

# Reviews

Edited by John Leeder

## Recordings



Figure 1: Magnolia Buckskin.

**Magnolia Buckskin.** MBCD2010. Emily Triggs, 2133 Spiller Rd. SE, Calgary, Alta. T2G 4G7; [emilytriggs@shaw.ca](mailto:emilytriggs@shaw.ca); [magnoliabuckskin.com](http://magnoliabuckskin.com); [www.myspace.com/magnoliabuckskin](http://www.myspace.com/magnoliabuckskin) (no addresses on packaging)

Magnolia Buckskin are a female quintet based in Calgary. The members include Corry Ulan, Emily Triggs, Kathy Cook, Marti Smith, and Natasha Platt. All 13 songs on this self-titled album are original songs, each member contributing to both lyrics and music that project their individual musical interests,

Although instruments typical of country music are apparent throughout the album, the songs include a wide variety of folk, as well as other genres like R&B, jazz, and pop. In my opinion, Kathy Cook and Emily Triggs share the similar R&B style of writing, whereas Marti Smith, Corry Ulan, and Natasha Platt have more of a folk and indie pop style. These different flavours make this album more than “just another folk song album”.

The lead vocals of each song are performed by whoever wrote the music, and so personal emotions are well delivered. Each member of the group is not just a singer-songwriter, but also a multi-instrumentalist. One or more group members play guitar, banjo, accordion, mandolin, and piano. Other

musicians contribute to the accompaniment and are listed on the album, which carefully acknowledges everyone who contributed in any way, showing the group’s humble appreciation for all who took part.

The artwork is also worth mentioning. Inside the lyrics sheet is a small painting for each song. Nine out of thirteen are done by group member Kathy Cook, one is by Natasha Platt, and three come from other contributors. The paintings are adorable and charming, just like the group’s songs. They show another artistic side of some of the members.

Though a few songs, such as “Say a Little Prayer” and “Big Black Lake”, use more than five different instruments on the track, for the most part the accompaniment is kept rather simple. There are no fancy riffs or techniques done by the instruments in any of the songs. The main focus is on the voices, each of which delivers the words they have written by themselves. The women’s voices are gentle and warming, and the tunes are very catchy. It would not be too hard for you to pick up your guitar and sing and play along with them.

From the very first song, “Say a Little Prayer”, lead vocal Marti Smith’s kind voice and simple melody will set you in the mood for a cozy warm evening. The vocal range is very small in this song, with only six notes used in the melody. Because of its melodic simplicity, the lyrics are very easy to hear.

The album features a song, “Walk”, which won “Best Harmonies” category at the 2010 Calgary Folk Festival/Ship and Anchor songwriting contest. The second song on the album, “Walk” has harmonies which are simple but charming. Accompaniment is provided mostly by piano. The full harmonies sung by group members throughout the song create the feeling of a full choir responding to Natasha Platt’s lead vocals. The message of the song is very uplifting, as it encourages us to keep walking despite the obstacles in life.

The last two songs, “I Had It All” and “A Place I Lived”, struck me hardest emotionally. Written and performed respectively by Natasha Platt and Marti Smith, the songs share a common theme, reminiscing about home, wherever that may be. At one point, the lyrics of the first song go, “I had it all. Why couldn’t I see what was right in front of me?” I also left my hometown – a small city – to live far away in a much bigger city, and I began to appreciate things which I

had previously taken for granted. Platt's song reflects my own feelings of longing and home.

"A Place I Lived" simply reminisces about a hometown, without the regrets of the previous sing. The chorus goes:

A place I lived, I stood on that land, in every season,

We gathered the sunshine like the arm of a father.

We walked the rail line covered with coal,

The hills were for cattle and the sound of the living.

We found their bones and we carried them home.

This beautiful lyric vividly describes the plain but delicate alluring hometown where the author spent her childhood. Personally, it reminded me of the days when I used to live in Saskatchewan. The first chorus has only Marti Smith's voice and simple piano accompaniment in the middle range of the piano. Other instruments and harmony voices join in afterward and intensify the feeling of "homesickness". Mart Smith's choice for the very last chord of the song – a first inversion of the vi minor chord – creates the feeling of "longing", as it doesn't go back to the "home" tonic chord. I highly recommend these two songs in particular to those who are in similar situations, living far from home.

If you are fond of folk country, R&B, and indie pop, musicians like K.T. Tunstall, Ingrid Michaelson, and Passengers, and soothing clear voices, I'm sure this album will satisfy you.

*Tetsuya Kobayashi, Toronto, Ontario*

**Old Man Luedecke. *My Hands are on Fire and Other Love Songs*.** BHCD-0062. Black Hen Music, Box 95105, Kingsgate RPO, Vancouver, B.C. V5T 4T8; [info@blackhenmusic.com](mailto:info@blackhenmusic.com); [www.blackhenmusic.com](http://www.blackhenmusic.com); [Andre.Instinct@eastlink.ca](mailto:Andre.Instinct@eastlink.ca); [www.oldmanluedecke.com](http://www.oldmanluedecke.com)

Old Man Luedecke is the solo project of Chris Luedecke of Chester, Nova Scotia. The moniker "Old Man" itself is more fitting for this 30-something singer-songwriter than one might expect. It is Luedecke's brand of prophesying, his style of presenting songs of love and loss, that make him an old soul at heart. His instrument of choice is the banjo, and Luedecke is a talented player in the tradition of Ralph Stanley and Pete Seeger. His instrument serves as a vessel for his clever lyrics and use of metaphor, and references a style of days gone by. Luedecke's narrative-driven folk-pop has struck a chord with fans and critics alike. 2009's offering *Proof of Lov*, won the Juno for

best roots album. His follow-up, the album I discuss here, 2010's *My Hand are on Fire and other Love Songs*, went on to win that award too. However, this album is not Luedecke's most recent musical offering. In 2013 he released the Juno-nominated *Tender Is The Night*, an album that represents a slight departure in style for him. So, for those listening to Luedecke for the first time, *My Hand Are On Fire and other Love Songs* is a great introduction.

Since being asked to review *My Hands are on Fire*, the upbeat tunes and infectious lyrics have been perpetually stuck in my head. Listening to Luedecke's clear baritone and his at times self-deprecating but equally profound lyrics injected this listener with a sense of happiness and satisfaction that one gets from hearing something truly well-crafted. The album, recorded in just three days, brought together musicians Keith Lowe on bass and John Raham on drums. The quartet is rounded out by bluegrass legend Tim O'Brien on guitar, mandolin, fiddle, and backing vocals. The album was produced by Steve Dawson, in a style that I really appreciate. He lets the instruments speak for themselves and gives them space, everything finding its place within the mix. There are lovely moments of interplay between banjo and picked mandolin, parts interlocked so tightly they give the songs a beautiful sense of forward motion.

Luedecke's offbeat humour is evident in many of the songs, but their profundity too becomes evident on close listening. Luedecke invokes classic themes of love and loss that could otherwise be considered played out in the singer-songwriter oeuvre. Luedecke offers a fresh take, always with a creative twist or invocation of metaphor that shows his talent as a lyricist. His old-time style contrasts with motifs of modern love. In "Machu Picchu" he sings of missing someone while far away: "I was climbing the stairs at Machu Picchu, found my cell phone and tried to reach you." Or "Foreign Tongue", the tale of a young man trying to muster up the courage to profess his love, "Oh Surrey girl... you'll feel my love when I hit send."

His words are perhaps equally self-deprecating. The second track, "Rear Guard", from which the album takes its title *My Hands are on Fire*, invokes the metaphor of foolish Icarus in the chorus. Luedecke begins the song by singing, "I'm bringing up the rear guard, I'm coming in dead last," and then later, "I'm so far behind that I think I'm first." In this song especially, Luedecke's use of subtle ornamentation in his "old-time" yodeling style adds beauty and interest to the vocal line and outshines even his virtuosic picking.

"Woe Betide The Doer of the Deed" once again contrasts the old with the new through the invocation

of an old English curse on those responsible for the 2008 financial crisis. It is a protest song in the tradition of Pete Seeger that wouldn't have been out of place 60 years ago. He sings, "we won't forget, the crushing pain of our debts, the way you drove your country to the ground."

The only cover on the album is a Willie P. Bennett tune, "Caney Fork River", about a young voyeur who drowns while spying on the farmer's beautiful daughter. Bennett's influence can be heard throughout Luedecke's music and within his own brand of narrative storytelling.

In Canada, Luedecke is one of the few prominent musicians spearheading an old-time revival in popular music circles by seamlessly bringing this old style of music into the modern age through his lyrics. In doing so, Luedecke offers young fans an accessible entry point from which to explore the old-time style that first inspired him.

*Frances Miller, Toronto, Ontario*

**100 Mile House. *Wait With Me*.** CR038. Denise MacKay, 7607 86<sup>th</sup> Ave., Edmonton, Alta. T6C 1H6 ; [ilive@100milehouse.co.uk](mailto:ilive@100milehouse.co.uk); [www.100milehouse.co.uk](http://www.100milehouse.co.uk)

Edmonton-based 100 Mile House consists of multi-instrumentalist Scott Zubot, as well as husband and wife duo Peter Stone and Denise Mackay. Their third studio album, *Wait With Me* (2013), is the follow-up to their award-winning 2011 release *Hollow Ponds*, in which they continue to deliver their distinctive sound, which they often refer to as "transatlantic folk". This unique sound may be characterized by catchy melodies and lush harmonies, as well as a predominantly acoustic, syncopated and lyrically-driven nature. The band's composition style is equally distinctive, in which Stone and Mackay typically write the lyrics and formulate the general structure of the songs. Stone typically sings lead vocals and plays rhythm guitar, while Mackay provides the band's signature harmonies, and also plays various percussion instruments (which interestingly includes a suitcase played with brushes). Zubot then works with this general structure, using instruments including but not limited to the violin and mandolin, to develop it further and create the final product. The exceptions to this style of composition on *Wait With Me* are the tracks "Left Unattended" and "Arrival", which are instrumental pieces composed entirely by Zubot, and essentially serve as instrumental introductions, or preludes of sorts, to the songs "My Love" and "London" respectively.

Named after the small British Columbia town often referred to as the "Log Home Capital of North America", the band's music provides a feeling of intimacy and connection, as if they are actually singing and playing in front of you. I found this intimate experience, the feeling of the band singing in my presence, to be a particularly fulfilling and distinctive aspect of the album as well as the group's music overall. One factor that seems to contribute to this feeling is their minimal use of or reliance on vocal effects such as reverb. However, Zubot uses delays and other studio effects (which may also include the use of space echo and a phaser) for his violin solo on the title track, "Wait With Me", showcasing the band's ability to provide listeners with a modern and refined sound that is simultaneously natural and reminiscent of the past.

I found it difficult to select favourites from the album, which is a testament to the quality and depth of the work as a whole. Along with the title track, I was particularly fond of "My Love" and "London", and enjoyed these songs for largely different reasons. For example, "My Love" is the only song on the album for which Mackay acts as lead vocalist. In this regard, while her voice is very complementary to Stone's as a background vocalist, I found that her role as a lead vocalist provided a refreshing change from the rest of the album. I would personally love to hear her voice featured more prominently on future albums. In contrast, I feel "London" very much suited the group's typical setup of Stone as lead vocalist with Mackay providing harmonies. The song draws strong parallels to the conventions used by Mumford and Sons, from Stone's singing style and the repetitive nature of the lyrics, to the heavily-syncopated strumming patterns and dynamic contrast emphasized throughout the song. In this light, it seems that songs like "London" would be a great way for this album and band to be introduced to fans of folk groups that have risen to global fame over the last few years, including Mumford and Sons and The Lumineers. Therefore, I would highly recommend *Wait With Me* to those who are at all interested in Canadian folk music, the aforementioned artists, or the recent resurgence of folk conventions in popular music in general. I would also broaden this recommendation to those primarily listening to today's pop radio stations, as this album would likely provide a refreshing change from the current ubiquity of electronic dance music.

*Neel Dani, Woodbridge, Ontario*