



Americana Concert – Traditional Fiddle & Banjo Tunes from the Appalachians

Alan Jabbour: fiddle; Stephen Wade: banjo, guitar

Stony Point / Shoes and Stockings / Santy Anna's Retreat / Bonaparte's Retreat / Washington's March / Paddy on the Turnpike / Isom Waltz / Schottische / Ragged Bill / Shooting Creek / Cabin Creek / Falls of Richmond / Betty Likens / Liza Jane, Liza Jane / Red Fox, Leather Britches

This is a live recording of Alan Jabbour and Stephen Wade, made at the Library of Congress in May 1998. The 29 tracks consist of 15 music tracks and 14 thoughts, or introductions, on each tune. These thoughts are, for me, just as valuable as the music, giving an insight into the culture and people of those who formed the music. Those who listened, or got to play with Alan Jabbour when he visited Gainsborough in 2005, will remember his warm and friendly manner, and his obvious love and dedication to old-time music. This comes over wonderfully well on this CD, and I felt that he was talking to me, as well as the seated audience. I think it was Mike Seeger who remarked that old-time musicians never said look at me, but sat back and shared their music with their friends. This record epitomises that attitude.

Stony Point sets the mood of the CD – a rousing three part tune where fiddle and banjo crackle along. Both musicians listen to each other, taking the lead or playing back-up as required. *Shoes and Stockings*, although a simple tune used by many as a starter tune, is a prime example. Stephen Wade's drop thumb frailing way up the neck is a real joy. Throughout the record I got the feeling that they were looking at each other and saying, "OK, your lead, see what you can do with this". *Bonaparte's Retreat*, in the usual D tuning learned from Henry Reed, is an outstanding track, as are the amusing thoughts on the lessons of history. *Washington's March* is played as a solo piece. Jabbour explains that many old-time fiddlers always had tunes that they felt were better unaccompanied. *Paddy on the Turnpike* is preceded by Jabbour's thoughts on why fiddlers re-tune, and is worth remembering if (like

me) you've been asked about re-tuning by an orchestral violinist. *Isom Waltz* has been a favourite of mine since hearing it played by the Hollow Rock String Band. This is accompanied on guitar by Stephen Wade and is played in D, with the second section in G, a more gentle sound than the banjo reflecting an older European tradition. Unmistakably influenced by the Scottish tradition (despite the German spelling) is *Schottische*, learned from Henry Reed who often said "a good tune is a good tune – wherever it comes from". Jabbour talks about the influence and interchange with black musicians and the influence of ragtime, before playing *Ragged Bill*. Like a lot of ragtime-influenced tunes it is in the key of C, although I have no idea why this should be so, and no explanation is offered, which is a pity, as I've been asked this question at gigs, but never had an answer. *Shooting Creek* and *Cabin Creek* keep up the high standard of playing, preceded by Jabbour's interesting reflections on creeks and rivers as a means of communication between early American settlements, hence their appearance in so many tune titles. He also notes the widespread habit of Appalachian fiddlers playing the high part of a tune as the first section, with the lower part second, unlike most of the British tradition. Alan Jabbour has noted this in one of his many essays, published on the web. Tradition and the misleading lessons of history make an amusing introduction to *Falls of Richmond*, which is the second of his solo fiddle pieces. *Betty Likens* is another deceptively simple tune raised up above its humble reputation. Two versions of *Liza Jane* appear and the thoughts on the tunes note the use of syncopation and the influence of native American music. The disc ends with *Red Fox* and *Leather Britches*. The britches are actually string beans hung up to dry and not, as I thought, items of clothing.

All of these tunes will have been played by old-time friends, but they take on a new lease of life here. The two musicians play each tune as if it was a suite of movements. Subtle changes in dynamics, lyrical when needed, then a hard driving sound, which is a joy to listen to. I really envy the people who got to experience this concert. The accompanying 12 page booklet does not list the titles, but is a summary of Alan Jabbour's feeling on old-time music and fiddlers, notably Henry Reed. This, by itself, is worthy of study. If you're a fiddle or banjo player and only buy one CD per year, then get this one!

Colin Tipping

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