

BUA
An Spealadóir
Mad River MRCD 1016 (2008)

Reading through the extensive source notes in the booklet that accompanies this simply produced and cheerfully melodic CD, you might regard Bua as a collection of scholarly Irish folklorists. The five musicians from the American Midwest and Ireland who comprise this talented Chicago-based quintet have certainly done their historical homework. But they can also raise the rafters with their playing, charm with their singing, and delight with their contemporary energy.

Bua — the name means “innate gift” in Irish Gaelic — generates a varied, layered mix through the efforts of multi-instrumentalists Jackie Moran on bodhrán and tenor banjo, Chris Bain on fiddle and bouzouki, Seán Gavin on uilleann pipes and flute, Brian Ó hAirt on concertina and tin whistle, and Brian Miller on guitar and flute. Ó hAirt, clear-voiced tenor and a devotee of the sean-nós singing style, capably handles lead vocals.

The tune sets that predominate on *An Spealadóir* are a bright and lively collection of jigs and reels that feature an interwoven combination of fiddle, flute, pipes, and concertina as lead instruments, all crisply backed by Miller’s steady guitar and Moran’s percussion. The songs, mostly in Gaelic, are all traditional. The disc’s mellow

title song, which translates as “The Harvest,” is a touching story of an ailing farmer who gets help from his neighbors, featuring the harmonies of Deirdre Scanlon, while a rapid-fire medley of Scottish mouth music will leave you wondering just how many syllables per second Ó hAirt can sing. There are a few quieter moments on this disc, but on the whole, Bua evokes the good times that Irish traditional music so often celebrates.

— Tom Nelligan (Waltham, MA)

IVO PAPASOV
Dance of the Falcon
World Village 450004 (2008)

After the swing stylings of big-band leaders Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman died away decades ago, the sound of the clarinet has largely disappeared from popular music. Don Byron has been keeping klezmer clarinet in the public eye, and Ivo Papasov has worked the same magic for an even more obscure style — Bulgarian wedding music.

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Papasov emerged as the king of the Bulgarian wedding music style known as *stambolovo*. He helped modernize the style by adding heavy doses of jazz and electronic keyboards to the bands.

On *Dance of the Falcon*, Papasov presents updated versions of his favorite traditional tunes. He kicks things off with a tour de force, the title track, which amounts to an eight-minute, frenetic, nonstop clarinet solo set to a relentless beat. The third track’s a cover of “Pink Panther,” an improvisation that Papasov spontaneously unspooled for the first time at a 1981 wedding. Here, it kicks off faster than what we’re used to, propelled by some kuh-razy bongos before a percussive piano backs Papasov’s solo, and he takes it to territories the panther never tread before, bringing it home briefly toward the end. The mood changes on

“Sunrise,” which tells the story of a bridegroom who is killed on his wedding night and his bride’s long night of waiting for him in vain. The sound here is lush and full of strings and keyboards. The next, “Hubava si Moya Goro (Beautiful Forest),” is even dreamier.

Papasov’s music today is based on tradition, on the dance rhythms of the farming areas of southern Bulgaria, but the resultant compositions now exist in a realm somewhere between avant-garde jazz and folk music. As Frank Zappa once said, “Ivo’s wedding music, played first thing in the morning, provides thorough and long-lasting attitude adjustment for the busy executive.”

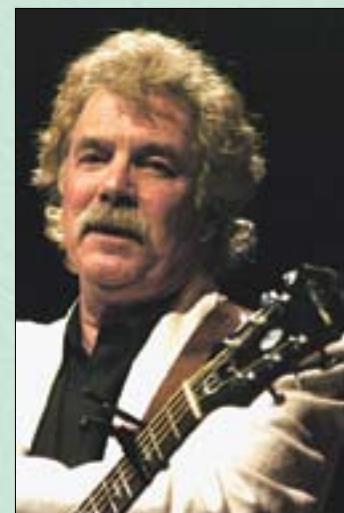
— Jeffery R. Lindholm (Montpelier, VT)

TOM RUSH
What I Know
Applesseed APR CD 1115 (2009)

It’s hard to believe, but this is the first full-length studio album of new material from Tom Rush in nearly 35 years; hard to believe because the droll, warm-voiced veteran of the 1960s folk revival has spent many of those years performing around the country and releasing occasional live discs. Now living back in his native New Hampshire after many years out west, Rush finally returned to the studio along with veteran producer Jim Rooney (an old friend from the Club 47 days) and a crew of Nashville session musicians and guests, creating this disc of new material that will remind his many old fans what a fine, expressive singer he still is.

There’s nothing revolutionary on *What I Know*, definitely no deep-seated songwriter angst, just a collection of songs both serious and humorous that reflect a mature and often wistful view of life from a man who looks back but also enjoys the present. “River Song,” a staple of Rush’s concerts in recent years, is a melodic summary of a lifetime of wandering in three verses linked by the metaphor of a river that flows like life itself. “Hot Tonight” and the disc’s title track are lighthearted love songs, the former a country blues featuring harmonies from Bonnie Bramlett, the latter a lighthearted but wise tribute to his wife, with a swing feel.

Rush has always been known for his good taste in selecting cover songs, a skill that continues here. There’s



Gwendolyn Stewart

Tom Rush -
wandering west in gray blue jeans

a version of Eliza Gilkyson’s “Fall Into the Night” that captures the song’s steamy longing (“baby take your blue jeans off and lay your body down”) with a quiet intensity that would be the envy of most younger singers, while the reflective “What an Old Lover Knows” (by Melanie R. Dyer and Kim Beard Day) salutes familiarity as a cure to loneliness. The disc closes with a wonderfully mellow version of the 1970s Dobie Gray hit “Drift Away” that’s accompanied by chiming guitar harmonics.

Rooney’s production brings a comfortable and casual feel to the music, mixing touches of country, acoustic pop, and blues in the ensemble arrangements and occasionally letting Rush’s voice and guitar stand alone. While Rush may have been away from the studio for far too long, *What I Know* shows that he’s lost none of his touch.

— Tom Nelligan (Waltham, MA)

JO FREYA
Female Smuggler
No Masters NMCD29 (2008)

Jo Freya has had a long and varied career since joining the Old Swan Band at the age of 13. She’s been a member of Blowzabella, Token Women, Scarp, and the European band Maalstroon, as well as duo projects with her sister Fi Fraser, Pete Morton, and, most recently, Kathryn Locke. Freya was also the guiding force behind the recording project *Lal*, which celebrated the songs and music of Lal Waterson.

Female Smuggler, her first solo recording, is a collection of traditional and original songs, the majority of which are presented



Bua - gets help with their homework