The November Workshops
Countdown to Gainsborough
Dancing Around Revived
**Vic Furtado**

Vic Furtado: banjo; Nate Leath: fiddle; Aila Wildman: fiddle, vocals; Andrew Vogt;fiddle;Danny Kniceley: guitar; vocals ; Eli Wildman: mandolin, tenor guitar; Sean Newman: bass, vocals.

*Rattletrap / Candy Girl / Rasty / Dance All Night With A Bottle In Your Hand / Elzic's Farewell / Branches And Vines / Grub Springs / Denver Belle / Clifftop Belle / If I Should Wander Back Tonight / The Indian Song / Dellorto Island / Sugar Hill / Heart Of Gold / The Bear Chase / Tirth*

This is Vic Furtado's third album, his first being issued when he was 13 years of age. Now only 19 he displays a prodigious technical talent allied with great musicality. Stephen Wade provides the sleeve notes regarding his recollections and writes that while he is conversant with the Round Peak masters, he does not copy them, but draws his influences from their admirers and YouTube performances that catch his interest. He approaches the music, as Wade notes, not as "a preservationist... but as a participant". His preferred instrument is an open-back twelve inch pot, which gives a deeper tone, but also a bell-like quality within the same piece.

The first few bars of Rattletrap promise something special. A fast paced traditional tune played with a really tight ensemble where no one dominates, this swings along – a masterful introduction. *Cindy Girl* has a haunting feel, with a dialogue between banjo and fiddle in call and response mode. The band then breaks out into a full-blown ensemble with Vic's drop thumb frailing to the fore. Vic Furtado's own composition *Rasty* is a reflective piece, leaving the usual string band sound and where the banjo takes the lead, well supported by guitar and string bass. *Dance All Night With A Bottle In Your Hand* has a strong mandolin, and bass, which subtly drift the tune into new territory. *Branches And Vines* is another of Vic's compositions which runs into 'newgrass' territory incorporating smooth Nashville and western swing sounds with rippling harmonic runs and a gentle fade-out. It's more thoughtful than "get up and go" dance tunes, and beautifully played. *Grub Springs* is back on familiar ground and the quiet start erupts into an exciting jumpy piece with bluesy licks and tightly controlled ensemble playing. The first section of the traditional Denver Belle is very similar to "Liberty", and contains some excellent mandolin from Eili Wildman duetting with one of the fiddles. Track nine, Clifftop Belle, is another of Victor's compositions and is a reflective solo piece using the deeper guitar of the twelve inch pot to good effect, and exploiting the bell-like sound you can get in the upper register with the larger pot. The second song on the CD, If I Should Wander Back Tonight is pure commercial country, with its commercial vocal harmonies and instrumental breaks. A style sometimes looked down on by the purist – but it requires some effort to get the vocal harmonies right!

The Indian Song is about as far removed from the last number as you can get, with its Arabic references and bent strings evoking the Arabic lute. Dellorto Island is a further move from old-time, and starts with a quiet reflective ramble around the fingerboard evoking a feeling of isolation. Just when you thought they'd abandoned the old tune, the band bursts back with Sugar Hill. The playing is amazing, prompting the thought, I know what he's doing, but how do his fingers and brain keep up? There is no frantic rush as the band retain their usual smooth assured style. The second vocal track, Heart Of Gold, sung by Aila Wildman, is a moody piece with subdued banjo and fiddle passages with echoes of Bela Fleck and Stephane Grappelli. Victor's next composition The Bear Chase reminds me of the Hot Club Of France – composition and Stephane Grappelli. Victor's next piece with subdued banjo and fiddle begins with a strumming pattern going back to the days of Uncle Dave Macon, and develops into a fingerboard-wide tuneful piece with some neat abrupt stops in the bars. This is another track where he displays the range of his technical mastery, accompanied only by Sean Newman's thumb frailing. This final track represents the gradual move from old-time to more exotic influences, still using the earthy tradition, but in a similar vein.

**Raf Stefanini and David Bragger**

_Holy Smoke! (Tikki Parlour Recordings)_

Raf Stefanini – fiddle; David Bragger: banjo

**Forty Weight of Gingerbread** / _Shipping Port/Nitches Over The Hill/Merrivether/ Billy In The Lowground / Toss The Feathers / Back Sourt / Chinquapin / Down At The Mouth Of Old Stinson / Hamilton's Special Breakdown / Smooth Hole / The Wise Maid/ Pretty Little Girl With A Blue Dress On / Sweet Milk And Peaches / Poundache And Sugar/ Back Step Cindy / Irish Boy*

This CD is what happens when you look to the future recordings. There are tunes which originate with the more well known masters of old-time: Clyde Davenport's _Merrivether_, Tommy Jarrell's _Back Step Cindy_ and John Morgan Salyer's _Irish Boy_. However there are also tunes which originate with both Raf and David, sharing Raf's extensive knowledge of old-time music, bringing to the fore more unusual fiddler's and their versions of tunes, such as _Esker Hutchins' version of Billy in the Lowground_ which is a reworking of a traditional tune which it's believed was done as a joke on the other musicians who were trying to follow him. There's also Delbert Hughes' _version of Chinquapin_ and Lon Jordan's Buck Sourt, amongst many others. All of them are well worth a listen. The only 'new to old-time' tune on here is _The Wise Maid_, a traditional Irish reel which Raf heard the Irish band Planxty play in the late 1970s. Raf has reworked this into an old-time tune which is presented here, as David notes, following "a tradition that goes back a few hundred years."

Overall this is an eclectic and interesting CD which clearly wants the listening audience to share in the joy that this music has brought to Raf Stefanini and David Bragger by becoming part of the musical heritage of these tunes. Hear them, play them, pass them on.

Kat Craddock

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