

NEW SKIRTLIFTERS RECORDING

WAIT FOR THE WAGON by the Skirtlifters. Clarke Buehling: five-string banjo, bones, tambourine and vocal. Jim Lansford: violin, mandolin. Kelly Muhollan: guitar. Allan Gibson: C trumpet. Doug Reid: banjo-mandolin, jawbone. Carol Widder: cello, piano.

Contents: Smokey Mokes (Holzmann), Eureka Clog Dance, Joe Murphy's Jig & Water Street Reel, Wait for the Wagon & Wagon Jig, Takes the Cake Walk Around, Grey Eagle, St. Louis Tickle, Under the Double Eagle (J. Wagner), Old Dan Tucker (Emmett), Fred Wilson's Clog, Maria Mazurka (Navarro), All Night Reel & Trouble Begins, Dill Pickles (Johnson).

This is another great recording (the third) from the Skirtlifters. This one features Clarke's brilliant banjo playing (classic and minstrel) on all songs. Clarke has a relaxed swing to his ragtime playing; all his playing is a wonderful combination of brilliance and good taste. There is a clever mix and choice of accompaniments. The subdued trumpet playing on three of the cuts is really great. Some of the selections are overdubbed, such as the St. Louis Tickle, where Clarke accompanies himself on banjo and cello banjo.

As usual, Clarke has dug deep to find all sorts of pieces from the early banjo repertoire and he provides very informative notes indicating which early methods the pieces come from, as well as giving references to other published versions. Most of the selections are classic fingerstyle banjo--the rest a blend of classic and minstrel. Unlike the earlier Skirtlifters tapes, which had a strong old-timey feel due to the strong fiddle playing, this is very much a banjo album. The only vocal is the title cut, Wait for the Wagon, and I can tell you that it makes for a great sing-along while driving in your car.

Wait for the Wagon is available as a cassette or CD. The cassette is \$10, the CD \$15. Clarke also sells the following cassettes: Clarke Buehling Out of His Gourd, Fire Alarm (Skirtlifters), Somewhere in Dixie (Skirtlifters), Buehling Banjos (classic banjo with Bill Morris), Banjo Gems (classic banjo with Clarke, Steve Moore and Hank Sapoznik). Clarke also has available, either as cassette or CD, the Rounder Minstrel Banjo Styles (with Bob Winans, Tony Trishka, Bob Carlin and Joe Ayers), and Mark Gardner's Songs of the Santa Fe Trail. All cassettes are \$10, all CDs \$15. Postage is \$3 if ordering one item or \$2 per item if ordering more than one. Clarke Buehling, PO Box 744, Fayetteville, AK 72702-0744. EJK

NEW CLASSICAL BANJO RECORDING

Reviewed by Geoff Freed

Bach On The Banjo John Bullard, five-string banjo, with John Patykula, classical guitar; Neil Gladd, mandolin; Paul Stokes, steel-string guitar; Catherine Hubert and Yen Yu, violins; Molly Ruze, viola; William Comita, cello; Michael Grant, harpsichord.

Contents: Handel: Hornpipe, Vivaldi: Concerto in D Major for lute, Concerto in G Major for two mandolins. Couperin: Mysterious Barricades. J.S. Bach: Prelude from Partita No. 3, Menuet in G Major, Menuet in G Minor, Musette in D Major, Fugue in G Minor. Memuet in G Major, Polonaise in G Minor, Marche in G Major. Martini: Gavotte. Telemann: Concerto in C Major Albany Records, Troy 255.

This is John Bullard's second recording of Baroque-era music transcribed for the banjo and, like his first disc (The Classical Banjo, Dargason DMCD-115), it is a great success. On this recording, Bullard plays a Gibson RB-250 banjo, using steel strings and fingerpicks, and performs with a variety of instrumental accompaniment, from strings and harpsichord to various combinations of mandolin, classical and steel-string guitar. There is one solo performance.

The danger in presenting a project like this is that some classical music fans might automatically write off the efforts of a banjoist to play such music. Additionally, some might not be able to let go of preconceived notions of the how the pieces "are supposed to sound." However, it is very much worthwhile to suspend expectations and listen to the recording as if the music were totally new and unfamiliar. You will not be disappointed.

The best ensemble work on the CD are those pieces where Bullard is joined by the strings and, most notably, with just the cello accompaniment. There are a only few passages where the banjo and cello play alone, but the effect is memorable. I would love to have heard more banjo-cello duets. The banjo-classical guitar duets are also excellent. John Patykula's accompaniment is strong but not overpowering and his contrapuntal work with Bullard is very clear and effective. Part of the fun in listening to or playing contrapuntal music is following the different voices as they weave through the piece. In both the string- and guitar-accompanied works, the voices are clear and well-balanced. The pieces with mandolin and/or steel-string guitar accompaniment were not as attractive to me, as the playing seemed more restrained. These arrangements were not always as convincing as others, and the players sometimes lacked the enthusiasm found elsewhere on the CD.

However, the very finest moment is when Bullard plays solo on his transcription of the Prelude from the Violin Partita #3 by J. S. Bach. At first, his playing feels a little confined by strict adherence to rhythm, but he quickly relaxes and, by the end, brings everything to a powerful conclusion. At times, Bullard's banjo takes on the majesty of an organ. This piece also shows off Bullard's clear articulation and exacting approach to the banjo. His first recording featured a healthy dose of solo work, and I was sorry there weren't more such pieces on this recording. His solo playing is the most flexible and emotive on the CD.

I would have liked more liner notes, especially with information on how these pieces came to be transcribed and arranged as they were. However, the lack of this information doesn't detract from the overall production. Bullard's banjo playing is superb, and I hope that in his next recording he branches out to other types of concert music. His technique is huge, and I would love to hear him take on some twentieth-century music. Bach on the Banjo is highly recommended!

If you can't find Bach on the Banjo in your local record store, you can purchase it directly from Albany Records by calling 1-800-752-1951, or from John Bullard by visiting his web site: <http://www.bullardintl.com>