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Melrose Quartet

The Full English Tour...

Cecil Sharp's Appalachian Harvest

Handsworth Sword Dancers

Philippe Callens



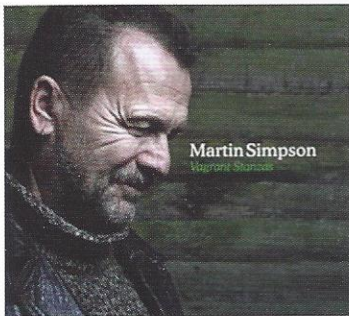
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Reviews

CDs

Vagrant Stanzas Martin Simpson

Topic Records, TSCD589



Released to coincide with Mr Simpson's 60th birthday, *Vagrant Stanzas* offers us 'one man and his guitar (or banjo) close-miked and personal' whose stated aim is to give us 'what I do at a gig'. I think he's achieved that rather well.

The CD is a wonderful collection of tunes on banjo and guitar, and songs both his own and those written by others, including of course that master songwriter Mr (or Ms) 'Trad Arr.' Of these, his version of 'Waly Waly' is particularly fine. Of those written by his contemporaries, Martin gives us a splendid version of Leon Rosselson's 'Palaces of Gold', written in 1966 following the Aberfan disaster, but still too chillingly relevant today. Bob Dylan has written some pretty bleak songs in his time, but they don't come much bleaker than 'North Country Blues': 'remarkable for its woman's voice and... clarity of description'. If you can have a wonderful version of a bleak song this is it. Being of a similar age to Martin, I'm gratified to read we share that ultimate sixth form party experience... the 'putting of *The Songs of Leonard Cohen* on the turntable... result(ing) in one of the party crying on the stairs within minutes.' I just wish my version of 'The Stranger Song' was one tenth as good as the one given us here. But of all the songs, it's the self-penned 'Jackie and Murphy' that stands out... a hymn to the folly of the Gallipoli campaign that's as good as any of those better known.

Of the tunes, there's a masterful electric guitar version of James Leach's 'Shepherds Rejoice', while its acoustic brother turns in the Copper Family's 'Come Write Me Down' played as an air. The Simpson love of American songs and tunes is well known, and homage is suitably played here in his versions of

I was fortunate enough to review the limited edition version with an eight-track bonus CD. If you can track this down, it's the version I'd recommend for the stunning versions of 'Fair Annie' and 'The Green Linnet'. Or, to be honest, any of the other six.

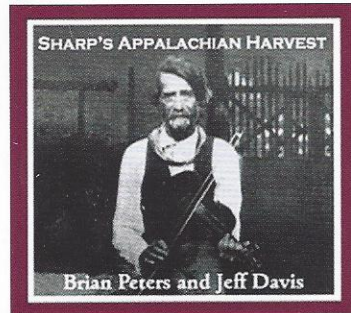
One of my favourite Martin Simpson songs is 'Never Any Good'. Don't believe him. He's very, very good indeed.

www.topicrecords.co.uk

Baz Parkes

Sharp's Appalachian Harvest Brian Peters & Jeff Davis

Pugwash Music, PUGCD009



No-one could accuse Brian Peters of being idle. Hot on the heels of coordinating an album of songs from the *New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, here's another themed collaborative project. Brian has worked with Jeff Davis for a number of years, but this is the first time they have recorded an album – it's been overdue, one might say. Appropriately enough for an Anglo-American duo, they explore the 1600-odd songs notated by Cecil Sharp in the Appalachians between 1916 and 1918. Songs which he categorised as 'English Folk Songs' but which, as the CD notes point out, were by no means all English in origin – many in the collection, and on this recording, were of Scottish origin, while others were quite clearly straightforwardly American.

They're treated here in a variety of ways. If hearing 'William Taylor' or 'Boney's Defeat' in isolation, one might imagine they were a standard part of Brian's British repertoire. Elsewhere Jeff's banjo and fiddle accompaniments give a more obviously American feel, while Jeff's singing is unmistakably from the other side of the Atlantic. In a couple of places (notably the chorus of opener 'Jack Went A-Sailing') I felt that Brian's northern English vocals didn't quite gel with Jeff's. But that's a minor quibble. Overall these two work really well together, and the instrumental arrangements – with various combinations of guitar, mandolin, concertina, banjo, fiddle and mandocello – are excellent. Some fantastic versions of well-known songs here, too. I'd be very surprised if these versions of 'The Green Willow Tree' ('Golden Vanity'), 'Barbara Allen' or 'A Frog He Went A-Courting'

don't get picked up by folk club floor singers. Or perhaps, even better, hearing these fine recordings will inspire singers to look for different versions in The Full English archive – they're all there, you know.

www.brian-peters.co.uk

Andy Turner

Far in the Mountains Volume 5: Echoes from the Mountains various

Musical Traditions Records, MTCD513

When you buy this excellent CD, and you really should, please ensure that you are sitting in your favourite chair with the accompanying booklet close at hand. As sure as eggs is eggs, you will be forever referring to it whilst listening to these archival recordings of musicians and singers from Mike Yates' recording trips in the late 1970s and early 80s to the Appalachians. Conversely, you will be so engrossed in the booklet that perchance you will defer listening to the recordings until you have read it through.

In 2002 Musical Traditions launched two double CD sets, *Far in the Mountains*, volumes 1 and 2, and *Far in the Mountains* Volumes 3 and 4. Mike has since re-visited his collections and has gleaned this further selection, which will have you wanting to purchase the previous recordings if they are not already in your collection. With over 40 tracks and playing time of over an hour and a quarter, this is a treasure trove for singers, musicians and anyone else who appreciates traditional music, to delve into. Obviously, with so many recordings on the CD, some of the tune tracks are not over long, but as far as the songs are concerned, the words are all in the booklet along with fascinating snippets of information for every track.

This is yet another gift from Musical Traditions that is not only a joy to listen to but will serve as an inspiration for all performers who want to access and tap the roots of Appalachian music. I hope that Mike will be inspired to take yet more time to rummage in his attic to uncover another lode of gems for our delectation.

www.mtreports.co.uk

John Bentham

Mayday Lady Maisery

RootBeat Records, RBRCD19

Don't be fooled by the celebratory bunting on the cover: take heed of the gathering clouds over our dense, decaying skyline and listen as the trio forces us to examine our own fragmented, fractured society through stories of struggle. Okay, so that sounds heavy-going, and in other mouths and hands, it might well be an album which only surfaces on the stereo