

The Leeds Golden Collection CD - Neil Barron and his SCD Band.

A brief appreciation from a fellow musician.

It's not often I sit down and listen to a disc of dance tunes from end to end. I find it too difficult to suppress the urge to get up and dance. Alone, and amongst the living room furniture, that is just too frustrating.

So I was surprised that what I had intended as a toe dipping session of short snippets from Neil's recent recording for the Leeds Golden Collection, turned out to be almost an hour of happy listening calling for the exercise of much self control – just a little involuntary foot tapping and only an occasional travelling step foray around the furniture. After a cup of tea and a brief rest I played it through again just to make sure my initial assessment was accurate.

And it was. This must surely be the best CD Neil and his band have ever produced.

As bands go it is one of the biggest, with six accomplished players. The result is a full, homogenous sound and very pleasing. The overall balance is excellent and the disc has been well engineered by Stuart Hamilton at Castlesound Studios. The piano and drums are pleasantly discreet and the inclusion of Bill Craib's double bass gives the band's sound an enhanced depth with very little loss of clarity. Alasdair MacLeod on second box shows good judgement on the weight of that off-beat emphasis so essential to the rhythm of the music which gives us all such a buzz and I particularly enjoyed Marie Fielding's violin playing. She shows a strong sense of rhythm and her intonation is faultless, blending with the accordion in a way we do not often hear. Usually there is either too much fiddle or none at all. With all due respect to Neil I feel that he might have given her her head a little more often. The opportunity of hearing such fiddle playing in Scottish country dance music does not come too frequently.

Neil is at his best throughout and never drops a shoe. He leads well and his playing, which dominates as it should, has clarity without being too incisive.

There will rarely, if ever, be agreement on tempi – it's all far too subjective – but for me they are here spot on. But then, thanks to "Rodney's Rant", everyone knows just how old I am, so I will leave you free to make your own minds up. But this is a CD to be listened to as well as danced to, and all concerned in its production are to be congratulated.

Just one small but personal carp which has nothing to do with Neil and his band and which I know not all will agree with. It concerns the choice of music for Scarborough Castle and Jacqui Watson's Strathspey, both of which appear on this disc, and for that of many others. For me the "scotch snap" is the very essence of the strathspey and without it here and there it surely cannot be considered a true strathspey. So why, oh why are they now so often set to airs ... and not good Burns-like airs but those so reminiscent of a variety act on the stage of the Glasgow Metropole on Saturday night? Miss Milligan – please forgive them for they know not what they do!

Rodney Mount