



The Journeymen “**New Directions In Folk Music**” Collector’s Choice Records

The Kingston Trio first rose to prominence in American Folk Music during the late nineteen-fifties, and by the early sixties in the wake of their ongoing success there were a legion of *clone aggregations*, including their label mates at Capitol Records, The Highwaymen. The line-up consisted of Dick Weissman, Scott “San Francisco” McKenzie [born Phil Blondheim] and the late John “Papa” Phillips. “**New Directions In Folk Music**” was the third album that the trio cut during the period 1961/1963, and Collector’s Choice have also released, concurrently, “**The Journeymen**” [1961] and “**Coming Attraction – Live!**” [1962]. The latter set was recorded at The Padded Cell in Minneapolis. All of the recordings have been enhanced by the addition of, between six and ten, bonus tracks, some previously unreleased.

In its original form “**New Directions In Folk Music,**” was a twelve-track release, and this reissue includes seven bonus cuts [plus a hidden track advertising an Armstrong flooring product]. The principle writers within the trio, on their first recording, were Phillips and Weissman, mainly as collaborators, while input from McKenzie was restricted to two of the bonus songs, including mono and stereo versions of “Kumbaya.” McKenzie’s collaborative writing input increased dramatically on “**Live!**” and “**New Directions....**” On the latter collection his name appeared on four of the original cuts [with John and Dick], as well as on a couple of the bonus tracks. Of the latter, “Rag Mama” credits each trio member plus a Traum, but was it Artie or Happy? And no, this is not the song subsequently cut by The Band on “**The Band.**”

A pair of the original tracks, Bob Carleton’s “Ja-Da,” composed in 1918, and Phillips’ ballad “One Quick Martini” must surely rate as the low spots in this otherwise welcome reissue. We’re talking about a couple of songs that, these days, simply wouldn’t make the cut. On “Ja-Da” the trio imitate the sounds of trumpets plus the song has one of those meaningless *la de la* choruses, while the lounge vocalist on “One Quick Martini” sounds like a Vic Damone [or similar] imitator. If the latter cut once amounted to a *new direction in folk*, thank the Lord the trend never took off. In terms of songs with genuine folk/country credentials on “**New Directions....**,” there’s Jesse Fuller’s “San Francisco Bay Blues” and Ian Tyson’s classic reply to Dylan’s “Blowin’ In The Wind,” “Four Strong Winds.” Featuring some initially inventive harmonies “Greenland Whale Fisheries,” a Phillips/John Stewart [*] co-write, is one of the bonus cuts, as is “Makes A Long Time Man Feel Bad” a Sylvia Fricker/Ian Tyson tune that appeared on the Canadian couple’s 1963 Vanguard debut album “**Ian & Sylvia.**”

I’ve always looked upon the much of the *folk music* from this era as derivative and, in truth, closer to nightclub cabaret than music that possessed genuine traditional [or pioneering contemporary] folk music credentials. The Highwaymen, complete with occasionally zippy banjos on acid, fall into the latter category from time to time on this collection. Apart from tracks already mentioned, if you want further proof, simply listen to the “Oh, Oh, Oh Poo Pe Do” intro to “Rag Mama,” plus the trio’s up-tempo rewrite of the classic “Stackolee” that finds them sounding like a bunch of smiley, excessively happy preppies. “All The Pretty Little Horses” the lullaby [and trio co-write], that follows, is much more acceptable fare. As for McKinley “Muddy Waters” Morganfield’s “Someday Baby,” there’s a hint of acoustic rock’n’roll in the guitar break. The foregoing apart, considering how Phillips [and other pioneers like Curt Boettcher] would expand the horizons of vocal harmony a few years later, it’s good to have these historic documents back in the public domain.

Note.

[*] – In 1961 John Stewart replaced Dave Guard in the original Kingston Trio, and during the early half of that decade Big John wrote a number of songs with John Phillips.

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

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