



Alberta

WILD ROSES NORTHERN LIGHTS



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Alberta

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1. The Corb Lund Band **No Roads Here** 3:22
(Corb Lund / Corb Lund Music, SOCAN)
2. John Wort Hannam **Church of the Long Grass** 4:05
(John Wort Hannam)
3. Ian Tyson **Land of the Shining Mountains** 3:10
(Ian Tyson / Slick Fork Music, SOCAN)
4. k. d. lang **Big-Boned Gal (Remix)** 3:09
(k.d.lang-Ben Mink / Universal Pogram International Pub. Inc.–Mizmo Music, ASCAP)
5. Asani **Otī Nīkan** 2:44
(Sherryl Sewepagaham)
6. Calvin Vollrath **Wild Alberta Rose** 3:09
(Calvin Vollrath-Andy Greatrix / Bonnie Pearl Publishing, SOCAN)
7. Tom Wilson **The Harvest Dance** 3:17
(Tom Wilson-Kevin Simpson)
8. Tim Hus **Alberta Crude** 4:02
(Tim Hus)
9. Tim Tamashiro **I Turn into a Cowboy** 2:50
(Tim Tamashiro)

10. The Swiftys **Sweet Rose** 3:15
(S. Jonassan)
11. Laura Vinson and Free Spirit **Half-Breed** 5:21
(L. Vinson–D. Martineau–P. Martineau–A. LaRose / Allen James Music, SOCAN)
12. Kubasonics **Polka from L'viv** 2:01
13. Lé Twés **Allez Ouest** 4:22
(Martin Lavoie / Lé Twés)
14. Terry Morrison **Long Dusty Road** 5:07
(Terry Morrison)
15. Diamond Joe White **High Rider (The John Ware Story)** 3:49
(Diamond Joe White / Casino Music Pro, SOCAN)
16. Maria Dunn **Do You Know Slim Evans?** 4:00
(Maria Dunn / Distant Whisper Music, SOCAN)
17. David Wilkie and Cowboy Celtic **Wind in the Wire** 3:49
(David Wilkie– Stewart McDougall / Ghost Writers in Disguise Music, SOCAN)
18. The McDades **Jonny's Flush / The Boiling Hen** 3:37
(Shannon Johnson)
19. Ian Tyson **Four Strong Winds** 3:38
(Ian Tyson / Slick Fork Music, SOCAN)

This CD is an outgrowth of the "Alberta at the Smithsonian" program at the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Having grown up in rural Alberta and spent the past 20 years as a musician, teacher, and music consultant for the province of Alberta, I have had the pleasure of being raised on great Alberta music. The music chosen for this project provides a poetic look at the diverse landscape, people, philosophy, and issues of our past and present, and it draws from a long lineage of great singer-songwriters from Alberta's music community. We are honored to have Peter North, award-winning music journalist and champion of the Alberta music scene, write the liner notes and provide listeners with a personal and informal look at the featured artists. I hope you will enjoy this album and come to Alberta to experience this music live at our many world-class festivals.

Al Chapman *Alberta Project Manager, 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival*





Courtesy Travel Alberta

Nancy Groce

Curator's Introduction

Named after Queen Victoria's fourth daughter, Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, "Wild Rose Country"—as it is called by its 3.26 million residents—is a land of contrasts. Its physical landscape is among the most diverse in North America, with badlands, prairies, arboreal forests, rolling foothills, enormous freshwater lakes (like the Athabasca), and mighty rivers (like the Peace and the North Saskatchewan).

Alberta's western border is defined by some of the most breathtakingly spectacular ranges of the Rocky Mountains; its eastern border, by the Great Plains. Alberta is enormous: it stretches 764 miles from the U.S./Montana border to the Northwest Territories, and 412 miles east to west from Saskatchewan to British Columbia. It has an area of 255,213 square miles, exceeded in the United States only by Texas and Alaska.

With the fastest-growing economy in Canada, Alberta's wealth extends beyond its oil-sands and gas fields, beyond its majestic Rocky Mountains and rich agricultural plains, and beyond its legendary ranches and its cosmopolitan, multicultural cities. Alberta's true wealth is its people: a diverse, hardworking, innovative population, whose "can-do spirit" has transformed a frontier territory into a prosperous province with a vibrant cultural landscape. Its people are proud of their past and increasingly confident of their future. For all these reasons, it is most appropriate that Alberta was the first Canadian province featured at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Peter North

Introduction

This recording was compiled in 2006, just after Alberta, the most westerly of Canada's prairie provinces, had finished celebrating its centennial. Of course, immigration had started much earlier than 1905, the year Alberta officially became a province. European settlers began moving west in great numbers in the 1880s, drawn by cheap land and transported by Canada's newly completed coast-to-coast railroad. Once there, they settled among long-established First Nation and Métis peoples and began forging a new culture, which would mature to become contemporary Alberta.

These pioneers came from the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe, France, and even the United States, as U.S. cowboys and ranchers moved north of the border to follow their dreams. They built new lives and new communities in the wide-open spaces, prairies, foothills, and mountains. Naturally, they brought their music with them, and while many communities nurtured their distinctive cultures, cross-cultural exchanges were common. The fiddle was especially popular, and it helped create bonds among the newcomers, and with local American Indians and Métis.

Paintings and narratives documenting community dances and socials at frontier forts, early homesteads, and late-19th–early-20th-century community gatherings are common. Cowboy songs, ballads from French-Canadian fur traders, Ukrainian choral music, and Métis fiddle tunes all contributed to a growing musical mosaic, as Albertan culture flourished in urban and rural areas.



Courtesy Travel Alberta

Over time, technology began to play an increasingly important role in the development of Alberta's musical landscape. In 1927, radio station CKUA, Canada's first public broadcaster, took to the air in Edmonton. Initially owned by the University of Alberta, CKUA broadcasts today from Calgary and Edmonton. It has always championed the music and culture of Alberta. It quickly gained a large and loyal following, demonstrated in 1997 when plans to sell it and convert it into a standard commercial station were met by widespread community opposition. Today, it is a member-supported nonprofit station. Many of the artists appearing on this CD have had a close working relationship with it.

Alberta was also home to CFCW, the first full-time country-music station in Canada. CFCW started broadcasting from the small central Alberta town of Camrose in 1954. Artists found on this CD, including Ian Tyson, Corb Lund, Calvin Vollrath, and Laura Vinson, are frequently featured on its playlists, and it has been hosting a weekly Ukrainian music show for decades.

Today, Alberta's folk and traditional music scene is thriving, as artists are nurtured by commercial and publicly sponsored events and institutions. The long-running summertime Edmonton Folk Festival and Calgary Folk Festival are considered among North America's best. The Blueberry Bluegrass Festival in Stony Plain, just west of Edmonton, is the largest of its kind in Canada. Since 2003, the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta in Edmonton has been home to folkwaysAlive!, an archive and research centre working in partnership with

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in Washington, D.C., to produce educational events and publications.

The artists represented on this compilation were selected because their compositions vividly illuminate one or more aspects of the multifaceted culture that is contemporary Alberta; however, they represent only a handful of the Albertan country, folk, and roots artists whose music reflects what it means to be from “Wild Rose Country.” We hope this CD inspires listeners to seek out and enjoy more music from Albertan singers, songwriters, and bands.

Peter North

Music Director, CKUA

Music Columnist, Edmonton Journal



Courtesy Travel Alberta

TRACK NOTES

1. Corb Lund Band **No Roads Here** (From *Five Dollar Bill* Stony Plain SPCD 1284 (2002); courtesy



of Stony Plain Records) In 2003, with the release of the album *Five Dollar Bill*, Corb Lund's star began to rise. His music had an immediate effect on Canadian music, one that resembled what Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings had accomplished as catalysts of the American outlaw country-music movement in the 1970s. A

little irreverence, a lot of enthusiasm, and songs from biographical and historical perspectives provided a refreshing take for country fans who expected an artist to keep one foot in tradition. Lund, a fifth-generation Albertan, hailing from Taber in southern Alberta, comes from stock that loves culture as much as agriculture. He successfully combines that 21st-century renegade attitude with stories about what is happening in his own backyard. Born into a family that cherishes wide-open spaces, he earned a reputation as a feisty young competitor in rodeo events at county and regional rodeos in southern Alberta. He was drawn to music at an early age, and music was his eventual calling. In the late 1990s, after spending the better part of a decade rocking college crowds with a band called The Smalls, he shifted musical gears and began

crafting gritty, image-laden country songs and catalysts for material that thematically included trucks, individuals gathered around poker tables, working people, chewin' tobacco, the oil patch, and those wide-open spaces. As the saying goes, "the rest really is history," as both *Five Dollar Bill* and the 2005 follow-up album, *Hair in My Eyes Like a Highland Steer*, have received gold-record awards. Lund was named Independent Male Artist of the Year at the 2005 Canadian Country Music Awards.

2. John Wort Hannam **Church of the Long Grass** (From *Dynamite and Dozers*



JWH040502 (2004); courtesy of John Wort Hannam) To be compared, by credible sources, with the late, great Canadian singer-songwriter and epic storyteller Stan Rogers is a feather in the cap of any Canadian folksinger. Such a comparison brings a certain amount of pressure, but this Fort MacLeod, Alberta, resident has been

meeting the challenge of establishing himself as one of Canada's new troubadours since 2002, when he jumped into a rigorous touring schedule. Few new voices project images and emotion with such a poetic authority and clarity as his. That he

was nominated in 2005 as Emerging Artist of the Year at the inaugural Canadian Folk Music Awards confirms he is a rising star, a superior craftsman, who is following in the footsteps of icons like Rogers and Lightfoot.

Many of Hannam's points of inspiration come from events and observations in southern Alberta. Some of his songs are steeped in the personalities of his protagonists; others, in politics and social issues: all are fitted with arrangements that draw on traditional folk, Celtic, and country sounds.

This song, from the artist's second album, *Dynamite and 'Dozers* (2004), is set in the Porcupine Hills in southwest Alberta, not far from Hannam's Fort Macleod home.

3. Ian Tyson **Land of the Shining Mountains** (From *Songs from the Gravel Road* Stony



Plain SPCD 1305 (2005); courtesy of Stony Plain Records.) Ian Tyson spent his childhood in British Columbia and moved in the early 1960s to Toronto, where he stayed for more than a decade. He has spent what amounts to several years on the road as a touring musician. Since 1976, his home on the range has been the foothills of

southern Alberta, where the Rocky Mountains frame the western horizon. Few men, let alone musicians, know the back roads and trails that run along and through the eastern slopes of the Alberta Rockies as well as Ian Tyson does, so it's not surprising that the landscape figures in many of his songs. "Land of the Shining Mountains" is one such piece. Like that landscape, Tyson's career is dotted with many peaks. In the mid-1960s, as part of the folk duo Ian and Sylvia, Tyson enjoyed the same kind of critical and commercial success that accrued to acts like Bob Dylan and Gordon Lightfoot. By the end of that decade, the Tysons were fronting the groundbreaking band The Great Speckled Bird, which many music historians consider a major force in the first wave of country-rock music.

After a few years as the host of a prime-time country-music television show, Tyson could not ignore the call of the west, and he permanently relocated to Alberta's cattle country. A rodeo champ himself, he specialized in riding cutting horses (horses used to separate and control cattle). His musical focus shifted to writing about "cowboy culture" and its history.

4. k. d. lang **Big-Boned Gal (Remix)** (From *Reinternation* Rhino/WEA 73366, (P) 2006 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc.) k. d. lang is an Alberta-born, Grammy-award-winning vocalist, who has sold millions of recordings worldwide since 1985, when she roared onto the international stage. Her teenage years, in the late 1970s,



found her on the sprawling prairie of central eastern Alberta in a town called Consort, which borders on the province of Saskatchewan. By 1983, she was living in Edmonton and had assembled a band known as the reclines. After only a few months, lang—who possesses one of the most explosive, dynamic,

and stunningly beautiful vocal instruments of her generation—was being touted as an artist destined for stardom. Her early engagements found her playing a variety of licensed establishments, from honky-tonks to jazz lounges, but no matter the setting, she insisted that her audiences join her in having “a wingding daddeo of a good time.” She stayed on that circuit for only a year before graduating to concert halls, but during that time she became a songwriter, leaning on her powers of observation from wry angles. The evolution of her songwriting is documented in her early recordings: *Truly Western Experience*, *Absolute Torch and Twang*, and *Angel with a Lariat*. “Big-Boned Gal,” released on *Absolute Torch and Twang* in 1989, could be about a southern Alberta woman from the 1950s heading to a night of two-stepping at a local legion—or she could be making a beeline to the hardwood dance floor in some small town in rural Alberta this coming Saturday night. “Big-Boned Gal” is vintage k. d. lang, a song that she was still performing early in the new millennium.

5. Asani **Otī Nīkan** (From *Rattle and Drum* (2004); courtesy of Asani and Arbor Records) Singing in a mix of



Cree and English, the female aboriginal trio of Asani became one of Alberta's most recognized musical ambassadors in 2003, two years before the province celebrated its centennial. Asani is taken from the Cree word *asinij*, meaning 'rock'. Chosen by group members Sherryl Sewepagaham, Sarah

Pocklington, and Debbie Houle, the name reflects the enduring strength that is reflected in the singers' lives and music. Influenced by the American native trio Ulali, the singers accompany themselves on traditional drums and rattles, but they add contemporary sounds and instrumentation. By 2006, the group had performed in South Africa, Finland, and several U.S. states. Topping the list was a performance at Carnegie Hall, in New York City. "*Otī Nīkan*" comes from the group's debut album, *Rattle and Drum*.

Kitawasimsinowak otī nīkan kanīkanohtakonawak /

Kiskinahamawatanik tansīsi tīsiniāw

Our children are our future. / Teach them to be our leaders.

Translation by Bill and Emily Sewepagaham

6. Calvin Vollrath **Wild Alberta Rose** (From *Car Tunes* (2004); courtesy of Calvin Vollrath) There



are almost as many fiddle styles on the Alberta musical landscape as there are outdoor hockey rinks in the dead of winter. Fiddler Calvin Vollrath has been perfecting his technique on all of them since he first picked up the instrument, at the age of eight, in 1968. A child-prodigy-turned-teenage-fiddle-champion,

he became an in-demand performer and session player in a decade.

The pride of St. Paul, located in north-central Alberta, Vollrath is known in traditional music circles in North America and Europe as a musician who can lay down toe-tappin' traditional tunes with dazzling intricacy, or pull on one's heartstrings with a sweet-sounding waltz. The 40-plus albums he released between the early 1980s and 2006, give more than sufficient proof that he is a world-class instrumentalist, one who knows his way around old-time, country music, swing, jigs, waltzes, and traditional Canadian fiddle styles that were born on the prairies, in Ontario, or on the east coast. His spirit and musical sensibilities will remind listeners of days when barn dances, community-hall potluck suppers, and church basement get-togethers were at the core of rural social gatherings. On "Wild Alberta Rose," one of Canada's greatest

fiddle players of all time lets music voice his thoughts on his native province.

7. Tom Wilson **The Harvest Dance** (From *Another Blue Sky Day* (1994); courtesy of Tom Wilson)



Tom Wilson came north across the U.S.–Canada border in 1969, and brought with him many musical touchstones that are cultural cornerstones in his home state of Virginia. After spending a few years in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the heart of the Canadian prairies, he moved to Calgary, Alberta, where he has made his home

ever since. The rolling foothills that give way to the Rocky Mountains west of Calgary have inspired countless songs from the region’s tunesmiths, and Wilson has written some of the best of that large catalogue. Many observers have stated that his music has a John Denver–like sound, in the imagery that his lyrics paint and the rhythmic bounce that many of them move to.

Wilson is as comfortable playing bluegrass festivals as he is playing folk clubs, as songs found on his two recordings, *Another Blue Sky Day* and *On The Radio*, make smooth transitions to one of the musical styles he grew up listening to in Virginia. “The Harvest Dance” is his musical portrait of a generations-old celebration that

remains a popular event on the social calendar when early October rolls around on the Alberta prairies.

8. Tim Hus **Alberta Crude** (From *Alberta Crude* (2004); courtesy of Tim Hus) Tim Hus is a tune-



smith and rhyme-scheme bandit who is equally comfortable writing about Alberta's early days as a province (which it became in 1905), or giving us glimpses into the lives of today's unsung heroes. For the initiated, it's easy to hear that the Calgary resident was influenced by Canadian country-folk icon Stompin' Tom

Connors. Like Connors, Hus chisels and fashions his stories about individuals who drive trucks, haul logs, or bootleg liquor, and he does so with sturdy rhyme-schemes, many of which find room for a dash or two of humor. Armed with a guitar, a grin, and a gleam in his eye, he has endeared himself to country, folk, and cowboy culture audiences across western Canada since 2004, when he started to perform upwards of 200 dates a year.

On "Alberta Crude," Hus turned on his songwriting tap, and out poured an historically accurate ode to the black gold that makes Alberta's economy hum.

9. Tim Tamashiro **I Turn into a Cowboy** (From *Big Balls in Cowtown* (2002); courtesy of Tim



Tamashiro) “I Turn into a Cowboy” is a 180-degree turn from most of the material found on this compilation. Tim Tamashiro has been considered an entertainer’s entertainer from the early 1990s, when he sang swing and fronted a horn band called The Jump Orchestra. When it comes to pulling out a punchline or two,

he possesses a great sense of timing. He’s been known to lampoon all sorts of individuals in song, from politicians to musicians, and when he moved from Edmonton to Calgary, in the mid-1990s, the former record label executive found a whole new community to poke fun at. On his original song, performed in a style that Tamashiro refers to as “foothills swing,” the smooth-singing entertainer takes aim at a cosmopolitan crowd, the one that digs out cowboy hats every summer for the ten-day party known around the world as the Calgary Stampede. “I Turn into a Cowboy” comes from his album *Big Balls in Cowtown* (2002).

10. The Swiftys **Sweet Rose** (From *The Swiftys* SW 101 (2003); courtesy of Shawn Jonasson) The Swiftys is the only group on this compilation that formed after the turn of the millennium. Founded in Edmonton in 2002 by singer and guitarist Shawn “Swiftly”



Jonasson, the trio creates a lean and rugged electric country sound, which finds favor with audiences in honky-tonks and folk festivals. This is a band that likes to kick up the dust and drive its audiences into a frenzy. More often than not, Jonasson and his bandmates will succeed before a night comes to a close.

In 2004, The Swiftys released a debut, self-titled disc, which critics likened to the maverick sounds that Waylon Jennings and Billy Joe Shaver had whipped up on the U.S. country scene in the mid-1970s. “Sweet Rose” comes from that album.

11. Laura Vinson and Free Spirit **Half-Breed** (From *Point of the Arrow* (1999); courtesy of



Laura Vinson) Laura Vinson has been a recognized and successful member of the western Canadian music scene since the mid-1970s. Born and raised west of Edmonton, near Jasper National Park and the northern range of the Rocky Mountains, she connected with music at a young age. Her Métis heritage, which

brings together Cherokee, Cree, English, and French bloodlines, gave her a multifaceted exposure to culture.

After graduating from university, Vinson began fronting a country folk-rock band called Red Wyng. By the mid-1980s, she had enjoyed a considerable amount of commercial success at radio in Canada, but her focus shifted as she began to explore her heritage and write songs about her ancestry and contemporary native issues. Working with a new group of musicians collectively known as Free Spirit, she took her music to international audiences. To date, she has toured in Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Incorporating dance and traditional costumes into her concerts, Vinson gives performances that are unique and spellbinding, on several levels. The song “Half-Breed,” which addresses issues of growing up as a Métis woman, comes from Vinson’s release titled *Point of the Arrow*.

12. Kubasonics **Polka from L’viv** (From *Big Beet Music by the Kubasonics* (2005); courtesy of The Kubasonics) Since the late 1890s, when the first Ukrainian settlers came to Alberta, Ukrainian culture has had a profound impact on the province. Ukrainian dancing, cuisine, music, architecture, and visual art are all part of the cultural mosaic, particularly in the north-central, rural part of the province, where many of some 175,000



immigrants settled. Ukrainian orchestras and ensembles played community concerts and dances in the 1920s and 1930s. Edmonton's beloved Kubasonics are a popular band that helps keep Alberta's Ukrainian heritage alive. The group is led by ethnomusicologist Dr. Brian Cherwick, a scholar of Ukrainian

music and an accomplished ballad-singer and multi-instrumentalist. The group uses traditional instruments and fuses old-time melodies with contemporary arrangements. The song "Polka from L'viv" finds the Kubasonics revisiting the roots of the music. It would be at home at weddings, country dances, and other celebrations.

13. Lé Twés **Allez Ouest** (From *Les Pieds dans Bouette* (1999); courtesy of Lé Twés) Representing Alberta's Francophone community on this compilation, the group Lé Twés has been a popular act at festivals and community and country fairs since the 1970s. It incorporates traditional instruments into its sound. As the years have



Photo by Ruth Doyon

passed, any number of respected musicians have come and gone from the group. Because the focus has always been on keeping a specific tradition alive, the band's identity is linked more to those traditions, rather than to personalities.

The song "Allez Ouest" is also about keeping tradition alive. It tells the tale of a group of French Canadians moving west and wondering if they'll be able to retain their cultural identity in a new community.

"Allez Ouest. . . Allez Ouest. . . "

J'ai perdu ma langue, j'ai perdu ma culture.

Y'en a qui dissent que j'fais dur.

T'es comme un rond dans un rectangle.

"T'es un assimilé déraciné,

Un perdu dépaysé."

J'suis même gêné d'vous en parler.

Ça fait dix ans que j'ai mangé de la tourtière.

Je connais même plus mes priers.

J'ai oublié qu'est-ce qui arrive

Su'é Plaines d'Abraham.

J'sais pas si je vais m'échapper

De l'influence de l'Oncle Sam.

Un pion dans un jeu de dames,

J'ai même pris goût aux chips du A&W.

"Go West . . . Go West . . . "

I've lost my mother tongue and I've lost my culture.

Some people say that I'm a disappointment.

That I seem bent out of shape and out of place.

"You're assimilated, without roots,

A lost person without a country."

I'm ashamed to talk to you about it.

Haven't eaten "tourtière" in so many years.

Can't remember any childhood prayers.

Don't care much anymore what happened

On the Plains of Abraham.

I don't know if I'm going to shake

The influence of Uncle Sam.

A pawn in a game of chess.

I've even become addicted to A&W fries.

Allez ouest, alouette, les pieds dans 'bouette.(2)

Go west, alouette, feet stuck in mud.(2)

Allez ouest, tout le monde les pieds dans 'bouette.(3)

Go west, everyone, feet stuck in mud.(3)

Mon chum s'appelle Chung;

My best friend's name is Chung;

Un autre s'appelle Joe.

Another one is called Joe.

J'mange du chop-suey avec mon ami Kulshki.

I eat chop-suey with my pal Kulski

Lui, il dit qu'il aime mieux le spaghetti.

He tells me he really prefers spaghetti...

On est des assimilés, déracinés,

We're all assimilated and uprooted,

Des perdus dépaysés.

Lost people without a country.

J'suis pas gêné d'leur en parler.

I'm no longer ashamed to talk about it.

Allez ouest, Newfies, les pieds dans 'bouette.

Go west: Newfies, feet stuck in mud.

Allez ouest, Québécois, les pieds dans 'bouette.

(Québécois (...), Anglophones (...), Ukrainians (...)

Allez ouest, Anglais, les pieds dans 'bouette.

everyone...feet stuck in the mud!

Allez ouest, Ukrainiens, les pieds dans 'bouette.

Allez ouest: tout le monde les pieds dans 'bouette.

© 1999 Martin Lavoie - translated by Ronald Tremblay (2006)

14. Terry Morrison **Long Dusty Road** (From *High Mileage Soul* (2003); courtesy of Terry Morrison)

Another veteran of the Alberta folk scene, Terry Morrison continues to build on an impressive body of work, which is as poetic as it is compelling. A native of Edmonton, she started to gain experience as a performer in the mid-1970s, when



Photo by Laura Herr

she began playing coffeehouses, folk-clubs, and concerts. Hanging with peers and learning the craftsmanship of accompanying oneself on guitar and shaping songs gave her the resources to record a handful of superb recordings. Albums like *No Covers* and *Breaking Ground* find her warm voice weaving its way through

arrangements that broaden the folksinger-songwriter idiom as jazz and electric instrumentation envelop songs that project images of travels and experience.

“Long Dusty Road” comes from Morrison’s album *High Mileage Soul* (2003). The song is a finely etched metaphor describing life in Alberta.

15. Diamond Joe White **High Rider (The John Ware Story)** (Courtesy of Stony Plain Records) “When your name is Joe White, you’ve got to embellish it with something,” was one of this songwriter’s most recognized introduction lines on stage in the late 1970s, when he was hitting his stride and achieving nationwide acclaim. This was the Joe White who in the post–World War II baby boom grew up within sight of the cattle range and the oil rigs that dotted the landscape in the foothills of southwestern Alberta. It was there that he soaked up the music that American roughnecks



brought to the area while working the rigs. That meant the music of folk-blues pioneer Jimmie “The Singing Brakeman” Rodgers and country-music legend Hank Williams were on White’s radar at an early age, as was Canadian cowboy-singer and legend Wilf Carter. Like his musical heroes, Diamond Joe White is

an original artist, who puts an identifiable brand on the folk-song-writing tradition.

“High Rider” brings to life the story of John Ware, a black American cowboy, born into slavery in South Carolina before the Civil War. As soon as he was a free man, he herded cattle north. He crossed the Canada—Montana border in 1882, chose to stay, and went on to become a respected Alberta pioneer. Singing image-laden lyrics, Diamond Joe White brilliantly captures the spirit of the frontier days of Alberta on what has continued to be one the most popular songs in White’s vast repertoire of honky-tonk folksongs.

16. Maria Dunn **Do You Know Slim Evans?** (From *We Were Good People* (2004); courtesy of Distant Whisper Music) When it comes to making introductions with the underdogs, champions, and other individuals whose selfless acts of courage helped shape Alberta



and western Canada from the turn of the 20th century, look no further than Maria Dunn's remarkable catalogue of songs. A songwriter with a passion for history, Dunn began making a name for herself on the Canadian folk scene in the late 1990s, after leaving a career as a medical research assistant. She lives

in Edmonton, Alberta's capital, and has enjoyed several successful tours of Canada and the United Kingdom. Reviews in influential, international roots-music publications echo the positive assessments of her recordings and performances from media back home. An engaging singer and superior storyteller, Dunn is represented on this compilation by a song—"Do You Know Slim Evans?"—that appeared on her acclaimed release *We Were Good People* (2004).

From 1919 to 1924, Arthur "Slim" Evans was an organizer for the local One Big Union (OBU) in the Drumheller Valley coalfields of southeastern Alberta. In 1924, he redirected local union dues from the Indianapolis-based United Mine Workers of America to feed the families of local striking miners. As Dunn's lyrics accurately recall, Evans was jailed for his efforts and freed by popular petition. He later moved to British Columbia, where he continued his career as a union organizer.

17. David Wilkie and Cowboy Celtic **Wind in the Wire** (From *Cowboy Ceilidh*; courtesy



of Centre Fire Music) As an artist who immersed and educated himself in the history of the Celtic musical tradition, David Wilkie is a bandleader, interpreter, songwriter, and mandolin player whose music has found much favor with “cowboy culture” audiences in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Nicknamed the “Mandolin Kid” in the early 1970s, just

after he moved from California to Calgary, Wilkie is a master of any number of musical styles, including western swing and cowboy jazz. In his mid-twenties, he began a career as a much sought-after sideman. He recorded and/or toured with Ian Tyson and other artists, while working on his own projects, which resulted in excellent recordings, like *The Mandolin Kid* and *The Shoebox Sessions*.

After spending much of the 1980s in a shifting aggregation of musicians collectively known as the Great Western Orchestra, Wilkie once again altered his course. His passion for retracing the journey that brought Celtic music to the cowboy culture of North America in the 1800s and how it influenced contemporary country and folk music became his focus. He began leading a group called Cowboy Celtic. By 2005,

the group had released four critically acclaimed albums and toured North America extensively. “Wind in the Wire,” which Wilkie wrote with Stewart MacDougall (known for his piano work with k. d. lang and Ian Tyson) in his days with the Great Western Orchestra, finds Cowboy Celtic flipping the calendar pages back to the late 19th century. The story is set on the western frontier, which is about to go through monumental changes with the mass immigration of European settlers to North America. “Wind in the Wire” was recorded by American country-music star Randy Travis in 1993.

18. The McDades **Jonny’s Flush / The Boiling Hen** (From *for reel* (2002);



courtesy of Free Radio Records) As young children in Edmonton in the early 1980s, Shannon Johnson and her brothers Solon and Jeremiah McDade would often find themselves booked to play at major Alberta historical sites on spring and summer weekends, tutored by musical parents. The young musicians’ immer-

sion in traditional music styles has paid off handsomely, as predictions that they would go on to achieve national success have come to pass. A few thousand performances down the road from those early days of playing fairs and fests, along with

postsecondary degrees in music studies, dozens of sessions, and production credits with some of Canada's best-known jazz and folk artists, and the result is a group that, with every new recording or tour, comfortably and confidently presents a new side to its sound. This critically acclaimed ensemble incorporates many world-music influences into its inviting blend and convincingly combines an African rhythmic pulse with Celtic instruments. Here, on this medley, bassist Solon, the fiddle player Shannon, and multi-instrumentalist Jeremiah come full circle as they dip their ladles into the Celtic broth of "Jonny's Flush" and "The Boiling Hen."

19. Ian Tyson **Four Strong Winds** (From *Alberta Bound* (DVD 2005); courtesy of White Iron Pictures)



Ever since the mid-1960s, when Ian Tyson released "Four Strong Winds" on an Ian and Sylvia recording, the song has resonated with North American folk audiences like few others. A contemporary folk anthem, it ties together several strong emotions and sentiments, all evoking a sense of longing for being back

in Alberta. Tyson wrapped the song in one of his strongest melody lines. Over the years, "Four Strong Winds" has been recorded by numerous artists, including Neil Young and the great American guitarist Tony Rice. In fact, Young, who has recorded

it more than once, has been quoted as saying it is his favorite song. Tyson continues to pull out the song for encores in his performances. That it is annually sung at the finale of the Edmonton Folk Music Festival by performers and an audience of 10,000-plus fans shows how imbedded the song is in Alberta culture.

This recording is a collaboration of Smithsonian Folkways and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Many of the artists represented here received financial support from the AFA at some point in their careers, whether to study, record, or create. The foundation is delighted to present these artists to the world.

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Credits

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Annotated by **Peter North**

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Special thanks to **Carla Rugg**, **Chelsey Hoople**, **Fraser Chapman**, **Peter North**, **Holger Petersen**, **Ken Regan** and the crew at **CKUA**, **Alberta Economic Development and Travel Alberta**, **Nancy Groce** from the Smithsonian for her support and guidance on this project.

Additional support was provided by **Stony Plain Records**, **White Iron Productions**, **Arbour Records**, **Sire Records**, and **Warner Special Products**. Thanks also to **Tarik Bradford**, **Braun Farnon**, and **Denise Withnell**.

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