

# fROOTS

## LITTLE GEORGE SUEREF

Bluesman Of The Moment

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Local Music From Out There





# CATHRYN CRAIG

**Pigg River Symphony** Goldrush GOLDCD007

The question I would pose is, are we subliminally enjoying another, albeit minor, traditional folk music revival? The soundtrack to the Coen Brothers movie *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* has stirred a long dormant part of America's cultural psyche. At the time of writing this review the recording had spent 16 consecutive weeks at No.1. The first three volumes, and subsequent fourth volume, of Harry Smith's *Anthology Of American Folk Music* were significant sellers when reissued a few years back. Dave Alvin's appropriately titled *Public Domain* won last year's Traditional Folk Grammy.

Ms Graig's ancestors hailed from Appalachia, specifically, the area where the Pigg River flows through Franklin County, Virginia. Cathryn's father, John Grady Sowder, is heard recalling being raised in Franklin County during the '30s and playing music with his father and siblings. Cathryn's uncle, ninety year old Dr. Wilson T. (Wit) Sowder, remembers (in the opening track) that he was one of thirteen children, twelve of whom survived to become adults. A couple of items – most certainly lo-fi – dating from twenty years ago feature respectively Cathryn reprising *Cornbread & Beans* with her father, and Cathryn and her sister Susan performing *Frankie & Johnny*. The sixteen traditional songs that underpin this project, include *Carry Me Back To Old Virginny*, *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*, *Red River Valley* and, naturally, *Amazing Grace*.

Cathryn is supported in this project by a few Nashville based, UK bred ex-pats – Clive Gregson, Pat McInerney and Brian Willoughby, as well as some home-grown talent – Kathy Chiavola, Adie Gray and LeAnn Etheridge (aka Mrs. McInerney). Recorded over three evenings, using a mini disc recorder, one microphone and a mass of acoustic instruments, in words and music, *Pigg River Symphony* is a well thought out and charmingly executed recollection of her family's association with traditional music. Proof positive that less can be far, far more.

Available in the UK from Goldrush Records, 9 Kinnoull Street, Perth, PH1 5EN.

*Arthur Wood*



# BUDDY & JULIE MILLER

**Buddy & Julie Miller** Hightone HCD 8135

Following a series of solo outings for the Hightone imprint, it's time to welcome this self-titled duo recording that leans heavily upon the pen of Julie Miller for eight songs (including *Dirty Water*, a co-write with Buddy) out of eleven selections. The covers amount to the Richard Thompson opener *Keep Your Distance*, the much recorded Utah Phillips' epic *Rock Salt And Nails* and Dylan's *Wallflower*.

Much lauded by the music press on both sides of the Atlantic, I've felt for a considerable time that Julie deliberately employs her little girl lost voice to emphasise even further her well-documented quirky nature. Listen to *You Make My Heart Beat Too Fast* for audible corroboration. As for hubby, there's no doubt that he's a quality guitar picker although in pursuit of roots credibility, his penchant for severely distorted (aka grungy) electric guitar sounds can grate somewhat over the duration of an entire album.

Does Julie Miller write quality songs? Well, going by the covers she has scored, Lucy Kaplansky, Emmylou Harris and Richard Shindell appear to think so. Ever the sceptic, for me Miller is far from being consistent in terms of quality. That said, when she occasionally hits the bulls eye I will admit to losing control over certain body hairs.

In pursuit of those two standards, execution and quality, *Little Darlin'* strays somewhat close to what a dear friend generously refers to as pig callin' music. Whatever, if you desire whiny vocals, you will develop a love affair with this cut. Elsewhere, *That's Just How She Cries* and *Rachel*, the latter a tribute to the first child killed in the Columbine School shooting, are sung straight from the heart and smack of (quirk free) work, performed well. The best that can be said for this disc is that it sounds great, and there are moments where the merger of words and melody produce magic... though only a few. Sadly, there are no bull's eyes.

Available in the UK via Proper Records Distribution.

Arthur Wood



# GENE PARSONS

**In Concert – I Hope They Let Us In** String  
Bender Records SBR 002

While I steeled myself against every conceivable possibility, after a couple of trips through this live, acoustic recording I came to the conclusion that its low-key approach was an appealing asset. According to Gene's liner notes, with some three and a half decades as a performer under his belt, this was his first solo show – ever. Better late than never, I guess. Accompanied by his guitar and banjo, and interspersing the songs with some wry insights into his life, Parsons' unhurried approach works like a charm. As to the vintage of this recording, when introducing *Abilene*, Gene mentions that his father-in-law, Bob Gibson, helped write the song. Gibson passed on during late September 1996.

It's hardly surprising that the seventeen cuts featured, lean heavily toward songs that were in vogue during Parsons sojourn as The Byrds drummer (1968-1972). Apart from Gene's *Gunga Din* and Larry Murray's *Bugler* from the foregoing era, *Sweet Desert Childhood* – a new autobiographical Parsons's tune, amply proves that he can pen a neat tune and lyric when the muse calls. Gib Guilbeau's *Sweet Susannah* and *Take A City Bride*, add a cajun flavour to the proceedings, plus there's a rendition of the Lowell George classic *Willin'*, while Dylan's *You Ain't Going Nowhere* closes the show.

Available from Stringbender Records, PO  
Box 76, Caspar, California 95420, U.S.A. and  
[www.stringbender.com](http://www.stringbender.com)

*Arthur Wood*



**👍 Ella Jenkins *Little Johnny Brown***

(Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SFW 45026)

Three decades on from its first appearance, the sub-title of this twelve song set – *And Other Songs With Girls And Boys From Uptown Chicago* – amply gives a flavour of the contents. Jenkins uses the call and response technique to engage the pre-teen children, vocally and rhythmically, in her mix of traditional and original, multi-ethnic sing-a-long songs. Via Koch in UK.

**👍 Pete Seeger *Song And Play Time***

(Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SFW CD 45023)

Throughout this sixteen song collection, recorded some four decades ago, Seeger's upbeat approach equates to an invitation to the listener to tap their feet, clap their hands, and sing along with him on classics such as *She'll Be Comin' 'Round The Mountain* and *Mary Wore A Red Dress*. This is music for children of all ages. Via Koch in UK.