

# Barley Bree: Blenders of the traditional and the modern

by Neil Erskine

Barley Bree: *No Man's Land*

There is a new band in the field of traditionally-based Irish music. *Barley Bree*, comprised of four men (Jim Sweeney, P. V. O'Donnel, Seamus O'Hagen, and Tom Sweeney), produces its music in a style somewhat reminiscent of the recent collaborations of Tommy Makem and Lyam Clancy, although lacking the strong, sophisticated instrumental support that was led by Archie Fisher and which was such an important part of that duo's recent successes. As is customary for recordings of such bands, *Barley Bree* is accompanied by a bassist for the album.

Their new album (possibly their first) is a release in Canada of music recorded last spring in Dublin. The content is a blending of instrumental versions of traditional Irish dance tunes and songs by recent composers of traditionally oriented music. There are twelve cuts in all, with twice as many songs as dance sets.

The four instrumentals are played at reasonable speeds on the album, a practice that is not always followed by some Canadian groups. O'Donnel plays his fiddle admirably, and the band has selected tunes that are less frequently heard on these shores than are some less worthy tunes. For those of you old enough to remember Don Messer, there is included splendid renditions of 'Margaree Waltz' and 'Clarinet Polka' both Maritime Favorites.

All songs are well written and well sung, with generally good arrangements. A Tommy Makem song opens the first side as the story of 'Count O'Hanlon' is recounted. It is proof again of Makem's talent as a song writer, and is a good romp for the band. Following that is a hard task for any song, but 'No Man's Land' by Eric Bogle manages to shine above all the rest of the album. It is a song on the subject of many Irish outpourings: the tragedy of war and its ultimate futility. The Irish have had a hard time in wars and this song says it all, for everyone. It is every bit as good as another

recent song from Australia, 'The Band Played Waltzing Matilda,' dealing with the same subject. I hope it becomes as popular.

'The Massacre of Glencoe,' another recent success, follows on excellent sets of jigs. The song relates the story of the night the Campbells, acting on orders from England, exterminated the house of MacDonald. A selection of reels separates this song from a better-than-original version of Stompin Tom Connors' delightful 'Song of the Irish Moss.'

The second side opens with a disappointing performance of the recent hit 'The Dutchman.' It seemed to lack the warmth, that makes the song so endearing to the modern ear. The second set of reels follows.

Unfortunately, the album does not say who sings the lead vocals on the next song, since for Ralph McTell's 'From Clare to Here,' someone has sung vocals every bit as good as the best traditional acapella singers, though in a different style. The song rises above its quite ordinary writing to become a great

piece of music. 'Margaree Waltz' provides an excellent bridge to the closing numbers: 'Fincairn Flax,' a real rouser that would be popular with the pub crowd and a beautiful composition in the traditional vein by Jim Sweeney 'Ar-

tigarven Mills Adieu.'

The music speaks for itself. Buy the album and listen to as fine a collection of performances of Irish music as has come by in a long time. The album appears on Boot International.



## Coast to coast

by Michael McCarthy

*Coast to Coast* is an entertaining comedy; nothing more, nothing less. The gags are mostly visual, and while generally they are not new or wildly innovative, they follow each other smoothly in a comprehensible script. It is a well-paced package that keeps you watching and keeps you laughing (or at least smiling benignly), except for a 15-minute token meaningful segment that fails utterly, but is quickly dropped and forgotten.

The plot is a variation of the old 'wild and crazy trucker gambolling on the highways' theme, with a gorgeous (but insane) girl-on-the-run thrown in for a different twist. The movie opens quickly with a hilarious psychotherapy session which winds up with the psychiatrist put in a straitjacket by his patient (Dyan Cannon) and coerced into getting her out of the mental hospital, under threat of her pressing the plunger on the hypodermic she stuck in his ass (and has left there).

The batty heroine flags down a trucker (Robert Blake, but keep reading, anyway) with her panties, and off we go. The trucker turns out to have a company wanting to repossess his truck on his tail. Unable to get rid of the girl (and believe me, he tries), he agrees to take her from Pennsylvania to California (coast-to-coast, get it? Clever title, eh?). The pair, plus a load of 25 head of cattle, are pursued cross-continent by a neanderthal, prepossessing repossession agent, and a duo of detectives trying to recapture the woman so her husband can get her out of the way. There is an ensuing melee of double-crossing deals, cars being smashed by trucks ('Don't they have

bigger roads for trucks?'), asks Cannon), and a raucous battle royale (in a series of livestock pens) in which Blake is punished for *Baretta* by being rammed in a delicate place by a charging bull (with predictable results). The film is capped with a scene in which a lawn-and-dinner party thrown by the woman's husband to impress high society and delectable girls is somewhat spoiled when his wife drives the truck and its load through the tables on the lawn, into the front room and over the art display, and through the dining table, whereupon she, the trucker, and the cattle *exeunt*.

Robert Blake shows an unsuspected gift for submerging his own personality in his role by playing an inoffensive character who doesn't say too much, ceding the major spotlight to a slimmed down and beautiful Dyan Cannon. She totally fills the gap with an impressive high-energy performance as the enticingly bizarre escapee. Her reactions and erraticisms come a mile-a-minute, always effecting a comedic situation and not allowing the audience to lose interest (except during the aforementioned draggy bit, presumably thrown in to keep Miss Cannon's desire for drama and character development satisfied). Several minor characters add to the laughs, such as the psychiatrist who utilizes a pay phone while he is in a straitjacket, and two strong-arm types who have a number of violent mishaps with bulls, boards, and back-rolling cars, and Blake is given a straight line of a magnitude most actors never come close to receiving (sorry, if you want to hear it, you'll have to see the movie) (. . .no, that wasn't the line, you idiot). The result is a gently funny 90 minutes of good escapist entertainment.

## Elvis is God

by Rob Cohn

Why is Elvis Costello one of the leading figures in new wave music? Why do people travel thousands of miles to see his concerts? Why is his music considered to be the cream of the crop of the new wavers? Why? Why? Why?

For the answers to these and many more questions be sure to pick up *Taking Liberties*, Elvis Costello's latest

North American release.

**WARNING:** this is not an all new Costello el pee. It is a compilation along the lines of the Buzzcocks' **Singles going steady**. It does include everything you've always wanted by Elvis Costello and the Attractions but couldn't get your hands on.

Notable among the inclusions on this compilation are **Sunday's Best**, from the

British release of **Armed Forces**; and [I don't want to go to] **Chelsea**, from the British release of **This Year's Model**.

**Taking Liberties** is a fast paced set of tunes demonstrating Costello's versatility. From the country sounds of **Stranger in the house** to the Motown sound of **Getting mighty crowded**, from the soothing tones of **Just a memory** to the hard rockin' **Clean Money**, Costello shows us why he is one of the premier performers in the world today.

For collectors this is the record to pick up for the songs that you have missed. **My Funny Valentine**, previously available only as an import single, and a new version of **Clowntown is over**, previously released only on the **High Fidelity Ep**, highlight the collectables.

There are also three previously unreleased tracks: **Clean Money** (with Dave Edmunds), **Black and white world**, and **Hoover Factory**. **Big Tears** with Mick Jones of the Clash is also included.

The music, the lyrics, and of course that voice are at their best on this lp which adds up to his best release since **My aim is true** in 1977.

Listening to his records combined with seeing him in concert has led me to the belief that Elvis Costello is God and that **Taking Liberties** is the latest chapter in the gospel according to Elvis. After all 50,000,000 Elvis fans can't be wrong!

