

A Ragtime Episode

Clarke Buehling and the Skirtlifters
SL 2004



Clarke Buehling: five-string banjo, piccolo banjo, cello banjo, percussion; Tom Verdot: violin, second banjo; Thom Howard: guitar, vocal; Kent Beyette: end man; Carol Widder: cello; John Behling: guitar

Fire Bell Gallop/Creole Belles/Bowery Buck/Tickle Toes/The Old Man's Dream/The Entertainer/Darktown Dandies/Palladium Rag/In a Dixie Dell/Blaze Away!/A Ragtime Episode/Carolina Tar Heel/Rag-Time Dance/Georgia Grind/Levee Pastime/Maple Leaf Rag/Sweet Corn/Hot Corn

Let me start off by telling you how much I enjoyed this "Ragtime Episode" by Clark Buehling and his gang. The Skirtlifters' music skillfully and accurately represents ragtime from the 1880s through the early 1900s, when the banjo was king. By the turn-of-the-century, the banjo had found its way into many types of music, and the instrument was played by young and old, black and white, male and female, educated scholarly types as well as workers and farmers. This was a wonderful time for both the banjo and its development, and banjo music of that time varied from barn-based hoedowns to ivy league glee club material. The fiddle in this type of music and in this recording might be better described as violin playing, as it is sweeter

and more refined than what you tend to hear in rural music. In fact, in the liner notes, the instrument is listed as "violin" as opposed to the more often seen "fiddle" designation. How do I best tell you what type of music to expect? Well, I imagine that by telling you that Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" is here, most of you should get the idea. That cut also provides some of the cleanest, or better yet, simplest arrangements on the album, allowing you to hear the skill of the musicians and the clarity of the recording.

High spots: I love the feel you get from the cello undertoning the rhythm line in "The Old Man's Dream." The resulting sound gives the impression of a piano, but I would rate the cello an even better sound. The cello plays so well off of the guitar that I don't think you could ever get quite the expression that pervades this piece without it. Ah, and a banjo march! Not often heard. "Blaze Away!" shows off the joys of "arpeggiated," or as the liner notes call it, "guitar style" banjo playing (the style of banjo playing heard throughout this CD)—a bright and glorious sound. This is followed by "A Ragtime Episode" which presents a slightly darker image. With only the slightest imagination, I can see the ghosts sneaking up the steps to an old

cartoon house. The dancing bones are knocking on your door to let 'em in! Finally, the package is well done: the cover design is clean and pleasant, and the photos are in keeping with the style of the time period represented. All of the information on instrumentation and recording is there.

I am left with only one small nagging question. Is it "old-time" in the sense this community has come to define the term? There is no doubt that the music contained here is very much an ingredient of the brand of old-time music most of us now play. I'll leave you to determine that for yourselves as you enjoy this wonderful music of an older time. On *A Ragtime Episode*, you will hear a different but grand "old-time:" historic music, historically played. I highly recommend this CD.

DAN LEVENSON

To order: www.theskirtlifters.com; P.O. Box 744, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72702.

Rain and Snow

Elizabeth LaPrelle

Old 97 Wrecords
CD 004



Elizabeth LaPrelle: vocals; Jon Newlin: fiddle; Amy Davis: banjo; Jim Lloyd: guitar; Sandy LaPrelle: backup vocals

Gypsen Davey/Black is the Color/Come All You Fair and Tender Ladies/My Dearest Dear/Darlin' Corey/Over the River Charlie/Squirrel/Wagoner's Lad/Come All You Virginia Girls/West Virginia Mine Disaster/Fly Around My Blue-Eyed Gal/Devil's Nine Questions/Young Emily/Pretty Saro/Storms Are on the Ocean/Whole Heap of Little Horses/Rain and Snow

Rain and Snow is the debut recording of Elizabeth LaPrelle from Rural Retreat, Virginia. Elizabeth, 17, is traditional ballad singer to keep your eye on. She has been winning prizes in both youth and adult categories of the folksong contests at local fiddlers conventions from an early age, and was only 11 in 1999 when she won second place in the Junior Folk Song competition at the Mt. Airy Fiddlers' Convention. There, West Virginia singer Ginny Hawker heard her and was so impressed she recommended the girl for a scholarship at Vocal Week at Augusta Heritage Center in West Virginia. More recently Elizabeth received a Henry Reed Fund Award for Folk Artists from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, to continue her study of traditional songs.

A significant part of Elizabeth's background in traditional singing is her association with

members of her family and the Hushpuppies band. Fiddler Jon Newlin and banjo player Amy Davis of that band are Elizabeth's uncle and aunt. The couple, along with Sandy LaPrelle, her mother, and Jim Lloyd, an old friend, serve as her band on this CD. Together, these folks do a tasteful job supporting Elizabeth without distracting the listener from the main course—her powerful singing. With her strong, distinctive voice, her archaic old-time ballad singing style, and strong traditional string-band backup, Elizabeth LaPrelle's *Rain and Snow* is a must-have CD.

Elizabeth's repertoire comes from wide-ranging sources, from the well known to the obscure—both from recordings and living singers. According to the liner notes, Elizabeth's song sources, except for Jean Ritchie's song "West Virginia Mine Disaster," are traditional, learned either from family and friends or from recordings. Though she learned a great many songs from recordings, she caught others in person from well-known ballad singers such as Sheila Kay Adams, whom she met at the Augusta Vocal Week, and others from her own family. "Black is the Color," "My Dearest Dear," and "Young Emily" come from Sheila Kay Adams, and "Squirrel" comes from Elizabeth's mother, Sandy LaPrelle, who sang it to her when she was a baby. Jean Ritchie is represented several times in Elizabeth's songbag with "Over the River Charlie," "Pretty Saro," and "West Virginia Mine Disaster." Other songs are from her general area of Virginia and neighboring Kentucky. "Wagoner's Lad" is from Kentucky singer and banjo player Buell Kazee, "Fly Around My Blue-Eyed Gal" comes from Hobart Smith, and "Devil's Nine Questions" and "Whole Heap of Little Horses" are from Smith's sister Texas Gladden. "Storms Are on the Ocean" is from the famous Carter Family recording. "Rain and Snow" is from the great ballad singer Betsy Rutherford who lived near Independence, Virginia. "Gypsen Davey" is from Custer Larue, with additional material from Cecil Sharp's English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians. Incidentally, if you want the lyrics to all of the songs, so you can sing them yourself, they are posted at www.old97wrecords.com/elizabeth-laprelle/index.htm.

Though you might be familiar with these songs and their sources, you will still find this CD significant because of the singer's extraordinary style and presence. All of Elizabeth's performances on this CD are strong and engaging. If there is a rubric covering excellence in mountain-style ballad singing, Elizabeth LaPrelle would surely score very highly for ornamentation, phrasing, choice of material, musicality, good taste, and nuance. I look forward to her future work and wish her the best of luck in what I hope will be a long career in traditional singing.

PAT WALKER

To order: Elizabeth LaPrelle, 284 White Rock Furnace Road, Rural Retreat, VA 24368; 276-686-5878; elizabethlaprelle@hotmail.com