

Reviews

Editor: John Leeder

Ian Bell. *Forget Me Not When Far Away.* 013. Sound Reconstructions, 15 Banfield St. Paris, Ont. N3L 2Y5; ian.bell@sympatico.ca; www.ianbellmusic.ca

It's a treat to discover a recording which is not only an important historical document but also a collection of singable and listenable songs.

Ivan H. Walton, in the 1930s, compiled songs from old sailors who had worked on sailing ships on the Great Lakes in the 19th Century. Around 30 years ago a manuscript copy¹ came into Ian Bell's hands. Almost all the songs on this CD come from that collection. Several instrumental tracks echo the Great Lakes theme, and the one modern song, "Bonnie Boy", is inspired by a Great Lakes tragedy, although the song is non-specific, and can fit any seaborne disaster. It's printed at page 33 of this issue,

Like most folk songs of the 1800s, the songs on this CD would usually have been sung unaccompanied. On one track, the capstan chantey "Heave Her Up and Bust Her", this arrangement is preserved, as five singers recapture the feeling of a work crew raising the anchor by the drudgery of walking around the capstan. The rest of the songs have instrumental accompaniment to various degrees, but not to the extent of detracting from the storytelling and the a cappella feel; in some cases the arrangements are innovative to the point of being daring.

The CD opens and ends with "Lake Erie", which the notes describe as a "crooked tune", played on concertina with accompaniment by guitar and – unusually – cello. Two instrumental medleys crop up fifth and ninth, breaking up the sequence of songs. "The Erie Hornpipe/Shores of Lake Erie" feature multiple instruments, with clawhammer-style banjo prominent on the latter, as it is on "Boatman Dance Medley", a set of familiar old-time dance tunes.

Some of the songs use familiar melodies, a common practice of the time. Some are parodies or reworkings of other songs. "Goodbye My Lover Goodbye", a very singable chorus song, stems from a popular parlour song, "The Ship Goes Sailing Down the Bay", and also references the much-parodied poem *Casabianca*.² The song makes fun of a raw farmboy who has trouble learning the ropes (literally and figuratively) on his first voyage. "It's Me for the Inland Lakes" uses the well-known melody of "The Star of the County Down", but in $\frac{3}{4}$ time.³ The song humorously describes the difference between ocean

sailing and the inland version, to the detriment of the former.

"A Trip on the *Bentley*",⁴ a parody of "The *Dreadnought*",⁵ uses a tune from the "derry down" family, also used for "The *E.C. Roberts* (Red Iron Ore)".⁶ "The *Jenny P. King*" obviously goes to the melody of "The Trip of the *Bigler*".⁷

Some of the programming shows sly humour. The raucous "My First Trip Down Old Lake Erie", known more familiarly as "The Buffalo Whore", is followed by a verse of "Buffalo Girls"; the next track is a hymn, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning" – Saturday night and Sunday morning! The hymn was inspired by an incident where a schooner ran aground at night when the "lower lights" on the shoreline were not visible. An inspired arrangement includes trumpets (reminiscent of the old Salvation Army bands) plus cello and (tasteful) electric guitar.

Perhaps the most daring instrumentation on the CD accompanies another work song, "The Ward Line", a loading chantey. Electric bass (also tasteful), electric guitars and drums somehow give a feel somewhere between jazz and calypso, perhaps appropriate given that the song is an "African-American" chantey.

A couple more work songs round out the album. "Bonnie Hieland Laddie" chooses verses specific to the Great Lakes, and leaves out the more familiar "Donkey Riding" chorus (referring to the "donkey" steam engine, too modern for the age of steam). A jaunty instrumental version at the end reminds us that it's a great melody in its own right. Lastly, "Leave Her Johnny" again chooses verses appropriate to inland sailing, some humorously relating the experience of constant pumping on a leaky ship. The reprise of "Lake Erie" finishes things off.

This CD is a thoroughly satisfying listening experience. Some of the songs have found the way into my repertoire, and it's become a regular on my CD player. You don't often find recordings like this any more – we need more!

John Leeder, Calgary, Alberta

Notes

¹ Since published as *Windjammers: Songs of the Great Lakes Sailors* (Great Lakes Books Series), 2002, Detroit: Wayne State University Press. (Walton's journals were published in 2005 by the same publisher under the title

Songquest: The Journals of Great Lakes Folklorist Ivan H. Walton.)

² The opening line is “The boy stood on the burning deck”.

³ Ian confesses that he has since discovered the original tune, but prefers to sing it this way.

⁴ The ship’s name is spelled variously on the website and the CD packaging. The song is printed at page 35 of this issue.

⁵ Available on *Songs of the Great Lakes*, Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4018, available on CD from Smithsonian Folkways, www.folkways.si.edu.

⁶ Printed in this magazine, vol. 43, no. 4 (2009), p. 29, also found on *Songs of the Great Lakes*, supra.

⁷ *Songs of the Great Lakes*, supra.

Jim McLennan. *Six-String Gumbo: Solo Acoustic Guitar*. JM1001. Box 482, Longview, Alta. T0L 1H0; mclennal@telusplanet.net

Nominated by the Western Canadian Music Awards for 2012 Instrumental Recording of the Year, *Six-String Gumbo* is a labour of love and a very personal CD by a talented Alberta-based guitarist, known internationally as a fly-fishing guru. After a successful ongoing career with his wife Lynda, as a writer, teacher, organizer, and champion of Alberta’s rivers and natural habitats, Jim McLennan decided to record in 2010 his first solo album dedicated to finger-style acoustic guitar, a technique which he has definitely mastered over the years. Active in the Edmonton music scene since the 1970s, Jim was forced to interrupt his guitar playing due to a left hand injury in 1988. This CD signals Jim’s return to live stage performance after more than 20 years’ absence; it includes an older track recorded in 1975 as testimony of his full playing abilities before the accident. All this information is revealed in the liner notes of this work, dedicated to Jim’s parents, and with design and photography by Lynda.

The artwork on the cover and back shows part of an appetizing dish with shrimp in a red sauce, probably a version of the 18th-Century Louisianan gumbo. Another section of this image is also used on the CD face, this time uncovering the plate’s other chunky items, looking quite delicious. The blue-textured background with goldish-yellow lettering, and the bright white, reds and oranges of china and food on the different panels, convey an invitation to a pleasant and tasteful musical experience awaiting inside. Once you pull out the disc, another photograph shows the snout of their beloved late pet, Rosie, sniffing a dish of some dried fare over a hand-written music score, as if we had just entered the McLennan’s abode. The actual liner notes insert is sandwiched in the cover panel and shows the artist in action on his acoustic guitar, a detailed annotated list of the 12 tracks, cre-

aits, thanks and dedications, instrument and recording studio information, plus a special photographic tribute to Rosie, the dog, wearing glasses.

Apart from its title and photographs, there is no Creole connection in this album, which, musically speaking, is more of a *combo* than a *gumbo*, as it contains a variety of genres and two tracks as medleys. Featuring three original pieces, the CD includes works by ragtime piano master Scott Joplin, Nashville artist Jerry Reed, Winnipeg guitarist Steve Bell, Ontarian Bruce Cockburn, Top 40 pianist Billy Joel, “authentic” bluesman Willie Brown, Bohemian classic Anton Dvorak, popular music film composer Harold Arlen, and Beatles John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

Being described on its cover as a “solo acoustic guitar” CD, I find the use of other instrumentation to be rather superfluous and counterproductive, not adding anything relevant to the arrangements. Jim used a 2008 Martin OM-16 guitar on all tracks, except in the 1975 recording, played on a 1969 Martin D-18 (track 5), and a 1995 Fender Stratocaster for the electric guitar solo on track 9 and a bluesy “Amazing Grace” on track 12. An obvious explorer of different sonorities, Jim provides us with a track-by-track account of the tunings used, including: Standard, Open A, Drop-D, and Open D. Acknowledging his influences in Canadian artists such as Red Shea (Gordon Lightfoot sideman) and Bruce Cockburn, in this recording Jim also demonstrates his passion for Ragtime and Blues, presenting us with the vintage recording of one of his arrangements of Scott Joplin’s piano pieces, “The Easy Winners” (track 5), “Mississippi Blues” by Willie Brown (track 9), and several others with hints of the aforementioned genres (tracks 1, 2, 10,12). I also enjoyed listening to his original compositions for the joyful playing in “Sweet Tooth” (track 2), the experimentation in “Mamoo’s Dream” (track 8), and the melodic voicing in “Prairie Rose” (track 11). The overall sound of the album is clear, with a good presence and frequency balance; nevertheless, the editing could have been more careful, avoiding the presence of recording aids such as the metronome on track 1 and a few strange endings on tracks 9, 10, 11.

I believe that *Six-String Gumbo* would appeal to anyone who enjoys acoustic guitar music, in particular to those interested in fingerstyle technique. A celebration of a lifetime passion, this CD is an important document of the work developed by a local Canadian musician, with great potential to inspire others in pursuing their own musical aspirations.

Nuno Cristo, Toronto, Ontario.