

Three Reviews of The Bills' CD *Let Em Run*

Let Em Run [Borealis] *****

From the introductory Overture, the aural equivalent of a sequence of multi-flavoured sherbet fireworks seducing your taste buds, this third release from Canadian quintet The Bills is a classy journey into their very own acoustic wonderland. Bluegrass and old time influences act as entrees for the Balkans marinated Lay Down, a gipsy mandolin reading of Hoagy Carmichael's Stardust, the Cajun calypso of Nowhere to Be, the lusty a cappella sea shanty, Barnfield's John Vanden, the mini La Bottine Souriante-style Quebecois folk dance of Oeil Au Buerre Noir and lots more harmonious enterprises, atmospheric airs and string driven, zingy reels. The trick is that it all sounds so naturally like the work of one band. They're due here in November. Buy this and count the days.

– Rob Adams, *The Herald* (Scotland)
11 September 2004

The Bills – *Let Em Run*

Borealis BCD164

Here come The Bills with the follow up to 2002's award-winning *All Day Every Day*, with a shortened name and a new fiddler - former Scruj McDhuck man, Jeremy Penner. And all we can do is stare in amazement as they stride like a colossus across the acoustic music scene. These guys can play just about any North American traditional musical style. Or, come to think of it, these guys can play anything. They are inspired and versatile, engaging and funny, sincere and warm, spectacularly good live and more than a bit nuts. They surely practiced loads to get this good.

If you want variety it is here. There's bluegrass, classical, jazz, acapella folk singing and lots more to savour. More than that, they wrote the whole thing themselves. Fiddle, accordion, bass, guitar, piano and mandolin are all woven seamlessly together to produce the distinctive and unmistakable sound of great musicians enjoying the hell out of playing.

Favourites of mine include the acapella Bamfield's John Vanden, the fiddle and flat-pick driven instrumental, The Gatlinburg, and fiddler-keyboardist-accordionist Adrian Dolan's Cambridge Set. Chris Frye's voice has grown stronger and more commanding since the last CD and mandolinist Mark Atkinson continues to lead from the front with cavalier soloing and musical derring-do. An absolute corker of a recording, this.

– Tim Readman, *Penguin Eggs*

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What a class act. Just as orchestras prepare opera audiences for what's in store with a musical preamble, here the multi-talented Canadian roots combo lay out an overture to introduce us to their latest collection. The Canadian melting pot created something very special this time around.

Formerly known as The Bill Hilly Band, these guys have already been well and truly recognized on their home turf. A recent review of a 'live' show in one of their country's daily heavyweights described how an audience in Toronto left their seats to give the band a standing ovation after they finished the opening song in the set. Can you beat that?

Their appeal is twofold. The five-piece works from a palette so appealing and broadly eclectic it could be used as a bench mark for World Music. But, the musicianship, originality and arrangements are so mature in places you have to wonder why they have taken so long to arrive here.

The band formed in 1996. After this, it will be astonishing if they do not break into the big time soon. Europe got its first taste of the 'live' experience at the big Tonder Festival in Denmark, where they headlined the special 30th anniversary bash in August. In November, they arrive in the UK for their first tour here. I'm thinking of taking the week off to stalk them.

So, what about the CD? Well, apart from occasional flourishes that meander as far as Eastern Europe and toy with Quebecois 'Son-of-La Bottine Souriante' nuances too, you will find strong vocal whiffs that drift in the direction of Mark Olson, Nickel Creek, Jason Ringenberg or Michael Weston King.

And, make no mistake, the end result is as good as anything that has come out of North America in recent years and distinctly Canadian thanks to the broad streak of integrity that runs right through its core.

The song-writing is based in the main around the pairing of Marc Atkinson and Chris Frye, and brilliantly-played instrumental touches, such as the soaring fiddle breaks on Hello and Which Way Away provide clear indications why these guys have such a strong pedigree.

The Vancouver Island quintet are folksy in the same robust way as fellow-Canadians, The Paperboys or the Pierre Schryer Band. Gifted multi-instrumentalists all, they are as good-time as it gets, and while they might sound southern Appalachian one moment and dipped-in-Louisiana the next, they nonetheless manage in the process to maintain an over-riding tempo and style that sets them apart.

I defy you to remain seated when the title track's playing, it is so bouncy and infectious. Similarly, Nowhere To Be (And All Day To Get There) is another that reaches the parts that others fail to get anywhere near to satisfying.

When not dabbling in the territory of the Romany Gypsy, they flirt with Quebec fiddle tunes, enjoy the odd trot down Tin Pan Alley, dip into Djangoesque jazz and even the world of the Broadway musical. If that makes it sound like a bowl of minestrone that's too heavily seasoned, don't be fooled. It's more of a magic carpet ride.

– LT, *Maverick Magazine* (UK)