Banjo Diary: Lessons from Tradition
By Stephen Wade

Innovative and often surprising, Banjo Diary: Lessons from Tradition explores knowledge older musicians have bequeathed to younger players. Inspired by past banjo masters of fanning and of two- and three-finger styles, Stephen Wade, accompanied by Mike Craver, Russ Hooper, Danny Kniceley, James Lova, and Zan McLeod, mines new creative possibilities with pump organ, piano, mandolin, fiddle, guitar, Dobro, washtub banjo, rhumba box, and bass.

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- Sherman Hammons (FRC701) - West Virginia's Sherman Hammons was an accomplished singer in the traditional Appalachian style and a fiddler in a fine, archaic style reminiscent of his Uncle Edin. He learned banjo from a wide circle of West Virginia musicians.
- Harold Hausenflock, Volume 2: Banjo Workshop (FRC702) - Harold describes a wide variety of banjo tunings and traditional styles which he demonstrates on many classic and unusual tunes learned from the masters.
- Jerry Lundy with Hilary Dirlam (FRC703) - The grandson of the great Galax, VA fiddler Emmett Lundy, Jerry Lundy (1942-2001) was a skilled and driving fiddler who was well respected in bluegrass as well as old-time music circles.
- Calvin Cole, Fancy Gap Banjo (FRC704) - Calvin Cole (Fancy Gap, VA) played clawhammer-style banjo with tremendous precision and drive. Though he was old enough to have been recorded in the 1930s by the Library of Congress, these recordings (made by Peter Hooven in 1968) show Mr. Cole still at the top of his game.
- Parlay Parsons, Old Galax Fielding (FRC705) - A member of the last generation of fiddlers firmly rooted in the local style, Parley’s playing was immediately recognizable as having been influenced by Emmett Lundy (d.1964) and Charlie Higgins (d.1967), two iconic older Galax fiddlers.

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Letters

Cellos in old-time music

Hearty thanks to all those who responded to my “Attic” lecture on cellos in old-time music (OTH vol. 13, no. 4). This is exactly the sort of feedback that I have been hoping to get when I’ve thrown out questions in my pieces to which I had no answers myself. I am particularly delighted with the letter from Margot McMillen since she has first-hand experience playing cello accompaniment to fiddlers. Hank Bradley’s speculation about possible European influence, and Clare Milliner’s extensive genealogical research on the Wight family are also quite welcome. I’ve had some other interest in the topic from folks who are not regular OTH readers. It is an area that continues to intrigue me—I’m wondering now if any of the players of Yankee “church basses” who accompanied congregational singing in early New England churches might not also have had dance gigs on Saturday nights. As always, research spawns the need for continued investigation!

Paul Wells
West Kennebunk, Maine

“... here’s to the Fuzzies, Highwoods, and Hollow Rock ...”

In the fall of 1971 I returned from overseas deployment in Okinawa and reported for duty at the Kimbrough Army Hospital at Fort George Meade, Maryland, just outside Washington, DC. The following summer I was discharged from the military and decided to celebrate my emancipation over the Fourth of July holiday by attending the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Quite by accident I stumbled across the Highwoods Stringband, not on the stage, but rather sitting in a circle playing under a shade tree. I vaguely remember one of them was smoking a pipe. Though I had played guitar in folk/bluegrass bands since age 14, this was my first head-on collision with the “old-time” ensemble way of playing the music.

This chance encounter inexplicably and irrevocably altered my brain chemistry to the extent that for the next few years I kept returning to that moment and trying to figure out what in the world
it was. During this time I was completing my education on the GI Bill and met a fellow student named Victor who was making annual spring pilgrimages to a place called Union Grove, somewhere south of Philadelphia. Bit by bit I became aware of the people of my generation who were tapping into the music of Henry Reed, Tommy Jarrell, Kyle Creed, Fred Cockerham, Benton Flippen, and others. Inevitably, drawn like a mayfly to a windshield, I picked up with my young bride and struck out to the Promised Land of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where I thought the music could be found.

As luck would have it, Nowell Creadick lived just across the road and was my banjo teacher and good friend. Through Nowell I met Blanton Owen of the Fuzzies who taught me my first clawhammer banjo tune, "Fortune." I must have imprinted on Blanton because right from the get-go I wanted to play fretless banjo and I continue to play fretless almost exclusively today.

Musicians that I started playing with back then are the same people I play with today, and we share the same core repertoire—the recordings of the Fuzzies, Highwoods, and the Hollow Rock Stringband. This music was the common denominator and universal language shared by all.

As one matures, one tends to reflect. I know that from the outside this account looks like a hundred other such tales, totally typical and utterly predictable from beginning to end. However, when viewed from the inside I can assure you that my story is composed of a series of unrelated, random, unpredictable events. Contrary to Mr. Einstein's assertion, God does play dice. The only question is whether they're loaded. After all, not everyone becomes a banjo player and, although Tommy Thompson once famously opined that clawhammer banjo players were becoming as common as pennies, mercifully this seeming proliferation is still a statistical rarity. Had I never been drafted, had I been stationed in Texas, had it rained on the day I attended the Folklife Festival, the life I have led would have unfolded in a completely different manner. By now, of course, it's far too late to do much about any of that. But to tell the truth I wouldn't have it any other way. So here's to the Fuzzies, the Highwoods, and Hollow Rock. The entire journey has been and continues to be quite an adventure.

Rob Morrison
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Old-Time music in Hawaii

... just a quick word to let you know how excited I am to finally get some heralds in my teaching studio in Kauai.

I've been living/teaching here for a couple of years (visiting for five-plus years), and have stood by in amazement as my banjo/fiddle students form their own groups, learn to buck dance, and light the old-time fire all over this little island! It'll be wonderful to share the magazine with them. Just imagine dozens of Hawaiians reading these articles... in the middle of the ocean! I'm trying to get an island fiddler's convention together. I'll keep you all posted.

Matt Morelock
Kauai, Hawaii

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Here & There

Events

Upcoming events at the Blue Ridge Music Center include concerts and dances with the following performers. July 6: Slate Mountain Ramblers, New Southern Ramblers with caller Phil Jamison; July 13, Riley Baugus, Stuart Brothers, Ira Bernstein (flatfoot workshop at 6 pm, concert at 7 pm); July 20, Whitetop Mountaineers, Crooked Road Ramblers; July 27, Big Country Bluegrass, Marshall Brothers; August 4, Balsam Range, Cullen's Bridge; August 17, John Dee Holeman, Lightnin' Wells, Willette Hinton (uke workshop at 5 pm, concert at 7 pm); August 24, Travis Frye and Blue Mountain, Gospel Plowboys; August 31, Wolf Brothers, Skeeter and the Skidmarks. The Blue Ridge Music Center (blueridge-musiccenter.org, 276-236-5309) is located at Blue Ridge Parkway Milepost 213, 10 miles from Galax, Virginia.

Luther Jeff Menzies (featured in Volume 12, Number 4 of the Old-Time Herald) will teach a course in gourd banjo building July 21–27 in Galax, Virginia. Contact Jeff at jeffbanjo@yahoo.com for information about the course, or visit chestnutcreekarts.org to register. (Register by July 7 for a 10% discount.)

Mac and Jenny Traynham host old-time music workshops at their home in Floyd County, Virginia. Upcoming workshops include: August 22 – 25, Old-time songs and guitar styles of the Blue Ridge; October 3 – 6, Clawhammer banjo and Blue Ridge fiddle; October 31 – November 3, Rhythm and Repertoire. For details and to register visit southernmtntmelodies.com or call (540) 789-4201.

The Berkeley Old Time Music Convention will take place September 18 – September 22 at multiple venues in Berkeley, California. This year’s featured artists are the Jumpsteady Boys (Bruce Molsky, Rafe Stefanini, Joe Newberry, and Mike Compton), Alice Gerrard and Beverly Smith, Foghorn Stringband with Dirk Powell, Frank George and Kim Johnson, Eddie Bond and Josh Ellis, Big Hoedown (Bruce Molsky, Rafe Stefanini, and Beverly Smith), Thompson, Thompson, Ventreisco and Axelrod, Right to Parlay, Grace Forrest and Clelia Stefanini, Evo Bluestein, and Evie Ladin. Visit berkeleyoldtimemusic.org for more information.

Johnson City, Tennessee, will host a weekend-long celebration October 18
- 20 in honor of the 85th anniversary of Columbia Records’ 928 recording session in that city, chronicled in Ted Olson’s article in this issue of the OTH. The Johnson City Sessions Weekend will coincide with the release of the Bear Family box set The Johnson City Sessions, 1928-1929: Can You Sing Or Play Old-Time Music? The historic recordings will be commemorated with music, lectures, a taping of Mountain Stage at East Tennessee State University, and a live recording session at WEIS-FM. Information about the events will be posted to the Johnson City Sessions Facebook page.

The next Appalachian State University Old-Time Fiddlers Convention is scheduled for February 8, 2014. The workshops, competition, concerts, luthiers’ gathering and other events will take place on the campus of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. Updated information will be available at fiddle.apps.appstate.edu.

The Dhalonega Gold Museum State Historic Site in Dhalonega, Georgia, is the location of a new monthly Appalachian music jam, from 2 – 5 pm on Saturdays through October 12. Call the Dhalonega Visitors Center at (706) 864-3513 or Rebecca Shirley at (706) 482-2707 for details, or visit facebook.com/DhalonegaAppalachianJam.

Online, in print, on the air

The Mostly Mountain Boys—Paul Brown, Terri McMurray, and John Schwab—have released a self-titled CD, their first album. The 13 songs and tunes are from varied sources, especially highlighting the old-time music traditions of Virginia and North Carolina. Visit mostlymountainboys.com for ordering information.

Bob and Leilani Thornburg of Sierra View Acoustic Music in Bishop, California, have created a museum exhibit, now in its second year, Banjos: From Africa to the Shores of Lake Tahoe. The exhibit will be on view four days a week from June 21 – August 11 at the Tallac Historic Site near South Lake Tahoe. Visit gourd-banjo.com for more information.

East Tennessee State University student Indiana Hoover has created a new online resource for old-time musicians, the Old-Time Atlas. The website, at oldtimeatlas.org, includes an interactive map of

Mountain Arts Gathering

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and Susan Hanley.
festivals and workshops. Events are also searchable by state or month. Indiana hopes to expand the site to include information about local jams, instrument shops and builders, and traditional music venues; an online form is available to submit information for possible listing.

Do you have a new recording, publication, or website, or other news to share with the OTH? Let us know! Email editor@oldtimeherald.org.

Congratulations

The National Endowment for the Arts has announced the 2013 roster of National Heritage Fellows. They include old-time ballad singer, musician, and storyteller Sheila Kay Adams of Madison County, North Carolina; David Ivey, Sacred Harp singer of Huntsville, Alabama; Irish fiddler Séamus Connolly of North Yarmouth, Maine; Nicoles Feraru, cimbalom player of Chicago, Illinois; Carol Fran, swamp blues singer and pianist of Lafayette, Louisiana; Chicano musician and culture bearer Ramón “Chunky” Sánchez of San Diego, California; Ralph Burns, Pyramid Lake Paiute tribe storyteller of Nixon, Nevada; Verónica Castillo, ceramicist and clay sculptor of San Antonio, Texas; and Pauline Hillaire, Lummi Tribe Tradion Bearer of Bellingham, Washington. The awards presentation and a free concert will take place on September 27 at Lerner Auditorium on the campus of the George Washington University in Washington, DC, and will be webcast live at arts.gov.

Cerry Milnes recently retired after 25 years as the Folk Art Coordinator for the Augusta Heritage Center at Davis and Elkins College in Elkins, West Virginia. During this year’s Vandalia Gathering, Milnes received the Vandalia Award from the state of West Virginia, the highest honor for “individuals who . . . embody the spirit of the state’s folk heritage and are recognized for their lifetime contributions to West Virginia and its traditional culture.”


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The following fiddlers were winners at the Great Big Yam Potatoes Oldtime Music Gathering, held May 18 in Washington, Mississippi. Pee Wee Division: Zeke Morgan; Anabel Morgan. Junior Division: Joseph Crouse; Lydia Allen. Senior Division: Tim Avalon; Rachel Ward; Ashley Carr.

This year's winners at the Topanga Banjo Fiddle Contest and Folk Festival in Agoura Hills, California, are as follows. (Contestants' hometowns are in California unless otherwise noted.) Fiddle: Advanced: Tony Ludiker, Valley Village; Grant Wheeler, Los Angeles; Laurie Kost, Pacific Grove; Asha Rigter, Lancaster. Fiddle, Intermediate: Amya Rose Dempsey, Paso Robles; Jordan Ezquerra, Rancho Santa Margarita; Mari Haig, Dana Point. Fiddle, Beginning: Elijah Kaak, Pomona; Luisa Bryson, Los Angeles; Christine Lee, Canyon City. Mandolin: Advanced: Scott Lindford, Los Angeles; Chris Lauer, Lompoc; Christopher Murphy, San Diego. Mandolin, Intermediate: Laura Osborn, Glendale; Michael Ostgaard, San Clemente; Mark Thompson, Buena Park. Blue-
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At the May 30 Vandalia Gathering music competitions this year, in Charleston, West Virginia, winners were as follows. (Contestants’ state of residence is West Virginia.) Old-Time Fiddle: Dan Kessinger, St. Marys; Jason Chewing, Beverly; Walter King, Elkins; Cody Jordan, Point Pleasant; Robbie Mann, Glenville. Senior Old-Time Fiddle: Elmer Rich, Morgantown; Jim Mullins, St. Albans; Terry Vaughan, Cross Lanes; John Morris, Ivydale; Richard Eddy, Madisonville. Youth Old-Time Fiddle: Walter King, Elkins; Lydia Hager, Kenna; Chioe Sergent, Milton. Old-Time Banjo: Tim Bing, Huntington; Logan Hoy, Belle; Dennis Ott, Ronceverte; Chad Ashworth, St. Albans; James Blankenship, Sand Fork. Senior Old-Time Banjo: Jim Mullins, St. Albans; Paul Gartner, Yawkey; Ken Sheller, Elkins; John Morris, Ivydale. Bluegrass Banjo: Logan Browning, St. Albans; Marteka Lake, Hacker Valley; Karl Smakula, Montrose; Robert Russell, Tallmansville; Blaine Johnson, Beaver. Flatpicking Guitar: Adam Hager, Kenna; Jamie Rhodes, Culloden; Matt Lindsey, Dunbar; Doug Workman, St. Albans; Jarrod Saul, Summero. Youth Flatpicking Guitar: Brian Underwood, Charleston; Isaac Putnam, Looneyville; Claire Walker, Charleston. Lap Dulcimer: Martha Turley, Ona; Will Manahan, Elkhoev; Ezra Drumheller, Prosperity; Ryan Davis, Beckley; Morgan Spradling, Beckley; Mandolin: David Watson, Jr., West Union; Dan Kessinger, St. Marys; Karl Smakula, Montrose; Robin Kessinger, St. Albans; Ben Perdue, Morgantown. Vandalia Award: Gery Milnes.

In the Eleventh Annual Nebraska American String Teachers Fiddle Tune Composition Contest, First Place went to Peggy Ann Contos Harvey of Columbia, Connecticut, for “Tom’s Waltz”; Second Place to Rebecca Edmonson of Mount Desert, Maine, for “Bramble Dance”; Third Place to Paul Hoegemeyer of Lincoln, Nebraska, for “Yellow Truck Waltz”; and Best Viola Tune to Claudia Rowen of Omaha, Nebraska, for “Rowen’s Choice.” The winning tunes will be printed in an upcoming edition of Stringing Along, the newsletter of the Nebraska Unit of the American String Teachers Association. (Contact Mindy Hunke at hunkel@cox.net for subscription information.) The winning viola tune will appear on the website of the American Viola Society, americaniolaosociety.org, as part
of their American Viola Project. Contact Deborah Greenblatt Seay (debbv@greenblattandseay.com) for information about next year’s contest.

Final notes

Al Hauge, 64, died of cancer in February, 2013, at his home in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Al was instrumental in keeping traditional music alive in Minnesota by booking local musicians for the New Riverside Cafe, a co-operative restaurant that somehow managed to support live music for about 20 years. During approximately the same period, he had a program, Walk Right In, on local public radio station KFAI, playing roots music records. He also played jug, washboard, and harmonica in the Fat Chance Jug Band. He will be long remembered by those of us who were provided with a venue for traditional music when no one else was interested. He’ll also be remembered for his sense of humor; he described himself as a Frisbeetarian: “When you die, your soul gets stuck on the garage roof.”

Numerous musicians paid tribute to him at a day-long memorial celebration.

Lyle Logfren

Retired Command Sergeant Major Robert Allen Macon died on April 12 in Tennessee. The 86-year-old decorated Army veteran, retired machine shop teacher, and country music enthusiast was the grandson of Uncle Dave Macon. Robert Macon served in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. He was an active volunteer at the Country Music Hall of Fame well into his eighties, and a supporter of the Uncle Dave Macon Days festival in Murfreesboro. Macon is survived by daughter Hilda Macon Young, siblings Mary Doubler and David Macon, and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Lawrence McKiver, 57, died March 25 on St. Simons Island, Georgia. In 1980 McKiver and other members of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church in the Bolden/Briar Patch community in coastal Georgia founded the McIntosh County Shouters. The singing group preserves the antebellum Gullah tradition of the ring shout, which has its roots in West Africa. McKiver served as the songster, the singer who sets and leads the group in a call-and-response song, with rhythm kept by the stickman. During the song, the shouters move in a counterclockwise circle, using a low shuffle-step in keeping with religious proclamations against dancing.

The Shouters were recorded by Art Rosenbaum for Folkways in 1984. In 1993, they were recipients of the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. They have also received the 2010 Georgia Governor’s Award in the Humanities and recognition from the NAACP, and were documented in Art Rosenbaum’s 1998 book Shout Because You’re Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia. The McIntosh County Shouters are a nonprofit organization that relies on public support. Contributions may be sent to the group at 2126 GA 99, Townsend, GA 31331.

Musician and textile designer Sue Draheim, 63, died on April 11 at her home in Berea, Kentucky. The Oakland, California, native had a long and varied musical career, from the Bay Area folk revival to the traditional music scene of the United Kingdom and continental Europe, and from old-time string band and traditional Irish music to Celtic-rock and Gilbert and Sullivan.

In the late 1960s, Draheim, Jim Bamford, and Mac Benford formed Dr. Hambred’s New Tranquility String Band and Medicine Show, which shared a billing at the eleventh Berkeley Folk Festival with Howlin’ Wolf and John Fahey. She delved into Irish music as a member of the Grueneo Ceilidh Band, which led her in 1970 to the British Isles. She toured Europe for five years as a member of The John Renbourn Group, with whom she appeared on the album A Maid in Bedlam. While on that side of the Atlantic she also played on Richard Thompson’s Henry the Human Fly, and John Martyn’s Solid Air.

In 1976, back in California, Draheim co-founded the Any Old Time String Band with Kate Brislin, Suzzy Thompson, Valerie Mindel, and Genny Haley. The influential band recorded two albums on the Arrobie label, playing a mixture of old-time, Cajun, blues, and other musical styles, and including stages with, among others, Bill Monroe, Doc Watson, the New Lost City Ramblers, and Pete Seeger.

Over the next decades, Sue Draheim was a member of several orchestras, the Gilbert and Sullivan troupe The Lamplighters, and the Western Opera Theatre. From 1999 to 2001, she played in the Celtic folk band Golden Bough, and then spent two years touring and recording with the Celtic rock band Tempest.

Since 2011, Draheim and her partner Wayde Blair had lived in Berea, Kentucky. There, in addition to pursuing her career as a textile and surface pattern designer, she played contra dance music with Sea Change, a band that also included Elise Melrod, Liza Di Savino, and Nathan Wilson. Over the course of her career, Sue Draheim had appeared on more than 30 albums. John Renbourn called her “one of the best musicians I have ever met,” and once described the experience of hearing her playing with a prominent classical orchestra. “The enjoyment of listening to Mahler,” he said, “was enhanced by the thought that she could easily slip into the Skillet Lickers.”

Itoy McGuire of Todd, North Carolina, died on May 13 at the age of 47. The banjo player and carpenter was a member of the seventh generation of his family to live in Watauga County, North Carolina. He was deeply connected to the music of the Blue Ridge Mountains. While growing up, McGuire heard old-time music at family reunions and on recordings. He attributed early inspiration to an Albert Hash record, a tenth-birthday present from his father.

Moving home to the mountains after living in northern Virginia, McGuire was influenced by elder musicians including the Roan Mountain Hilltoppers, Stanley Hicks, Dave Sturgill, and Enoch Rutherford. He spent formative musical time with Dick Terriker and Jim Ginski, of whom he said, in an interview with Mark Reed for the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, “I came back to Boone at just the right time to hang around with all of those guys... Back when I could only play three tunes, they would play them all night with me.”

With fiddler Sam Gobble, whom he credited as being “my biggest mentor for tunes,” McGuire founded a weekly jam at the Todd General Store. McGuire played music with Gobble, Alex Hooker, and other friends for many years, and was a well-known figure in the Western North Carolina music scene.

Just as this issue of the Old-Time Herald was wrapped up for press, we learned the sad news that Gail Heil—distinguished old-time musician, longtime friend of the OTH, and wife and musical partner of OTH contributor Bob Bovee—died at her home in Minnesota on May 30. We will feature a remembrance of Gail in an upcoming issue of the magazine.
Can You Sing or Play Old-Time Music?

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Players, Etc.

Are Invited

To call on Mr. Walker or Mr. Brown of the Columbia Phonograph Company at 334 East Main Street, Johnson City, on Saturday, October 13th, 1928—9 A. M. to 5 P. M.

This is an actual try-out for the purpose of making Columbia Records.

You may write in advance to E. B. Walker, Care of John Sevier Hotel, Johnson City, or call without appointment at address and on date mentioned above.
"CAN YOU SING OR PLAY OLD-TIME MUSIC?"
THE JOHNSON CITY SESSIONS

By Ted Olson

In a recent interview, musician Wynton Marsalis said, "I can't tell you how many times I've suggested to musicians to get The Bristol Sessions—Anglo-American folk music. It's a lot of different types of music: Appalachian, country, hillbilly. It's folk music in the Anglo-American tradition. It's essential for musicians to know that." Johnny Cash (who was not entirely unbiased, since he had married into the famous family group "discovered" in Bristol) once referred to the 1927 Bristol Sessions as "the single most important event in the history of country music." Scholar Nolan Porterfield went so far as to suggest that, "As a sort of shorthand notation, [the Bristol Sessions have] come to signal the Big Bang of country music evolution."

As important as Victor Records' 1927 Bristol Sessions were (and are), the attention paid to their impact has led to a general neglect of the larger phenomenon of "location recording sessions" in Appalachia. The most noteworthy location recording sessions to be staged in Appalachia after the 1927 Bristol Sessions were those held by Columbia Records in October 1928 and in October 1929, only 25 miles away from Bristol in Johnson City, Tennessee, then a boomtown and a bustling railroad hub. Though they did not uncover musicians of the caliber of Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, who first recorded in Bristol, the sessions in Johnson City generated many fascinating recordings. Indeed, Columbia's Johnson City Sessions, taken as an entire corpus, are as worthy of our attention today as the recordings made in Bristol for Victor.

The Bristol Sessions conducted by Victor Records producer Ralph Peer in July - August 1927, yielded memorable recordings by influential Appalachian musicians, including such often-overlooked old-time music luminaries as Ernest Stoneman, Blind Alfred Reed, Henry Whitter, Ernest Phipps, and Alfred G. Barnes, as well as artists who would change the direction of country music—Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. Experiencing commercial success with the recordings and management contracts he had generated in Bristol that summer, Peer returned the next year to make additional recordings by Stoneman and his group, Ernest Phipps and his quartet, Barnes, and more musicians. The location recording sessions Peer conducted in Bristol became legendary for having marked the emergence of the modern country music industry and, equally important, for continuing to inspire musicians working in a range of other genres, including old-time, Americana, alt-country, bluegrass, and rock.

For several years before the Bristol Sessions, record companies had been setting up recording sessions on location near the places where Southern musicians actually lived. This practice began in such major Southern cities as Atlanta and Memphis, where A&R (Artist & Repertoire) scouts in contemporary parlance, record producers sought out traditional and professional musicians in the effort to create commercially viable records. By the early 1920s, A&R scouts focused on finding black musicians to perform blues and jazz numbers, as such records were proving popular to a broad record-buying audience. In June 1923, Ralph Peer, then working for OKeh Records, cut and released the first commercial record of Southern vernacular music by a white musician, Fiddlin' John Carson. The record's success proved that there was an audience for the new commercial music genre, which would be referred to by several names, including "hillbilly music," and which would eventually be termed "country and western" and then "country music."

There was one location recording session in Appalachia before the Bristol Sessions: Peer's 1925 recording visit for OKeh Records to Asheville, North Carolina. In late August and early September 1925, Peer set up a temporary studio in Asheville's George Vanderbilt Hotel and recorded such important 1920s-era musicians as Stoneman, Whitter, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Wade Ward, and Kelly Harrell. (In the fall of 1925, Robert W. Gordon of the Library of Congress also traveled to Appalachia to make noncommercial documentary cylinder recordings of regional music.)

The idea of transporting recording equipment to Appalachia was, to record companies, a shift from their previous practice of depending on Appalachian musicians to leave the region to make records in the large Southern cities, or up North. While these 1925 recordings from Asheville were hampered by the limited dynamic range rendered by analog recording, Peer realized that there was more talent to be mined in the mountains. After accepting a position with Victor Records in 1926, Peer began to speculate as to where his next recording foray in Appalachia should be. Working with Ernest Stoneman, who was by that time already a successful "hillbilly" recording artist, and who hailed from southwestern Virginia, Peer selected Bristol, a small yet modern city situated on the border between Virginia and Tennessee, and a crossroads for rail and automobile transportation.

The Bristol Sessions recordings of 1927-1928 were dramatically superior to those made at the 1925 Asheville Sessions. Whereas the sessions in Asheville had made use of low-fidelity acoustic horn microphones, for the Bristol Sessions Peer utilized the recently-introduced electronic carbon microphone system, which made it possible to capture a fuller, more natural dynamic range of sound. The commercial success of many of Peer's Bristol Sessions records for Victor led A&R scouts from competing record companies to set up recording sessions in and near Appalachia. Other such occasions included a September 1927 session by OKeh in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; a February 1928 session by the Brunswick label in Ashland, Kentucky; two sessions, in August 1929 and in April 1930, by Brunswick in Knoxville, Tennessee; and Columbia Records' Johnson City Sessions in October 1928 and October 1929.

Peer's Bristol Sessions recordings were revolutionary in their influence, of course, but the Johnson City recordings, overseen by Columbia's pioneering A&R scout Frank B. Walker, reflect Walker's more eclectic tastes and keener sense of humor. Indeed, the recordings from the Johnson City Sessions provide a distinctly different portrayal of Appalachian music. Peer was interested primarily in capturing vocal performances of sacred material or secular
songs with concisely-structured lyrics projecting generalized emotions—ostensibly to reach the broadest possible audience. For his part, Walker maintained an open-\end{verbatim}
Sessions recordings, despite their overall excellence, sold poorly upon their release in early 1930.

Few of the recordings from Johnson City are widely known today. Three records—“Old Lady and the Devil” by Bill and Belle Reed, “The Coo-Coo Bird” by Clarence Ashley, and the Bentley Boys’ immortal “Down On Penny’s Farm”—were reissued in 1952 on the influential Anthology of American Folk Music. “Down On Penny’s Farm” would lend a thematic and stylistic backdrop for not one but two Bob Dylan songs, “Hard Times in New York Town” and “Maggie’s Farm.” Other outstanding recordings from the sessions include, from 1928, “Johnson Boys” by the Grant Brothers, “Southern Number III” by the Roane County Ramblers, “Johnson City Blues” by Clarence Greene, “Lindy” by the Proximity String Quartet, and “Roll On Buddy” by Charlie Bowman and His Brothers; and from 1929, four classic recordings by Clarence Ashley, “I’m Just a Black Sheep” by Jack Jackson, “Beckley Rag” by Roy Harvey and Leonard Copleland, “West Virginia Hills” by the Moatsville String Ticklers, and “Powder and Paint” by Ira and Eugene Yates.

Frank Walker’s inspired work on the Johnson City Sessions may not have garnered much scholarly attention, yet his peers certainly bestowed respect upon him for his subsequent roles in the recorded sound industry. For his work for RCA Victor, producing recordings by Bill Monroe, Glenn Miller, Coleman Hawkins, and Duke Ellington, and for MGM Records overseeing the career of Hank Williams, Sr., Walker acquired the sobriquet “The Dean of the American Record Industry.”

Columbia Records’ Johnson City Sessions have long merited an in-depth examination, and that examination is now here, in the form of a four-CD box set and book released by Bear Family Records. Developing a story begun in the 2011 box set The Bristol Sessions, 1927-1928: The Big Bang of Country Music, this new collection, entitled The Johnson City Sessions, 1928-1929: Can You Sing Or Play Old-Time Music?, continues Bear Family Records’ commitment to tracing the larger story of the location recording sessions conducted in Appalachia in the late ’20s and early ’30s. The Johnson City Sessions compiles all 100 extant recordings made during those 1928 and 1929 Columbia sessions—the first time that they have been collected in any form. The recordings and accompanying book chronicle the presence in Johnson City of all the musicians who heeded the invita-
tion of a widely disseminated October 1928 newspaper ad, calling upon area musicians to participate in “an actual try-out for the purpose of making Columbia Records.”

In April 2013 the State of Tennessee erected an official historical marker to commemorate this compelling if overlooked event in early country music history. In October 2013, Johnson City will host several public activities focused on the Johnson City Sessions, including the dedication of the Bear Family Records box set.

Today, the Johnson City Sessions recordings are deemed by those who know them best (scholars and record collectors, if not yet the general public) as a strong, distinctive cross-section of old-time Appalachian music made at the cusp of the Great Depression. Indeed, they might arguably constitute the second-most important recording sessions ever conducted in Appalachia. If the 1927 Bristol Sessions can be considered “the Big Bang of Country Music,” then the Johnson City Sessions were a major aftershock.


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Rick Good is a six-foot-six native of Dayton, Ohio. He has lived in the hamlet of Spring Valley for over 40 years, quietly and unassumingly playing and composing music for the banjo. In the summer of 2012, Rick released a career retrospective CD, *The Human Banjo Player*. The material, far-reaching and eclectic, is not intended to be a lesson, rather a happy, lucid musical dream mirroring Rick’s 48 years of devotion to this instrument.

Good is a prolific composer, and one would be hard pressed to discern what is old and what is new among his compositions. Rick began writing songs early in his musical career, and has always been a fan of restrictions: within a genre, of an instrument. He innovates within his given parameters using simple chord changes and witty, poetic wordplay. His compositions have an honesty that comes from a deep understanding of the traditional elements.

Rick’s older brother Chuck bought him his first banjo, a Harmony Bakelite, when Rick was 12.

"I had a band starting in 1964 with my grade school classmates, Jim Stammen and Jerry Ray Weinert. We were very earnest and we played folk music. Need I say more? We originally called ourselves the Lonesome Travelers, but we tried to keep up with the times by changing our name periodically. We were Waterweed toward the end of our seven-year run, but we spent most of our time as the Freewheelers. Rick first gained wide notice as the banjo player and singer with the Hotmud Family, the old-time/bluegrass/early country band known for its singing, which toured steadily from 1974 to 1983. I started going to the Mariposa Folk Festival up in Ontario in 1968, I went up every year, and it was my dream to play there. When the Hotmud Fam-
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Ily had been playing mostly locally in Ohio, I got a call from Mariposa. They said Larry Sparks had just cancelled and they needed a bluegrass band. Our singing was always bluegrass-based, though I didn’t think of us as a bluegrass band. We did what we wanted to do. The festival organizer asked if we played bluegrass, and I said yes, so they hired us.

We were just a trio, myself and Dave and Suzanne Edmundson. With this gig coming up, I suddenly felt the pressure to get a Gibson resonator banjo. We also felt we needed a bass player. There happened to be a bass player around the house I was sharing in Spring Valley with my high school buddy Harley Campbell. I showed him some basic rudiments, though I didn’t really play the bass, and he took it from there. Not only did we go to Mariposa, but two years later, in 1976, Hot Mud went to the Kentucky State Music Contest and won both the bluegrass and the old-time categories.

We were pretty popular in Kentucky and Virginia. Being hippies, we looked like the audience’s kids, but we played music like their grandparents. It probably confused them at first. I was mostly playing old-time banjo at these bluegrass festivals where there just weren’t any old-time players on stage. The most old-time music you’d see was Ralph Stanley playing one fanning tune a night, “Little Birdy” or “Shout Lulu.” Most old-time bands at that time featured fiddle tunes, but we made singing our specialty and that gave us a foot in both the bluegrass and old-time worlds.

If playing with Hot Mud was my college education, Van Buren Kidwell was the professor. Van was a retired farmer from Richland, Kentucky, who had moved up to Miamisburg, Ohio. He was a contemporary of Doc Roberts and had a similar repertoire of hard-driving tunes and raggy blues that he said he and Doc both learned from the same “colored” fiddler. The way I play the banjo is because of the way Van fiddled. He took no prisoners. We recorded two albums with Van, and they’ve been reissued on one CD by the Field Recorders’ Collective.

Rick has been playing his curly maple OME resonator banjo since the mid 1970s.

I got my banjo from Zeke Hutchison. OME made it for Zeke. The banjo and I were both in a car wreck in February of 1976. Harley and I were driving home
(bottom) Van Kidwell & The Hotnud Family at Marijouce, 1974: Rick Good, Tom Harley Campbell, Van Kidwell, Dave Edmundson, & Suzanne Thomas.
from a Jamestown, New York, Hotmud gig. We slipped on the icy interstate and got ping-ponged around the road by a trio of semis. The third one hit us as we were sitting still, thinking we were okay. It sent us spinning and everything centrifugally spilled out of the car onto the northern Ohio countryside. My banjo was split in half and the resonator destroyed. There was a guy who used to come see us in Dayton, a furniture maker. He resurrected the banjo, did a great job that still holds. I fished a resonator out of a dumpster that same year. It’s still on my banjo!

After eight albums and many miles, Hotmud wound down in the early ’80s. Rick spent a couple of years with Mad River Theater Works, which was called Little Miami Theater Works at that time. Mad River is a rural Ohio theater company, which brings historical events and experiences of the Midwest to the stage as original plays for all ages. Good worked with Mad River in the one-man show *The Last Song of John Proffit*. Tommy Thompson of the Red Clay Ramblers wrote and first performed the show in 1984. It is the story of the Ohio-born minstrel entertainer and “Dixie” composer Dan Emmett, told through the eyes of a fictional friend and fellow minstrel performer, John Proffit. Proffit narrates how Dan Emmett pirated music of black minstrel musicians and took credit for authorship.

Mad River expressed interest in the show, and Thompson told them, “Well there’s really only one person I could recommend for this, and that’s Rick Good.” One of the first things we did was call Mike Martin in Pennsylvania and ask him if he would make another gourd banjo like the one he made for Tommy. It turned out that he still had the other half of the same gourd and, by virtue of the fact that he’d already made one, I think I got a slightly nicer instrument. That banjo was all I wanted to play for a long time.

Overall the course of several years, Tommy did a few different versions of the play. The last one had a second cast member, with Clay Buckner playing Dan Emmett. The one-man show I’ve done is yet another version. Jeff Hooper (of Mad River) did some nice dramaturgy and tightened a few things up. We also added a song I wrote and some minstrel show material from days gone by. Tommy came to the premiere and liked it a lot. Tommy died in 2003, but when he was inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2011, I got to do a six-minute excerpt of the play at the big show in Charleston.

In 1987, Rick began his longest collaboration of all, with his wife and partner, choreographer Sharon Leahy. In that year Rick and Sharon embarked on what would become 23 years as co-directors of the ensemble Rhythm In Shoes, creating material for large theatrical dance and music performance. This became Good’s sole focus. He went from writing songs and tunes to creating worlds in which to dance. Rhythm In Shoes produced new work annually, and drew out a full-length concert repertoire for six weeks at a time. Working with a broad artistic brush and a 15-member company of dancers and musicians, which at one time included three of their children, Leahy and Good created memorable and timely work, such as *Street of the Capitol* about the war in Bosnia, *Do You Remember This?* with sound sculptor Michael Bashaw, and *Nova Town*, which delved into the subject of urban decay. They joined forces with the Horseflies, the Red Clay Ramblers, and Crosspulse, choreographers Brenda Bufalino and John Giffen, and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. The creative process would begin with Leahy bringing an idea or series of rhythms to Good, who would follow her lead to find a musical fit; or in reverse, with Good initiating the process with a phrase, a banjo lick, lyrics, or a melody.

Though staggering in sheer quantity alone, Good’s musical accomplishments during this period are also impressive for the diversity of styles he employed in his compositions, and the ways in which he created new uses for the qualities and textures of the banjo. The banjo might lead the band, support a fiddle, play the fool drone, mesmerize, be propulsive, be jarring, elevate the level of joy, or echo perfectly a dancer’s steps. As a bandleader Good drew from his ensemble’s strengths to create imaginative arrangements of new and traditional music, always staying true to the underlying essence of a tune.

Rick considers himself primarily a dance musician, but considering his musical and stylistic accomplishments, he defies classification. Paul Brown adds, “With all the resonances of the great old-timers floating through his music, he still sounds absolutely like himself. No one else. That to me is a sign of a
really good musician. His dance music experience makes his playing noticeably strong. It's filic with integrity and punch and sinew. You may think you know how to play a tune on the banjo, and when you hear Rick play it, all of a sudden you realize there are new ways to think about it."

For over twenty summers Rick has taught in upstate New York at the Ashokan Fiddle & Dance Camp. He can also be found in West Virginia, tucked deep in the maze of tents and camp kitchens each summer at Clifthop, where he has won several contest ribbons. Adam Hirt remembers "... being utterly captivated by Rick's stunning performance of 'Flowery Girls' in the 2006 Clifthop banjo competition, in which I was a judge. The tone that he pulled from every note and the impossibly lyrical quality of his performance left me in complete awe."

Rhythm In Shoes disbanded in 2010. That summer Good was awarded the Ohio Heritage Fellowship by the Ohio Arts Council "in honor of lifelong achievements that have had a lasting positive impact on the excellence, vitality and public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts in Ohio." Rick has continued to compose and play for theater in productions by the Human Race Theater Company in Dayton. He also moonlights regularly with the Red Clay Ramblers, and hosts a weekly open jam session with his stepson, fiddler Ben Cooper, at Dayton's Trolley Stop. His ongoing family collaboration with Sharon, Ben, and daughter Emma Young, along with Paul Kovac, has evolved into the ensemble ShoeFly. During the 2012 election season Good posted two original songs with accompanying videos to YouTube. "This House is Not For Sale" was given mention in a New York Times op-ed piece about modern protest songs, in honor of Woody Guthrie's 100th birthday.

Asked why he waited 48 years to put out a banjo album, Good said simply, "Well... I've been busy."

Abby Ladia and Sara Bartlett have been part of old-time communities for 40 years. Their greatest achievement together is raising their three kids to sleep soundly through any late-night jam session. They live in Bloomington, Indiana, and this is their first contribution to the Old-Time Herald.
TALES FROM THE 'WOODS
PART 6: TOMMY'S HOUSE
By Walt Koken

After our wonderful visit with the Fuzzies, we had some time to kill before our next stop on our summer adventure of '71, so Mac and Bob and I headed off from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, riding high in Mac's old trusty '53 Ford panel truck towards Mount Airy and Tommy Jarrell's house. We followed Malcolm Owen's directions to the house, and also his advice to bring a bottle of rye with us.

Tommy's house was situated on a fairly big lot. It had a large yard with several trees on the lawn, in a semi-rural setting with neighboring houses nearby. We arrived mid-afternoon, knocked on his door, and were greeted by Tommy himself. We were well versed in his tunes from the County LPs of his wonderful playing with Oscar Jenkins and Fred Cockerham, and it was a bit surprising to see our hero for real. After we introduced ourselves he cordially invited us in. We shortly learned that he also had heard of us! Apparently Wayburn Johnson had told him of our recent escapades at the fiddlers' convention at Marion, Virginia, so we started off our first meeting with a bit of mutual admiration. He said he'd been sitting around the house and was somewhat tired, but he thought he could play a little. He grabbed his fiddle and broke into "When Sorrows Encompass Me Round," which seemed to reflect his mood pretty well.

Tommy was a big person, and his fiddling was quite energetic and strong, but his singing voice nearly knocked me off my chair! Such dynamics do not come across very well in recordings. When he had finished his song, he asked us to play a tune for him, which we did. After that, we all allowed as how a little drink might help us get in tune and play better. I ran out to get the bottle from the truck, and we had a drink. Then we traded tunes back and forth, and played a few together, enjoying the afternoon's musical camaraderie as well as the rye. We played "Rockingham Cindy" with him, "Susannah Gal," "June Apple," "Ground Hog," and many others that we had learned from his recordings. Occasionally we would play something different for him, and he would show us tunes that he hadn't yet recorded, like "Sail Away Ladies." I was on a high, and tried to absorb everything I saw and heard from him.

After a while Tommy's son Benny came home. He seemed unhappy that we three strangers were invading his home. After introductions he told us he played fiddle too, and we expressed an interest in hearing him. He apparently didn't have a fiddle, so he played mine a bit, and then tried Bob's, which he liked a lot better. It became quickly evident that his music was quite a bit more contemporary and bluegrass in style than either Tommy's or ours. Tommy was about 70 then, Benny was about 40, and they appeared to be odd roommates. Benny didn't join in, or even fit, really, with our session with Tommy, but he did enjoy a glass of whiskey and then disappeared somewhere else in the house. He would reappear periodically to fill his glass, grab Bob's fiddle and play another tune by himself, seemingly triumphant that we weren't familiar with it, then disappear again. He got a strong, gritty tone by playing his bow down near the frog a lot. Tommy, on the other hand, powerful as he was, got a wonderful little rhythm by rocking the length of his bow between two, three, or even four strings. I noticed that he put his bent thumb between the stick and the bow hair, and grabbed the hair between his first two fingers and thumb, creating a nice pivot point there. Thus, the harder he mashed down, the harder he pulled on the hair. And he did mash down!

We had a wonderful afternoon of music, but suddenly the bottle was empty and it was time for Tommy to go to his sister's house for supper. The three of us had some meat and vegetables, and asked if we could make a stir-fry in his kitchen while he was gone. He was glad we would stay, and told us we were welcome to spend the night.

Tommy's ride came, and we were left to ourselves in a strange kitchen with Benny. We asked him if he would like to join us for supper. After inquiring what we were up to, he told us that our chuck steak, which we were about to cut up and add to a stir fry, needed to be boiled for about three hours before it would be edible. He informed us that if we merely fried it, it would be too tough to eat, and then he went back to his room. We realized that he was just worried about his dentures, and continued with our camp meal. When it was done cooking, he actually joined us and enjoyed it.

When the meal was over and the kitchen cleaned up a bit, Tommy came home with a new bottle of I. W. Harper, and a twinkle in his eye. He allowed that it was not a good idea to have a drink so soon after supper, so we took out our instruments and took up where we left off, trading tunes and stories, and having a grand time with it. Benny occasionally came in to check on us, the bottle, and the fiddles.
Tommy loved to have a drink when he played, and welcomed the company. He seemed invigorated and animated by the spirits. The jolly rapport amongst us all grew as we played into the night. We were in heaven, doing what we loved with one of our heroes.

Along about eleven o'clock, Bob, showing signs of fatigue and over-indulgence, announced that he was going to retire. He said he would take the bed in the truck, and meandered on out. Mac and I kept playing with Tommy, trying to catch some of the wonderful sounds and bow-strokes emanating from his fiddling and enjoying what was left in the bottle. After a time, Benny came in, wondering where Bob had gone. We told him he'd gone off to sack out in the truck, and continued our musical adventure. It was a delightfully warm summer evening. The windows were open, and between the crickets and katydids in the yard seemed to echo our fun.

Suddenly we heard some commotion right outside the window. Bob had decided to throw down his sleeping bag on the ground near the open windows, where he could hear the music and be serenaded off to sleep. Unfortunately, his slumber was interrupted, since Benny feared that the neighbors would be offended seeing some long-haired stranger snoozing on the ground in the morning. Escorted by Benny to the garage, Bob bedded down there for the night.

It was getting late, and the bottle was empty, and it was time to pack it in. Mac headed off for the bed in the truck, I took the couch, and we looked forward to another few tunes in the morning after sleeping it off.

Well, Benny got up at six o'clock and headed out to mow the lawn. As it turned out, the riding mower was parked in the garage on the concrete slab a few inches from Bob's soon-to-be throbbing head, and Benny started it and warmed it up for a few minutes before gleefully driving it out around the lawn for the next hour or so.

We never did see Benny again, but we did visit Tommy and ran into him at several festivals. He loved us for playing some of his tunes, often saying, "That's the best I ever heard!" after we'd played something. He had a way of making one feel pretty special. His unique style was always moving to listen to, and our first visit with him was unforgettable.
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BACK ISSUES OF THE OLD-TIME HERALD

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In this two-disc set, Yazoo follows up its 2006 release *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of*, which put together some of the rarest old-time and blues 78s of the 1920s and '30s. *The Return*, though it too features many extremely rare cuts, focuses on recordings that some major record collectors consider the most desirable for their musical content rather than scarcity.

It's not hard to argue that most of these cuts are musically superb, including old-time recordings that are the top of my playlist: Charlie Poole's "Milwaukee Blues," Luke Hignight and the Ozark Strutters' "Fort Smith Breakdown," the Carter Brothers and Son's "Old Jaw Bone" (all quite rare), and Fiddling Sam Long's "Seneca Square Dance" and the Cartwright Brothers' "Texas Ranger" (more common). However, these have all been reissued numerous times and the same is true for the majority of the blues songs. I expect most readers will already have a lot of this material in their collections.

The mix is pretty varied with old-time, lots of blues, two Irish sides, two beautiful Cajun numbers, a couple of Eastern European (Polish?) tracks, and some nice sacred pieces. All in all these make a very enjoyable listening program, a fine set to take on car trips or listen to around home. Again, though, it's hard to imagine a lot of people going out and purchasing these CDs when they are likely to have so much of the material elsewhere. And that brings us to the notes with this set.

The beautiful digipak that encloses the CDs also holds the 55-page booklet, which I expected to have copious notes and discographical material on the 46 selections. Instead, it is devoted overwhelmingly to a history of 78 rpm record collectors: stories, interviews, discussions, and the reasoning behind picking the cuts used here. The music itself only gets four and a half of those pages, and that includes photos. We are told that there is plenty of information available in other places, that we can just Google the artists and songs. But it seems to me that...
part of the job when reissuing music like this is to present it with as much material as you can, to put it in context. Some of us just like to know, and besides, it's not easy to find out about a lot of these artists and recordings.

Among the earliest record collectors, there was mainly a desire to collect the hot jazz discs. That was followed by a slowly developing appreciation of rural blues, hillbilly, and finally ethnic recordings. A great service has been done by these collectors preserving and reissuing such vast quantities of the music recorded in what we refer to as the "Golden Era." I do find the stories of the collectors fascinating, but I expect that this extensive documentation of collecting is not as interesting to the main market that is targeted with this release.

The remastering of these recordings is quite good; only a few tracks have much noticeable surface noise remaining. In fact, many of the numbers sound better than I have ever heard them before, on reissues or the original 78s. Maybe for that reason, or to have some exceptional cuts that you might not have in some other place, you'll want to acquire this set. Musically you can't go wrong.

Bob Bohee

Old Hat CD-1009


When it comes to popular birds in old-time music, Gallus domesticus wins easily. But I guess you already knew that. Given that popularity, I can't remember any previous recording featuring all-chicken songs. So this CD fills a musical void that you might not realize needed filling.

You might wonder why anyone would waste their time playing chicken songs. For one thing, chickens are low-maintenance they require very little care compared with other animals on a small farm. You pretty much just let them wander around eating whatever they can find in the yard. In return, you collect their eggs. And on Sundays, kill one for a feast. Meanwhile, you can amuse yourself by watching how
they strut around with such obvious self-satisfaction, considering that they've been bred to be astoundingly stupid. And, of course, the clucking and crowing are easy to imitate with fiddle, banjo, or your voice. Almost nobody on this record was able to resist the temptation to sound like a hen or rooster.

Minstrel shows leaned heavily on the cliché of the chicken thief, and it is well represented here. Some of the more popular minstrel chicken songs appear twice on this record: for example, “Chickens Can't Roost Too High For Me” (McClung Brothers; Beale Street Sheiks) and “Who Broke the Lock on the Henhouse Door” (Riley Puckett; The Georgia Browns). Some non-minstrel chicken songs also are presented more than once, although sometimes with different titles: “Old Hen Cackled” (George Edgar’s Corn Dodgers; Carolina Ramblers) and “Chicken Reef” (J. O. LaMadeleine; Six Jumping Jacks; Tune Wranglers).

Some of these groups, such as the Dixieland Jug Blowers or the Six Jumping Jacks, use such instruments as clarinets, trumpets, saxophones, and drums, providing an uptown sound that doesn't go as well with chicken songs as, say, the Leake County Revelers or the Carolina Ramblers. Still, with the possible excep-
The New Young Fogies, Volume 1


Anna Roberts-Gevall and Joseph DeFornellette (alias "Joe Bass") have put together a sampler CD of songs and tunes by many young artists (average age probably 30 or younger) who have found their own paths to the old-time world and are making some pretty wonderful music. The technical skill level on this CD is high, and what is more, it is generally used with taste and an appreciation of the tradition in which the musicians are playing.

Calling this album The New Young Fogies immediately invites comparison with Ray Alder's The Young Fogies, which came out on vinyl nearly 30 years ago. Ray wrote in the liner notes: "We came upon the music in many different ways. For some there were close relatives who played. Others virtually adopted musical parents through collecting and studying with great rural musicians... still others heard field recordings or commercial 78 rpm recordings... yet for all the distances involved there is a sense of community and celebration when we do get together."

In contrast to the collection compiled by Ray, who roamed the whole country, tape recorder in hand, this CD features musicians who (with one or two exceptions) live in North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. (Of course, this is only Volume I.) Interviews with the musicians, which comprise most of the liner notes, describe the same paths to making music found over a quarter-century ago. Some of the musicians (for example Emily Miller, Jesse Milnes, Sarah Jamison, and Jesse Wells) have parents who also play or sing old-time music. Others describe visiting older musicians: Brett Ratliff talks of "hanging around with folks like Art Stamper, Paul David Smith..." while Andy FitzGibbon spent time with Lester McCumbers, Melvin Wine, and John Hannah. Others heard recordings of older people; Hannah Johnson described old-time music as "a chance to connect with people who are dead, their lifestyles and personalities and such."

With 25 tracks, there is not room here to mention all the good ones. Some of my favorites were tunes I recognized and so could appreciate the creativity that went into the versions. They include Don Rogers and Anna Roberts-Gevall's playing of 'And the Cat Came Back' as a duet of flat-picked guitar and fiddle; Emily Schaad and Mark Freed's 'Arkansas Traveler' in the key of C ("It's the same, but different"); Sarah Wood singing "Wondrous Love" as a solo, backed with thumb-lead two-finger banjo; and the Buckstinkle Boys' reworking of "Rainbow Sign" into an early bluegrass style.

I had to work to track down sources for some tunes. Andy FitzGibbon's "Give the Fiddler a Drum" turned out to be Edden Hammons' version, possibly influenced by the Cliffhangers. (Adam Hurt was Tom Detective on this one, and I am grateful!) Hannah Johnson and Aviva Speigleman singing "She Ain't No Good" first reminded me of Uncle Dave Macon's "Go Long Mule," but I was then able to trace the song to the Mississippi Sheiks. And Elizabeth LaPrelle's "London Bridge" is "Geordie" (Child 239), but none of the words and tunes given in Sharp's Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians match what she sings. And there were other tunes and songs I loved, but could not remember having heard before.

This brings me to my major complaint about this CD: the absence of information about the tunes and songs themselves. After reading the liner notes, I know a lot about the artists, but nothing about the tunes and songs which they chose to play — what changes they made from the source recordings, and what aspects of the sources they kept. This does not keep me from recommending The New Young Fogies. I suspect that everybody who listens will have different favorites; I am sure that anybody who enjoys old-time music will find this CD worth buying.

One final note: I wrote Anna and Joe asking about sources, and they replied that it was a deliberate choice not to include them. (They will, however, appear on the CD website.) In the course of our discussion, we were able to define our positions; some of our correspondence will appear in an upcoming "Issues in Old-Time Music" section of the OTH.

PETE PETERSON

To order: newyoungfogies.com

Note to Artists and Record Companies
Please send all material for review to the OTH (PO Box 61679, Durham, NC 27715). Please do not send to individual reviewers. What gets reviewed is determined at the discretion of the OTH according to space available, balance of old and new, and compatibility with our mission. We cannot review everything that comes in nor guarantee that because we received it we will review it. We do not return materials to the sender. Thanks!
Roll On, Roll On / Little Birdie / The Mourning Blues / Sally in the Garden / Shove That Pig’s Foot a Little Farther in the Fire - Prettiest Gal in the County / Beelzebubbles / Johnson City Blues / The Fiddling Soldier / A Horse Named Bill / The Morning of 1845 / Whiskey Seller / Little Rabbit / Who’s That Knocking At My Window? / Green Grow the Lilacs / Poor Bill / Devilish Mary / Keep On Truckin’ Mama / The Midnight Special

None of the tunes played on this recording by Tom Paley is what you’d call a ripper or a roarer. The word “torrid” never comes to mind, nor does “sizzling” or “driving.” The twin-fiddle medley of “Shove That Pig’s Foot a Little Farther in the Fire - Prettiest Gal in the County” comes the closest, rising up a bit, but never really setting the pulse racing. Paley instead offers a set of mostly vocal songs that are predominantly medium and tuneful. A couple of them are downright sentimental. The title tune, which opens the recording, falls in that category, being, as Paley says, something of a lament he wrote for a woman he once loved. “Green Grow the Lilacs,” would, of course, be another; here performed on autoharp and with harmonica and bass accompaniment. The rest are in that play-party, good-time, lightly danceable mode, and that works really well, being perfectly attuned to Paley’s sly, relaxed, and somewhat wizened voice.

Joining him for the recording are the members of the Old-Time Moonshine Revue. Tom’s son Ben is on fiddle, Jonny Bridgewood in on bass and guitar, Jason Steel is on guitar, slide guitar, and harmony vocals, Robin Gillan on harmonica and harmony vocals, and on a couple of tracks Dave Morgan on percussion. Most of the tracks feature guitar, fiddle, and bass, with settings of twin guitar (“Who’s That Knocking At My Window”), twin fiddles or solo banjo (“Sally in the Garden”), or solo guitar (“Johnson City Blues”) mixed in here and there for contrast. One minor complaint would be that several of the guitar leads come off, at times, thin, flat, and distant. It is particularly noticeable on “Johnson City Blues,” and while it doesn’t ruin the track, or any of the others, it does distract a bit.

The recording opens with the aforementioned title tune. That gives way to a gentle, flowing cover of “Little Bircie,” then to a lilting, minstrel-like tune, “The Mourning Blues,” once popularized by Uncle Dave Macon. A few tracks later, Paley includes one of his originals, “Beelzebubbles.” He said he got to wondering if the Devil had a family and what they’d be like, and his musings resulted in this slightly salty tale of a man dating the Devil’s daughter. Hence the title. It probably won’t become a classic, but it fits the mood of the album and stands well beside the goofy lyrics (and revamped “Dixie” melody) of “A Horse Named Bill,” or the lighthearted ballad of drinking and dancing called “The Morning of 1845,” or the tale of a woman trying to decide whether or not to marry “Poor Bill.” The album closes out with a three-song series of “Devilish Mary,” “Keep On Trucking, Mama,” and “The Midnight Special.” No new ground is broken with any of them, but Paley gives each a convivial reading that is, again, in keeping with the mood.
set from the opening chords of “Roll On, Roll On.” All in all, a welcome and successful recording from one of the legends of the old-time and folk community.

BILL WAGNER

Walt Koken
**Sittin’ in the Catbird’s Seat**

Mudthumper Music MM-0071

Sittin’ in the Catbird’s Seat / That Gal with the Run Down Shoe / Strawberry Jam / Banjo On the Hill / Talking Garden / Chinquapin Pie / Peas and Taters / Down at the Mouth of Old Stinson / Br’er Bear / Weary Blues / Peaceful Times / Store Road / Frankie and Albert / Silk and Velvet Waltz / Down South Blues / Maple Leaf Rag / Save the Nation

Should this solo banjo and vocal recording from Walt Koken be called a retrospective? That sort of implies a summing-up of a career. Indeed, there are instances here that lean in that direction. Koken has been at the banjo a long time, beginning with his instruction in 1959, down through his time with the Highwoods Stringband and to the present. Several of the 17 tunes he presents here are pulled from his past, either reprising a tune he once played or learned long ago, such as “Banjo On the Hill” or, as in the case of “Chinquapin Pie,” reviving a tape of an old performance that one being from 1967 and finding him racing with verve through the tune’s long modal lines.

Most of these were, however, recorded between 2011 and 2012 (an exception being “Down at the Mouth of Old Stinson” a jaunty clawhammer tune recorded in 2005), and rather than being a summation, are more a taking-stock of what he’s learned and how those skills can be applied and combined in new tunes. Down through the years, Koken has acquired techniques from the old minstrel style, the ragtime era, the classical players, and bluegrass, as well as from, obviously, the more traditional modal styles such as Round Peak. His originals reflect those styles in whole or part or combination. On this album he includes nine originals. Both “Sittin’ in the Cat Bird Seat” and “Strawberry Jam” have a light, airy blend of classical and minstrel approaches, and are very melodic. The tinkling of the metal strings striking the frets gives them a crystalline sound that is almost hypnotic. By contrast, “Peas and Taters” and “Br’er Bear” are more modal excursions. “Stone Road” falls somewhere between the two, while “Peaceful Times” blends ragtime elements with a slow nod to Earl Scruggs’ rolls. His “Silk and Velvet Waltz,” sort of classical sounding, is also nice. “Talking Garden” is in a talking blues form, and was for me one of the highlights of the album. There is just something relaxing and soothing about his description of the meal he’d feed the stranger (the listener) who wanders into his garden about luncheon.

The rest of the album is filled in by his takes on old favorites from Frank Hutchison (“Weary Blues,” done with a sort of stuttering, pulsing banjo accompaniment to his singing), Riley Puckett (a play-party bit of good-time nonsense, “That Gal With the Run Down Shoe,” about which Koken challenges us to name all the song titles included in the lyrics), and Dock Boggs’ (“Down South Blues”). He also covers “Frankie and Albert” and gives us a nifty version of “Maple Leaf Rag”
on which his banjo sounds almost like a
tacked upright piano.
Rather than thinking of this as a re-
trospective, think of it as a funnel point through which the next phase begins.
Or maybe, just think of it as a very good recording of banjo tunes and songs, both
old and new.

Bill Wagner

To order: muthumper.com

The Foghorn Stringband
Outshine the Sun

Hearth Music

Be Kind to a Man While He’s Down / Humpback Mule / Homestead on the
Farm / Salty River Reel / Going Home / Horseshoe Bend / Sweeter Than
the Flowers / Come All You Virginia Gals / Western Union / Just a Few Old
Memories / Indian Ate the Woodchuck / By the River / Lovers’ First Quarrel
/ ‘tis Yeux Bleus / Whoa Mule / Distant Land to Roam / Outshine the
Sun / Jones’ Waltz / Gospel Ship / Over the Garden Wall / Mama Blues

Changes keep coming to the Foghorn Stringband. Members have joined and
departed, taking them from a quintet to
a trio and now, to a quartet. The last time
we heard from them, on 2010’s Sou de
la Louisiane, they were a trio of Sammy
Lind, Caleb Klauder, and Nadine Landry.
For this recording they’ve added guitar-
ist and vocalist Rebecca “Reeb” Willms,
and the change is for the better.
Don’t misunderstand that. The trio
was a fine group and Sou de la Louisiane a
fine recording. It’s just that the Foghorn
must be at least a quartet to get the full
live drive that characterized their sound
their sound as many of us first knew it.
If they’re a trio, either: the bass sits out or
the guitar sits out or they have to over-
dub. Either way, the sound is different.
Adding Willms on guitar brings the band
more in line with the full band sound of
the original group, yet leaves them leaner
than a full quintet. Willms also gives
them greater versatility. She can sing an
emphatic, declaratory lead, as she does

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here singing about the dangers of marrying a West Virginia man on the humorous "Come All You Virginia Calfs," or she can wail away mournfully and beautifully as she does on Hazel Dickens' "Just a Few Old Memories." Moreover, the group can now vocalize as a male duet ("Outshine the Sun"), a male female duet ("Be Kind to a Man While He's Down") or "By the River") or a female duet ("Homestead on the Farm"). The possibilities are many and the results impressive.

_Outshine the Sun_ gives us twenty-one tracks, barely a week one in the lot, and as on _Sud de la Louissiane_, they more or less alternate for contrast between vocal songs and fiddle tunes. Lind's fiddling and Klauder's mandolin, almost always tunning the leads, remain, as they always have, the core of the band sound, lyrically charging through the fiddle tunes and the fast tunes alike. Paired with Landry's powerful bass and Willms' fine rhythmic sense on guitar, the sound is still irresistible. The opening "Be Kind to a Man While He's Down," followed by "Humpback Mule," pretty much set the bar, defining what you'll hear instrumentally all the way through. The one variation is "Whose Mule?" There we get a chance to hear Klauder on fiddle and Lind on banjo.

As also with the trio recording, the selections here, particularly the vocal numbers, draw from a wide range of sources. If anything the scope is slightly broader. Dominating is a nod to the Carter Family, four tracks here, including "Over the Garden Wall," which manages to balance parlor-esque sentimentality with a tongue-in-cheek story, the aching "Distant Land to Roam," and their "Gospel Ship." Charlie Poole's "Outshine the Sun," as bright and uplifting as anything you'll hear, underscores the positive-gospel message first declared by "Be Kind..." and stands with the call-and-response form of "Going Home" as one of the album's many highlights. Where they've broadened the scope a bit is in their inclusion of a tune from the Stanley Brothers. The tune they've chosen is "Sweeter Than the Flowers," and it's a good one, well-suited to Klauder's distinct and heartfelt singing style. He gets that one and runs with it, wrenching out emotion and pathos, and when it ends you realize they have, as they do with all the songs they attempt, made the song their own. That's what the top bands do.

_Bill Wagner_

To order: foghornstringband.com

Adam Hurt and Beth Williams Hartness
_Fire Times at Our House_

Possum Up a Siemon Tre / Ole Sport / Obama's March to the White House / Bill Cheatham / Richmond / Katy Cline / Shakin' Down the Aooms / Walking Up Georgia Row / John Henry / Haste to the Wedding / Cora Dye / Speed the Plow

A new album from Adam and Beth is always something to look forward to, and _Fire Times at Our House_ is a special treat. Consisting of old-time duets featuring Adam's clawhammer banjo and fiddle along with Beth's signature fingerstyle guitar, this album represents a selection of some of their favorite tunes, just as they play them at home for their own pleasure—hence the album title. This is clearly musicians' music.

Beth Williams Hartness was the first member of this formidable team to appear on my radar. I was intrigued by her incomparable guitar work on two CDs, _The Appalachian String Band Music Festival_ ("Cider") and Young Fogies 2 ("Walking up Georgia Row"). Soon afterwards I had the pleasure of playing with her at festivals, and I even managed to persuade her to share with me the secrets of her fingerpicking approach to backup. She explained it with crystal clarity but, to this day, I can't even begin to figure it out. Beth's playing fits nicely into a larger jam or string band setting, and it also provides a rich backup for a fiddle or banjo.

Around ten years ago, Beth was jamming with some frequency with a small group of hot young players, including Jared Nutter, Andy Edmonds, and Adam Hurt. I got to sit in on some of those sessions and, being a banjo player myself, I was frankly amazed by Adam's unique approach to clawhammer. Seemingly devoid of technical limitations—and squarely in the clawhammer tradition—he flawlessly成交s every technical challenge of the style into a potent asset. Adam's early banjo influences included such melodic players as Reed Martin and Ken Perlman, but he quickly turned to studying the earlier players—most notably Kyle Creed. His personal blend of authenticity and innovation helps to explain his torrent of blue ribbons at Mount Airy, Galax, Cliftop, and a host of other festivals and state championships.

For those who feel that grittiness is at the core of this music, it's challenging to be confronted by the nearly lapidary polish of this duo. The smoothness present in their music that clearly differentiates it from the raw edginess of (say) the Birchenfield, Tommy Jarrell, or Luther Davis. But, to my ears, Adam and Beth's music follows the silky tradition of such great fiddlers as Bill Stepp, Marion Reese, J. P. Fraley, and Luther Strong. Adam's brilliant last album, _Earth Tones_—which consists of unaccompanied and highly traditional solos on gourd banjo—should have amply reassured any doubters who thought he was too far from the mainstream. It's wicked good!

_Fire Times at Our House_ is also a gem. The album showcases the state of Adam's banjo art, his excellent fiddling, and Beth's guitar playing, and it even contains a terrific vocal duet. Here are some highlights.

The album opens with a rip-roaring rendition of "Possum up a Siemon Tre" (Buddy Thomas' name for the tune that Franklin George called "Nancy Ann"). It was from Frank George's banjo version that Rick Martin learned this tune and adapted it to fiddle, and it was from Rick's playing that Adam picked it up.

One banjo track I especially like is "Richmond" (not "Richmond Cotillion," but the tune that shares many characteristics of "The Cuckoo's Nest"). Adam lists the source as "traditional." I found this tune on the old Heritage album called _The Old-Time Way_, on which Galax stalwart Rosey Parish plays it—although the liner notes call it "Unnamed Tune." I'm told that Parish actually did call it "The Cuckoo's Nest." Adam plays it beautifully.

Adam does a very fine banjo rendition of Greg Canote's delightful AEAC fiddle tune "Obama's March to the White House," and a surprising waltz-time version of "Haste to the Wedding" in a setting derived from the playing of the fine fingerstyle banjoist Marvin Gaster. Clawhammerists who struggle with waltz time will be impressed by this one.

I was pleased to hear "Cora Dye"—a tune that was kind of popular in my neck of the woods about 15 years ago...
but which I haven't encountered anywhere else. Adam plays it nicely on banjo. I discover that it comes from Illinois fiddler Benton Reed, and I'm guessing that the title is a woman's name, but I suppose it could be some sort of fabric dye. This is the only track on the album in the gAdE ("Sandy River Belle") tuning which is usually a cornerstone of Adam's playing. I especially enjoyed "Katy Cline," wherein you get to hear Beth's clear alto singing and some fine harmony singing from Adam. Adam also demonstrates some rip-roaring Round Peak inspired banjo playing with a really excellent up-the-neck solo. Nobody does a better job of playing up there. You also get to hear Adam play some first-rate backup.

To those who know of Adam solely through his banjo playing, his excellent fiddling will come as an enjoyable discovery. He did include three excellent fiddle tracks on the *Adam and Beth* EP album from a few years back, but *Fine Times at Our House* represents his fiddling debut on a full album. Adam's fiddling is clear with ample use of drones, bow rocking, pulses, multiple patterns, tasteful ornamentation, and appropriate variations. There are four fine fiddle tracks here. Among them are Melvin Wine's version of "Bill Cheatham," and a very Round-Peakish "John Henry." Adam learned "Old Sport" from the playing of Greg Hooven on the classic album of the same name. I just can't think of this great Albert Hash tune without "Gatsby" leaping to mind. Also included is a cool "Speed the Plow" that Adam learned from Rachel Eddy and Stephanie Coleman. He identifies the unexpected source as the Beers Family (paterfamilias Bob "Fiddler" Beers and his clan hosted the Fox Hollow festival in Petersburg, New York, from 1966 to 1980). I have no idea where Bob Beers learned it but, if I'm not mistaken, Rhys Jones was the vector who launched this version into the old-time community.

*Fine Times at Our House* is packaged in an attractive sleeve with a nice photo of Adam and Beth in front of a fireplace. liner notes are scant, but Adam and Beth's website does provide tunings and sources (both the earliest documented source and also the musician from whom they personally learned each tune). A minor peevie is the absence of the title tune (one of my personal favorites). The Ida Red String Band and John McCutcheon both recorded albums with the same name—and both did include "Fine Times at Our House."

In summary, *Fine Times at Our House* is a must-buy for banjo players, fiddlers, guitar players, and lovers of old-time music of all stripes. It's in constant rotation on my CD player and on my iPhone. I give it my highest recommendation.

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To order: adamhurt.com

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**The Old 78's**

**The Women Wear No Clothes at All**

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Beaver Slide Rag / The Women Wear No Clothes At All / You and a Canoe (Romance) / Eli Green's Cake Walk / Maybelle Rag / Monroe Stomp / Liberty Bell March / The Lion - Hole in the Wall - John Wild's Reel / St. Louis Tickle / Cripple Coon / On the Mill Dam (Ga/op) / Jimmy Sutton / Temptation Rag / Fabe / Get Off Your Money / The Raccoon's Picnic - Champion Jig / Carolina's Best / Hor de Man (Joldeti)

Wander around Cliftop, and you will enjoy hearing lots of bands playing in the standard keys of A, D, G, and C. If you're lucky in your explorations, you may come across a group of people playing in flat-keys such as F, Eb, and even minor keys. Look, listen, and sniff. If somewhere in the vicinity, you smell the distinctive succulent aroma of shiitake mushrooms being cooked, you are indeed fortunate, for you have found the campfire and music of Curly Miller and Carole Anne Rose, who with their friends Melanie and Ray Palmer make up The Old 78's.

The Old 78's are good at so many different styles of music that it's hard to describe, or even comprehend, the many sources for the tunes and songs that are found on this CD. The tunes are well documented in the notes, which give source and, when known, date of composition. Most are from the late 1800s, and the latest date is 1930; nevertheless, this is a very eclectic CD. The band plays in two
Where would your fiddle take you if it could fit in a 2" PVC pipe?

basic configurations: in one Curly plays fiddle; in the other, classic-style banjo. In the first category, there are some square tunes, things like "Get Off Your Money" from the Stripling Brothers and "Old Jimmy Sutton." There are crooked Southern tunes as well: Hiter Colvin’s "Monroe Stomp" and Hoyt Ming’s "Cripple Coon." (The last one may win an award for Most Crooked Tune Ever. Challenge to a dance caller: write a dance for that tune!) "St. Louis Tickle" is done by the full band: Curly on fiddle, Carole Anne on six-string banjo, Ray on banjo-mandolin, and Melanie on baritone sax. The "banjo" provides a bass sound and more. This configuration is also used for the East Texas Serenaders’ "Babe," played in the original key of Eb.

Classic banjo—pre-Scruggs three-finger banjo playing, popular around the turn of the last century—sounds especially great with classic ragtime tunes, Sousa marches, and "set-pieces" meant to evoke a particular mood or paint an aural picture. (On several of these tunes, Clarke Buehling plays lead banjo.) The classic ragtime includes "Temptation Rag," which Curly arranged for banjo (and other instruments) from the piano score. Can anybody listen to Sousa’s "Liberty Bell March" without thinking, "There’s a penguin on the telly?" Set-piece "On the Mill Dam" brings to mind a winter scene of horse-drawn sleighs racing, slowing down as they pass single-file across the mill dam, and speeding up again to an incredible finish. "You and a Canoe" evokes summer days on a lazy river with two lovers and only one canoe.

The last tune, "Hor de Man" is a Romanian tune (reasonably enough, in a minor key) that left me wishing the Old 78’s had included more Romanian tunes. Of course, then they would have had had to omit something. Perhaps the solution would be another CD! Happily, we’ve got this one to enjoy in the meantime.

Pete Peterson

To order: theold78s.com, c2@TheOld78s.com

Black Twig Pickers
Rough Carpenters

Blind Man’s Lament / Rough Carpenters / Little Rose / Banks of the Arkansas / Elk Horn Ridge / The Poplar Pole / Where the Whippoorwills Are Whispering Goodnight / You Play the High Card and I’ll Play the Ace / Old Christmas Morning / Roll On John / Jack of Diamonds / Charleston Girls / Sift the Meal and Save the Bran / I Can’t Stay Here By Myself

"Rough Carpenters," the band-written title song on this, the Black Twig Pickers’ eleventh release, is all about pride and resilience in Ivanhoe, Virginia—one of the small industrial towns all but dead when the corporations are through with them. Over galloping twin banjos, guitar, and harp, out rolls their story of desolation, one highlighted by a chorus that ends with a different tagline each time through, with the "rough carpenters" building "ships in the clouds," or "houses of gold," and so on. It’s all very triumphant, in a "we shall not be moved" way, and underscores the jubilant mood and engaging music that dominates this recording.

All the rest of the tracks are traditional tunes offered in a variety of settings, from solo instrumental pieces to duets, trios, and quartet tracks, two of the latter made
quintets by the bass playing of sound engineer Joe DeJarnetts. Interviews given over the years indicate that, in addition to (obviously) recording tunes they like, the band (including fiddler/banjoist Mike Gangloff, guitarist/north harpist Isak Howell, banjoist Nate Bowles, and fiddler Sally Anne Morgan) selects songs drawn more from the obscure side than the staple side. Looking through their previous catalog, that seems to be largely true, as it is with this recording, “Jack of Diamonds” being easily its most recognizable tune. “Elkhorn Ridge” has had some play through the years, usually as a jaunty solo banjo piece. Here the Twigs cast it as a quartet of fiddle, banjo, guitar, and washboard, along with rough-hewn vocals, and the results are far more propulsive. The song is easily up to the transformation. Also somewhat known, if only because it was once recorded by Charlie Poole, is “Where The Whippoorwills Are Whispering Goodnight.” Though the Twigs give their instrumental-only version a nice lift, the intonation of the twin fiddling could have been tighter. How much of that is by design is debatable, but the fact that they hit the intonation better elsewhere makes me wonder. Still, the song itself, slow and wistful, saves the track.

Beyond those, the tunes become more obscure. The recording is bookended by solo slots, Gangloff’s doleful reading of the fiddle tune “Blind Man’s Lament” at the front, and his banjo/voice cover of “I Can’t Stay Here Myself” at the back. There’s an archaic, almost medieval-sounding twin-fiddle version of “Old Christmas Morning” that whirs and swirls. That’s followed by an equally intriguing banjo and guitar rendition of “Roll On John,” with an added layer of interest from Bowles’ hammering in fiddle stick fashion on the banjo strings. Fiddlesticks are also used on Gangloff’s solo fiddle rendition of “Little Rose,” learned from French Carpenter’s playing. String band settings round out the fourteen-track recording, the highlights being the twin-fiddle- and finger-picked-guitar-driven “You Play the Fiddle Card and I’ll Play the Ace,” along with “Possum Pole,” arguably the least well-known tune here.

You won’t be overawed by the technical prowess on any of these tracks (a point they make in their liner notes, though I think they undervalue themselves a bit), but you should find yourself engaged by the results. What it is exactly that makes you lean in a bit closer is hard to define. Maybe timing. Maybe a washboard. Whatever it is, the Twigs have it, and that’s the battle won right there.

To order: www.thrilljockey.com

Adrian Tanner (mandolin and fiddle), Mark Jackson (guitar), and Chuck Shreve (bass) are the Twillite Broadcasters. They specialize in singing, playing, and writing, () songs in the style of brother duets of the 1920s and later years. This is their third CD; their first, Evening Shade, was reviewed in OTH volume 12, number 7,
and their next, *The Trail of Time,* in volume 13, number 2. The first two recordings were praised highly and this one is equally wonderful; it’s getting hard to find good things to say about them that haven’t been said already. To say one of them over again, “When they’re at their best, which is most of the time, they cease being two guys re-creating an old style of performance, becoming, instead, two guys working in and contributing to an old style of performance.”

The 1920s were the era of the string bands. The Skillet Lickers, and Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, DaCosta Woltz’s Southern Broadcasters, Uncle Dave Macon and the Fruit Jar Drinkers all did most of their recording in the 1920s. The Depression killed the recording industry for some years, but by the mid-1930s the popular old-time acts were brother duets: the Monroe Brothers, Delmore Brothers, Blue Sky Boys (Bolick brothers) and so on. Many of the best early bluegrass bands also were formed around brother duets such as the Stanley Brothers and Jim and Jesse. This CD builds on music from the 1930s and later.

To give readers some idea of its scope, there are only two “classic” brother duets, “Sinner You Better Get Ready” by the Monroe Brothers, and “Airmail Special,” which I remember in a bluegrass setting by Jim and Jesse on one of their early Capitol sides. For both of these, Tanner plays mandolin in an early style in which open strings are used to supplement the melody. (This means, of course, that they are singing in keys that have open strings A and D, respectively.) Rosalee McFall is similar, but only one voice is singing. (Wonder why? I’ve heard others do this as a duet!)

Adam and Marc each included one original song here. Mark sings “Only Time,” a slow ballad that sounds like it could have come from a honky-tonk. Adam contributes “The New Great Depression,” a topical story which starts out, “I opened the letter from the mortgage company.” After that start, life only gets worse. If Woody Guthrie were around to update “I Ain’t Got No Home” it might have come out like this.

There are some wonderful instrumental parts too; Tanner is a good fiddle player and teases loose on Arthur Smith’s “Peacock Rag.” (Happily, bass player Chuck Shreve is given a bass solo here in addition to his excellent bass playing everywhere else on this CD.) Other instrumen-

tals include Adam’s originals “Mandolin Rock” and “El Gusano,” as well as a Tommy Magness tune, “Comin’ Down from Roanoke.”

This review would not be complete without describing my favorite song of the whole CD, their take on George Jones’ “Long Time to Forget.” If somebody told me this was an undiscovered Louvin Brothers song from their rockabilly years, I’d believe it. But it isn’t, it’s the Twillite Broadcasters in 1931.

To order: twillitebroadcasters.com

Pete Peterson

Skip Gorman with Angus Gorman, Connie Dover, Matt Levine, and Mary Burdette

**A Herder’s Call: Lonesome Old Time Songs and Tunes on the Range and Ranch**

Old West 006

Git Along, Little Dogies / Doney Gal / My Calvary Home / A Cowboy’s Life / Shuckin’ the Brush / Buffalo Hunters / Fugitive’s Lament / The Herder’s Call / The Mountie’s Prayer / The High Toned Dance / When the Cactus Is In Bloom / Bury Me Not On the Lone Prairie / Faded Coat of Blue / Streets of Forfes / The Yodeling Cowboy’s Last Song / Clayton Boone / The Great Round-Up / Tom and Jerry / Home On the Range

Country and Western. “We play both kinds of music, Country AND Western.” Most of us will remember that line from the *Blues Brothers* movie, but have never stopped to think about the truth it contains. And what does “Western” mean, anyway? The prairie does not stop at the 49th parallel but continues up north into Canada.

The first time I saw Skip Gorman’s name, he and Rick Starkey were a mandolin/guitar duo, Rabbit in a Log, playing and singing songs from the Monroe Brothers and other brother duets. I later learned that he had been singing cowboy songs with the Deseret String Band since the mid-1970s. This guy knows his music, as is shown both by the tracks on the CD and the well-researched and well-written liner notes.

On this album you get to listen to real songs collected from real cowboys. John A. Lomax (Alan’s father) published a collection of such songs in 1910, and many of them are here. The titles will be familiar: “Git Along Little Dogies,” “Cowboys Life,” “Buffalo Hunters,” “The Great Round-Up,” “Home on the Range.” You may think you’ve heard it too many times, but you will enjoy this version. (By the way, the song has more than one verse!) Skip has arranged these songs into a string band setting: usually fiddle, guitar (sometimes a slide guitar as well), and bass. The songs are often sung in harmony; he and Connie blend wonderfully together.

Skip has also included songs written after the cowboy era was over, trying to evoke the spirit of that time. Examples are the Delmore Brothers’ “Fugitive’s Lament,” “When the Cactus Is In Bloom” from Jimmie Rodgers, and “The Yodeling Cowboy’s Last Song” from Rex Griffin, who played and sang in Rodgers’ style. (Hank Williams learned “Loveseck Blues” from a Rex Griffin recording.) It’s a fine line between cowboy and fake-cowboy songs. Skip does his best to stay on the tasteful side of the line, and I believe that one of the reasons he succeeds is his choice to sing sad, lamenting songs rather than the “romantic life of the cowboy” songs from the Sons of the Pioneers and similar bands. He jokes in the liner notes that his songs would make good background music for funeral parlors.

Also included are two wonderful songs learned from Yodeling Slim Clark of Maine, born in 1917, whom Skip got to meet before Clark died in 2000. Both songs, “My Calvary Home” and “The Mountie’s Prayer,” reflect the influence of Wilt (“Montana Slim”) Carter of Canada, in style and subject matter. There’s also a Child ballad here, a version of “Gypsy Laddie” (Child 200, or, if you’re a Carter Family fan, “Black Jack David”), this one called “Clayton Boone.”

As if this weren’t enough, Skip also plays a couple of fiddle tunes, both from the Texas “contest” fiddling tradition. “Shuckin’ the Brush” is directly from Benny Thomasson and “Tom and Jerry” comes from a mixture of sources.

Have I convinced you that this CD is worth buying and listening to? I hope so.

Pete Peterson

To order: skipsgorman.com

To order: twillitebroadcasters.com
Ragtime Skedaddlers
Mandolins At the Cakewalk

Mandophones CD 0902

A Florida Cracker / Peacherine Rag / Mississippi Bubble / Dengozo / Golden Spider / Eli Green's Cake Walk / Pepper Sauce / Silver Heels / Apple Jack / Cuban Belles / Shiftless Johnson / Rag Time Chimes / Chicken Chowder

If you've ever wondered about the string ragtime sound that so strongly influenced such old-time musicians as Charlie Poole, Uncle Dave Macon, and the Leake County Revelers, to name but a few of dozens, this recording by the California-based trio the Ragtime Skedaddlers makes a great entry point. Mandolins At the Cakewalk is their second recording, and a good one.

As in their first recording, Ragtime Skedaddlers (2009), the band's lineup is Dennis Pash on banjo-mandolin, Nick Robinson on mandolin, and Dave Krinkel on guitar. Their approach remains largely the same as well. I hesitate to call them an archival group, for that might seem to label them as stuffy and overly scholarly. They bring every bit as much zest to the music as the early greats of the genre, groups such as the Okan-Dudlay Trio. Think of them as archivists in the same sense that classical musicians are archivists; they play from and adhere to the original scores, in this case old sheet music from such sources as Brainard's Ragtime Collection for Mandolin and Guitar (published in 1900) or from the string instrument magazine Cadenza. If interpretation or personality seeps in, as it does here, so much the better.

This recording differs from the one they made in 2009 in that, whereas the earlier one included no fewer than three well-known pieces ("The Entertainer," "Whistling Rufus," and "Maple Leaf Rag") with a helping of less-familiar numbers, the pieces on this release are almost all less familiar. All of them date to between 1896 ("Eli Green's Cakewalk") and 1923 ("Cuban Belles"). Unless you're a real ragtime aficionado, "Peacheree Rag" by Scott Joplin is probably the only fa-
miliar title, though some may know "Eli Green's Cakewalk" from Uncle Dave Macon's 1929 recording.

"Peacheree Rag" also proves to be among the best tracks here. Joplin's mastery of the form is obvious and there is no weak moment in the composition. The Skedaddlers give it a good airing. Right in there with it is Charles L. Johnson's "Golden Spider" from 1910, with its nice use of energetic triplets in the A strain and the hanging notes in the B strain, followed by the lightness of the C strain. It too, doesn't let down from start to finish. The blend of smooth and rhythmic among the Latin strains of "Cuban Belles," the recording's one true slow number, also makes for some great listening, as does the lively and chromatic scale-dominated "Chicken Chowder."

The sound all through is entertaining and captures the feel and sound of an old piano, tacks and all. Krinkel's guitar acts as the left hand, pulling away and sloughing in bass lines here and there. Pash's banjo-mandolin takes the lead lines, mostly, harmonizing with Robinson's lighter mandolin lines, both of them standing in for the right hand. Together they create a delightful flow and bounce and a very good recording.

Bill Wagner

To order: ragtimeskedaddlers.bandcamp.com

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Waynesboro / Breaking Up Christmas / The Butcher Boy / Bay Rum Blues / Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss / Johnson Boys / Old Plank Road / Shove That Pig's Foot a Little Farther / The Lonesome Road / Drunken Hiccup / Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy / Give the Fiddler a Dram / This Is the Piedmont / Don't Let Your Deal Go Down / Green Willow / Little Sadie - Cold Frosty Morning / Hard Times Come Again No More / Sally Ann Johnson

According to their band website, the Zinc Kings met and formed a band in 2010 in the wake of an Old-Time Ensemble course in college in North Carolina. The band's website currently lists fiddler Christen Blanton, banjoist Dan Clouse, and guitarist Mark Dillon as members, but the recording at hand names six: Blanton, Clouse, Dillon, plus Ryan Mack on bass, Revel Carr on harmonica and accordion, and Gavin Douglas on banjolin, tin whistle, and fiddle. This is their debut recording.

Compared to other debut recordings, I found this one somewhat uneven overall. There are high points. The three songs that open the recording, beginning with the fiddle tunes "Waynesboro" and "Breaking Up Christmas" and concluding with the ballad "The Butcher Boy," deserve mention. "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy," one of two bluesy tracks, has a saucy grind and humor, and an infectious rhythm driven by a judicious use of slides. "Lonesome Road," a lovely sentimental song recorded by many country acts between 1929 and 1935, succeeds on the strength of its tune and a good reading. The recording is anchored nicely near the end by a wonderfully harmonized and arranged cover of "Hard Times Come Again No More," easily the highlight track.

Positive things also can be said of Blanton's playing throughout the recording, particularly on the seven fiddle tunes included. Though still developing her technique, she displays a nice sense of invention and variation. If you hear her

work on the opening track, "Waynesboro," you'll get a pretty good picture of what she can and does do; particular attention is due her third and fourth passes through the tune, both of which are both strong in a groove.

Unfortunately, the gains made by the positives are tempered by a difficulty on number of tracks (most detrimentally on a couple of the fiddle tunes) in getting much of a lift from the backing. Sometimes you hear the bass, but even on those, the banjo and guitar are little more than a blended murmur, the rhythm lackluster. Is it the mix or is it the approach? Perhaps a little of both. While it doesn't destroy the tracks, it does take something away from the drive, especially those that need driving.

More of a problem is stiff singing. For every good performance, such as the ethereal way in which Blanton intones "The Butcher Boy" over droning bowed bass, there is a weaker one, such as "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down," on which the phrasing is awkward and off the rhythm. This is not a vocal quality issue but rather a result that can be corrected on future recordings.

Had either of those negatives been avoided, and had a couple fewer warhorses been included, it would have been more positively balanced. As it is, the results are promising but average.

BIL WAGNER

To order: cdbaby.com/cd/zinkings

Pharis and Jason Romero
Long Gone Out West Blues

Lula Records 1303

Sad Old Song / Long Gone Out: West Blues / Wild Bill Jones / I Want to Be Lucky / Lost Lula / The Little Things Are the Hardest in the End / Come On Home / Truck Driver's Blues / Waitin' for the Evening Mail / It Just Suits Me / Lonely Home Blues / Sally Goodin' / Across the Bridge

Pharis and Jason Romero try to beat the reviewers to the punch by stating in their promo notes that "it's inevitable..." that they "will be compared to Gillian Welch and David Rawlings." They're right. Similarities do exist. Both feature a woman and a man, with the woman playing guitar, writing songs and singing most of the leads, and with the man singing mostly harmony and playing the guitar leads. There are also songs, such as "Long Gone Out West Blues," "I Want to Be Lucky," and "Come On Home," on which they sound like Welch and Rawlings. Usually that's during the duet portions, though Pharis does hit a couple of solo lines that hint at Gillian.

For all those similarities, however, there are many more differences. You could just as easily hear touches of Joni Mitchell in Pharis' delivery, as when her voice breaks a couple of lines into "Sad Old Song," but mostly she has her own voice and style, one smooth, lyrical, and with a good range of emotion. You could also note that Jason Romero sounds vastly different from Rawlings. His style is really more akin to Norman Blake's, as best exemplified in "Long Gone Out West Blues." His lines are more bluegrass-oriented, and are clean and more on the beat. On this recording, he shifts between flatpick and resonator guitar, but also plays banjo on three tracks, including his recasting of "Sally Goodin'" which finds the old warhorse slowed way down and the melody so submerged that it is, at times, barely recognizable.

There are thirteen songs on this second release. Five are written by Pharis, one (a banjo instrumental) by Jason, and one as a tandem. The rest are covers, some traditional, some not. "Wild Bill Jones" gets a slow reading, blending, as they note, ideas from Dock Boggs and Bruce Molsky. The result is gentle and folkish and a bit out of sync with the story; but it sounds good and still retains enough of the modal feel to make it viable. To the traditional, floating lyrics of "It Just Suits Me," a gospel tune from the Georgia Sea Islands, Pharis has added a chorus reminiscent of '60s folk rock, and in doing so, given the sung a joyful lift. That track is preceded by "Truck Driver's Blues," a Jimmie Rodgers-type number from Ted Daffan, and "Waitin' For the Evening Mail," a more city blues-flavored number, once a staple of Riley Puckett. Both are well done and give a nice contrast to the recording, but "Waitin'..." sung by Jason, comes off best, being the stronger song.

On a par with "Waitin'..." are several of Pharis' originals. "Sad Old Song" opens the recording with a look at perils of per-

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forming. Anyone who has ever played music in a bar will understand the competition with conversations and television. Or gambling machines, and will know the triumph of finally getting the audience's attention. The Romeros have obviously been down that road often, and Pharis captures it well. "I Want To Be Lucky," features an insistent beat and Jason's reso guitar leads as it examines the gambler's life, while "The Little Things Are the Hardest" is a pure country song of parting. There is a certain obscurity to all three of these songs, and most of her others, as well. You can say what they speak to generally, but they seem short on specifics. In the long run, that's good. They give us some nice settings and point us in a certain direction, and we fill it in as we see fit.

Bill Wagner

To order pharisandjason.com

Jody Stecher: vocals, guitar, mandolin, mandola, banjo; Kate Ruslin: vocals; Keith Little: vocals, banjo, guitar; Paul Knight: bass, vocals; Chad Manning: fiddle; Eric Thompson: guitar, mandolin; Stacy Thompson: fiddle, accordion, vocals; Allegria Thompson: vocals; Bill Evans: banjo

Five Rode Up to Phoenix/Kenny in Kansas City/The Kabul Grind/ The Waters of Caney/Weasels and Snakes/Fly Away Home/Long Time A-Comin'/The Highway/Look Me Up When You're Down Under/Gwendolyn McGrath/ Osuna's Pajamas/At Waterloo/The Southwest Train

Jody Stecher is best known to us old-time aficionados for his presentation of traditional songs with Kate Ruslin. Here, he examines another part of his repertoire: songs that he's written. He presents these accompanied by various talented musicians from northern California, some of whom played with Jody as members of the Perfect Stranger and the Peter Rowan Bluegrass Band. Predictably, many of the pieces presented here follow the bluegrass tradition of flashy solos rather than all ensemble playing.

"Five Rode Up to Phoenix," which opens the album, is a tribute to Forrest Rose, a bass player with Perfect Strangers who died after a concert. It's squarely in the bluegrass genre. "The Highway," a more generalized tribute to fallen comrades, is bluegrass in 3/4 time. Kate Ruslin provides an exquisite harmonic line that adds to the melody, as she does on "Fly Away Home," a memorial to Jody's mother, reminiscent of Alice Gerrard's beautiful "Agate Hill."

Some of the more interesting pieces here are based on Jody's dreams. Normally, no one wants to hear about your dreams. Jody, though, uses them as a springboard for artistry that goes beyond their origin. "The Kabul Grind," for instance, started as a dream in which Jody was waiting for a sandwich, and the clerk explained, "It's a mighty big job to assemble the Kabul Grinder." Jody takes this germ of an idea and expands it into a hilariously surreal description of what the sandwich must have been like. Jody performs this song in old-time style, using only a fretless banjo. Another song based on a dream, "The Waters of Caney," a quasi-blues sung with only a guitar, is a personal song somewhat similar to Laurie Lewis' compositions.

There are detailed notes, including lyrics, at jodyandkate.com. It's obvious that this is a better economic solution than a fat tree-killng booklet. I compliment Jody on having the notes and lyrics available — I've been disappointed with some other artists who promise online notes, then forget to post them.

The last two songs, "At Waterloo" and "The Southwest Train," commemorate a trip to England. The first is a meditation on guilt at not responding fast enough in acknowledging an unexpected acquaintance who passed by, followed by the thought that maybe the acquaintance was also avoiding Jody. The second is a lively song with funny words about the towns the train passes through — including Beaulieu, pronounced "Bewie." A Brit I once met mentioned a wine of the same name, and I asked why he pronounced it that way. He explained that he was merely following the logic of how you pronounce "beauty." Another mystery solved.

Political songs are difficult to do well, partly because of their topical nature, and partly because there's a smaller tradition to rely on. "Weasels and Snakes"
is a very good economic protest song, reminiscent of Blind Alfred Reed’s “How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live,” but with a bluegrass influence. “Long Time A-Comin’,” about the death of the New Deal and the rise of Homeland Security, is similarly successful, performed with gospel-influenced called-and-response. Less successful is “Osama’s Pajamas,” because, to my mind, it’s too complicated, both thematically and musically, resulting in an oratorio. The online notes give an explication of the meaning of each line. If you have to have that detailed an explanation of the meaning of a song, perhaps it’s best to start over.

Still, I recommend this recording. Many of the songs, although personal, have enough universal appeal to become traditional in the future.

LYLE LOPGREN

To order: jodyandkate.com

DICK AND JUDY HYMAN

Late Last Summer: A Collection of Original Waltzes

LetEar Records

RALPH’S WATCH / SAVING A THOUGHT / AUDUBON’S LUCY / LATE LAST SUMMER / INVISIBLE / VICTOR AND NAOMI / CLAIRE’S RESOLVE / JOHNNY’S GONE / JULIA / WOLF DREAMS / HANNAH / BREATHE / BETH

Diversity is imperative for recordings such as this. If you’re going to write and record thirteen original waltzes for violin and piano, you’d better know what you’re doing and you’d better mix it up quite a bit. Tempos. Moods. Arrangements. There must be a variety of each. Otherwise sustaining interest from start to finish will be difficult.

Judy Hyman, perhaps best known to followers of old-time music as a member of the progressive-leaning group The Horseflies, knows what she’s doing on the violin and as a composer, and she gets the idea of the need for diversity. Hearing these songs one after another, you do hear similarities from time to time and favorite compositional devices as well. That’s a given. Judy did, after all, write all thirteen pieces, and whenever you have the same composer at work, you get some similarity. Call it style. But the diversity of her music from track to track far outweighs any feeling of repetition. “Save a Thought,” the second track, dark and sounding like a missing theme from “Dr. Zhivago,” is completely different from the light and airy blend of parolesque and new age ideas that follows on the next track. “Audubon’s Lucy,” written for a PBS documentary as a character theme for scenes involving John J. Audubon’s wife. “Victor and Naomi,” written for a wedding of two friends, has a Celtic and folk quality. “Wolf Dreams” is heavy and propulsive, full of motion and lots of rhythmic lines centered on the low strings and the low keys. They both contrast with the mix of Cajun and ragtime bounce of “Hannah” and with the Italian street cafe imagery of “Breathe,” augmented as it is by accordion. Other tunes are tined with classical elements (“Ralph’s Watch” and “Invisible”) and folk ideas (“Beth”), others, such as the spare “Julia,” a tune dedicated to her mother, are set off by nice arrangements that change mood and tempo or, as in particular on the title track, make good use of tension and release.

Aiding Judy on the arrangements and as a co-performer is her father, Dick Hyman. Anyone familiar with jazz piano will know Dick Hyman’s work. To do his career justice would require more than this review allows. Just know that it is extensive and that his playing here, as an accompanist or as a soloist, is impeccable. The two pieces that give him the best airing are the aforementioned “Hannah,” on which he stretches out a bit, rippling through jazz- and ragtime-colored solo, and “Johnny’s Gone,” a tune written in memory of John Hayward of the Horseflies. On the latter, Judy and Dick arranged the piece for solo piano, as if to emphasize that John is gone. Dick then created a moving performance full of pathos and loss.

Judy and Dick, who had never recorded together, brought this project together, as she says, “because it seemed like a beautiful way for us to connect and collaborate.” That collaboration and collaboration, no doubt wonderful and affirming for them, proves to be equally so for the listener.

To order: judyhyman.com

BILL WAGNER

Loafer’s Glory

Crow Little Rooster / Legend of the Johnson Boys / May You Never Be Alone / Let Me Fall / Sweet Heaven in My View / Banjo Pickin’ Girl / I’ll Be Alright Tomorrow / Milwaukee Blues / The New Partner Waltz / Just to Ease My Worried Mind / Otto Wood the Bandit / Ridin’ on the L & N / Is There Room For Me

Introductions are hardly necessary for the members of the California-based group Loafer’s Glory. Fiddler and clawhammer banjoist Tom Sauber, guitarist Herb Pederson, and bassist Bill Bryson are well-known performers, Sauber particularly among followers of old-time, Pederson and Bryson among bluegrassers and country rock fans. Tom’s son Patrick is probably—now the least known of the group, but a fine bluegrass banjoist and, arguably, an even better mandolinist. All four band members take turns at singing lead and sharing in the harmony.

On this, their debut album, they work their way engagingly through a set of thirteen songs that, source-wise, draws heavily from the old-time repertoire. About half of the tracks fall into that category. They open with a somewhat obscure Missouri fiddle breakdown called “Crow Little Rooster,” on which Tom and Patrick trade propulsive fiddle and mandolin solos before closing the tune with a couple of duet choruses. That’s followed by the whorehouse “The Legend of the Johnson Boys,” and later “Sweet Heaven in My View,” a lesser-known A. P. Carter tune recorded in 1936. Further in, from the Coon Creek Girls and 1938, comes “Banjo Pickin’ Girl,” and from Charlie Poole, his raggy and always delightful “Milwaukee Blues,” sung here with relaxed verve by the two Saubers. The last of the old-time tunes covered is the ballad “Otto Wood the Bandit.”

And yet, as they are performed here, it would be a mistake to think of those six, or any of the others, for that matter, as old-time. Hank Locklin’s 1950 gospel tune “Is There Room For Me” comes the closest, sound- and presentation-wise, what with
its vocal quartet over spare, brother duet-style guitar and mandolin. You could also say that, as it's the only tune to feature Sauber's clawhammer banjo, "Banjo Pickin' Girl" has a distinct old-time gallop, and you could say that throughout this recording Sauber's fiddling lends a tint of old-time coloring to each track.

But honestly, those few exceptions aside, the results are bluegrass. Bluegrass is certainly the dominant sound in the beat, the arrangements, and all but one of the banjo solos. It's true well of the harmonies, several of which, including those on Hank Williams' gorgeous "May You Never Be Alone" and the Louvin's equally gorgeous "The New Partner Waltz," have a classic Osborne Brothers approach. There is no doubt that music (bluegrass or old-time, or any other style) doesn't come much better than this, and no doubt that old-time fans and bluegrass fans will enjoy this recording.

BILL WAGNER

Books

John Cohen
The High and Lonesome Sound:
The Legacy of Roscoe Holcomb

CD: Across The Rocky Mountain / Mean and Stingy Woman / Hills of Mexico / I Am A Man of Constant Sorrow / Hook and Line / Graveyard Blues / Single Girl / Let Her Go / In the Pines / Barbara Allen Blues / Swanno Mountain / House in New Orleans / A Village Churchyard (All songs performed by Holcomb)


In 2001, John Cohen published There Is No Eye (powerHouse Books), a collection of his photographs that explored the wide range of his witness, including pictures of the 1950s New York art/literary scene, Harlem gospel meetings, Peru, and Appalachia. That book turned out to be a sampler: In 2010, Steidl published Past Present Peru, a collection of Cohen's Peru photographs. They have followed it up with this superb edition of his Appalachian pictures, which is also, as its title says, a tribute to Roscoe Holcomb (1912 - 1991) of Daisy, Kentucky. Many of these images have been published with the liner notes to Cohen's Kentucky recordings (such as the fabulous Mountain Music of Kentucky, Smithsonian-Folkways CD 40077), but the high-quality reproduction and large format presentation here gives them a new power.

Holcomb was a construction worker who, by the time Cohen met him, was no longer able to do the hard physical labor required by his job. He could, however, still play banjo and guitar and sing with an intense voice that we've come to call the "high, lonesome sound." This term, now often applied to bluegrass singing, was originally coined by Cohen to describe Holcomb's delivery. If you're not familiar with Holcomb or his music, you would do well to start at the very back of the book: listen to the CD and watch the movies on DVD. They will provide the context necessary to interpret Cohen's photographs, which are presented in the main part of

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the book without commentary. They were taken in East Kentucky, Virginia, and North Carolina between 1959 and 1965. The images include Holcomb and other musicians (mostly non-professional), coal miners, farmers, and worshippers at rural Kentucky churches. Almost every picture has at least one human in it, which gives scale to the landscapes and dwellings presented in the rest of the image. The expressions and posture of the people pictured reveals a combination of self-containment and tension that's as mysterious as Holcomb's singing. The photos call to mind Diane Arbus' statement, "A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know."

During the 1960s - 70s, Cohen arranged for Holcomb to appear at several Northern music venues. My wife Liz and I met him at the first University of Chicago Folk Festival (1961), which was also his first appearance on stage. His performance was electrifying. As Cohen notes, it makes your hair stand on end. Holcomb must have been mystified to be surrounded by adoring college students, but he showed no sign of being cowed by the attention. At one point during the weekend, we found him sitting almost alone in one of the rooms between workshops, playing some pieces on his banjo. Some others entered, slamming the door behind them. Roscoe jumped off his chair, looked around, then sat down to play again, explaining that, back home, a sound like that usually meant someone was shooting at someone else. Otherwise, he would answer direct questions, but didn't volunteer much information about his life.

The book's only text is in the last 30 pages. Included are transcriptions of interviews with Holcomb and other people who knew him, as well as copies of correspondence between Holcomb and Cohen. They reveal some important things about his attitude towards music, but otherwise provide very little biographical information of the type we're used to seeing from interviews with artists. One interesting part of an interview shows a conflict between Cohen's artistic aims and Holcomb's feelings about Kentucky. As Cohen states, his own aesthetic was strongly influenced by the Depression-era pictures of rural poverty taken by Walker Evans and other FSA photographers. And his photographs reflect that influence: he chose pictures of houses and outbuildings that had either already collapsed or were on the verge. One of his most telling pictures of Holcomb shows him playing his banjo, standing in front of an old shed.

Holcomb complained that the shed was no longer used — why didn't John take a picture of him in his own kitchen, which was a far nicer background? Cohen had no good answer for him. He did not explain that the ramshackle buildings supply a visual metaphor for the endemic economic poverty of the southern Appalachians. But one of the facts of rural living anywhere is that it's difficult to dispose of old buildings or machinery. There's no one to haul them away, and no place to take them, so they're left to decompose. A city in the middle of a garbage-workers' strike also has exotic scenery on the sidewalks.

After you've absorbed the powerful photographs in this book (preferably while listening to the CD, go back and watch the DVD again. You'll understand some things that you may not have noticed the first time through. Also, look at the extras: I was particularly taken with "Mary Jane's Playhouse," an interview with one of Holcomb's cousins showing the quilts she made over the years. Her commentary about how you feel when you assemble a quilt could just as easily be applied to a description of how it feels to play this music. The entire experience of book, CD, and DVD will definitely deepen your understanding.

LYLE LINGREN

DVDs

Doc and Merle: An Intimate Documentary

Vestapol 13044 DVD

I'm not sure how wide a distribution, if any, this documentary had before Vestapol Productions and Rounder put out the current package. Maybe it was out before and is being rereleased, or maybe this is its first release. Either way, in the wake of Doc Watson's passing in late 2012, we should just be grateful that such films are available.

The film was made by Joe Murphy and Kevin Balling in 1985, just a short time before Merle Watson's death in a tractor accident in October of that year. Murphy and Balling filmed and interviewed Doc and Merle and their family and friends on and around the family farm in North Carolina. They also shot footage in several other locations, including at the home of Doc's old playing partner Jack Williams (at which time he and Doc played a tune together), at a festival in Mountain City, Tennessee, and at a recording studio.

They then interspersed still photos from family collections (including several photos of Doc performing on the street), and performance footage (both archival and created especially for the documentary). The performance footage, to be honest, could have been more extensive, at least in the fullness of the clips. While we get to see vintage black-and-white film of Fred Price, Clint Howard, and Doc performing a chorus or two of "Daniel Prayed" in the early 1960s, who wouldn't want to see the full clip? And who wouldn't want to see complete clips of Dan and Merle performing for President Carter on the White House lawn, or more than just the final break of "Black Mountain Rag" on stage at the FOLKart Festival on the Mall in Washington? Fortunately, Murphy and Balling did arrange for and film several full-song performances. In one of them, Doc reunites with Price and Howard beneath a grove of trees, and the trio rips through "Fire On the Mountain." In another Merle plays "Bonaparte's Retreat" in his living room. They also included a couple of complete songs filmed in concert, so we don't truly get full versions of the "sixteen songs" proclaimed in the liner notes, we do get six or seven. The bonus section, however, shot in 1970 for a California TV show, does offer eight full performances: "Tom Dooley," "Shady Grove," "Black Mountain Rag," "Peach Pickin' Time in Georgia," "Stagger Lee," "Hold the Woodpile Down," "Southbound," and "I Don't Love Nobody." Music aside, be prepared for the emotional rollercoaster this film creates, one by turns joyous and inspirational, sad and humorous. Seeing Doc climb a ladder to his roof carrying a window screen, install the screen, and climb down, will lift the spirits and make you ashamed of every time you've said "I can't . . . ." Hearing Merle play his composition "Thoughts of Never" over a montage of his life, including a clip of him on his tractor, will pull at the heartstrings. Hearing Doc tell Ralph Rinzler that if he knew what he knew now, he'd never have gone on the road will make you realize how much we almost lost, and, of course, remind you how much we have lost by their passing.

BILL WAGNER

To order: www.guitarvideos.com
This teaching DVD takes us back to the way songs were learned in the “oral” transmission days. In other words, there is no tab or sheet music used here. Instead, you’ll have to learn by listening and watching, and probably listening and watching again and again. What you’ll learn, aside from the skill of learning by ear and observance, are six tunes. Of them four are performed at regular speed (three of them backed by Erynn Marshall’s guitar) and then taught by a couple of passes through at slow speed. The other two are performance-only pieces taken at regular speed, also backed by Marshall. None of the six is overly challenging, but to learn them will require some basic proficiency on the instrument.

The six songs are “Gwine Down the Valley,” “Mr. Barwick’s Tune,” “Wes Muir’s Tune,” “Little Princess Footsteps,” “Little Home in West Virginia,” and “Georgia Waltz.” They aren’t warhorses, and a couple are highly obscure. Little or no information, for example, could be found for “Gwine Down the Valley” or “Georgia Waltz,” and all I learned about “Mr. Barwick’s Tune” is that it was a favorite of a barber from Alabama. “Little Home in West Virginia,” on the other hand, comes from the playing of Ellis Hall in the early 1950s. “Little Princess Footsteps” from a 1931 session by the Newton County Hillbillies.

Taking us through these tunes and through a set of playing tips is Carl Jones, a multi-instrumentalist, singer, songwriter, and educator. Jones has played and recorded with Norman and Nancy Blake, James Bryan, and Beverly Smith. While the tunes are central to this DVD, Jones spends a good bit of time on playing tips and mandolin theory. It is from those segments that even a beginner can benefit. Jones starts by breaking the major scale into segments using the first string, then explains how those notes and segments relate to other strings. He then moves through “slants” and “reaches,” “floors and ceilings,” and harmonizing the scale, then through a segment on chord shape relationships, touching briefly on backup. The terminology is largely his own. “Slants” and “reaches,” for example, are his way of describing “double-stops.” Most of the tips are just that—tips. They are ideas to help you along but are not meant to be a comprehensive exploration of how to play the mandolin. For the beginner, they are helpful stepping stones. For the more advanced player, they offer a different way of looking at the instrument.

If I had problem with the DVD, it is that Jones has a way of jumping his ideas. Terms are often used in advance of being explained, and new ideas are occasionally jammed into the middle of the explanation of the ideas he is explaining, breaking the continuity and creating some confusion. But since you have the ability to hit replay, it’s not that big a problem, and it’s compensated for by the benefits of the tunes and tips.

Bill Wagner
To order: www.dittyville.com
THE OFF-THE-SHOULDER LOOK
By Paul F. Wells

A n unstated rationale for this series—beyond simply offering OTH readers the chance to enjoy looking at some cool old photos of musicians—has been to consider what we might learn from the photos that we print here. In past installments we’ve examined images of fiddle duos, of female fiddlers, and of family groups, and have pondered about the role of cellos and flutes in ensembles that may or may not have played old-time dance music. Along the way we’ve touched briefly on such technical matters as presence or absence of chin rests on fiddles, tightness of bow hair, and the overall affect of the players and how they relate to their instruments. In this issue we will deal squarely with a very basic element of fiddle playing, i.e., holding the damn thing!

All readers of OTH know that while many fiddlers hold their instruments on their shoulders, tucked under their chins, in at least a semblance of the position used by classical violinists, a healthy percentage play with their instruments down on their chests, or cradled against their upper arms. This divide has been present in the world of fiddling for a very long time. Although I cannot document this assertion, my sense is that playing with the fiddle down off the shoulder is seen as the more “old-time” way of doing things and, further, that this practice is, or historically has been, more common in the South, especially in Appalachia, than in other parts of the country.

More “old-time” or not, holding the fiddle against the chest clearly does have historical precedence in the world of violin playing. There is ample pictorial evidence of violinists in the 18th century playing with the fiddle held against their chest or arm. Historian David Boyden has dubbed this the “French style” of playing, in contrast with the “Italian style,” in which players held the instrument up on their shoulders, in what might be considered the root of the modern classical violin method.

As for it being predominantly a Southern or Appalachian way of playing, the accompanying photos dispel that notion pretty convincingly. The fiddlers in this small gallery of images all hail from north of the Ohio River. Two are from Ohio, one is from Minnesota, two are from New Hampshire—both photographed in the same city, Berlin—and one is from Pennsylvania. Only one of the images is dated; the photo of the fiddler seated in the white wicker chair, from the studio of A. Couturier in Berlin, New Hampshire, carries a date of 1897. The images of the two Ohio fiddlers are the typical size of cartes de visite (roughly 2.25” x 3.75”) which would place them in the 1890s or ’70s, but the others are probably of similar vintage as the Berlin fiddler. Similarly, identification of the individuals is almost non-existent. The seated fiddler who is holding his instrument with the right bow just barely resting on his left shoulder is identified in a hand-written note on the back as: “This may be Charles Merrill, Mina’s brother.” This image comes from the studio of W. H. Harry, in Wooster, Ohio. There is also a hand-written name on the back of the photo from the studio of J. B. Rivard, in Berlin, New Hampshire, of the seated fiddler with his open case on the floor beside him, but, alas, the writing is illegible.

Quibblers might argue that Mr. Merrill (if so he be) does not belong with the others in this little group since his fiddle technically is, indeed, on his shoulder.
However, since his hold on the instrument is so far removed from the norm of violin playing I feel that he merits inclusion here. It is perhaps worth noting that with the exception of the gentleman from York, Pennsylvania, none of these players have chin rests on their instruments. After all, why would they need them?

It is tempting to speculate that the fiddle-on-the-chest position is evidence of a holdover from an earlier period in the development of violin technique, but I'm reluctant to do so. While early folklorists often engaged in the search for "survivals" of older cultural elements, this can be a trap that leads to incorrect conclusions. Rather, it may simply be the case that holding the fiddle against the chest or arm is a more natural, even instinctive, position. Anyone who has endured even a bit of classical violin training knows that the modern hold is anything but natural. The early practitioners of the "French style" of violin playing may well have been doing what came naturally to them, and what was most comfortable—as I suspect, did the fiddlers in our photos. Although today we have formalized fiddle instruction in numerous camps and even some college programs, this is a very recent development. Earlier generations of fiddlers have either been on their own or had the benefit of a bit of tutoring from other players in their family or local community. There was no systematic instruction and therefore little or no sense of an absolute right or wrong way to do things; players did whatever worked for them. We could just as easily print photos of fiddlers from the same era and locales as those pictured here who did, in fact, play with their instruments up on their shoulders. Fiddle up or fiddle down was, and still is, a personal choice, unbounded by geography.

Note: I have again used Photoshop to do some minor repair work on some of the images. This has mostly consisted of cleaning up some spotting and tweaking the contrast.
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