

## RECORD REVIEWS

**Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory: Historic Field Recordings of Forty-One Traditional Tunes.** Edited, with commentary, by R. P. Christeson.

Forty-one selections on two discs, fiddle instrumentals with string band accompaniment. Jacket notes by R. P. Christeson.

University of Missouri Press. 107 Swallow Hall, Columbia, Missouri 65201, 1976. \$10.50.

Reviewed by Tom Carter

**The Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory** comes as the long-awaited sequel to Christeson's similarly titled book of 1973, also issued by the University of Missouri Press. The two records here present fiddle tunes gleaned from Christeson's extensive 1941-1961 field recordings. As a collector, Christeson ranged through the central United States, from Missouri to New Mexico, looking for old-time fiddlers. The book, containing 245 transcribed tunes, and this record, attest to the success of his work.

In both the book and the record, Christeson sees himself primarily as a collector and compiler and eschews the roles of analyst or interpreter. Consequently, the folklorist will find that the recordings reflect little internal cohesion save that the tunes are basically Midwestern and come to us through the collector's early interest in old-time fiddling. The recordings were made during Christeson's summer vacations and were initially pursued more as a hobby than as an attempt to document a specific style or region. Prefacing the book, Christeson states that he has published this fiddling "in the hope that succeeding generations will keep these tunes alive." By no fault of its own, the book failed to achieve this admirable goal, for fiddlers today, much like their earlier counterparts, learn tunes primarily by ear and not from the printed page. With the release of this record, Christeson's hopes for preserving old-time fiddling become more of a reality. Already several of the tunes here have slipped back into tradition and can be heard at fiddlers' contests and gatherings across the country. Beyond releasing some new fish into the fiddler's

pool, **Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory** also makes a contribution to the growing body of material documenting American instrumental folk music.

Christeson's recordings are among the earliest to be made in the Midwest, an area often seen in the past by scholars as a folk cultural desert. Vance Randolph recorded fiddlers for the Library of Congress in the Ozarks during the early 1940s, but Randolph's recordings are, unfortunately, of uneven quality and have yet to be released commercially in any form. Christeson's work stands as a primary source in the beginnings of a regional study. While most of the musicians featured on the **Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory** are now deceased, the selections confirm the richness of the area's instrumental tradition and suggest the prospect for continued and rewarding research here for folklorists. (Serious collecting, by the way, is even now underway in Missouri, Illinois, and Oklahoma.) If the tunes Christeson found in his travels looked good in printed form, the live versions deliver well beyond expectation.

Though recorded on wire and early tape machine, the sound here is exceptionally clear. Dick Baily and the people at United Sound deserve recognition for their remarkable achievement. The music does full justice to the likes of such artists as Bob Walters, Cyril Stinnett, Tony Gilmore, Bill Driver, and George Helton. Walters, who saws out twenty-nine of the forty-one cuts, is obviously the spotlighted musician. A Nebraska native, Walters' music is marked by impeccable execution and lively performance, qualities which make him one of the outstanding fiddlers to recently surface on record. Equally impressive is Bill Driver from Iberia, Missouri. One of the few black fiddlers to be recorded (a fact curiously omitted from the sleeve notes but mentioned in the book), Driver is quite comfortable with the regional Anglo-American performance style. Driver's recordings are extremely useful in further documenting the black-white musical interchange in this country. The overall quality of the musicians is high, the tunes interesting and unusual, and the spirited accompaniment buoyant, resulting in music which all can enjoy. While we might complain that there is too much Bob Walters, it is to Christeson's credit that he devotes space to the total range of dance tunes popular in the Midwest. Besides the standard breakdowns, you will get to hear quadrilles, waltzes, schottisches, and even a couple of "country" rags.

While the music is swell and there are lots of obscure tunes here, Christeson's failure to fully explore the background of the music, if perhaps excusable, remains lamentable. The records come in a handsome double-sleeve jacket, a layout normally devoted to extensive notes. Here we get only a short descriptive statement on the back cover and nothing but mail-order catalog reprints on the inside--a disappointing use of potential space. The front cover photo is a good one, a 1925 picture showing a large group of Missouri fiddlers, but it cannot make up for the neglect of the fellows on the record. Both the scholar and the enthusiast alike are robbed of insights into the fiddlers' world which only the collector can provide. Christeson's comments on the music and the performers are confined to casual asides between cuts. Such banter might make for easy listening, but adds little to the appreciation or understanding of the music.

Christeson explains that it will be left for others "to research parallels and antecedents," but one feels disadvantaged for not having firsthand contextual information. I keep getting the feeling that Christeson's output to date only scratches the surface of his knowledge of fiddling. He seems willing to tell us so little. Enough perhaps for the beginning fiddler, but those who are going to research the Midwest further will want to know more about the total repertory, tune distribution, significant influences, and so forth. Christeson has given us a book and a record which no one interested in American folk music should be without. We must wait and hope for more.

**Ray Lum: Mule Trader.** Ray Lum

Fifteen selections, liner notes by William Ferris, transcript: 13 pp., essay: 14 pp.

Center for Southern Folklore SF102-11-76, 1216 Peabody Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, 1977, \$7.50.

Reviewed by Simon J. Bronner

The media concept in folkloristics emphasizes the use of media techniques and materials in field research for investigative and pedagogical purposes. A process, event, or artifact can be recorded through the use of cinematic film, recording tape, video tape, and photographic film, media which