

Reviews

Book

Dale Jarvis. *Haunted Waters: More True Ghost Stories from Newfoundland and Labrador*. 2010, 170 pp. ISBN--978-1-897317-79-2. Flanker Press, P.O. Box 2522, Station C, Saint

John's, N.L.

fo@flankerpress.com. www.flankerpress.com.

Have you heard the tale of the phantom dory of Davis Cove, or the spectral soldier who haunts the grounds of Government House in Saint John's, or the shrieking horror of Signal Hill, or the ghost horse of Mattis Point, or the sinister specter haunting a suite in the Carson Hotel in Lewisporte? These are but a few of the tasty and chilling narrative gems you will find in the latest ghostly incarnation from Dale Jarvis, the master of the Newfoundland ghost story.

This is his fourth collection to date, and it takes up where the Golden Leg leaves off. As Jarvis has so often pointed out, Newfoundland is either blessed or cursed with more ghosts, devils, witches, faeries, spectral horses, phantom ships, and sea beasties than any other of Canada's provinces. The stories are grouped under such headings as haunted schooners and other ghostly ships, faerie lore and related legends, family ghosts, ghost horses and other strange critters, haunted houses and other bothersome buildings,

and ghostly gals and midnight maidens, among other chapters in the collection.

Many of the stories, in one form or another, have appeared in two local Newfoundland publications, *Downhome Magazine* and the *Telegram*. Here are ghosts who hunt for buried treasure, avenge wrongs done to them in their mortal lifetime, or lure sailors to their doom, while others, such as Charlie from central Newfoundland, are merely friendly and do not cause any harm.

From Labrador's northern lights to Lime Street in Saint John's, ghosts and specters come in all shapes and sizes. Many of these tales are of modern origin, although one goes back as far as the middle of the sixth century C.E. involving the good Saint Brendan himself. Ghost pirates, spectral wolves, old hags, malevolent faeries, the Devil himself, and so many other strange apparitions make up the core of this delightful volume.

From the Northern Peninsula to the streets of Saint John's, the tales just keep on coming and coming, and what results is some of the best storytelling on printed page in the realm of the other-worldly and the supernatural. Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, Dale Jarvis once again shows quite nicely why the Newfoundland ghost story is just as chilling, dark, and malevolent as it ever was.

Robert Rodriguez, New York

Recordings

Bonnie Dobson. *Vive la Canadienne*. Bear Family Records BCD 16720 AH. P.O. Box 1154, D-27727 Hambergen, Germany. bear@bear-family.de; www.Bear-family.de.

This CD is a reissue (plus two extra tracks) of two LP records: *For the Love of Him* (1964) and *Bonnie Dobson* (1974). The only disappointing thing about this CD is that it doesn't include the song for which Bonnie Dobson was most famous, "Morning Dew", one of the best anti-nuclear songs to come out of the sixties. No matter, Bonnie Dobson has a beautiful, clear voice (she reminds me of the early Judy Collins), and you get well-sung versions of twenty-four good songs. The ten items from *For the Love of Him* were mostly recorded with just guitar accompa-

niment, and there is not an inferior track among them. It was a very impressive debut album. Perhaps my favourite is "Peggy Gordon"—I have never heard a better rendition of this pretty lyric, which, if I remember correctly, Helen Creighton collected from Dennis Smith. Of the other traditional songs on the CD, I particularly enjoyed "So Early in the Spring" and "Thyme"; also notable is the only Child ballad, "Lord Gregory," which has a particularly beautiful melody. Bonnie also has a flair for singing francophone songs, and there were two included on her first LP: "Un Canadian errant" and "Le Roi", both performed impeccably. The only duplication between the two records came with the repetition of "Un Canadian errant," so you will find two versions here, without a great deal of difference between them. The other francophone songs

(from the 1974 release)) are “Vive la Canadienne” and “À la claire fontaine”.

The song selections on *Bonnie Dobson* were less adventurous than on *For the Love of Him*. A male chorus was employed on some of the most familiar singalong songs, such as “Farewell to Nova Scotia” and “I’se the Bye” and, perhaps as a result, the performances seem rather more routine. On the other hand, Bonnie made distinctive renditions of half a dozen contemporary folksongs that have since become classics, including “Land of the Silver Birch” and Lightfoot’s “Long River”. The two bonus tracks are live recordings of Ian Rankin’s “Special Sense of Kind” and “Sweet Somerset”, the only song on the CD written by Bonnie herself.

My only criticism of the production is that the guitar is often too prominent, rather than providing a quiet tapestry of sound under the voice. That may be a function of the remix, and it can be minimized on playback by adjusting the stereo balance. Because the production was simple and tasteful, these performances by a fine singer with a lovely voice do not sound dated half a decade after they were recorded. In short, this CD is a bargain, since both LPs were excellent and they still sound good today.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Woody Guthrie. *This Land is Your Land*.

Discmedi Blau DM 4224-02. Rda. Guinardo 59 bis, 08024 Barcelona. discmedi@discmedi.com; www.discmedi.com.

Woody Guthrie needs no introduction, but there is a reason for bringing this Spanish 2-CD set to your notice. It includes all of the tracks that he made for RCA Victor on 26th April 1940, as well as a bunch of other early recordings, in which he was often accompanied by Cisco Houston and occasionally also by Leadbelly or Sonny Terry. The RCA Victor recordings, originally issued on 78s, were long unavailable, and when they did eventually appear on an RCA LP titled *Dust Bowl Ballads*, that also was all too soon deleted. It was a great pity, because these are the best recorded versions of many of Woody’s finest songs, in the main superior to later remakes for Moses Asch. They include “Talking Dust Bowl Blues”, “I Ain’t Got No Home”, “Blowin’ Down this Road”, “Do Re Mi”, “So Long, It’s Been Good to Know Yuh” and “Tom Joad” (among others).

All in all there are 36 tracks on this collection, and most of the other songs are well worth

having too, including, as they do, “Pastures of Plenty”, “Jesus Christ”, “This Land is Your Land”, “Sinking of the Reuben James”, “Hard Traveling” and “Talking Columbia”. There are also a few of Guthrie’s children’s songs and versions of several folksong and hillbilly classics, for example, “Gypsy Davy”, “John Henry” and “The Wreck of the Old ‘97”.

All of which means that this reissue is *essential* to anyone’s folksong collection. Moreover, there is the bonus of a good booklet, although most of the text is in Spanish. Despite its origin in Barcelona, this CD set is available through Amazon, so it is not difficult to come by.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Sid Marty. *Let the River Run*. CP2008CD 01. Centre Peak Productions; sid@sidmarty.com; www.sidmarty.com (no addresses on packaging).

This is a CD release of a cassette recording made in 1990. At just over 38 minutes, it is rather short, and one wishes Marty had seen fit to add a bunch of bonus tracks. However, most the ten songs on the CD are excellent, and Marty has a very appealing, deep and smooth, baritone voice. What is unique about this recording is that many of the songs evoke the look and feel of a single geographical area: the foothills of southern Alberta, east of the Crownsnest Pass. That is true of “Southcountry Wind”, “Dryland Blues”, “Down Along the Livingstone”, “Cool Green”, “By Oldman’s River” and “Let the River Run”.

There is an element of nostalgia in some of Marty’s songs: for the naïve idealism of the ‘60s, for young love now only a memory, for the cowboy’s hard life, and for a lost, unspoiled natural environment. Yet the poetic evocations of natural beauty make this recording more than a personal expression: in its quiet way it is also a political manifesto against the unchecked greed that can transform and ruin the natural environment. That message comes through clearest in a song, “Let the River Run”, which was written as part of an unsuccessful campaign to prevent the damming of the Oldman River. It’s a fine anthem, and there are other songs on the record that make one want to reach for a guitar and sing them oneself, especially “Coureur de bois” and “Down Along the Livingstone”. My personal favourite is one that sounds traditional, “Barbary Shore”, although it may be a Marty creation. Which is a way of saying that Sid Marty is a delicate craftsman of fine songs that sound like nobody else’s. This CD is a gem. Don’t miss it.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta