

Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

Welcome to yet another issue of Cuz's Corner. I sure do hope you folks have been able to take advantage of all the great concerts and festivals that have been taking place all over our area in the last month – it has truthfully been overwhelming! One ultimate highpoint for me was having the opportunity to be a part of the October 12th **Earl Scruggs Homecoming Concert** in Shelby. This evening featured great music by the **Circuit Riders**, the **Nashville Bluegrass Band**, and an especially inspired set by the master himself. This event was put together by a progressive group of folks that call themselves Destination Cleveland County, whose goal is to make Cleveland County a destination for both music and heritage lovers. The two centerpieces of this monumental effort will be the Earl Scruggs Center and the 400 seat Don Gibson Theatre, honoring another one of Cleveland County's finest. I have long felt that music is an immense part of an area's culture and history and it is exactly the goal of this fine group of dedicated individuals to tie all of these components together! I would encourage you to go to www.destinationclevelandcounty.org and read all about this absolutely wonderful grassroots effort and perhaps even get involved!

Any of you 600 or so folks at the Charlotte Folk Society's 25th Anniversary Concert will testify as to what a wonderful night of music and community the evening was. I will not even attempt to mention favorite performances from that evening, as there was not a weak spot in the entire four

hours. The partnership of CFS and John Tosco in the presentation of this event was pure magic and it just proves that people are starved for honest music made for the pure love of it.

I have been working diligently for some time to perfect a cloning technique whereby I could attend multiple stellar events occurring on the same weekend. A case in point was the weekend of October 21st, with Shelby's Art of **Sound, Prairie Home Companion**, and LEAF all underway at the same time. A dozen or so friends and I opted for a large campsite at LEAF. I must say the weather, the music, and the overall experience could not have been better. Highlights included a stellar set by Tony Trischka and his amazing young band, Michael Franti's moving set of consciousness-inspired music, the craziness of the **Wilders'** breakneck honky tonk, and one of the best sets of music I've heard in a while from the legendary Doc Watson, David Holt, and Richard Watson. Now in his mid 80s, the legend shows no sign of slowing down and, truthfully, his voice has never sounded better than it did that weekend in the shadows of the Black Mountains!

There is one concert coming up November 16th I want to mention. **Caroline Herring and Jeffrey Foucault** will be making an appearance at the intimate Evening Muse for what promises to be an inspiring evening of songcraft. Jeffrey is a Folk Alliance winner, and Caroline, who hails from Atlanta, weaves her

stories in a style that reminds one of the great southern novelists. (www.maxxmusic.com)

Some CDs that come down the line are merely fine releases, but every once and a while one comes down the pike that is simply an event. Such is the case with the new one from **Levon Helm** entitled **Dirt Farmer**. (www.levonhelm.com) I say "event" because of the fact that Levon has survived throat cancer, twenty-eight radiation treatments, the loss of his barn and studio to fire, and the loss of his brother



Cuz and Little Bit

Rick Danko (also a member of **The Band**) - all in the last few years. Now, he says, thanks to good friends, the studio sounds better than ever and he feels his voice is about halfway back - he is indeed a survivor. It was, however, his daughter

Amy Helm (**Ollabelle**) that encouraged him to go back and record the songs that his family played and sang while he was growing up. The song selection is outstanding on this release with a number of traditionals like **False Hearted Lover Blues**, **Little Birds**, **The Girl I Left Behind**, as well as A. P. Carter's **Single Girl, Married Girl**. Covers of Steve Earl's **The Mountain**, Buddy and Julie Miller's **Wide River to Cross**, and Laurelyn Dossett's **Anna Lee** are equally moving. Although the voice is not what it used to be with **The Band**, Levon's arrangements, the musicianship of daughter Amy Helm, Buddy Miller, Larry Campbell, and the pure soul and passion in his distinctive voice all add up to Cuz's pick of the month!

A couple of other releases are definitely worth your consideration. **Robin & Linda Williams** have put together a disc of *Prairie Home Companion* performances that will satisfy old listeners and new fans alike. The CD is appropriately entitled *Radio Songs* and is in essence a retrospective of their long-standing career, marriage, and association with Garrison Keillor. (www.robinandlinda.com)

There are quite a few Buck Owens tributes around these days, but the best for my money is **Dwight Yoakam's *Dwight Sings Buck*** release (www.dwightyoakam.com) Dwight is definitely true to the sound on this one, but in usual fashion, he makes each song his own. Long live the Bakersfield Sound!

That's it for this edition, as I need to hit the road over the mountains and across the Cumberland Plateau to Nashville and the Americana Music Association Festival and Conference. It's a good bet that a goodly section of next month's edition will be covering this year's AMA events. In the meantime, as always, try to get out and enjoy some live music and we'll visit again next month! Ya'll come back now, you hear!

CUZ

To share your thoughts about your favorite music with Cuz (especially old-time), contact him either at dcmfrost@mindspring.com or 704-532-8846.

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CD Review

Birdie: Old Time Songs & Tunes

Martin & Johnson, *Birdie: Old Time Songs and Tunes*
SSPO 7001 5-String Productions
(www.5-string.com)

By Tom Hanchett

Wayne and Margaret Martin love the old songs, and it shows. Wayne has been North Carolina's state folklorist for almost twenty years. Margaret is an educator who helped open the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh (it's no coincidence that recordings by Carolina traditional musicians introduce some of the exhibits) and now works for the North Carolina Wildlife Commission. In this homey, low-key CD Wayne and Margaret share some of their favorite musical gleanings from the stringband South.

One of their best finds is fiddler and singer Craig Johnson. His wonderful cracked warble was a highlight on **Double Decker Stringband** LPs back in the 1980s and it's great to hear it again now. Craig's passion on the fiddle is country blues. I especially like his take on **K. C. Railroad Blues**, originally recorded in Charlotte in 1927 by African American fiddler Andrew Baxter. The fiddle line and vocals are pared down to pure emotion, a sound that sticks

with me for days.

Wayne grew up in Dinwoody, Georgia, hearing family members singing shape-note hymns. On this CD his voice can be heard on two sacred songs from Virginia, the quartet-style **Feed My Sheep** and the Stoneman Family's **There's a**

Light Lit Up in Galilee. He

also contributes guitar and harmonica throughout the recording, and doubles up with Craig on fiddle for the dance tunes **Sally Ann** and **Fisher's Hornpipe.**

Margaret Martin's sunny

singing has always reminded me a bit of early June Carter. Here she takes the lead on the Carter Family's **My Old Cottage Home**, originally recorded in 1931 in Charlotte. Margaret plays banjo for the trio's dance tunes, and she and Wayne join voices on several other selections, including **Rise When the Rooster Crows**, learned from Carolina banjo player Bill Mansfield.

The title track of the CD is **Birdie**, a piece once played by Fields Ward of Galax, Virginia. Birdies also decorate the cover and the liner notes - specifically a flock of slightly comical ceramic ducks from collector J. Wingate Hobgood. It's just the right visual touch for a homey CD that's lovingly made but doesn't take itself overly seriously.

