



Various **“Cool As Folk”** Gott Discs

This 2CD collection gathers together thirty-six selections from the annual summer extravaganza that is the Cambridge Folk Festival – this year is the 43rd event. This isn't the first occasion on which the event has been memorialised on CD. BBC Music released single compilation CD's in 1998 and 2000. The former featured recordings from 1979 - 1997, while the latter focused on 1998 - 1999. Overlapping with the latter release, the Gott discs span the period 1998 to 2006 and include two previously released 1998 – 1999 tracks by Martin Carthy and The Poozies, plus newer renditions of “Hummingbird” and “Adieu, Adieu.”

While the word ‘folk’ appears in the event title, Cambridge has survived and prospered by booking contemporary as well as traditional acts of all sonic hues, while also reaching out and booking blues, country, bluegrass, even [former] punk and pop artists and more. In his liner notes, respected writer John Tobler hints that **“Cool As Folk”** may be start on an ongoing series.....here's how it sounds.

The energetic fiddles and supporting guitars of Irish band Altan launch Disc 1 with “John Doherty's Reels.” Some performers wait years, even decades, to get a call from Cambridge. “One More Moment,” the title track of country performer Mindy Smith's 2004 debut, was recorded at that year's event. New Orleans bred Dr. John [aka Mac Rebennack] has been performing his unique blend of blues music on world stages for four decades. Here, the pianist/vocalist gives the Duke Ellington/Irving Mills collaboration “It Don't Mean A Thing [If It Ain't Got That Swing]” a soulful workout. Local boy Boo Hewerdine [born in London but *raised* in Cambridge] has collaborated with Eddi Reader for over a decade and here, circa 2006, she performs his bright and breezy “Hummingbird.” Founded by John Spiers and Jon Boden, Bellowhead is a ten-piece English folk band that performs traditional songs and tunes. On Disc 1 the brass section blasts out the dance number “Hopkinson's Favourite.” Yorkshire's Kate Rusby revisits the wistful “Underneath The Stars,” while Guy Clark shoots a backward glance to his mid-seventies classic “L.A. Freeway.” Northern Ireland bred songbird Cara Dillon [Mrs Sam Lakeman], formerly of Equation, launched her solo career in 2000 and her ethereal rendition of “She's Like The Swallow” dates from 2002. Once upon a time Norfolk born Beth Orton collaborated with William Orbit and the Chemical Brothers on electronic recordings. In the new millennium she's become a ‘born again’ folkie with a distinctive vocal waver and she sings “Someone's Daughter.”

The octane fuelled mandolin and fiddle of Hayseed Dixie merge rock and bluegrass on “Fat Bottomed Girls” by Brain May [Queen]. The late Joe Strummer [d. 2002] played the festival in July that year accompanied by his ‘rock band with fiddle’ Mescaleros. From his days with The Clash, Joe reprises the politically slanted summer of 1978 minor hit “[White Man] In Hammersmith Palais.” Performing “Hello Starling [Snow Is Gone]” the title song from his Fall of 2003 breakthrough album, a ‘band-less’ Josh Ritter played the festival in 2004. John Prine & Iris DeMent duet on the formers amusing “In Spite Of Ourselves,” Essex boy Billy “Barking” Bragg supported by The Blokes performs the multi-rhythm that is his ‘mongrel’ history lesson “England, Half English,” while Martin Carthy's take of “The Devil And The Feathery Wife” previously appeared on the Y2K BBC release. The 2002 festival saw an appearance by Emily Saliers and Amy Ray aka Indigo Girls and with audience support they perform “Closer To Fine” the opening cut on their 1989 self-titled collection. Despite his Celtic surname Michael McGoldrick was born in Manchester, England and founded Celtic-rockers Toss the Feathers, then formed Flook, and has also performed with Capercaillie, Lunasa, the Afro-Celt Sound System and Kate Rusby. Here the Michael McGoldrick Band performs the jazz tinged instrumental “Watermans.” Scot Karine Polwart's debut solo album **“Faultlines”** won a trio of 2005 Radio 2 Folk Awards including Best Original Song for her bittersweet song of love and loss “The Sun's Comin' Over The Hill.” The latter title is the penultimate cut

on Disc 1, which closes with guitar whiz Martin Simpson's 2003 obviously 'Iraq conflict inspired' slide guitar reading of Dylan's then forty-year old "Masters Of War."

In terms of world geography Disc 2 reaches further a field [than North America and the United Kingdom] for contributions. "Habana del Este" is performed by the Juan de Marcos González led Afro Cuban All Stars and there's "When I Die" from West Australian trio The Waifs [Josh Cunningham, Donna and Vikki Simpson]. In the traditional vein there are tunes and songs from Canada's Duhks ["Death Came A Knockin'"], Eliza Carthy Band ["Adieu Adieu" as performed in 2003], Quebec based La Bottine Souriante ["Le Reel des Soucoupes Volantes" aka "The Flying Saucer Reel"], John Tams Band ["Hugh Stenson And Molly Green"] while two Scots - John McCusker accompanied by Phil Cunningham - reprise the wistful "Leaving Friday Harbour" a tune John first recorded as a member of The Battlefield Band. As for covers of contemporary cover songs, The Poozies then vocalist Kate Rusby tackles Mick Ryan's "The Widow" aka "The Widow's Promise" [this rendition previously appeared on the Y2K BBC release], Joan Baez remembers "Joe Hill" c/o the Phil Ochs' song, and western swing exponents Asleep At The Wheel cut loose on Bobby Troup's cross country "Route 66." As for further contributions from the first family of English folk, Norma Waterson and hubby Martin Carthy accompanied by accordion player Chris Parkinson tackle the Grateful Dead favourite "Black Muddy Water." In terms of writers who pen their own material Cambridge goes 'chart pop' with Jimmy Webb's "Wichita Lineman" [# 3 U.S., 1968] and The Proclaimers "I'm Gonna Be [500 Miles]" [# 1 U.K., 1988], while more rootsy fare comes from folk rebel Ani DiFranco ["Cradle And All"], acoustic blues exponent Eric Bibb ["Good Stuff"], the overrated Mary Gauthier ["I Drink"] and Disc 2 closes with the perennial Richard Thompson ["Tear Stained Letter"].

A full colour sixteen-page booklet forms part of the package and in addition to John Tobler's liner notes there are track-by-track notes on each contributor. Retailing at the bargain price of a single CD, this double disc collection is a folkin' 2007 must have.....

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 07/07.