



Words and Music

John Leeder, Review Editor

Recordings

David Francey. **Torn Screen Door**. LKR 1001. Laker Music, Box 539, Ayer's Cliff, P.Q. JOB 1C0; <laker@abacom.com>; <www.davidfrancey.com>

There are so many good things to say about this recording, it's hard to know where to begin.

The gritty singing? The evocative songwriting? The spare, note-perfect arrangements? The excellent backup musicians? All these aspects combine to create a completely satisfying musical experience.

There are two things I like about David Francey. The first is that he pays homage to his traditional roots in both his songwriting and his singing. His songs are ballads and shanties and airs and laments, and although their stories may be set in the contemporary world, their themes are timeless.

The second is that he is satisfied to let his songs deliver themselves, using only a voice and a guitar, and occasionally some backup bass, mandolin or fiddle. The arrangements (by Dave Clarke, who plays guitar on many of the tracks and who also produced the album) are simple in the best possible way. There is no clutter in these songs, only a voice (sometimes with backup vocals) and the support of a few musicians.

And what a voice it is — honest, direct, and unadorned, like the songs themselves. As a singer-songwriter, Francey has the gift of never sounding the same. His songs range from the shanty-like "Sorrows of the Sailor" to a poignant account of love-gone-wrong in "Sumach Street" to the jaunty anthem to spring in "Red-Winged Blackbird."

I loved this CD from start to finish and highly recommend it.

Jean Mills Guelph, Ontario

Prairie Ceilidh. **Dry Island**. BAMC1001. Elisa Sereno-Janzen, 2004 17th Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2M 0S6; <tjanzen@mtroyal.ab.ca>

Prairie Ceilidh is a Calgary folk band whose repertoire includes traditional Canadian and Celtic songs and tunes, as well as some original material. This is their first CD, and it's a promising beginning, although there are some aspects of the recording that keep it from being completely successful.

The band is at its best when playing tunes — the instrumental arrangements are colourful and direct, with the melody claiming pride of place and the other instruments adding support and colour.

The fiddle and flutes are particularly strong, and the guitar playing is solid. There's also some funky percussion from time to time, notably on the Celtic classic "Star of the County Down."

The result is less successful on the songs, partly because the singers (both Elisa Sereno-Janz and Tim Janz) seem to be either too far away from or too close to their microphones. This was very noticeable on the Newfoundland folksong "Sarah", and what saves the song in the end is the strong backup singing of the chorus, giving a fuller sound to the vocals. This is more a fault of the recording (or mixing?) than the singing, but it does jar against the ear. A few problems with intonation, especially on the female vocals, also detract from the overall beauty of the songs.

The musicians obviously love their Celtic music, and they render the tunes with confidence and grace. I preferred the traditional music to the original pieces (although the original fiddle tune "Snow in April" was impressive with its hard-driving rhythm), and I preferred the instrumentals to the songs, mostly because of the uneven vocal performances by the lead singers.

The weakness of the songs aside, Prairie Ceilidh's "Dry Island" is worth a listen. There is nothing like a spirited rendering of traditional jigs and reels and airs, and this band has no problem delivering on that score.

Jean Mills Guelph, Ontario

Rik Barron. Make Hay When the Sun Shines. Rik Barron, St. Catherine's Rd., RR#3, Bonshaw, P.E.I. C0A 1C0; <rbarron@isn.net>

Rik Barron was named the Children's Artist of the Year at the 2000 East Coast Music Awards, but there's no reason to think this recording is for kids only. Adults will love it too. However I would offer one caveat: you've got to like the banjo!

This is a banjo album, through and through. Just glancing down the list of tunes confirms it: "The Crowdad Song", "Cluck Old Hen", "Liza Jane". These are the songs of bluegrass and old-timey American traditional music. Rik Barron does them justice, whether singing in a voice that sounds as if he's always smiling, or playing his five-string with obvious enthusiasm.

He's joined by some pretty good banjo players as well, including Mark Johnson and Kevin Evans. The backup band includes Perry Williams on guitar, accordion and screwdriver (?), as well as Alan Dowling on percussion and Bob Nicholson on tuba. The banjos may dominate, but the overall effect of these instruments is coherent and fun.

The songs are upbeat and perfect for a kitchen or car trip singalong, especially the title

track, "Making Hay." It's no surprise that Rik Barron is finding success with this recording of family folk music. It's a winner, a verdict confirmed by my own five-year-old son, who just can't sit still when those banjos start playing.

Jean Mills Guelph, Ontario

Three CDs from Calgary

Tinderbox. No, Really, Let Go. Tinderbox, 2442 6th Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2N 0X4

Ian MacDonald. **Holding Shadows.**

MAC20038. Leaky Boat Music, 912 18th Ave. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2G 1L3;

<leakyboat@cadvision.com>

Mr. Mole. **Silver Thin Lines.** Mr. Mole, c/o Will Mehew, 112 Maple Court Cr. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2J 1W1

One thing that is hard to do in Alberta is to predict the weather. Man, that is tough!

However, it has always been easy to predict the music that comes out of that province: Good! Some may be a touch better than others, but it's all still good. Tinderbox is no exception to that rule. Their sound is somewhat familiar, at least the first part of the CD. I am quite sure I hear some Moxy Frivous somewhere in there, just lying around, or perhaps vice versa. The trio open up with a gloomy tune played to an upscaled beat, very well done. Kris and Monika Wenzel's vocals are great in their storytelling songs. Although the subject matter is somewhat different, for instance, "Buckets of Frogs", it is tasteful and very easy to listen to. Ron Burland along with Monika are everywhere on this CD with their percussion, especially on tunes such as "Particularly Pointless". "Bug Catcher" is a wonderfully catchy song that jumps out at you — it is great! Still can't figure out why I do not hear this stuff on the radio. I did tell you the subject matter is different, but they do get you to think a bit, and I like that too. "Pieces of Us" could very easily slip into a radio station's playlist. "Aphrodisiac Hell" is the oddest tune on the CD. I am not too sure if they answered their own question, "Why do camels hump in the rain?" — well, was it answered? I'll let you guys have a listen to the rest of this CD. Out of the twelve cuts, one, maybe two, are weak. I think that has to do more with my taste than anything else. Tinderbox disbanded a while back. They did get together for shows in Alberta not too long ago. Another CD, could be, or maybe they really did let go.

Ian Macdonald left the eastern part of Canada to live in Alberta. He fits in very well, and so does that voice! Ever hear something that sounds familiar but is new? That's Ian. "Mud Flat"

opens up **Holding Shadows**, a catchy tune that Ian's voice just locks onto, giving us a look at his eastern home. So many Canadians are constantly looking for a better life and to build on that life. Many end up in the west, especially Alberta. Ian gives his version of this in "I'm Lost".

The CD is very well produced, with just the right amount of guitar for my taste. The voice is out there too, so the lyrics are crisp and clear. There are songs that are upbeat, like "Leaky Boat" and "The Seam", a bluesy look at the eastern life that was left behind. In a lot of the tunes one can feel the homesick blues. It is tough to relocate, especially from east to west. Mr. MacDonald takes us into his personal life also, from relationships that are all but over ("Dogs and Sunsets") to a relationship in which one can feel how desperately the singer is trying to recapture what was lost ("Of All the Mistakes"). There are 11 cuts on this great CD, a wonderful and interesting musical tour. Ian helped produce it, along with Ron Casat, and they did a fine job. You have to go out and get this one, you really do. There are five more tracks that you'll have to listen to. Some really good rockers, too, like "I Have To Know". Others take us back to the east ("Row Me Home"), and "The Fall" is a bluesy number that sounds just great with Ian's voice. **Holding Shadows** can really hold its own.

The Moles, or maybe you might know them as "Mr. Mole", are by any name a great trio. Three excellent songwriters go the way that feels good for them. That means it will sound good to us! Everyone is talking about how they perform. I have been told by a few friends in the West that they have a rocker's energy on stage and have a ability to give life to all their songs. It is hard to review a CD like **Silver Thin Lines** because of the songs' various formats. The CD opens with a wonderful traditional-sounding song, "Fisherman's Lament", sung by Will Mehew. Then we listen to the haunting voice of Mary Cole in "Painter's Cry". From then on we hear bluegrass, some jazzy tunes, then some bluesy ones, also a few ballads like "Old House" and "Ode to Grandma". Mr. Mole is Gary Kurtz, Will Mehew and Mary Cole. All are great on vocals, all are very professional musicians. **Silver Thin Lines** is their first CD. What makes it so listenable is that they are having fun, and you can feel that!

Terry St. James Montreal, Quebec

Central Fraser Valley Fiddlers. Silver & Gold. Central Fraser Valley Fiddlers, Box 2246, Abbotsford, B.C. V2T 4X2

Several recordings by old time fiddle groups are available; all aim to preserve and promote traditional tunes, but not all do so with a high

level of recording or musical quality. **Silver & Gold**, however, maintains an excellent standard of both.

The group stays together very well, to produce a rich, thick fiddle sound, which itself is very good; the tone is sweet, and the notes are quite clear, considering the number of musicians involved. The arrangements of the tunes are standard by well done and clean. The backup is solid, giving a very rhythmic and full body to the music.

The recording was done in the hall where the fiddlers hold their practices. The acoustics work very well, and the balance of all the instruments is excellent.

The tunes on **Silver & Gold** are well-known melodies taken from a variety of styles ("Log Driver's Waltz", "Five Foot Two", "The Plough Boy", "San Antonio Rose", etc.). They are all very familiar to the ears, yet are performed well enough that I did not tire of hearing them.

This is an excellent recording to own because it is enjoyable to listen to and preserves, in a very musical way, some of the best old standards.

Keitha Clark Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

The McGregor Family. Fourth Generation. Dale McGregor, 5904 Glendale, Sardis, B.C. V2R 3A6

This is a pleasant recording that preserves and promotes traditional fiddle values. Family, heritage and solid danceable tunes can all be found. It is clear that a lot of time has been put into the arrangements of the tunes; they are creatively put together. I enjoy the intros, and what I believe is a bpdhran bridging the shifts from one song to another. Some great new ideas on some old tunes are found on this album.

Most of the tunes are standards, the Top Ten Hits of the fiddle world (such as "Maple Sugar", "Westphalia Waltz", "Rubber Dolly", "Orange Blossom Special"), done up in a very toe-tapping way that is enjoyable to listen to. Dale (the father) also has four originals on the album; his slow air "Alma Townsend" is especially nice, and the arrangement of it is lovely.

The recording itself could perhaps have been a bit better done. The sound quality, while clear and crisp, doesn't bring out the full richness of the violins, and the backup is at times a bit too loud. Nothing is extremely harsh, but this is something that could be improved for another album. I hope the McGregors do go into the studio again; it's great to see a family combine their talents for such a good purpose.

Keitha Clark Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Jerusalem Ridge. *Together*. JR060501. The PandaBird Agency, 1207 37th St., Edmonton, Alta. T6L 2M8; <pandab@telusplanet.net>; www.telusplanet.net/public/pandab/music.html

The CD title *Together* is undoubtedly a tribute to the 12 years the band has been in existence, but is more likely in tribute to the five-piece band heard on this recording. The four Jerusalem Ridge members have been joined for the recording by a musician who has been a friend since the early 1990s, when he began to visit selected Western Canada bluegrass festivals. That man is LeRoy McNeas, better known as LeRoy Mack. This dobro or resonator guitar player was first heard on recordings of the Kentucky Colonels which also included Billy Ray Latham and the White Brothers, Clarence and Roland. The four Albertans and the visiting Californian hit it off right from the start, and a recording some time in the future was probably inevitable. That future has reached us in this recording, *Together*.

Aside from several songs associated with LeRoy, the main body of the music sounds just like the Jerusalem Ridge we've become accustomed to, with the addition of the resonator guitar. That is to say, neither LeRoy's sound nor the sound of the band has been compromised or drastically modified in any way. That sound comes from acoustic bass man Keith Burgess, banjo and guitar player Craig Korth, fiddle and guitar player Byron Myhre and guitar mandolin and guitar man Bill Lopushinsky.

None of the 14 cuts are the kind of bluegrass war-horses we might expect a band to record when they're looking for an easy music selection. The CD kicks off with a Mack original, "Just To Prove My Love To You", which begins with twin fiddles from Byron Myhre, with a touch of Cajun mixed in. The final song, "Grandma's Feather Bed", is the one recorded by John Denver, and is given a "fun" treatment here. In the middle is good, solid bluegrass, with great harmonies and sparkling instrumentals. The instrumentals allow everyone to stretch out, and are Bill Napier's "Daybreak In Dixie", "Up and Around the Bend" from Bela Fleck, and the well-known "East Tennessee Blues" given the 78 r.p.m. speed treatment.

Gospel selections include the bluegrass fan-favorite "Working On A Building" and the rarely heard "On My Mother's Side", which could be said to be a modified "call and answer" type of song. It's a song with a twist (or a "hook", in commercial terms) and features inspired harmony vocal work. Some of the older music includes "Behind These Prison Walls of Love" from the Blue Sky Boys. (Bill and Earl Bolick were amongst the first of the "brother music" acts to record, and illustrate how

tight sibling vocal harmony can be.) "Gold Watch and Chain" is a Carter Family favorite.

"Evangeline" is a Robbie Robertson song recorded by the Winnipeg country-rock band C-Weed in the '70s, and gets another touch of Cajun in the fiddle department; Billy Edd Wheeler's "Reverend Mr. Black" is here; and there's more "brother harmony" with Byron and Bill on "That's When I'll Stop Loving You", written by mandolinist Larry of the famous Rice family. You'll also hear a short medley of three pieces LeRoy played at some point in the mists of time on the Andy Griffith Show.

I found *Together* to be a delightful recording of good music by a class act of five singers and musicians who've known each other for many years but have not recorded before with that fifth member, the "special guest" in the person of LeRoy Mack.

Laurie Mills Calgary, Alberta

Loretto Reid Band. *From the Inside Out*. RCD-99. Reta Ceol Productions, 1561 Williamsport Dr., Mississauga, Ont. L4X 1T7

The name change (they're now "The Loretto Reid Band") isn't the only difference with this new CD from the Irish flute player transplanted to Central Ontario. When the album opens with its washes of New Age voices and instruments, you'd be forgiven for thinking it might be a new Enya recording. But by the second track, a jaunty set of jigs composed by Reid, we're back on familiar ground once more.

Most of the CD, in fact, is made up of traditional pieces, or tunes composed in the tradition. The playing is superb throughout, the production faultless and the arrangements well-considered. Anyone who can make a hoary old chestnut like "Danny Boy" or "The Coulin" sound fresh once more is doing something right, in my books. The addition of the occasional vocal cut is also appreciated by this listener. Rowena Taheny does an especially lovely turn on "The May Morning Dew".

And, contrary to the impression I might have given above, I don't mind the occasional forays into more adventurous territory. That opening cut, while certainly reminiscent of Enya, has much more heart than most New Age "Celtic" recordings, and they do a wonderful Celt-up on Beethoven's "Für Elise", featuring Brian Taheny's tenor banjo dueting with Qiu-xia He's Chinese pipa (the latter has a lovely mandolin-like sound). I also like the fact that they give a tip of the hat to the old Irish rock band Horslips by playing their uptempo version of "The King of the Fairies". So there's something for everyone here, from step-dancing to traditional tunes, contemporary song to

rocked-up jigs and reels. What's most surprising is how it all blends so well, cut flowing to cut like a well-told story.

Charles de Lint Ottawa, Ontario

From the President

Leslie Hall, President, Canadian Society for Traditional Music (CSTM)

I am very happy to report that the annual meeting of the society held in Vancouver Oct. 26-28 was very well attended and extremely worthwhile. Many thanks to Norm Stanfield and Alan Thrasher of UBC for providing such a wonderful venue and interesting program.

I am also very pleased that Norm has agreed to take on the Presidency. I know he will do an excellent job. The Society's finances could be better, but we were fortunate to receive \$800.00 as our share from last year's meeting in Toronto, which has allowed us to be in reasonable financial shape.

At the Vancouver meeting, we decided to attempt to organize sites for our AGM two years in advance so that we aren't scrambling at the last minute looking for a host. We would love to be able to meet in the eastern part of Canada, as most of our recent meetings have been in Toronto and the west.

To conclude, I would like to thank everyone who has worked so tirelessly on behalf of the *Bulletin*, the *Journal*, our two websites and mail order service, our Archives, and especially our secretary, John Leeder, and our treasurer, James Prescott. We are all indebted to them for their contributions.

Editor:

I would be remiss in not thanking, on behalf of all members of CSTM, Leslie for her work as our President. Thank you, Leslie! Here's hoping you will now have more time for some no doubt exciting projects to come.