



Various **"Old Town School Of Folk Music Songbook Vol. 4"** Bloodshot Records

One year on we now have the fourth and final instalment in this charming series that celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of this legendary folk music teaching and performing facility. The Old Town School Of Folk Music is located in North Chicago, and Chicago, in turn, is located in the state of Illinois. Appropriately, co-founder of the Old School, the late Win Stracke [d. 1991] opens this collection with a spirited rendition of "El-A-Noy" a traditional song that celebrates this northern state while lyrically taking a few liberties with its history – it appears that the Queen Sheeba and Solomon once passed through the state! Supported by Mary Hamilton's autoharp Frank Hamilton [Win Stracke's partner in founding the Old Town School] appears later in the disc performing the melodically familiar "Simple Gifts."

"Vol. 4" pursues the same formula as previous editions with the performers being a mix of professional musicians and Old School tutors, while the songs performed are mostly traditional in terms of source. On this occasion there are contributions from a few Chicago born and bred, nationally, nay internationally, known performers. In terms of their order of appearance, track 3 finds Tom Paxton tackle Woody Guthrie's "So Long, It's Been Good To Know You." Inspired by the Oklahoma/Texas Dust Bowl of the 1930's, Guthrie focuses on those former farmers and farm workers who, destitute, journeyed west in search of gainful employment. In the closing part of the collection the late Steve Goodman [d. 1984] delivers a 'live' performance of his Grammy winning song "City Of New Orleans," while his Maywood, Illinois [a Chicago suburb] bred buddy and former mailman John Prine voyages to "Paradise." A few months ago I visited Chicago for the first time. Disembarking early one morning at Union Station, the sign at the entrance to the adjacent platform indicated that "The City Of New Orleans" was the next outbound train. I guess you had to be there, but for an avid folk music [and Goodman] fan, how cool was that? Thanks Steve. Immediately prior to the Goodman cut, his sometime writing/performing collaborator and folk music giant/genius/deity [a personal opinion] delivers his best known composition "The Dutchman," while immediately prior to Prine's contribution Michael's wife, Barbara Barrow, performs the traditional "My Home's Across The Smoky Mountains." Michael Smith and Barbara Barrow are sometime Old Town guitar tutors. Considering that his folk music education began in Chicago, allied to his recent Folk Den recordings, I'm a little surprised that Roger McGuinn didn't contribute to this series....and for that matter whither Bonnie Koloc?

Driven by a stridently picked acoustic guitar, and supported by bodhran and whistle the Mike Austin Band delivers a Celtic flavoured reading of "Scarborough Fair," while, employing an insistent [Native American] drum beat Jacob Sweet [guitar tutor] serves up a mellifluous rendition of the bittersweet James Bliss' composition "Colorado Trail." A number of previous contributors reappear on **"Vol. 4."** The band Devil In A Woodpile is composed of Rick Sherry [harmonica tutor] – he sang "Salty Dong" on **"Vol. 1"** - Tim Ray and Joel Paterson, and they perform the Gus Cannon penned blues number "Stealin'." Rita Ruby [voice tutor] tackles the traditional "Angel Band," while Bill Brickey [guitar tutor] returns, on this occasion accompanied by Sue Demel [voice and songwriting tutor], with "Welcome Table."

As for 'new blood' on **"Vol. 4,"** Andrew Bird performs the 19th century anti-slavery spiritual/20th century 'civil rights' anthem "I Shall Not Be Moved," Minnesota bred, Nashville based Casey Driessen delivers an energetic vocal and fiddle reading of the travelling song "Lay Me Down A Pallet," while deep in a blues groove Steve Dawson [guitar, bass and songwriting tutor], supported vocally by Sue Demel, tackles a piano and guitar driven rendition of "This Train." "Pay Me My Money Down" features Freeze Dried, a seven piece Chicago based combo. The Astronomer aka Chicago based musician Charles Kim dispenses an atmospheric version of Paul Clayton's "Done Laid Around," and Typhanie Monique [voice and piano tutor] follows with the "Rivers Of Babylon." "12 Gates" is sung by Ed Holstein [an Old Town guitar tutor and younger musician brother of the late Fred Holstein [d. 2004]], while Chicago based trio

Sons of the Never Wrong [Sue Demel, Bruce Roper, and Deb Lader] close **“Vol. 4”** with the traditional “I’ll Fly Away.”

Congratulations to series producer John Abbey for a job well done, and to Paul Tyler for his consistently insightful liner notes. Whither do we go from here, musically, for the partnership of Bloodshot Records and Old Town School?

Folkwax Score 9 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 11/07.