

fROOTS

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250th issue!



THE FLATLANDERS

Wheels Of Fortune New World NW6049

It's good to see this trio of semi-elder statesmen, of the Texas folk/ country music scene, finally enjoying a modicum of commercial success at the onset of their twilight years. Hell, as solo acts in their own right, they are three of the greatest musical heroes of my adult decades. Great brouhaha was made of their comeback album *Now Again*, due to the new departure of co-writing the songs; on *Wheels Of Fortune*, however, there's nary a three-way credit. Personally, I felt that content-wise *Now Again* was, at best, mediocre; whatever, the disc sold significantly well. Joe Ely has stated that the decision to reprise their respective back catalogues in tandem with new material on *Wheels Of Fortune* was deliberate. Maybe they figure they've discovered an audience unaware of their past artistic glories in word and melody. That being the case, for long-standing fans, taken at face value the content of *Wheels* amounts to, "Heard much of it before, and I've got the T-shirt to prove it".

The album opens with Hancock taking the lead vocal on his own gently-paced ballad *Baby Do You Still Love Me?*, and the inimitable voice of Jimmie Dale Gilmore delivers the album title track, a Hancock-penned love song. This 'let me sing your song' tack underscores much of the rest of this collection: Ely, for instance, delivers a down 'n' dirty bluesy rendition of *Midnight Train*, a 10-year-old plus Gilmore song. The new tunes include Hancock's *Eggs Of Your Chickens*, Ely's *I'm Gonna Strangle You Shorty* and *Back To My Old Molehill*, plus his almost legendary *Indian Cowboy*. The fifth and final new band song, *See The Way*, is a six-verse Gilmore/ Hancock co-write. By way of bringing this collection to a climax, and displaying fully-fledged Texas diplomacy, each of the protagonists take the vocal lead on two consecutive verses.

Arthur Wood



Slaid Cleaves

SLAID CLEAVES

Wishbone Rounder/ Philo 11671-1238-2A

Wishbone is Slaid's third statement for the Philo imprint in a span of seven years. The album title track opens this collection and was co-written with that living legend of Texas music, Ray Wylie Hubbard. Subjectively, it's an old man's reflection upon his life: some things change, but mostly they stay the same. The collection includes three co-writes and one cover song. The bluesy *Sinner's Prayer* was co-written with school pal (and regular collaborator) Rod Picott. Slaid covers Picott's *Tiger Tom Dixon's Blues*, the tale of a boxer who succumbs to the demon, alcohol. Cleaves's latest co-writer is Nicole St Pierre, and *Below* concerns the submerging of a town in the name of progress. "Until the modern world started creeping in, One day came the lawyers with cash in hand, They swore that our village would light up the land." In the light of the foregoing – some things change, but mostly they stay the same.

As for the new, pure bred Cleaves tunes, *Quick As Dreams* is one of the finest equine story songs I've heard in a while. Following in its wake is the country-flavoured *Horses*, while rockabilly is the chosen beat for the love song *Hearts Break*. Slaid drops back into quality storybook mode for the penultimate *Borderline*, a tale of deception and corruption on both sides of the US/ Mexico border. The closing track, *New Year's Day*, opens at a wake and name checks a number of localities in Austin, including Barton Springs where the late Uncle Jack commenced Slaid's baptism as an honorary Texan.

Wishbones is the third consecutive Cleaves album to be produced by Gurf Morlix. Some things change, but mostly they stay the same.

Arthur Wood

Plaids & Bandanas: From Highland Drover To Wild West Cowboy

Rob Glover Luath Press ISBN 0-946487-88-X
£7.99 PB

The inspiration behind this book was two-fold. At the 1998 Highland Festival, Glover's group, Ceilidh Menage, presented a show featuring music, drama and slides, which contrasted the history of the Scottish cattle drover with that of the cattle ranchers in America. Concurrently, folk musician David Wilkie and filmmaker Tim Radford, both Canadians, were collaborating on a music documentary. Radford interviewed Glover regarding a Gaelic cowboy song titled *Mo Shoraidh Leis a' Coigich* (Leaving Coigich) which Wilkie had found, and posed the question "Surely there must be more droving songs in Scotland?" At the time Glover could only think of one other song, but the enquiry set the research in motion for this book.

Through the opening six chapters, Glover covers in detail the life of the farmer and drover in Scotland, the evolution of the Aberdeen Angus breed, and mentions in passing well-known drovers. Over the subsequent five chapters the focus is principally on the transition to the American West. There are maps covering the routes that drovers used to travel through Scotland and over the border to Carlisle in Cumbria and a chronology of historic occurrences in Europe and America, pertinent to the story. Glover ends each chapter with a list of book references, and the volume finishes with a list of places of interest in Scotland and the United States, a reading list, a discography and a glossary of terms.

This is a thoroughly researched work, and although the music that the Scots took to the new world may not be the main thrust of the text, a sufficiently clear picture is painted of life in the States, and of the evolutionary process that the music went through.

Luath Press Ltd., 543/2 Castlehill, The Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 2ND.

Arthur Wood

 **David Francey *Skating Rink*** (Laker Music LAKR 1003) Acoustic-based album by southern Quebec-based Scottish émigré, and 2002 Juno winner, that features 13 pleasant and down-to-earth but hardly intellectually challenging, self-composed songs, including the 9/11-themed *Grim Cathedral*. www.davidfrancey.com

 **Robin & Linda Williams *Deeper Waters*** (Red House RHR CD 173) A dozen easy listening, folk/ bluegrass tracks, mostly self-composed by the duo, sometimes with others, including Tim O'Brien. Guests include vocalists Iris DeMent and Mary Chapin Carpenter, and actress/ singer Sissy Spacek, plus guitarist John Jennings. Not much else you can say that's contrary to ordinary.