



Fiddler

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“Head” Fiddles

Jim Scancarelli

Alan Kaufman

**Playing Music
Together, Apart**

*Plus: Mackenzie Bell; Tom Morley; FiddleHed; The Tune Sleuth;
Waltzes & Airs; Bluegrass; Old-Time; Improvisation; Irish; Scottish;
Violin Making & Repairing; Travels with Charlie; Pembroke; 8 Tunes ...*



Brad Reid, *New Scotland* [FACTOR Canada; bradreid.ca]

Reid takes the rules and standards of Cape Breton fiddling and puts them into different situations with this disc. He definitely knows his stuff on the fiddle, and mixes that knowledge with backing rhythms and instrumentation from jazz, modern acoustic pop, and even a bit of Afro-Cuban stylings. An excellent example is the opening cut, “Trip to Peggy’s Cove,” in which Reid works the Scottish fiddle with congas and syncopated rhythm guitar. “Glasgow Gate” moves in that same direction, with the fiddle working a recognizable pattern against varied time signatures. However, he never wants to lose his fan base, and sticks to more traditional arrangements with “King George” and “Hills of Glenorchy.” The overall production is full-sounding with sparse instrumentation. This is a true pleasure album for anyone wanting to hear someone “fiddling around a bit” with traditional Cape Breton music.

– Matt Merta

GKN5, *Tri Hjarter På Ei Snor (Three Hearts on a String)*

[gurokviftenesheim.no]

Guro Kvifte Nesheim, Mats Edén, *Den Kaldsteikte (The Cold-Fried)* [nesheimeden.bandcamp.com/album/den-kaldsteikte]

Guro Kvifte Nesheim has released two CDs recently that feature her delightful and entrancing playing of the Hardanger fiddle (the Norwegian folk fiddle with five sympathetic strings which provide shimmering harmonics – like the musical equivalent of the northern lights). One is the second album by her quintet, GKN5, and the other is a duet album with Mats Edén, a Swedish master fiddler with deep roots in Norwegian and Swedish music. Guro was born into a musical family – her father, Tellef Kvifte, is a highly respected musician, academic, and record producer, and she recalls wanting to play Hardanger fiddle since she was 3 years old, listening to her father play with a neighbor at their summer farm. That neighbor, master Hardanger fiddler Salve Austenå, became Guro’s mentor once she got her first fiddle at age 7. She still plays many of his tunes, and they are featured on both albums. Traditionally the Hardanger fiddle was a solo instrument, as a large part of the magic in the tradition comes from the subtle improvisations that players use to decorate the motifs that are the bones of the tunes, all the while maintaining the rhythms that lift the dancers. On each of these recordings Guro answers the question of how to make the Hardanger tradition function in a more current format; in a band with the quintet, and in a duo with Edén. GKN5 adds clarinet and bass clarinet, 12-string guitar, nyckelharpa, and percussion to the rich Hardanger sound, and the band finds miraculous ways to sound both synced and spontaneous – a musical murmur. Guro’s playing is sparkling, inventive, and emotional, in that delightful high lonesome Norwegian way. And the timbre of the other instruments add a grand richness. On the duo album with Mats Edén, there is more a sense of two souls dancing through fields of ancient melody, with Edén (whom Guro refers to, rightly, as a god of harmony) following like a teasing, inventive, intuitive shadow. On “Den Kaldsteikte” Edén alternates playing a second Hardanger fiddle, a viola d’amore (viola with sympathetic strings), and a baroque violin. Wonderful. These are two favorite Scandinavian albums!

– Kevin Carr

Lone Piñon, *Nuevas Acequias, Rio Viejo, Traditional Music of Northern New Mexico* [lonepinon.com]

This band plays traditional music from New Mexico with profound respect for the elders from whom they learned, and with a depth of musicality and sheer joy that is astonishing and revelatory. This is wonderful music. Each cut is unique. When was the last time you heard an indita – or polkas, waltzes, foxtrots, rancheras, and cutillos? Jordan Wax plays fiddle perfectly, with a kind of virtuosity that emerges from exactly what the tunes call for. His accordion playing and singing have the same soulful, loving, joyful, playful depth and

beauty. Noah Martinez on bajo quinto, upright bass, guitarrón, quinta huapangera, guitar, and percussion is powerful, poised and equally possessed. The river is indeed old, but the current in the new canals runs strong through these young men, and this musical water is truly life giving.

– Kevin Carr

Rowan Leslie, *Escaping the Dawn*

Book: *Contemporary Fiddle Tunes from the Northeast of Ireland* [Mel Bay Pubs.; melbay.com]

Rowan Leslie is a very fine fiddler and composer of tunes from Country Antrim in the Northeast of Ireland. He is currently living in Glasgow, and his playing and composing has flavors of various traditions from around the Isles, while maintaining a solid Irish center of gravity. This is an album of tunes made by Mr. Leslie, and features some lovely powerful playing. His tunes are evocative, and some will undoubtedly enter the tradition. A very satisfying listen. He has also compiled a book of contemporary fiddle tunes hailing from the Northeast of Ireland. It is a handsome, well laid-out resource with some real gems in it.

– Kevin Carr

Arise and Go, *Meeting Place* [ariseandgo.org]

This album is a delight. Ellie Goud, from New Brunswick, plays a swinging, strong, sassy fiddle, Michael Roddy is a grand gifted piper on border pipes, small pipes and Uilleann pipes, and Tim Ball’s guitar, foot percussion, and bouzouki are inventive and as driving as you could want. This is a band which blends sounds beautifully. They have picked interesting versions of tunes, and their tune sets build in lovely ways. The band does their home traditions proud – Scots, Irish, and French roots blend in a way that highlights rather than obscures the richness of those sources. The sound of the recording is exquisite. I am a huge sucker for pipes and fiddle, and this recording didn’t let me down. Well worth searching for!

– Kevin Carr

Rakish (Self-titled), EP [rakishmusic.com]

Rakish is a duo of Maura Shawn Scanlin on fiddle and Conor Hearn on guitar. They have released this eponymous EP with five marvelous cuts, and it does whet the appetite for more. Ms. Scanlin is an extraordinary fiddler – inventive, fluid, tone a mile deep, and that is just the beginning. If we are all lucky she will be playing for us for a long, long time to come. On this recording she stays mostly in the new Irish style, but displays much skill with an old-time accompaniment to Mr. Hearn’s warm, inviting vocal on “Waterbound.” The arrangement is redolent of tradition, while feeling very contemporary – as in alive and vital. The guitaristry is lovely, also toneful, and the two play wonderfully together. I have had the great pleasure of hearing Ms. Scanlin play live, and I will jump at the chance to hear this duo should that be possible. In the meantime, we can enjoy this small but exceedingly enticing sampler.

– Kevin Carr

Katie McNally Trio, *Now More Than Ever* [katiemcnally.com]

I love this album. Katie McNally’s always soaring, joyful, rich playing is dancing here with Shauncey Ali’s strong and soulful viola and Neil Pearlman’s usual harmonic and rhythmic prestidigitation, and the whole feels as though we found a musical magical lamp, rubbed it and the genie came out and said, “Don’t ask – I have just the thing for you!” Strongly in the Scottish contemporary/traditional vein, much of the music on this recording is newly composed, but the roots are gloriously showing in the style and beauty of Katie’s playing – of all the playing. The mood of this music ranges from moving, deep, and gentle to epic and mighty, with side paths through monumental, sentimental (as the Scots do so, so well), lilting, and orchestral. This is wonderfully played, wonderfully made, seamlessly presented, brilliantly arranged, and highly emotional music.

– Kevin Carr

(Book reviews are on page 52.)