

CD and book Reviews

dentist's waiting room.

'Whisper Me This' features some great interaction between guitar and flugelhorn and the percussion lifts the ambience into the outdoors.

Think here of wide open plains and freedom.

'Flow' is a high energy track.

'Free Ascent' conjures images of a bird soaring, not flapping its wings but riding the thermals, at one with the natural environment.

Fans of guitar will find the instrument also soars.

'Waiting for Sunshine' has something akin to a reggae beat which adds to the variety on this album.

'Waters Gather' has a suitably quiet start for which arpeggios on the piano are perfect.

It is not at all difficult to appreciate the relationship between the instrumentation and the elements.

You can hear gentle rain, a stream perhaps flowing into a river, and the cello adds a slightly darker note, suggestive of approaching storms.

'And the Sky Was' is another track with perfect blend of guitar and flugelhorn.

'A Night in Nocelle' is an upbeat piece featuring some fine finger picking guitar.

Nocelle is a town on the Italian coast.

This is probably the track with the most obvious melodic line and has the potential to become an ear worm.

It is not clear whether the title of 'Tenth Life' relates in

any way to cats, but this is a sinuous piece in which the instruments flow around one another and intertwine.

'Rest Now My Friend' has a lovely guitar introduction and also has a strong tune that would hold its own in any genre.

There is a wistfulness about this slower track.

'For Rosita and Giovanni' is a quiet and serious finale.

Ackerman says that the exercise took them all to new places and the album represents something of a renaissance for him.

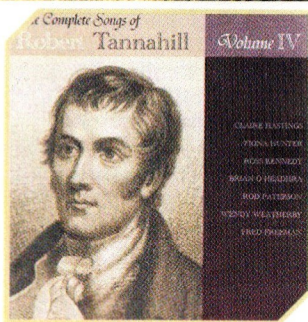
There is no doubt that Move has a synergy which is difficult for any band to achieve.

They are a true ensemble, listening to one another, supporting and elevating the performances.

Given the essentially free, jazz like style of this free flowing music, there is a remarkable degree of discipline in every piece.

If the players improvise then they do so within the parameters of a basic tune and an agreed style.

Move is an educational album in that it shows new age music in its variety and at a high pitch of artistry.



Various Artists - *The Complete Songs of Robert Tannahill Volume IV*

CD review by Graham Blackley

This extensive and carefully constructed collection celebrates songs of Scottish poet and silk weaver, Robert Tannahill, whose work was originally published in the early nineteenth century.

The handsome CD booklet proves to be a treasure trove of interesting information.

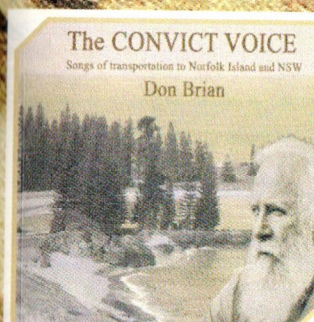
For example, producer and musical director, Fred Freeman, provides a concise and eloquent explanation of his thoughtful and reverent approach to this project in the enlightening liner notes.

The booklet also contains lyrics plus information about the singers and instrumentalists who are featured on the album.

Although this collection includes the traditional Scottish folk music that you might expect to discover on an album dedicated to Tannahill's work, there are some unexpected sonic twists and turns.

For example "The Wandering Bard", which features the vocals of, Claire Hastings, has an almost jazzy vibe and a rather groovy laid-back rhythm.

After enjoying this album, you are likely to be inspired to delve further into Tannahill's oeuvre.



Don Brian, *The Convict Voice: Songs of Transportation to Norfolk Island and NSW*

CD review by Tony Smith

Transportation to the eastern states ceased around 1850, but continued later in Western Australia.

Having some ten convicts in my ancestry, I am inclined to regard, Don Brian's, 2018 CD as the tunes of Australian Royalty.

These songs describe experiences my forebears might have shared.

Whether or not you feel a personal connection with these songs, however, they evoke an important feature of Australia's social growth.

As, Mary Gilmore, put it in her poem 'Old Botany Bay', "the nation was, because of me".

Nor is the convict era so distant.

The Address-in-Reply in the new Australian Parliament, in 1901, was moved in the House of Representatives by a transportee, WH Groom, from Toowoomba!

These songs are mainly laments, as the convicts cursed their luck and their appalling conditions.

Norfolk Island was a place of secondary punishment.

The desperation of the convicts can be found in the legendary death pacts some entered into, wherein one would find release when a second killed him.

The second invited execution as a way to end his misery.

Don Brian avoids exaggerating the horrors of Norfolk but gives a balanced account of convict experiences.

The CD and accompanying booklet are not designed as a comprehensive history but as an evocation of convict song.

Don Brian has a powerful voice, honed singing sea shanties with Forty Degrees South, (formerly the Roaring Forties).

Don and Sue Brian conduct tours of Norfolk Island.

Don also volunteers as a researcher at the Maritime Museum in Sydney, so listeners to this CD can be assured that the material is accurate and will not mislead or create myths about the wretched settlers in chains.

The songs on the CD are as much by the convicts as about them, and so, are primarily sympathetic.

There are 18 tracks and the arrangements are nicely balanced.

Don Brian provides instrumental interludes on whistle.

Sue McMahon supplies concertina, musical saw and keyboards.

Jennifer Brian adds vocals.

Production is by, Pete McMahon, who also plays fretboards and supplies vocal support.

There is a rich variety of arrangements.

For example, 'The Norfolk Island Exile' and 'Currency

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Lasses' are rendered unaccompanied, while in 'Adieu to judges and juries' and 'Piracy of the Wellington', the evocative saw joins in.

This unaccompanied singing establishes the importance of clear diction and ensures that the voice conveying the words is always paramount.

This clarity is one of, Don Brian's, great strengths.

Both 'Barrow's Tour of Hell' and 'Macquarie Harbour' are simply spoken.

The accompanying booklet provides the lyrics of the songs, while dustcover notes succinctly acknowledge the provenance of each song.

The ironic 'Assisted passage' has tasteful guitar accompaniment.

There is tuneful whistle on 'Moreton Bay', 'Jim Jones', 'Currency Lasses' and the 'Liverpool Judies'.

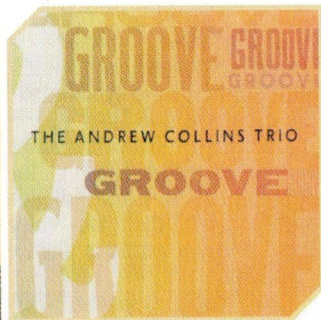
There is the rollicking 'The Catalpa', while, Jennifer Brian, sings the dance tune 'Street Hearts of the Female Factory', with its happily defiant chorus.

Where Brian needed to set the words to tunes, his choice is always appropriate as, for example, the traditional tune for 'The Cooking Pot Riot'.

'The Convict Voice' ensures that a period of history and song is evoked skilfully and sympathetically.

Don Brian and his collaborators have created a CD of power and musicality.

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Andrew Collins Trio - Groove
CD review by Tony Smith

This Toronto trio, led by mandolin master, Andrew Collins, includes, James McEleny, on upright bass and, Mike Mezzatesta, on guitar.

They are obviously at the cutting edge of innovation because Collins also uses fiddle, mando-cello and octave violin, while Mezzatesta doubles on mandolin and violin to great effect.

These tracks display individual instrumental brilliance but also a fine sense of ensemble.

The former does not guarantee the latter, but the Andrew Collins Trio has both in abundance.

These eleven tracks are mostly compositions by, Andrew Collins, himself, while, David Grisman, Roger Waters and 'trad' get the credits for others.

The opening track, 'Famous Last Words' fits neatly into a Gypsy swing/jazz style.

There are echoes on this track of Grapelli and Reinhart.

The playing here establishes the high level of artistry the trio

brings to their music.

The second track, 'Big Toaster' segues neatly from the jazz idiom into a bluegrass style.

This is without doubt the genre in which the trio's artistry is most obvious.

'The Grumpus' has elements of a Mediterranean style, possibly Greek, with its mandolin tremolos, or North African with its strong bass rhythm.

There are echoes of jazz styles in 'Badabada ba ba' while a simpler arrangement is perfect for 'Goodbye blue sky - ships in the clouds' (Roger Waters/ trad), and as a result, the music seems to be at its most expressive here.

'Lullaby for Len' is a slow, gentle track that provides plenty of opportunity for the trio to demonstrate their skills in ornamentation and their perfection in timing.

Folk fans will enjoy 'The Long Dusty Road', with the fiddle leading the melody and some great picking.

'Poplar Bluff' (trad) is another which fits neatly into the blues/roots medium.

The octave violin in 'Kentakaya' sounds like, Jordi Saval, playing viola with a drone creating echoes of seventeenth and eighteenth century dances, and 'Dawg grass' (David Grisman) is bluegrass/ country swing.

It is not entirely clear what message might be intended by the quotation from, Roger Miller, unless it is an instruction to keep your cool.

'Keep your pills in one pocket and your change in the other, because I just took my last 25 cents'.

There is no doubt that the trio stick to their brief in this album as all tracks fit that image of cool, smooth music which is commercially viable and likely to be universally acceptable.

The Groove genre is vast with

compilations appearing at the rate of a couple every year.

This trio is obviously extremely versatile and their skill transcends genre boundaries.

Their website shows that they can sing as well as play, and that they are in demand at folk, blues and roots festivals across Canada and into the USA.



The Mezcaltones - Second
CD review by Tony Smith

It might be a bit of a hike from Sydney's northern beaches to Mexico, but the Mezcaltones make the cultural distance shrink by their command of the popular music of Mexico and the south west of the USA.

They produce a 'Tex-Mex, 60s cowboys rockabilly surf guitar style of twang' and mention the inspiration of Los Lobos, Link Wray, Santana and Dick Dale.

The ensemble of six consists of various twangers, each of whom prefers a nom-de-performance to revealing everyday names.

So the 'Magnificent Six', a regular at Tamworth Country Music Festival and Blues and Roots Festivals along the east coast, consists of, Col Padre, on lead vocals, Don Juan, on drums, whistles and vocals, Lucre on bass twang, Mimi on percussion, dance and vocals, Neralita

on rhythm twang and vocals, and Shango on lead twang and vocals.

The Mezcaltones have received some accolades including for their 2016 hit, 'Painted Lady'.

On this CD, there are eight tracks.

Two are instrumentals, the 'For A Few Dollars More' medley and 'And the Address'.

The latter features some Hendrix like flashes.

The remaining six tracks are pretty well solid R & B with a country feel to get the feet tapping.

'I Know My Rider' and 'Humble Pride' tend towards a blues feel while 'Howlin at the Moon' features power chords that contrast neatly with some very good picking.

'Let Love Reign' has a Dylanesque air to it.

My favourite tracks are 'Short Change Hero' and 'Na Na Na'.

The former displays some great harmonies while the latter is one of those tarcks that will have everyone up dancing.

I suppose that I always look for variety and balance and these tracks in particular supply that.

It is probably a prejudice of mine that I would prefer the lead vocalist to be fore grounded in the mix more prominently, so long as this would not mar the obvious sense of teamwork that underlies all these tracks.

The Mecaltones are above all a relaxed outfit, nothing to do with their name or tequila, I'm sure.

They perform for their own enjoyment and when musicians so obviously enjoy themselves, the fun is infectious.

Without being self

deprecating, The Mezcaltones clearly do not take themselves too seriously.

Their costumes and dance routines are playful and they have that light approach which makes their music a pleasant experience.

Catch them live if you can.



John Kennedy - Second Best: Greatest Bits Vol.2
CD review by Graham Blackley

Australian vocalist and guitarist, John Kennedy, has a rich and interesting musical past that encompasses his time leading the bands, JFK and the Cuban Crisis, and, Love Gone Wrong, in the 1980s.

This sixteen track compilation provides an enjoyable and revealing glimpse into Kennedy's musical journey during the period 1993-2018.

Although much of his output during this period appears to have inexplicably escaped the notice of the majority of the record buying public, Kennedy's compelling song writing skills and charismatic vocals are well and truly present in each of these inviting tracks.

The buoyant melodies that burst forth throughout the album prove to be phenomenally catchy and it won't take long for the causal listener to be humming along to hook laden gems

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such as "Out Of Town" and "Strawberry Hills Forever."

A foot stomping highlight that may inspire you to crank up the volume to eleven is Kennedy's suitably roof raising cover of The Scientists' gritty classic "Swampland", which is as apocalyptic as you might expect.

If you are a fan of intelligent, edgy, soulful and idiosyncratic roots infused, country tinged, alt pop rock, then you will certainly welcome and relish this superb collection.



Take Me To Town - An Australian Alternative Country Compilation
CD review by Tony Smith

It is not every day that a CD, or in this case a set of three CDs, comes across your desk which is 'curated'.

The term certainly creates the impression that the 47 tracks presented here comprise an exhibition.

Dave Favours, of Stanley records, conceived the idea and is to be commended for taking this kind of initiative.

Other partners in the enterprise are, Areatha Bryant,

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of Mother Hen Touring, and Post to Wire's, Chris Familton.

This trio of townies drew on the thriving music scene of Sydney's inner west to corral their artists, which include performers, bands and songwriters, in a range of country styles.

There are 'seasoned' performers and relative newbies.

Although Australia is the world's most urbanised country, many of the images we hold of ourselves originate in rural experiences and values.

It is perhaps a kind of yearning for a cultural tree change.

Nevertheless, it remains true that while country music might be the dominant genre in rural areas, the main markets and producers lie in the heavy population centres.

The tracks on these CDs show that country music has been adopted firmly in towns, at least in its 'Alt' form.

However, it should not be imagined that the singer

songwriters on these CDs are urban cowboys hankering to get out into the country on weekends.

It is true that some tracks such as, Amber Rae Slade and the Mighty Big Noise's, 'Yippy Yo Ko Yi Ay', and, Bill Jackson's, 'Rollin' into Rosine' are unmistakably country.

But most tracks, beginning with 'Wake Up' by, Mick Daley, versus The Way She Goes, have an originality that defies categorisation.

If anything, most of the styles are rooted in a blues approach.

It should be noted however that the collection is eclectic.

Emlee South's 'My Baby' for example is straight from the fifties pop/rock stable.

Pete Favours and the Roadside Ashes', 'There Goes the Neighbourhood', has a recitative tone and concerns over development in Sydney.

Halfway's, 'The Night Sky', has a laid back arrangement suggestive of a last dance.

James Thompson and the Strange Pilgrims', 'Odds and Ends', is one of several tracks that show the influence of, Bob Dylan, which is hardly surprising given the American star's country music roots.

David Garnham and the Reasons to Live's, 'Worst House in the Best Street' uses some banjo to express contemporary concerns.

William Crichton's, 'Riverina Kid', deserves special mention as it reflects on a hard upbringing.

Chris Altmann's, 'Way Back to You', is an upbeat piece.

The Weeping Willows', 'The Devil's Road', features some fine guitar work and smouldering singing.

Sam Shanazi's, 'Songs You Can't Hear Any More', is a reflection on love lost.

There is some great banjo on, Jen Mize's, 'Over the Mountain', which would probably be a hit at Tamworth.

Peta Caswell's, 'Hard Work', likens a relationship to struggles at the coalface.

Lachlan Bryan and the Wildes', 'Peace in the Valley', tells a sad story simply and clearly.

Sam Newton, in 'Gategal Falls', sings of electric cold that killed off the sense in his bones.

There is a fair bit of introspection in these tracks.

The curators deserve congratulation.

Trad&Now is lucky to have a large panel of voluntary reviewers

They are people who have been involved with the folk music community for a long while and/or they are performers in their own right.

They spend a great deal of time listening to CDs very carefully and then sharing their thoughts with the rest of us.

This helps readers decide whether they should purchase a CD or not by giving them some idea as to what to

expect.

However, as with movie reviewers and with any critics generally, the review published may not be the same as what you would personally feel about a CD.

Everyone has their own taste in music and the range of tastes seems to be endless.

Reviews are the opinion of the reviewer only and not necessarily that of Trad&Now or its editorial staff.

Performers submit CDs without any guarantee of a favourable review and readers should always form their own opinion, preferably by hearing the CD under review for themselves or seeing the performer at a live performance.

If you are interested in joining our review panel, please contact Trad&Now at info@tradandnow.com

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