

NEWS, REVIEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE WORLD OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC

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THE LIVING TRADITION

ISSUE 98

BEOGA



Sharp's Appalachian Harvest • Rod Stradling
Home Service • The Greig-Duncan Collection



clubs: The Swindon Folksingers' Club and the Jolly Porter at Exeter, respectively. Though in his really marvellously informative liner notes – a hallmark of WildGoose as a label, are such *quality* notes – Mick goes on to say that these floor singers usually had the same source: *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*.

Like almost everyone I knew in the early 1960s, I too had my own dog-eared copy. I seem to recall it cost me 3/6 (17½ pence!) Just for the record, the new edition – admittedly in sturdy hardback and much more handsome – has an RRP of £25. I make that 143 times the original price! Sometimes I wonder if life isn't really just a bizarre *dream*.

Nine of the 14 tracks are shown as "Trad. arr. Downes & Ryan". Of the remainder, two are written by Mick; one is an instrumental piece written by Paul; and the remainder includes Dave Goulder's evergreen, *The January Man* plus an old Banjo Paterson song. (I wish I could be given a quid for the number of times I have seen Banjo's surname given a supernumerary letter T, as in the misspelling in the liner notes here. But then, I should get off my high horse and realise that spelling is perhaps a fifth-rate art, soon to be replaced by txtspk.)

This is an album to delight their legion of fans, even if jaded-old-me might have wanted a few slightly more compelling songs in their selection.

Buy it.

Dai Woosnam

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Bu Chaoin Leam Bhith 'N Uibhist: Gaelic Songs From The North Uist Tradition

Greenrux Recordings CDTRAX9025

This new release of archive material is the 25th in the Scottish Tradition series of recordings from The School Of Scottish Studies at the University Of Edinburgh and comes with all the attributes of previous volumes in the series: high-quality performances, fine remastering, authoritative choice of material and comprehensive notes and full texts (and perfectly effective near-translations) supplied within a typically chunky booklet – in other words, in accordance with usual excellent Greenrux house standards.

The project's editor, Margaret Callan, has clearly immersed herself fully in these recordings and her selection of 28 representative performances reflects her keen appreciation of, and deep affection for, the North Uist Gaelic song tradition as practised in the third quarter of the 20th century, just as the performances themselves reflect the singers' unreserved natural respect for their own cultural heritage. The listener is provided with a unique opportunity to experience, under one roof as it were, the rich and extensive repertoire of the community, through the contrasting performances of men and women from different generations, embodying a diversity of local dialects and singing styles.

The actual recordings date from between 1950 (four tracks by Donald MacLean: some a touch variable in sound quality but still acceptable) and 1975. Particularly impressive listening it all makes, although I might single out memorable moments provided by the Rev. William Matheson (*Óran An Ròin*), Mrs. Helen Morrison (the ballad *An Eala Bhàn* and the love song *A Fhleasgaich Óig As Ceanalta*) and Ronald John MacDonald (*Horó, Chan Eil Cadal Orm*), the latter two mentioned coming complete with chorus singers' contributions. Nevertheless, there's not a single performance here that's not both compelling on its own terms and treasurable. Occasional curiosities like the fading-out of the final track and some deficiencies in technique – as on Miss Kate McCormick's slightly strained rendition of a piping song (*Canntaireachd*) – are of course entirely forgivable in context of the importance of these recordings.

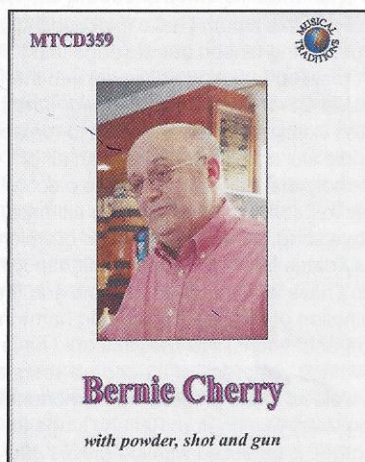
The songs themselves don't conform to any one category or group of categories and range from love songs, cradle songs and spiritual verse to humorous songs, from homeland songs to puit-à-beul, milking and waulking songs. But whatever the category, the immediacy and integrity of each and every individual performance is palpable, and the disc's 67 minutes seem to pass by in but a moment.

David Kidman

BERNIE CHERRY

With Powder, Shot And Gun

Musical Traditions MTCD359



So – what is a traditional singer? Or a revival singer? Does it matter? These are the sorts of questions which keep academics and web forum contributors combatively employed at great length. Personally I think it all depends on the end result. Bernie Cherry was involved in the early days of the Cotswold Liberation Front (which became the Old Swan Band) and Gloucestershire Old Spot Morris Dancers as well as Stroud Morris. So Bernie is a singer brought up in the revival, but who had a long contact and respect for traditional performers (of all sorts), their material and, most importantly, the way they perform their songs.

Having absorbed this performance ethos he puts it in into practice, treating the songs as paramount and leaving the listener to do the work, rather than indulging in histrionics or artifice to tell the listener what they should be thinking. Just how it should be. This is done as a field-recording – no editing, so his voice is slightly reedy and a couple of times struggles for a high note, but it is a great vehicle for delivering the words.

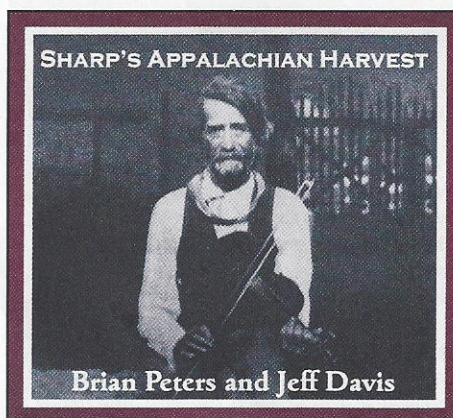
He is helped on a couple of tracks by the melodeons of Roger Grimes or Rod Stradling – but why is there nothing of Bernie's playing – especially of his occasional line-up with Reg Hall, John Grout & Co? It is unusual to hear a CD of someone who almost negates their own personality to use it as a means of delivering a song and there are some really great songs here. To my mind, this is an object lesson for younger singers in how to perform. I think Rod Stradling's comment sums it up: "If you value a no-nonsense approach to singing, and find unusual songs interesting, I think you'll enjoy this CD as much as we do."

Paul Burgess

BRIAN PETERS & JEFF DAVIS

Sharp's Appalachian Harvest

Pugwash Music PUGCD009



This collection of some of the gems of Cecil Sharp's sojourn in the Appalachian Mountains nearly a century ago is brought to you by two of their respective countries' finest performers of traditional music. Jeff Davis has a gentle style, no flash, no artifice, just a thoughtful presentation of the material which allows the song to come to the fore. Brian Peters does much the same, but often in a more dynamic fashion and the two have blended together very successfully to make a compelling duo.

The accompaniments are straightforward, but designed to really complement the song and the guitar, banjo and fiddle work is compelling. They start as they mean to go on, with one of my favourite songs *Jack Went A-Sailing*, but one which I've never found a satisfying means of performing. On listening to these two, I thought: "Of course, *that's* how it should sound," and I had this reaction on several other tracks.

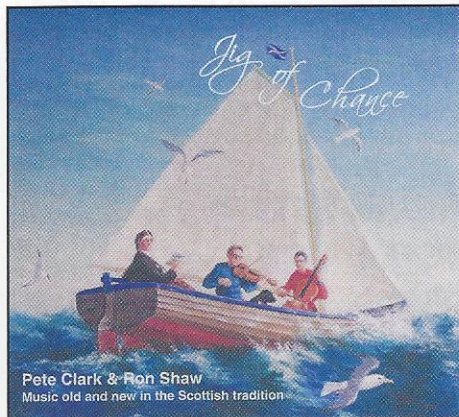
And the material is glorious. I was pleased to hear the jigs/party rhymes, but would probably not want to hear them too often – they're a bit bitty and detached. But these are the exceptions that prove the rule. The CD comes beautifully packaged with notes, background information and photos of the source singers, but it is far from an academic exercise. In short, this is an absolutely delightful CD which gives immense pleasure.

Paul Burgess

PETE CLARK & RON SHAW

Jig Of Chance

Inver INVER228



"Isn't it nice to walk into a house and hear real music being played?" So commented a friend of ours who is definitely not a fan of our music. She would no more go to see anyone live than I would listen to JLS or watch X Factor!!! But she stood still, quite still and listened. What I take for granted became something special to her, even if only for a couple of minutes.

Pete Clark (violin and viola) and Ron Shaw (cello) have subtitled *Jig Of Chance, Music Old And New In The Scottish Tradition*, and that is just what the CD is. They are also known as the Neil Gow duo (a kind of tribute act!) and some of the tunes on here are Gow's compositions, whilst there is a smattering by other well known writers and some which are self penned by Pete and Ron which sit very nicely alongside the others.

I love the way the cello intertwines with the violin and both players show how good they are - using all their years of experience to give us good quality music. I found the CD just a bit too long though, at an hour. I know there is an argument for good value but I have found it hard to get to the final tracks, which is a shame as they are just as good.

A well presented and recorded CD with excellent artwork. I do have an issue with the track listing and layout of the back cover – for me this serves no purpose as all the titles have been shortened, often in mid word. Perhaps a way forward would be to have a single name for a set of tunes, as the complete listing is

included inside. But, all in all, *Jig of Chance* is an enjoyable listen especially accompanied by a glass or two of single malt.

Dave Beeby

BARBARA DICKSON

To Each And Everyone – The Songs Of Gerry Rafferty

Greentrax Recordings CDTRAX378



The body of work that Gerry Rafferty left us was impressive – his high production values made his songs appear untouchable to many and there is thus a dearth of competent covers. Barbara Dickson, though, has the love of the man and the breadth of talent to do his songs justice, particularly with the monumental talent that is Troy Donockley at the helm.

Listening to this album I have experienced emotions being teased out of songs that I hadn't realised before were woven into the originals – Barbara's version of *Baker Street* uses the violin of Frank Van Essen to replace the iconic sax and gives the intro an air of melancholy that has reinvented the piece for me. *To Each And Everyone*, the ultimate goodbye song, the Rafferty version of which actually dates from 1971, has a poignancy he couldn't have anticipated at the time and the combination of Barbara's voice and harmonium accompaniment nails it. *The Ark* could have been written yesterday or a hundred years ago, but is welded to the present in this monumental version. *Mary Skeffington*, Rafferty's ode to his mother, is caressed with kid gloves and reminds us all what mums are all about and why they all deserve songs – 'cept we aren't all Gerry Raffertys! A particular moment that shook me to the core was Troy Donockley's uilleann pipe solo on *Family Tree* – stunning. Neil Drinkwater shines on grand piano on five tracks.

Most of us have seminal Gerry Rafferty songs that touched us in our youth. At least half a dozen of them are here – and performed with love and eloquence by his friend who never stopped loving him. There must be plenty for a follow up. I can't wait. This one is the business for me.

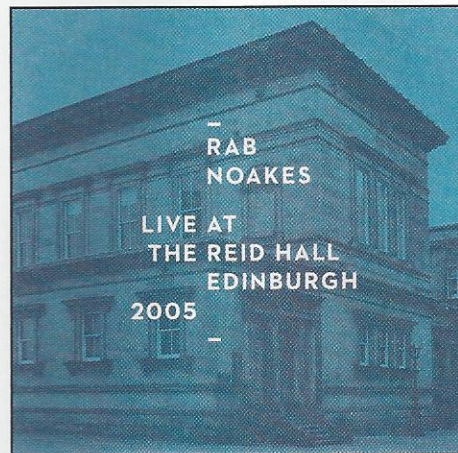
Grem Devlin

RAB NOAKES

Live At The Reid Hall

Edinburgh 2005

Neon NEONCD012



Nearly 50 years in the business is more than most of his contemporaries can claim and although he is somewhat less than prolific (barely 20 albums, if you include the cassette-only products), he is an icon of the Scottish folk scene and beyond. The essence of the man is his live performances and thus is it a performance outing such as this that would be a good starting place for those unacquainted with him. Pressures of work with his Neon Productions probably limits his live appearances to an average of one per month, so you'll be lucky to catch him in the flesh, but I recommend that you make the effort, if he's still on the form demonstrated on this album. Which is the first issue I have – this is a recording from a gig at the Edinburgh Festival some eight years ago and I know it is representative of his sets from around that time, as I caught several performances of Rab in the noughties, but it leads me to think that he has a dearth of new material to draw on. No matter, this is a slick performance of (mostly) his own songs in an intimate setting – just Rab and an acoustic guitar.

Particularly compelling is his *Gently Does It* (his song for Alex Campbell – most memorably covered by Allan Taylor). I also have a soft spot for *Branch*, which dates back to *Red Pump Special* (1973), the first of his albums I ever owned.

My only other issue, which may be due to the fact that I have a 'review' copy, is that there are no songwriting credits on the sleeve. The listener is directed to Rab's website for accompanying detail – but that doesn't include details of who wrote the songs (for anyone interested, they include Lennon/McCartney - *I'm So Tired*, Radiohead - *High And Dry*, Leiber/Spector - *Spanish Harlem* and Boudleaux Bryant/Gene Watson - *Take Me As I Am Or Let Me Go*). Solid performance, and a brilliant demonstration of what Rab Noakes has always been – a compelling teller of musical tales.

Grem Devlin