

Songs remain the same

Local musicians give new life to popular Newfoundland tunes

In an era where music can be short-lived, musicians often look to history for inspiration.

This is especially the case with the new CD *Our Songs: Favourite Songs of Newfoundland and Labrador*, a collection by Avondale Music of classic Newfoundland songs performed by modern Newfoundland artists.

The *Our Songs* CD includes such notables as Chris Andrews and Mark Hiscock of Shanneyganock, Con O'Brien of the Irish Descendants, Larry Foley of The Punters, Fred Jorgensen of The Navigators, Tommy Nemeč and Erin Best and Sandy Morris of RASA.

Showcasing timeless songs that have been part of the Newfoundland musical lexicon for years, these re-recordings are done with minimum instrumentation and concentrate on the power of the vocals.

Lyle Drake is the head of Avondale Music and his approach to putting the disc together was quite simple.

"I am a lover of the pure renditions of songs as our fathers and forefathers sang and performed, and I felt that it was time to do a new, yet old-style rendition of these songs," says Drake.

So how does one decide which songs to put on such a compilation?

Drake says he had help in his decision making.

"This was a joint effort where Chris Andrews (who produced the CD), Steve Hussey (of Fred's Records in St. John's) and myself compiled a list of songs separately, and then consolidated the list. It was surprising how many of the songs were on each list.

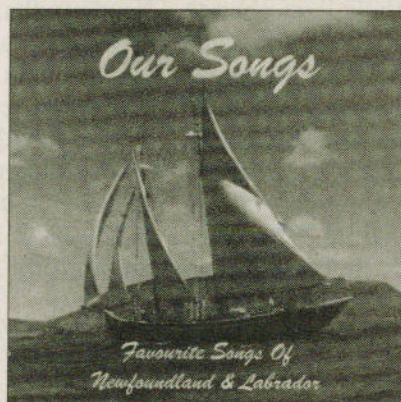
"From this, Chris and I decided on the songs that would be recorded



RASA perform two tunes on the *Our Songs* compilation CD.

ALBUM PROBE

BY KEVIN KELLY



for the CD," says Drake.

Our Songs does an excellent job of recreating our roots, however, one of the downfalls of the disc is that no less than seven of the 13 tunes feature either Chris Andrews or Mark Hiscock of Shanneyganock. Not that the two aren't talented, but perhaps future compilations could feature a wider diversity of artists. It would have been interesting to hear

a Patrick Moran (who does play on the compilation), a Fergus O'Byrne or even younger Newfoundland singers such as a Mallory Johnson have their take on a classic Newfoundland tune.

"What made it special was to be there during parts of the actual recording and seeing new life being breathed into these songs. Each of the artists strived to bring a special something and I think they all did a magnificent job," says Drake.

Let's look at some of the highlights of the disc.

The first revelation comes on track two and RASA's version of the Don Fulford (not Cory Fulford as claimed in the liner notes) song, *The northern lights of Labrador*. Best's voice is surprisingly suited to this Corey & Trina classic as her soothing vocals coupled with Morris's gentle guitar make this a worthy tribute.

"I was certainly honoured to record it," Best says.

"I tried to stick close to their

arrangement. I had a hard time finding a recording of it though. I ended up getting a vinyl copy at a used record store at the very last moment. I'm happy I could help pass down such a beautiful song."

Andrews is next, with a stirring version of *The Cliffs of Bacallieu*. Andrews' strength at the slow ballad is a revelation to those of us used to those fast-paced tunes from his band, Shanneyganock. He also contributes *The Star of Logy Bay* and *Let me fish off Cape St. Mary's* on the CD.

Larry Foley has his take on *Signal hill*, and Foley admits the John White tune is a special one.

"The choice of *Signal hill* for me was a complete love for the song and the chance on a very personal level to do an homage to the great John White," Foley admits.

"I'm sure he would be proud of the fact that even many years since his passing, a younger generation still has a passion for these Newfoundland folk songs. John White has been a part of my musical experience for as long as I can remember, and I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to cover this song," the Punters frontman says.

Hiscock returns with John Cameron's *Tribute to Newfoundland*, and his accordion is prominent throughout the song. But don't discount Hiscock's voice, which is perfect for singing traditional tunes.

Con O'Brien of The Irish Descendants offers his take on Eddie Coffey's *My sweet forget me not* with somewhat mixed results.



Chris Andrews produced the *Our Songs* compilation.

Considering the next tune on the disc was Andrews' version of *Let me fish off Cape St. Mary's*, a song The Irish Descendants made their own a few years back, maybe the tunes could have been reversed here.

Freddy Jorgensen, known for his work with Fine Crowd and The Navigators, has his version of *Hard times*. Jorgensen's not-so-subtle Irish brogue makes this tune a keeper.

However, the CD saves the best for last. *We'll rant and we'll roar*, probably one of the most patriotic Newfoundland songs, features an all-star cast, including Great Big Sea's Alan Doyle. Drake was especially happy to get Doyle on the compilation, even if it was in a small way.

"I was especially thrilled when Alan Doyle gladly lent his voice to one of the verses. I believe we have truly created a gem."

Drake is right on that one. These top local talents including Andrews, Nemec, Hiscock, Mike Hanrahan, O'Brien, Doyle, Jorgensen and Foley each give their take on a verse.

Foley says the recording experience was wonderful.

"It's a great song and a group of voices that care about maintaining this style of singing," Foley says.

Overall, *Our Songs: Favourite Songs of Newfoundland and Labrador* is an excellent CD. However, if there was a little more variety of artists chosen to be showcased, this compilation would have the makings of a must-have serie for generations to come. ▲

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Larry Foley covers the late John White's Newfoundland classic, *Signal Hill*.