

BB's CD Reviews

A number of nice people have contacted me recently to ask "Hey, Bill - what are you listening to these days when you're not writing great tunes and marvellously intense songs and stuff? Huh?" (or words to that effect).

Well, here are some of my recent purchases, with comments pithy and/or trenchant. Note that different genres are represented (they don't call me "eclectic" for nothing).

"Music for a Found then Lost Again Harmonium" (Belvedere Skink)
Question Mark CD006-B

Irish traditional for senior citizens. Tunes include "I Buried My Wife Then Forgot Where I Put Her", "Bonaparte's Dementia", and "Jenny's Welcome to the Shady Acres Rest Home". Everything is played slowly, the way we old geezers like it. Standard instrumentation (although the screaming guitar break in "What's Her Name's Chickens" seems a bit out of place). BB rating: ... uh ... I forget ...

"Green Vibrations" (The Goatskinners Quartet)
Percussion Arts CD0045

Take four tempo-challenged bodhrán players splitting a lottery ticket payoff, put them in a cheesy studio in somebody's cousin's basement, and voila - this CD! Tunes include "Thumpity-Thump-Thump", "Wickity-Wickity-Wickity", and Ringo McDonagh's immortal "Bumbaddabumbadda". The lads' arrangement of the second movement of the Débussy String Quartet was, shall we say, "interesting". A must-have for your collection, although presence of other musicians on the recording might have been nice. BB rating: four stars.

"Celtic Karaoke" (Lance de Boyle)
Purple Finch PF-0984

Purple Finch Records once again visits fresh insults on its stable of disgruntled recording artists with this CD, which consists of Lance's squeaky voice and uncertain banjo playing overdubbed onto unauthorized cuts from Eileen Ivers, Cherish the Ladies, and other superstars from the Purple Finch stable. Lance's attempts to scat sing the Coleman Reel Set are pathetic, as he seems somehow to run out of scat syllables late in the second repeat of "Longford Collector" and winds up nose-humming his off-pitch little way through the rest of the set. Whose idea was this piece of tripe? BB rating: one-half star (= liner note type font is pleasant). WARNING: consult your lawyer before purchasing!

"Fats Meets Mike" (F. Waller, M. Coleman)
FusionFactory CD FF226

The miracle of technology puts Fats Waller's unforgettable stride piano under the legendary fiddling of Michael Coleman. Interesting attempt at combining musical genres, especially the "re-creation" of Coleman playing "Lulu's Back in Town" straight into "Tell Her I Am". Ultimately fails because the producers apparently did not realize that jigs are in 6/8 time. BB rating: two stars (= for the effort and technical artistry).

"Forest Music" (CloudSister)
Wistful Vistas CD 9256

72 minutes of tinny harp arpeggios over the sound of a gently burbling stream (actually the runoff from a Pittsburgh sewage treatment plant), accompanied by (bogus) bird songs. Three bluejays listening outside BB's CD review space fell off the windowsill laughing during one track allegedly featuring "sparrows". Music is meaningless but restful; you'll be dozing before it's halfway finished. BB rating: zzzz

"Smash Your Own Windows, You Amadhán" (Seán, Mick, Paddy, Joe)
WWF CD 2231

Field recordings of traditional music played by four elderly Kerry brothers-in-law with limited talent who dislike each other intensely and show it clearly in their playing. Some neat tunes but hard to hear above the swearing and the sound of glass breaking. Also would have helped if anybody was in tune with anybody else, but you realize early on that this was never going to happen. An interesting cut of "Bean an Fhir Rua" being performed while Paddy and Joe are beating the bejazus out of one another in the background. Reportedly one of Mike Tyson's favorite traditional CDs. BB rating: three stars and twelve bandages.

"Amhráin na mBa" (various artists)
Latté CD 32B78

Authentic Roscommon milking songs recorded in 1967 under clouded circumstances, provoking nasty catfight among ethnomusicologists that has continued to the present. Tracks include "I'm in the Moo'd for Love", "Cow Cow Boogie", "You're the Cream in My Coffee", "No Udder Love", "The Whey You Took Tonight", the well-loved "Dairy Air", and the ever-stirring "Cattle Hymn of the Republic". BB rating: four stars (and jimmies on that banana split, please).

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"Alexander's Raga-time Band"
NothingVishnuWithYou? CD L656

The Ravi Shankar Sitar Ensemble performs favorites from the Irving Berlin songbook. Britney Spears and Sinéad O'Connor join in on some vocals. Cute but unsatisfying (the recording, that is) - surely Irving Berlin didn't compose ALL his songs in E minor? BB rating: one star. (Note: the liner notes are in Sanskrit; translation available on payment of additional \$25)

"Pick Up that Family Bible and Lay the Devil Down"
Liturgikick CD 0076

Christian pop like you've never heard it before! Excerpts from the "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas set to a hot bluegrass beat and performed by Flatt and Scruggs and various members of the Grand Old Opry. In Latin, English, and Alabaman. Minnie Pearl and Grandpa Jones doing a duet on "The Platonic Inquiry into Essences" (with a hot mandolin break by Chris Thiel) was worth the price of the CD. Not bad for a bunch of Baptists! BB rating: one "hot damn!" and five stars.