

Folkways: A modern tribute to classic folk music

By HOWARD KAMAN

Folkways: A Vision Shared
Various Artists
CBS Records

Compilation albums don't usually work. They often lack coherence and focus, and end up a jumble of mixed music and ideas.

Folkways succeeds because it is rooted in musical heritage — every artist on the album has derived his or her style from either Leadbelly or Woody Guthrie.

Between these two men lies the entire history of American popular music. Guthrie, whose songs have become folklore, was an acute observer of social strife in the Depression. Leadbelly's music, on the other hand, created a sharp comparison between southern blacks and northern whites. Both Guthrie and Leadbelly recorded for Folkways records, and it is in their albums that one can hear the origins of today's rock with a social conscience.

So it is a natural progression to have these songs recorded by stars such as Bruce Springsteen, John Mellencamp, and U2. The artists hope to

raise enough money for the Smithsonian Institute to purchase the Folkways Records label, in order to preserve the important contribution to America's culture that Guthrie and Leadbelly represent.

Recently heard playing gospel on their *Rattle and Hum* version of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," Bono's band goes full-tilt in a rousing rendition of Woody

overrated *Born In The USA*, it is nice to hear him honour the origins of his social conscience. Played with only guitar and organ, this haunting ballad holds the listener as few songs can.

The remainder of the album's first side is a study in contrasts. From Bob Dylan's "Pretty Boy Floyd" and Arlo Guthrie's "East Texas Red," to an inspired duet featuring Little Richard and Fishbone on "Rock Island Line," side one of *Folkways* is a fantastic set.

Side two is weaker. It opens with standard country version of "Philadelphia Lawyer," and "Hobo's Lullaby," performed by Willie Nelson and Emmylou Harris respectively. Although these songs are soothing and pleasant, they don't have the bite or originality of those on side one.

This mood is broken, however, by one of the album's most riveting tracks. On "Bourgeois Blues," Taj Mahal does an interpretation that is the closest thing on the record to the original recording.

Also included is Brian Wilson's rendition of "Goodnight Irene" — played with harmonies reminiscent of many Beach Boys classics — and a second Springsteen track, Woody Guthrie's "Vigilante Man."

Rounding out the album is the song which has come to represent all

that Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly stood for: "This Land Is Your Land." Written as an angry response to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," the anthem is sung in traditional style, with Pete Seeger, and over 30 children — The Little Red School House Chorus — picking up the now legendary refrain, "This land is made for you and me."

The song has been repopularized lately by Bruce Springsteen, who has

performed it on tour as a cry of anguish. Yet on *Folkways* it is the joyous rendition we are familiar with. Why this discrepancy, on an album supposedly interested in expressing the songwriter's realistic portrait of America? One possible reason may be the other side of what these artists are trying to show: a vision shared.

On this record they show that vision admirably.

Record Review

Guthrie's "Jesus Christ." Alternating between serene verses — accompanied by The Edge's distinctive guitar — and booming "Hallelujah!" choruses, the song is undoubtedly one of the album's highlights.

John Mellencamp, the glam star-turned-roots rocker, does a nice turn on "Do-Re-Mi," a Guthrie song commenting on those made homeless by the Depression and who moved to California. Lisa Germano's fiddle and John Casella's accordion, which figured prominently on *The Lonesome Jubilee*, make star appearances on this piece.

"I Ain't Got No Home" could easily have been the inspiration for Springsteen's own *Nebraska* album back in 1982, when he first began to listen to folk. Four years after his

Bach to the basics

By LEO MAC DONALD

Chester: A Prelude and Fugue
Directed by Greg Neale
Tarragon Theatre

Chester: A Prelude and Fugue is a play about a young man who loves his father. This sounds simple enough. The twist is that his father, who has been dead for over 230 years, is Johann Sebastian Bach.

Theatre Review

When we meet Chester Bach (Lorne Perlmutter), he is seated in a white hospital gown answering questions from an unseen psychiatrist, Aaron Ellis (Greg Neale).

Dr. Ellis, whose omnipresent voice booms over a PA system, tries to convince Chester that it is impossible for him to be Bach's son. Chester has become an accomplished organist by committing most of Bach's works to memory.

So you can see that Chester's world of imagination is at odds with Dr. Ellis' notion of "normalcy." This division is apparent in the stage set up. While one portion of the stage is Chester's hospital room, the other half is a play area for Chester's ruminations.

Chester is most happy in his play area. He leaps around the stage, unable to contain the love and respect he has for his father and his music.

Since there are no other actors in the play, Perlmutter also plays Chester's father and his sister Anna Magdalene. The banter between Chester and his different voices makes for funny and poignant moments. At one point, Chester cradles his dying sister who — as it turns out — is a Barbie doll.

This might sound weird to some, but nonetheless some valid questions are raised about the treatment of the "insane." Should they be exploited to work in factories for less than minimum wage? Who gets to decide and draw the boundary between the "sane" and the "insane"? Furthermore, how would the "sane" like it if the "insane" started to analyze them?

Lorne Perlmutter puts on an energetic and convincing performance. If this means that Perlmutter plays a good lunatic, then perhaps he has learned that "You don't have to be crazy to work, but it helps."


Chester is held over till December 4, at the Tarragon Theatre.

CHRY-FM 105.5 FM TOP TEN

ARTIST	TITLE	LABEL
Dinosaur Jr.	Bug	SST
C Various Artists	Nettwerk Sound Sampler Volume 2	Nettwerk/Cap'I-EMI
Michelle Shocked	Short Sharp Shocked	Polygram
Fishbone	Truth & Soul	CBS
the Gipsy Kings	Allegría	Philips/Polygram
C The Romaniacs	World On Fire	Ethnic Fringe
Big Daddy Kane	Long Live the Kane	Cold Chillin'/WEA
Sonic Youth	Daydream Nation	Enigma
Laibach	Let It Be	Mute/Restless
Nick Cave	Tender Prey	Mute/Restless

Compiled by Music Director Edward Skira from programmers' playlists over a two week period ending November 21st, 1988. Programmers choose their own material. C denotes Canadian material. CHRY 105.5 FM, 258A Vanier College. Request Line 736-5656.

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ARTS CALENDAR

By SUSAN VANSTONE

GALLERIES

The Gallery of York University continues *Desire For Life: Pictures From Berlin*, curated by **Dr. Wolfgang Max Faust**, until Dec 18. The gallery is open Tues-Fri 10-4:30, Wed 10-8, and Sun 12-5 in N145 Ross. Free admission.

Calumet College presents paintings and drawings by 4th-year Fine Arts student **Leslie-Ann Smith** until Dec 5 in the college's common room. Mon-Fri 9-5. Admission is free.

Glendon Gallery continues *Works on Paper* by **Uno Hoffman** until Dec 4. Hours are Mon-Fri 10-4, Thurs 6-9, Sun 1-4. Free admission.

IDA Gallery presents an exhibition of paintings by **Dariusz Krzeminski, Pat McDermott, and Lyla Rye**, from Dec 5-9.

Winters Gallery presents *Site Specific Installations II* until Dec 2. There will be a reception Dec 1 at 4 p.m. in the gallery, at 123 Winters College.

Samuel J. Zacks Gallery continues the exhibit of paintings by **Elton Yerex** until Dec 8 in 109 Stong College.

LECTURES/SEMINARS

There will be a symposium Tues Dec 6 at 10:15 am to 12 pm at the McAskill Centre, 4th floor of the Administrative Studies Building, entitled *Government and the Arts: Is the Arm in the Arms Link Principle Getting Shorter?* Admission is free.

Atkinson College presents a reading by **Marlene Nourbese Philip**, a Toronto poet, writer, and lawyer, as part of the series *Canadian Women Writers*. The reading will take place Dec 6 at 8:30 pm, in the Fellows' Lounge, 004A Atkinson College.

DANCE

The York Dance Department presents a series of new works by upper level composition and repertory class in Burton Auditorium on Dec 7 at 12 noon and 7 pm, and Dec 8 at 2 pm. Tickets are \$6 for adults and \$3 for students and seniors.

FILM

DIAR screens films on South Africa: *No Middle Road to Freedom*, and *The Struggle From Within*, in association with the **York Chapter of Amnesty International**. Dec. 1 at 5 pm.

WINE AND CHEESE PARTIES

Existere will hold a wine and cheese launching for its second issue on Dec 1 at 5 pm in the Vanier Senior Common Room.

STUDENT, GO HOME. CHEAP. (Get your laundry done: it's that time of year again.)

Gray Coach



More info? Phone 979-3511.