

**Snook's Christmas
My Gift - Someone Else's Money
(Independent, 2004)**

At the first thought of having to force Christmas melodies on my ears, I shuddered. That time of year again, I guess.

However, this is a twisted holiday album, as most of you who know Snook's humour can imagine. What kind of festivities would Snook have? The song titles are all-too revealing, and after hearing the near-sacrilegious renditions of holiday classics, you'll be very merry indeed. I was in stitches.

After a brief intro (and warning of 'no refunds'), Snook croons into the first ditty,

Wrote off a red Ford Ranger, telling of a fibbed stolen property report after a hydro pole mishap. A choir and fiddle help lighten the mood, aside from the insurance cheque to Bet's old man. Replace the red nose with one that grows.

Bingo balls, Nan's drownin' kittens, Crusty the plowman, Swingin' bells, Ches is givin' me the old spare tire, and other yuletide re-workings spin tales of mischief, debauchery and common Newfoundland vices into a Christmas that all will remember (much less forget).

There's family togetherness (*I'll be home for supper*), anti-drunk driving messages (*Police got my car*), hockey patriotism (*The first go-al*), rump-sliding pain (*Little bumper boy*), and Dougie's holiday in the drunk tank (*Violent night*) — keeping the XXX in your Christmas spirits.

After caroling through the obligatory *Dozen days of Christmas*, we get a bonus cookie before bed with a live story of Snook's *The night before Christmas*. Hilarious. It's great that Pete Soucy continues to charm you with Snook's exploits, even into the holidays, with a cast of solid musician-

types to set the mood, including George Morgan, Bill Brennan, and Sandy 'Claws' Morris.

A portion of the proceeds from this disc go to the Cerebral Palsy Association of Newfoundland and Labrador in aid of Daniel Primmer, a 12-year old boy in need of new equipment after complications caused by a stroke. Snook's not all bad. So if you'd like to have less-conventional, mildly-offending Christmas comedy, *Snook's Christmas* is your answer. Right on!

**Shanneyganock
Christmas
(Independent, 2004)**

Shanneyganock, and core members Chris Andrews and Mark Hiscock, appear to be perpetually busy, consistently making new recordings and touring them. They have been a leading part of the traditional scene for years, and now they're more serious about making the music work on a larger scale. It's no surprise then, that we get their offering of Christmas songs just in time for the shopping season.

This CD is made up of songs included on past holiday compilations, some newer original tunes, and traditional numbers to spike your eggnog. Many of the songs are familiar to the season, while others are unknown to the green traditionalists like me.

Like the first track, *The wren*, a lively ditty about collecting pennies to bury birds on St. Stephen's Day. Doesn't really sound like much festive fun, but I don't really know the story behind it.

The next one is a track I've heard before — their swinging take on *God rest ye merry gentlemen* — accordion fluttering along the main melody and a jazz-flavoured acoustic guitar solo.

Morningtown ride is a soothing journey by

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train, warm and snug with sleepy dreams in the wee hours and cooing refrains of *Rockin', rollin', ridin'*, to get you to your destination. This is followed by a swayed *What child is this*, including pleasing vocal harmonies accented by high-pitched accordion breaks.

Next is their version of Wince Coles' *Santa's a bayman like us*, a splendid story that put a big coastal smile on my face. We may never know what *The marvelous toy* was, but the band brings you all its well-known sounds in song with added fiddle flourish. Then Mark Hiscock lets his accordion speak for itself on an instrumental medley of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer/Frosty the Snowman*.

Chris Andrews tells his own yarn with accordion accompaniment of how *The Star of Logy Bay* saved Christmas for Berry Cove. Keeping a new generation of Newfoundland stories alive, I s'pose. Another

original composition of travelling rough seas to make it home for Christmastime in Newfoundland, shows that they can not only write memorable traditional tunes, but holiday ones, too.

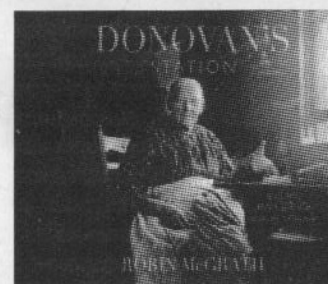
Traversing seems the common theme as they give a nod to *We three kings*, and enjoy a fun-filled ride in a *Rusty Chevrolet*, sung to the tune of *Jingle Bells*. Andrews lends his deep and penetrating vocal style to the classic *O Holy Night*, and the band finishes with a hint of twang on *Snowflake*, an unexpected surprise. It's also surprising not knowing who's behind the lead vocals on the last song — it's a happy tune to end the disc.

In general, I think mixing traditional Newfoundland sounds in holiday format is not my cup of tea. Shanneyganock, though, doesn't make Christmas sound so cheesy. These are certainly island sounds, reflective of our heritage. But the different song selection, the feeling and gentle arrangements, give this album the broad appeal I'm sure they were looking for. I only hope I don't hear it often enough this year to get sick of it, like other festive tunes I've heard.

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

Rick Bailey is a musician and radio DJ. His next column appears Dec. 19.

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