughan Williams is sitting very still by an open door leading out into the garden, and dad is busily moving around with a secret smile sorting papers into piles on a table. There is a quiet air of excitement... They seemed delighted to be putting together the material for publication so that other people could enjoy it as much as they did."

Even if you already have *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* (lucky devil!), you'd be well-served by obtaining *Classic English Folk Songs*. The excellent bibliography was compiled by David Atkinson, the author of a recent book on the English traditional ballad and an editor of *Folk Music Journal*. Thank you, EFDSS!

Lorne Brown, North York, Ontario

Recordings

Les Batinsés. *L'autre monde*. Mille-pattes, 503 Archambault, Joliette, P.Q. J6E 2W6; <mp@millepattes.com>; <www.millepattes.com>

"This is FOLK music?" The question hung in the air, and an incredulous smile danced across my son's face. My other son was enthusiastically gyrating in time to a rather aggressive hard rock beat backing a response song about parking meters. Folk music? Quite. The disk brings to mind memories of wandering Montréal streets on sultry July evenings taking in free shows during the Jazz Festival and asking a similar question: "This is Jazz?" Sometimes answers to such stylistic questions lie in the ear (rather than the eye) of the beholder.

If the five-track promotional disk for *L'autre monde* is any indication, Les Batinsés are unlikely to serve up anything close to traditional Québécois fare. It is clear, though, that the music of Les Batinsés is informed by the Québécois

cultural heritage. I don't know enough about the group to assess for certain whether the fusion of the traditional with contemporary world beat is driven by a love for the old or by a disdain. Certainly there is an element of Québécois popular culture that rejects the traditional and has made the terms "folklore" and "folklorique" into pejoratives. Some Québécois musicians have been known to be apologetic about their inheritance, spicing things up so as not to be seen as "ketain" or kitschy. I doubt that this is the case with Les Batinsés. The brief exposure afforded by the demo disk leaves me with the impression that the group celebrate their musical heritage and interpret it with wit and vigour. If I'm right, there's a wink or two here at such Québécois cultural icons as "La Bolduc".

The sextet certainly are accomplished musicians, multi-instrumentalists all, and are credible in their use of a variety of contemporary styles and approaches. I was left feeling a bit breathless by their romp across five very different styles, sensing that there is an almost devilish sense of humour and fun behind the group's musical choices. If the demo disk is any indication, the only common thread running through the actual album will be its heterogeneity, Québécois folk seen through some frenetic musical carnival kaleidoscope.

So if you are attracted by the prospect of hearing traditional fare served up in hip-hop, urban jazz, funk or God knows what else happens to cross their path, then this album is a must. *L'autre monde* does open up a whole other world, a world of in-your-face global interpretations of Québécois folk. A word of warning, though: you might never look at parking meters in the same way again.

Steven Méthot, Calgary, Alberta

Susan Crowe. *Book of Days*. Corvus Records CR011; Festival Distribution, 1351 Grant St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2X7 (no postal address on packaging); 1-800-633-8282; <www.festival.bc.ca>; <www.susancrowe.com> <www.corvusmusic.com>

This is a CD of original songs by singer/songwriter Susan Crowe. She is backed by a strong cast of musicians: John Reischmann on mandolin, David Travers-Smith on trumpet and peck horn, Dennis Keldy on Hammond organ and accordion, John Sheard on piano, Mark Mariesh on drums, George Koller on bass, Kevin

Briet on electric guitar, Jason Fowler and Danny Greenspoon (the producer) on acoustic guitar. Backup harmonies are sung by Gwen Swick, Cindy Church, and Liz Soderburg.

The first time I played this album, not listening particularly intently, I found it pleasant but maybe not exceptionally striking – another singer/songwriter, nice enough. Since then I have played the album many more times. And every time I listen to it, without fail, without particularly trying to, I hear something more in it that I did not hear before, and my appreciation and fascination with it grows exponentially, to the point that I am now enthralled with it. Subtly, insidiously, its genius has entwined itself into my consciousness.

The melancholy, nostalgic, and uplifting lyrics are threaded through with images of ice, snow, and winter. Three of the eleven songs express longing for an absent or past love, while two more lament an imminent parting. Other themes include relief and redemption (“The Gates of Hell”), the weariness of poverty (“High Street”), the blessing of a true love (“Love’s Pure Gold”), and “She Said No” – a poignant description of trying to reach out to someone and touching only a stone wall. Probably the most unique song idea was “If I’m Spared” which is based on the words of a 1929 letter. The album finishes on a lighter note with a gentle lullaby about the moon.

Crowe is a superb songwriter. This is poetry, sung in a clear, low voice and complemented by melodies and intricate instrumental accompaniment that adds interest and depth. In thinking about where this album fits in the musical tradition, my impression is that Crowe is a modern day troubadour. Some centuries ago she would have been composing a song like “Greensleeves” on her lute in courtly halls hung with tapestries. Today, I find her analogous to a female Leonard Cohen. If this sounds like the type of material you enjoy, you will not be disappointed with *Book of Days*.

Fiona Gregory, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

Finest Kind. *Silks & Spices*. FAM05. 285
Spencer St., Ottawa, Ont. K1Y 2R1;
<ianrobb@sympatico.ca>; <www.finestkind.ca>

In the interest of full disclosure, I will report at the outset that I am and remain an unabashed, unadulterated fan of Finest Kind. I will state that I waited with an almost absurd eagerness for this

album, an ardour unsurpassed since my misspent youth lining up at the local record store just to be one of the first to buy a particular album.

My first taste of this album came almost surreptitiously, late one night after a contra dance. We huddled conspiratorially around a friend's van in the empty parking lot, feeling strangely guilty, as if we were indulging in some illicit pleasure. But it wasn't some drug that left us slack-jawed and wide-eyed, it was the shimmering harmonies of "The Times They Are A-Changin'". "Can we hear that again?", I begged. Instead, we were treated to "The Maple Leaf Forever", and then left to count the days until our copy of the album arrived. It is that song, or rather Shelley Posen and Ian Robb's reworking of its tired and jingoistic original lyrics, that brought the most interesting review from one of my young sons. He begged to hear the song again, and after it was repeated, sat in silence, sighed and said, "That's MY national anthem." Indeed.

Does *Silks & Spices* live up to expectations? Yes, and then some. It is the third album for the Ontario folk trio, following *Lost in A Song* (1996) and *Heart's Delight* (1999). The trio is known for their rich harmonies and amazing, perhaps unlikely, vocal blend. I say "unlikely" because Ian Robb, Shelley Posen and Ann Downey hail from quite diverse musical backgrounds and different parts of the world. Their voices are so suited to each other that the mix is at times awe-inspiring. Their first two albums were delightful romps across musical traditions and origins, bouncing around the world from the Ottawa valley through Appalachia and on to the British Isles, but it is the a cappella pieces on these albums that have held my attention the most.

Silks & Spices pleases in that regard: ten of its fifteen songs are unaccompanied. The instrumentation on the other songs is simple and not overbearing, tending to support the singers. For all that I appreciate the a cappella, my favourite piece on the album is a haunting rendition of "The Blackest Crow", led by Ann Downey and accompanied by her on banjo and on viola by James Stephens. It is an example of what I think is Finest Kind's greatest talent, the ability to combine tight, goose-bump-inducing harmonies with wonderful lyrics (new and old) into a package that engages both head and heart. They don't just sing the song, they embody it.

Not that everything on this album is filled with gravitas; there is a great deal of fun on this album, but it is serious fun. It is clear from their performances that Ann, Shelley and Ian deeply enjoy the task at hand. There is whimsy here in songs like "Sweet Forget Me Not", a delightful love song, and "The Ten Dollar Bill", a slightly bawdy ballad that's a long musical setup for a delicious punch line. I'm not sure exactly why "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" is here, it is perhaps the one piece that doesn't quite fit in, but it is well performed, so I'll cut the group some slack. It has occurred to me that Finest Kind does enjoy a bit of play in its arrangements, having a male voice take the lead in a song that is usually sung by a woman, or vice versa ("Blue Mountain" from *Lost in A Song*, "Fond Affection" and "The Fugitive's Lament" from *Heart's Delight*). It's an interesting tactic that brings the lyrics into a new focus, and this is certainly the case here, with Shelley singing Carol King's lyrics. Shock value? Perhaps.

Fans of Finest Kind's renditions of Sacred Harp tunes might be disappointed to find that there are none on this album, but there are a delightful assortment of traditional British tunes, and one carol, "Shepherds Arise", that is more than suitable for group sing-alongs. In fact, it is included in Shelley's published collection of pub carols [reviewed 37.1, p. 33]. "Fair Maid Walking" is a fine rendition of a broken token song, but I will confess that I could not help but hear Grit Laskin's "broken" broken token lyrics, that had the hapless sailor being rejected as a twit by the young maiden. I think that it would be a hoot to hear Finest Kind tackle that particular version.

Two pieces stand out as examples of Finest Kind's skill at crafting arrangements of popular songs that can outshine the original interpretations. We've seen this on previous albums, with songs such as "Goodnight Loving Trail", and there are two examples on *Silks & Spices*. "At The End of A Long Lonely Day" is a superb rendition of a Marty Robbins chestnut that conveys a sense of heartbreak without wallowing in pathos. "The Times They Are A Changin'" is not some nostalgic do-you-remember-when? feel-good ditty, but has a bite to it, or, as the liner notes state, a bugle call "to remind ourselves, if we'd forgotten, of the work yet to be done". The song carries the force of Dylan's lyrics, and dare I say it, is far better sung to boot.

One last confession: I'm a bass, and I take absurd delight in listening to Shelley and in revelling in his harmonies. I sing them in the shower, I sing along in the car, I sing them at the oddest moments, to the distraction and consternation of my family. They're fun, they make sense, they "fit". That's what's great about Finest Kind: their songs are delights, wonderfully arranged, beautifully performed -- they "fit". And for the record, I'm counting the days until the next album is released.

Steven Méthot, Calgary, Alberta

Lennie Gallant. *Le vent bohème*. TOCD4525. Lennie Gallant, Hunter River RR#3, Rustico, I.-P.-E. C1A 1N0; <lennie@lenniegallant.com>; <www.lenniegallant.com>; TOCCQ Musique/Le groupe OKO, 1445, Lombert Closse, Suite 300, Montréal (Québec) H3H 1Z5; <info@dkd.com>

Le vent bohème, le premier disque entièrement français des six albums de Lennie Gallant, a reçu, parmi ses récompenses, le prix de l'album francophone de l'année ainsi que d'artiste masculin de l'année lors de l'ACME 2003.

La chanson thème est plutôt contemporaine pour une chanson acadienne et transporte le thème général des airs du présent et du passé de l'est canadien tout au long de l'enregistrement. Le son est clair et mélodieux et les mots caractérisent une partie de ces chansonniers canadien-français contemporains ayant une légère influence européenne. On y retrouve un son légèrement similaire à celui des anciennes chansons de Roch Voisine et nous pouvons aussi percevoir un soupçon de Zachary Richard. Néanmoins, Lennie Gallant demeure tout de même unique en son genre. Il mélange les sonorités électriques et acoustiques en utilisant à la fois des rythmes de reggae et de ballades. "Voulez-vous danser?" nous fait entendre un amalgame de ce que l'on pourrait appeler la musique acadienne traditionnelle contemporaine, mélangeant l'accordéon, le violon et le chant, tout en illustrant le patrimoine poétique et musical de l'est du Canada.

Gallant ajoute aussi un air de country avec son chant et l'usage de la guitare "slide" que l'on entend dans "Le manque de courage". Il y a aussi une touche de twang country et d'accordéon cajun dans la chanson "Laisse aller", faisant une petite référence à la légende maritime d'"Évangéline" et décrivant la nature du rêveur acadien empruntant la philosophie cajun répétée

dans le refrain: "laissez les bons temps rouler". Je me permets de décrire ce son comme étant du "twajun", ce qui peut-être montre le mieux les intentions de Gallant dans cet album. La musique acadienne fait miroiter les airs caractéristiques du country et de la musique folklorique retrouvée au Canada et Gallant tisse ces sons d'une manière tout à fait contemporaine.

En somme, ce disque illustre les attributs et les qualités retrouvées dans la musique contemporaine provenant des maritimes. De plus, la musique souligne les talents franco-canadiens de la côte est comme prenant une place importante dans la scène musicale traditionnelle au Canada. Le fait que le son soit contemporain traduit aussi le besoin d'apprécier les changements et les mélanges intéressants à repérer dans la composition d'une chanson. J'ai bien apprécié la poésie, la voix ainsi que les arrangements musicaux de Gallant et j'ai hâte d'entendre son prochain album.

Le vent bohème, the first all-French-language recording among Lennie Gallant's total of six albums, received the 2003 ECMA Francophone Album of the Year award, and Gallant was named Male Artist of the Year, another recognition to accompany his past awards.

The title song is rather contemporary for an Acadian sound, and carries the general theme of current and past airs of Eastern Canada throughout the recording. The sound is crisp and melodious, and the lyrics reflect a part of the contemporary French-Canadian chansonnier, mixed with a European edge. There is also a tinge of what was heard from Roch Voisine a decade ago, and we can pick up a hint of Zachary Richard; however, Lennie Gallant has a style which is quite his own. Gallant mixes electric and acoustic sounds, using at times reggae beats, and ballad rhythms. "Voulez-vous danser?" reflects a mixture of what could be characterized as traditional contemporary Acadian music, and the accordion, fiddling and singing reflect a part of the lyrical and musical lineage to be found in Eastern Canada.

Gallant incorporates a country edge to "Le manque de courage", with the sound of the slide guitar and his singing. There is also a taste of country twang and Cajun accordion in "Laisse aller", a song that makes an initial reference to the Maritime legend of Évangeline and describes the nature of the Acadian dreamer flavoured with the Cajun philosophy of "laissez les bons temps

rouler" heard in Gallant's chorus. Perhaps this "twajun" sound, if I could call it so, could best describe Gallant's intentions in this CD. Acadian music reflects the airs of the characteristic country and folk music found in Canada, and Gallant weaves these sounds in a contemporary fashion.

In general, this CD mirrors the attributes and qualities found in contemporary Maritime music. Moreover, the music also shines a light on French-Canadian talents from the East Coast as much a part of the traditional music scene of Canada. The fact that the sound is contemporary also reveals the need to appreciate the changes and the interesting mixes to be found in the composition of a song. I enjoyed Gallant's lyrical poetry, voice, and melody arrangements, and look forward to his future recordings.

Julie LeBlanc, St. John's, Newfoundland

Roger Helfrick. *Awen*. OKMN2002. 2640 19th Ave. SW, Calgary, Alta. T3E 7G1; <oakmoon@telus.net>; <www.rogerhelfrick.ca>

Roger Helfrick's newest album, *Awen*, is a very easy album to listen to. There is something here for the traditional music fan, for the world music fan, for the Celtic/Welsh music fan, and for the New Age music fan. This is an album that thrives on simplicity and directness. Everything is right in front of your ears, uncomplicated, accessible, crystal clear. The program takes us through a day or through a year, from dawn or from one winter solstice, until sunset or the next winter solstice. In between is beauty, sadness, love, calm and storm. As Roger sings and plays a couple of Celtic/Welsh-style harps (as well as the psaltery and guitar), inevitably there are more than a few hints of Loreena McKennitt in some of the tracks.

Nine of the 27 tracks on this album are traditional songs or airs, including the always lovely "Searching for Lambs", beautifully rendered in Roger's honest a cappella version, taking full advantage of the rich acoustics of Christ Church. Four of the traditional songs are short Icelandic songs, an excellent way of attracting my interest in things Viking. There's a fifth Icelandic lyric on the album, "Haegt í Dögun", with an unusual genesis. Roger had written two verses in English, had them translated into Icelandic prose, sent to Iceland to be turned into a traditional Icelandic saga verse form (lots of alliteration of both consonant and

vowel), and finally returned to Calgary, where he set the Icelandic verse to music. He doesn't say in the liner notes why he felt that such a roundabout route was important. His simple a cappella tune suits the theme very well. The other 18 tracks are all written by Roger. He is ably backed up on ten of the album's tracks by four other musicians, notably Nolana Baillargeon and Roger Duncan. I found several of Roger's instrumental compositions particularly lovely to listen to, such as "The Hunt", "Elegy", and the title track, "Awen". The last of these shows what musical pleasure Roger is capable of creating with a simple improvisation based on simple material.

There are a few minor flaws in this album. There are jarring contrasts in Roger's love song "The Dowry" between an Elizabethan courtliness of language and modern phrases such as "put a cork in it". I found myself wanting to ask him whether he was aiming for a love song or for a comic song, because he has ended up with neither. In Roger's song "Leading Me Home" there's a disconcerting triteness in the lines "Warm loaves of bread, / your breast under my head". The traditional Tyneside song "The Weary Cutters" (probably via Steeleye Span) did not seem to me to fit in with the rest of the album. The song is about Napoleonic era navy press gangs, and it doesn't match the bucolic and New Age mood of the rest of the album. And I'm still thinking about the strange vocal whoops in Roger's instrumental "Storm Call". Perhaps I will grow to appreciate them with time. There are also a few laughs. For example, the translation of the traditional Icelandic song "Gamall Hüsangur" includes the phrase "The raven plods through the snow". The image of a raven plodding instead of flying gives me a chuckle every time I read it.

James Prescott, Calgary, Alberta

Sid Marty. *Elsewhere*. SMC08032002. Centre Peak Productions, P.O. Box 3296, Pincher Creek, Alta. T0K 1W0; <sid@sidmarty.com>; <www.sidmarty.com>

Every once in a while, I encounter a song so appallingly catchy that I can't help but put the CD player on "repeat" mode and let it play continuously for an hour or more. The most recent was "Mountain Earth", the first track on Sid Marty's *Elsewhere*. It makes the rest of the universe fade away, and while listening to it I can hardly remember how any other song goes. Funny, now that I've written it down, that

doesn't sound like high praise, so for the record, I like the song an awful lot, and I like the album an awful lot too.

Sid Marty is well known in Alberta as an activist as well as a musician and writer, and the album is overridingly concerned with issues related to the wilderness. It is suffused with the sense of a rugged natural landscape, the subject of the bulk of the songs, and even those not directly concerned with the environment draw heavily upon natural metaphors. But Marty covers a considerable range of material under this heading. There are slices of western history and culture like "Mountain Earth" and "Other People's Cattle", and a few numbers that stand between sadness and anger about the industrialization and commercialization of the west. These sit alongside the more straightforward mountain pastoral of "Maybe the Wind" and the tongue-in-cheek escape fantasy of "Hidden Hotsprings". All of these different modes are well-served by Marty's voice, full of weight and dignity that carry material that might otherwise seem insincere. He even brings off a love song called "A Serious Man" with welcome earnestness. His evocation of the spirit of Wilf Carter, perhaps as a presiding shade of the album, seems entirely appropriate.

Another song that deserves particular mention is "Arrows of Pity", the title from Aeschylus, a lament about war and lost innocence. Marty's use of heightened imagery gives it a sad fairytale quality, and the guitar work carries it forward with the solemn elegance of a funeral dirge, building to a final verse of uncommon power. Likewise, the reflective "Two Pink Flamingos" provides an affecting invocation of fondly recalled youth. There's a fairly negligible instrumental in there, but on the whole, this is a very strong album, musically varied despite its thematic unity. The title *Elsewhere* seems to refer to that impulse to escape the mundane world and visit unspoiled nature. Listening to this album might provoke some of that same impulse to stir within the listener. Alberta's lucky to have Sid Marty.

Murray Leeder, Southbourne, Dorset

Northern Cree and Friends. *Honoring Singers and Songmakers*. CR-6350. Canyon Records, 3131 West Clarendon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

The ten heartwarming round dance songs on this recording were recorded live at the Louis Bull reserve, Alberta. The songs are lively, almost jubilant, with the many whoops, calls and accents floating around the melody.

While the songs are mostly sung with syllables, it's interesting to hear English words such as "When you're away-ay-ay" squeezed into the swaying rhythm. The songs are typical Plains form: one singer calls out the tune, the rest of the group then join the lead and the melody works its way down to the tail, before the lead begins the tune again. An atypical aspect is sliding up to a note, instead of the usual slide downwards from the pitch. The unison singing is excellent: this group really knows the music.

The recording insert has detailed notes on the unique form of hand drumming developed by the peoples of northern Saskatchewan and Alberta. The drummers "decorate" the beat by hitting their fingernails against the backside of the vibrating head. The drummers also use effective dynamics, ranging from silence to forte. The ample recording notes also help us to picture the dancers standing shoulder to shoulder, and side-stepping clockwise, and swinging their joined hands.

Lynn Whidden, Brandon, Manitoba

Brenda Stubbert. *Music All Around.* CP-2003-1. Cranford Publications, Box 42, Englishtown, N.S. B0C 1H0; <psc@cranfordpub.com>; <www.cranfordpub.com/stubbert>

Brenda Stubbert's bow is like sandpaper; its gritty strokes rhythmically work the strings until your inhibition is worn away. Stubbert's latest album, *Music All Around*, will have you dancing square sets until your shirt's wet. The album is made for dancers. It starts out like a good night at a Cape Breton dance hall, with a blast of jigs. "The First Figure Jigs" gets feet moving and ears warmed up for almost an hour of traditional Cape Breton fiddle music.

This is an "old school" recording. The arrangements and audio engineering are as traditional-sounding as the tunes. The album was recorded on location at St. Ann's in Cape Breton, and there is little monkey business. No sound effects or drum machines, just Stephanie Wills' fingers dancing on the keys of an old Heintzman piano and Stubbert's bow wearing down shoe soles. Wills' piano is too loud on a couple of

tracks, but her lively left hand never overwhelms the fiddle. Paul MacDonald's guitar is barely there; this is unfortunate, as he is a talented player. Stubbert's fiddle sounds tinny at times, but this is a recording problem, and not a reflection of Stubbert's playing. While the sound could have been better, the atmosphere is great. There is a strong sense of being in the room with the musicians.

The tunes are straightforward jigs and reels. Stubbert writes as well as she plays. *Music All Around* includes 15 of her originals. While the notes are new, the sound is not; Stubbert's compositions have a lyrical flow that never goes out of style. Stewart MacNeil and Eddie Woodsworth play accordion and bass respectively on the final set. "The Crossing to Ireland Melody" is a delightful rollick through two of Stubbert's best compositions. McNeil's accordion fills out the sound and gives tired toes an added incentive to "step lively" one last time. A solid performance from the matron of Cape Breton fiddle music.

Keitha Clark, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Tanglefoot. *Agnes on the Cowcatcher.* BCD143. *Captured Alive.* BCD157. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>; <www.tanglefootmusic.com>

The first of these two Tanglefoot albums, *Agnes on the Cowcatcher*, is the group's most recent studio recording. At the time of recording Tanglefoot consisted of Joe Grant (the only member from the group's beginnings, around 1980), Al Parrish, Rob Ritchie, Steve Ritchie and Terry Young. It was the group's fifth CD, preceded by three independent discs and one album with Borealis Records. "Agnes on the Cowcatcher" refers to a story told on track 10 (of 14), "Roll on Jamaica/Agnes on the Cowcatcher". It seems the wife of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, was not satisfied with riding the new trans-Canada railway alongside her husband in the comfort of their private rail car, and a more "engaging" viewing location was fashioned for her exclusive use. This story is but one example of the historical Canadian material to be found throughout the album. Tanglefoot's songs are all newly composed but are firmly rooted in the

history and traditions of Canada and Canadian folk music.

Tanglefoot's reputation for excellence on the concert stage made me a little worried prior to listening to this album for the first time: what if their studio work didn't measure up? Luckily, this concern was shortlived, as the merits of *Agnes* quickly became apparent. In addition to the title track, with its combination of beautifully crafted lyrics and expert arrangement, several other songs are worthy of note. "The Commodore's Compliments", written by Steve Ritchie and based on a story by C.H.J. Snider, tells the tale of the British/Canadian ship *Moira* in the closing days of the War of 1812. The song is a nautical tale of honour in conflict, and is especially poignant given current world events. "Radioman", written by Joe Grant and Al Parrish, is a much more lighthearted look at Canada-U.S. relations, involving several radios and a herd of cattle (readers are encouraged to follow this up on their own). Finally, "The Midwife's Dance", co-written by Rob Ritchie and Al Parrish, gives a multigenerational look at midwifery, an important and often overlooked part of our national history.

This CD demonstrates the health of Canada's living folk music. The music is lively and lyrical, the words poetic and the performance heartfelt. Every member of the group has contributed to the composition of new material, and the performances captured on this disc show spirit and polish. *Agnes* is a welcome addition to Tanglefoot's body of recordings, and should prove a great source of repertoire for other folk musicians.

Tanglefoot's most recent recording is the live album *Captured Alive*, which marks a turning point in the group's history. In addition to the arrival of Bryan Weirmier (replacing Rob Ritchie on keyboards), this album serves as both the swan song for founding member Joe Grant and the debut of Kingston, Ontario, fiddler Terry Snider. The recordings took place during the evenings of May 9th through 11th at the Flying Cloud Folk Club in Toronto. The finished product comprises the CD, lyrics and brief compositional notes, all nestled inside a soft, printed Digipak case.

The pieces selected for this recording are favourites from Tanglefoot's past, with only one piece, "There's a Bit of That Goes On", newly

composed for these sessions. Not surprisingly, this means that the music represents the best they have to offer, and their best is quite good indeed. The disc begins with a rousing a capella performance of "Secord's Warning", which tells the tale of Laura Secord's timely warning of an impending U.S. attack. The next track, "Seven a Side", is about a hockey game that took place in Wiarton, Ontario, around 1900, when teams played with seven players, not the current six (five plus the goalie). Clearly a current and pressing topic for many Canadians, as are so many others on the disc. I was particularly taken with the tale of "Dollar Bill", a Kingston-area hero from the days of Prohibition, who raised money for local causes and helped people cure their thirst at the same time. A true philanthropist, and one for whom a Kingston bar was named (although I believe it closed its doors in the 1990s). The 19-track disc ends with "La V'la M'Amie", the only piece surviving from Tanglefoot's early days when they focused on traditional music. A fitting close for Joe Grant.

Captured Alive shows in no uncertain terms why Tanglefoot has such a reputation for their live shows. The performances are all excellent (although the introduction to "One Broken Soldier" proves that even they make mistakes, or so they claim), and the rapport the group establishes with the audience is quite remarkable. While their studio recordings are excellent, *Captured Alive* ably demonstrates why Tanglefoot have become so popular on the live circuit in North America and the U.K. Their mix of pacing, musicianship and good humour is enviable.

It seems inevitable that comparisons will be made between these two recent Tanglefoot releases. While both are recommended, each may appeal to a different audience. For the longtime fan, *Agnes on the Cowcatcher* is a worthy addition to the CD collection. To those looking to sample Tanglefoot for the first time, it is hard to go wrong with *Captured Alive*. Either way, you win.

Paul Guise, Topeka, Kansas

Various. *Six Strings North of the Border: Vol. 1.* BCD128. *Six Strings North of the Border: Vol. 2.* BCD142. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)

Few instruments are as well-associated with folk music as the steel-stringed acoustic guitar. Its

prominence in early country music, bluegrass, Delta blues, the folk revival and other traditions, as well as its deployment by rock musicians and singer-songwriters, have made it an icon of many things -- down-home "roots", sincerity, authenticity and the myth of the acoustic instrument as more "natural" than its electric cousins. The acoustic guitar is most often heard as an accompanying instrument, but it is an appealing vehicle for solo performance as well, as is well-evident on these compilations.

Collectively, the two volumes of *Six Strings North of the Border* feature 31 Canadian acoustic guitarists from across the country. The selections range in style from Scottish and Irish dance tunes to bluegrass, ragtime and jazz to "World Beat" fusions. It is difficult to pick highlights, as the guitarists and their selections are of uniformly high quality. I gravitated immediately to some of the players whose styles are familiar to me -- the folk-rock lyricism of Bruce Cockburn's playing on "Foxglove", for instance, or the breakneck virtuosity of J.P. Cormier in his rendition of "The Mathematician/Sleepy Maggie" (both on Volume 1) -- but there were many players new to me whose music quickly got under my skin. For example, Art Turner's "Invitation to Circumstance" (Volume 2) is a harmonically adventurous exploration of different moods, accompanied by pipes and the fiddle. Toronto studio guitarist Rick Whitelaw's showcase "Bottom Dollar" (Volume 1) stands out as a fascinatingly quirky and skilled composition.

Just to give a sense of the breadth on offer here, Volume 1 includes guitaristic renderings of Gaelic song and fiddle tunes (Jason Fowler's "Shi Beag Shi Mhor", Jean Hewson's "Scotty MacMillan's G Minor Jig"), bottleneck and slide guitar (Ken Hamm and Doug Cox's "Dave Macon Rag"), Indian raga-flavoured improvisation (Thomas Handy's "Spring"), and some Travis-style country picking (Eve Goldberg's "Watermelon Sorbet"). Nearly all of this volume features the steel-stringed guitar alone, although a few tracks have accompanying instruments. In contrast, Volume 2 is a little more liberal, featuring performances with Irish fiddle, vocals and other instruments. James Cohen's "The Wind", in flamenco style, branches into nylon-stringed territory, while Colin Linden's guitar on "In the Deep Field" is treated with a tremolo effect. Martin Posen's "Django Townshend" is the most directly rock-influenced performance on offer in either

collection, and it features aggressive power chords which do indeed recall the playing of The Who's guitarist.

Both volumes feature producer Bill Garrett's amiable comments on each player. The annotations on Volume 1 were a bit inconsistent, not always telling us exactly who each guitarist is and where they come from, but this problem was not evident in Volume 2. To me, a guitarist and longtime fan of the steel-string, both volumes were sheer listening bliss, without a single unattractive track on either CD. As Garrett observes in the introductory liner notes, Canada has a wealth of extraordinary and diverse acoustic guitar talents, and after listening to these CDs, I wholeheartedly agree.

Chris McDonald, Mississauga, Ontario

April Verch. *From Where I Stand*. 116 617 046-2. Rounder Records, 2450 Victoria Park Ave., Toronto, Ont. M2J 4A2; <ian.gilchrist@umusic.com>; Rounder Records, 1 Camp St., Cambridge, MA 02140, U.S.A.; <info@rounder.com>; <www.rounder.com>

The fact that I've been humming April's own composition, "Riverboat's Gone", for the past several days says something about the success of this recording, her second for the Rounder label and her fifth since the age of 14. This CD maintains the trend of her previous recordings by offering a variety of tunes, 24 in all, in widely diverse styles, including six of her own compositions.

I am often apprehensive when I hear fiddlers trying to record tunes in styles that are not their own. While I applaud their interest in learning tunes in diverse styles, it sometimes seems that the drive to learn and play/record such tunes has more to do with trying to cater to an audience that needs to be constantly "entertained" with variety, rather than a real affinity on the part of the musicians for the tunes and/or styles. Often the result is an incongruous blending of a tune from one context played in a style from another. Even more disappointing are performances that are merely imitations, without any understanding or experience of the context that has nurtured the tunes/style. Before the reader labels me an incurable "purist", with some rosy-hued image of "authentic" performances of tunes, let me hasten to acknowledge that collaboration between tunes and styles need not result in an inferior product. Happily, this album is an example where

movement between styles works quite effectively.

April shifts easily and comfortably between most styles represented on this album. We can trace April's growing interest in playing a variety of fiddle styles through her recordings. Her introduction of styles from the southern U.S., evident particularly on her last two recordings with Rounder, is not surprising. As she tours more and more, particularly throughout the United States, and is further exposed to these styles through fellow musicians, they will have more personal meaning for her, and will continue to become more a part of her own palette of expression. Stylistically appropriate and aesthetically satisfying performances of southern-U.S.-flavoured tunes include "Dixie Hoedown", "Bumblebee in a Jug", and "I'll Be All Smiles Tonight".

Revealing my own background in Ontario fiddling, my favourite track is the Ottawa Valley medley of jigs and reels written by Ottawa Valley fiddling legends Reg Hill, Bob Ranger, Peter Dawson and Ward Allen. April is at her absolute best playing the fiddle style in which she grew up. Listeners cannot help but tap their toes, or even get up and dance, in response to her energy and drive. In the same style is April's own "Fraser Valley Reel", written for the Fraser Valley Fiddlers, a group in British Columbia dedicated to preserving Canadian old-time fiddling. The style is appropriate considering the group's mandate. Variation in dynamics, bowing techniques, ornamentation and accompaniment make this an interesting track with which to begin the CD. Another favourite is "August 19", the tune April wrote for her wedding day. The melody/harmonic progression of the tune is beautiful in itself. I can imagine that, played slowly and unaccompanied, it would set a beautiful mood for a wedding ceremony. Darol Anger's arrangement for two fiddles, cello and guitar is also gorgeous.

Breaking from past recordings, April sings on five of the tracks. This is not at all a stretch, since her father has been a popular singer and guitar player with various groups in the Ottawa Valley since before April was born. And April does not disappoint; she does an admirable performance on the vocal tracks, backed up by Michele Campagne and Connie Kaldor. In particular, the gospel tune "I Will Arise" is very moving.

My least favourite track on the CD is the Latin-inspired "Spanish for Crown", co-written by April and Montana-based fiddler Tyler Buckley. This is not to say, however, that April and Tyler don't write great tunes together; their other collaboration on this album, "Faniuk's Fancy", is more successful, to my ears. In this case, the Ukrainian melodic and harmonic flavour of the first part of the tune blends easily with the more "old-time fiddle" feel of the second part.

I could go on and on about each of the 14 tracks, but my descriptions cannot, of course, do justice to the infectious energy of April's playing and her careful, unique arrangements. This album will be a welcome addition to any fiddle and/or old-time music lover's collection. Finally, if you have an opportunity to see April play live, don't miss it. She's even better on stage!

Sherry Johnson, Toronto, Ontario

Randy Wood. *Round Dance Blues*. CR-6363. Canyon Records Productions, 3131 West Clarendon Avenue, Phoenix AZ 85017, USA; <canyon@canyonrecords.com>; <www.canyonrecords.com>

Round Dance Blues is Randy Wood's second solo album with Canyon Records and follows his initial success, entitled *Round Dance the Night Away* [reviewed 36.3, p. 41], which was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2002. However, as a founding member of Northern Cree, Wood is no stranger to the round dance scene. The story of how this well-known group formed and chose their name is included in the liner notes. Throughout the recording Wood employs a warm, smooth vocal style. These rich, mellow vocals are foregrounded against a barely-heard drum accompaniment, making the lyrics a significant feature of this round dance collection. Some are sentimental numbers, like "I'll Never Say Goodbye", which is dedicated to his wife, while "My Chevrolet" is a humorous number about a man's love for his car.

The majority of tracks on *Round Dance Blues* make excellent easy-listening music. This is not to say that the original social context for the round dance should be forgotten, but rather that Wood's artistry is at home in a variety of contexts and will find a broad musical audience. For the outsider who purchases this recording, however, the liner notes do not guide the listening experience. They are sparse, and largely devoted to the history of Northern Cree, leaving

little opportunity for the listener to learn more about Randy Wood and his music. Nevertheless, *Round Dance Blues* is a welcome addition to any music library.

Janice Esther Tulk, St. John's, Newfoundland

A Peak in Darien

Here are listed various recordings that we are in the process of reviewing, or, occasionally, items that we have received but do not intend to review because they are musically too far removed from our traditional or Canadian beat.

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

Burning Sky. *A Simple Man*. CR-7063. Canyon Records (address above)

William Eaton Ensemble. *Sparks and Embers*. CR-7061. Canyon Records (address above)

The Ecclestons. *Fir n Mnh*. PM10192. P.O. Box 30032, Saanich Centre Postal Outlet, Victoria, BC V8X 5E1; <skog@islandnet.com>; <www.irishclubvictoria.com/ecclestons>

The Ecclestons. *The Home Fires*. PM10972. (postal address above); <www.theecclestons.com>

The Ecclestons. *Imbole to Beltane*. PM10302. (addresses above)

The Ennis Sisters. *Can't Be the Same*. 2 51008. Warner Music Canada Ltd., 3751 Victoria Park Ave., Scarborough, Ont. M1W 3Z4; <www.ennissisters.com>

David Gogo. *Live at Deer Lake*. Corbova Bay Entertainment Group Inc., 5159 Beckton Rd., Victoria, B.C. V8Y 2C2; <info@corbovabay.com>; <www.cordovabay.com>; PHD Distribution Canada Ltd., 1330 Main St., North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 1C3

Enoch Kent. *I'm a Workin' Chap*. SAS2007. Second Avenue Records, 12 Aldergrove Ave., Toronto, Ont. M4C 1B2; 1-888-923-3879; <www.enochkent.ca>; <www.secondavenue.ca>

Tom Lewis. *360: All Points of the Compass*. BCD156. Borealis Recording Co., 225 Sterling Rd., Unit 19, Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; <info@borealisrecords.com>; <www.borealisrecords.com>; Festival Distribution (address above); Big Daddy Music Distribution, 162 N. 8th St., Kenilworth, NJ 07033, USA.

Lewis & Royal. *Ampersand*. Rosebud Creek Records, Box 630, Rosebud, Alta. T0J 2T0; <lewfrere@telus.net>; <www.lewisandroyal.com>

Dave McCann & The Ten Toed Frogs. *Country Medicine*. MCC20870. Old Man River Folk Music, 2625 Erlton St. SW, Calgary, Alta. T2S 2W2; <daviemccann@hotmail.com>; <www.davemccann.com>

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

Dale Nikkel. *Class Clowns, Breakdowns & Other Talk of the Town*. FFP0404. Dale Nikkel, 23 Truro St., Winnipeg, Man. R3S 2A2 (no postal address on packaging); <info@dalenikkel.com>; <www.dalenikkel.com>

Dale Nikkel. *Still Learning Tricks*. FPP0203. Dale Nikkel (address above)

Northern Cree & Friends. *Round Dance Songs Recorded "Live", vol. 2: Honoring Singers & Songmakers*. CR-6364. Canyon Records (address above)

Evelyn Parry. *Unreasonable*. BCD160. Borealis Recording Co. (address above); <www.evalynparry.com>

Shelley Posen. *Manna*. WDM02. Well Done Music, 295 First Ave., Ottawa, Ont. K1S 2G7; <shelley@shelleyposen.com>; <www.shelleyposen.com>

Shelley Posen. *The Old Songs' Home*. WDM01. Well Done Music (address above)

Shannon Saunders & The Splinters. *Cold November*. SAS20042. Shannon Saunders, 251 - 2416 Main St., Vancouver, B.C. V5T 3E2; <contact@thesplinters.com>; <www.thesplinters.com>

Dolly Sillito. *For a Spell*. CWR007. <dollyspell@hotmail.com> (no postal address on packaging)

Clark Tenakhongva. *Hear My Song, Hear My Prayer: Songs from the Hopi Mesas*. CR-6366. Canyon Records (address above)

Various. *Hold Your Ground, vol. III: Enough*. Gerald Wheatley, 940 5th St. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2N 1R2; <song@activist.ca>; <cd.activist.ca>

Ken Whiteley. *Gospel Music Makes Me Feel Alright*. BCD159. Borealis Recording Co. (address above)