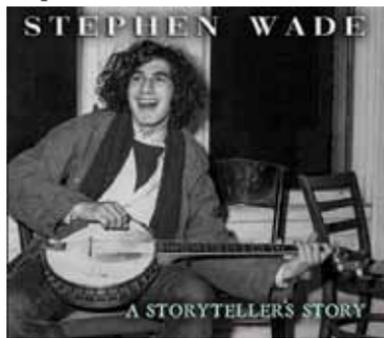


Stephen Wade



A Storyteller's Story (Patuxent CD 333)

Stephen Wade: vocal, banjo, guitar; Zan McLeod: guitar, washboard; Alex Lacquement: bass; Joel Bailes: piano; Tom Paley: fiddle; Marvin Reitz: jug; Doc Hopkins: vocal, guitar; Brennen Ernst: pump organ; Tom Mindte: mandolin

Banjo Serenade / Market Square / Another Man Done Gone / Peachbottom Creek / John Henry / The Far-Famed Fairy Tale of Fenella / Station Will Be Changed After a While / Leather Britches with Tom Paley / Railroad Blues / Rhode Island Reel / East Virginia / Hobart Smith on Music / Cumberland Gap / Voice of America Broadcast with Doc Hopkins / Snow Camp / Old Paint / How Ruby Played / Up Jumped the Devil / Tales and Yarns / Wolves Howling / Ray Nordstrand's Introduction at Orchestra Hall / Chicago

Born in 1953, Stephen Wade grew up in Chicago where he was lucky to encounter various musicians from southern states and the Appalachians. He started out learning guitar but picked up the banjo in the 1970s under the tutelage of Fleming Brown at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, and Doc Hopkins, a renowned Kentucky-born performer on the WLS National Barn Dance radio show. These gentlemen inspired his growing interest in the banjo, traditional American music and folklore which has been central to his scholastic and creative activities ever since. On May 15th, 1979, in the smallest of the three spaces at Chicago's Body Politic Theatre, Stephen Wade debuted his one man show entitled *Banjo Dancing, or the 48th Annual Squitters Mountain Song, Dance, Folklore Convention & Banjo Contest and How I Lost*. The show ran for 13 months including an invitation to play at the White House. It later played a short run in New York before transferring to Washington DC where it ran for 10 years and became one of the longest-running off-Broadway shows in the US at that time.

A Storyteller's Story is a collection of 20 items which Wade has assembled to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Banjo Dancing* and to share some of the musical, narrative and historical influences and experiences of growing up in Chicago that inspired the artist and the birth of that show. The CD comes with an informative 11,000 word, 44 page booklet. Pages 3 to 18 comprise an essay covering the cultural heritage of the arts around Chicago which influenced the artist that Wade was to become. Pages 19 onwards contain extensive notes on each of the 20 tracks with a few photographs of

selected persons and historical illustrations. One performance medium for which Wade is known is the combination of the spoken word over a musical accompaniment. There are 6 such tracks in this collection. *The Far-Famed Fairy Tale of Fenella* is a piece that Wade originally found in book in an antique shop in Nottingham whilst touring the UK and is quite unusual as most of the text is based on words using one particular syllable/sound. In *Tales and Yarns* Wade shares with us several items of doggerel, tall tales and such that he found among the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. *Chicago* is Wade's own often witty observations and recollections about growing up in Chicago. Among the remaining 14 tracks are six songs, six instrumentals, one radio interview (with Doc Hopkins) and a recording of Ray Nordstrand's introduction of the Banjo Dancing show at Orchestra Hall January 16th, 1987. The songs and tunes cover a variety of styles including old-time, bluegrass, spiritual and blues with well-chosen accompaniments throughout and Wade demonstrating his superb facility with both frailed and finger picked banjo and guitar.

My favourite tracks (in no particular order contestants) are the old-time fiddle tune *Wolves Howling* (which has been suggested to share similarities with the Irish tune *The Silver Spear*), the Tony Ellis tune *Snow Camp*, the cowboy song *Old Paint*, and of course *The Far-Famed Fairy Tale of Fenella*. This is an impressive package all round with a well put together album and superbly informative accompanying booklet. It demonstrates very well the consummate entertainer that Wade has become as well as giving glimpses into the cultural heritage that he has experienced first hand and sought out through his scholastic approach in order to make them available to his audience. And on top of all that, this album is just plain pleasant to listen to and I recommend it highly. For those looking for further reading the December 2019 edition of the Banjo Newsletter has an interesting interview with Stephen Wade speaking to Greg Cahill about the album.

Martin Kennard