

Boyne," and "Climbing the Mountain." The last tune is French Carpenter's "Shelving Rock," learned by Gaither Carlton and taught to Arnold Watson, who re-named it and taught it to Mansfield. (This seems a good place to praise the well-written and informative liner notes. Thanks.)

Mansfield wisely chose to record most of the tunes and songs here with only one or two sidemen at a time. All the guitarists play excellent, tasteful backup, as one would expect from Paul Brown, Riley Baugus, and Wayne Seymour. (Another fine guitarist chose to hide under the pseudonym of "Reake Havock." Wonder who THAT is.) He also demonstrates just how wonderful a fiddle-banjo duet can sound with such fiddlers as Andy Cahan (Tommy Jarrell's "Root Hog or Die") Wayne Martin (the D Medley), and Kirk Sutphin (C.L. Scott's "The United States"),—new to these ears and a very pretty tune!

This started life as a vinyl record back in 1987. Happily, it has been reissued as a CD for those of us who didn't get it as a record, and for new generations to enjoy.

PETE PETERSON

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Chuck Levy  
Banjourneys



Doctor Levy's Walk-Around / Belecha - Mariam Sajoe / Sandy Boys / Boat's Up the River / Late for the Dance / Mubah Suditan / Old Paint / Cindy / Walk Into the Parlor - Walk Into de Parlor - Grapevine Reel / Iaydiay - Ohlibilal / Rock the Cradle Joe / Chinese Breakdown / No Expectations / Stephen Foster's Nocturne / Crow Creek / Sembe

What happens when an already good musician decides to broaden his horizons by learning more about the roots of the banjo, and learns some tunes and songs from Gambia in the process? A CD as interesting and enjoyable as this one. (And how did he ever get Roz Chast of the *New Yorker* to draw the CD cover?)

Chuck Levy has played banjo and fiddle for many years. When you've played for a while, you can find yourself, as you get deeper and deeper into the music, playing more and more rests, and fewer and fewer notes, until you've got the tune down to some Platonic essence. Levy does this with familiar old-time tunes such as "Rock the Cradle Joe," "Cindy," and "Chinese Breakdown." A particular gem was "Sandy Boys," which in my mind is a tune that is overdone and over-recorded. Not here. It's a beautiful fiddle-banjo duet. (Dave Forbes plays clear, precise fiddle on all the fiddle-banjo duets.) What's more, Levy is playing a six-string banjo with a low A string, so that without going above the fifth fret, he can play the full tune in two octaves, going low when the fiddle goes low, and high when the fiddle is high.

On his website ([www.banjourneys.com](http://www.banjourneys.com)) and in his interview with Béla Fleck in the last issue of the *OTH* (Volume 12, Number 5), Levy discusses his interest in the African roots of the banjo, his trips to Gambia, and his development of a Western version of the akonting, the "banjonting"—a three-string instrument of Levy's own devising. *OTH* readers who own the Bob Carlin/Cheick Hamala Diabate collaboration *From Mali to America* (reviewed in Volume 11, Number 2) may be surprised how different Levy's African songs and tunes sound; they are sung as well as played, they use a Western-sounding diatonic scale instead of microtones, and seem rhythmically more regular. On reflection, why should this be surprising? Mali and Gambia are at least 200 miles apart. Think of the differences between Georgia and Kentucky fiddling in the 1920s. "African akonting music" is no more a monolith than "American banjo music."

There are four songs from Gambia on *Banjourneys*, each one played on the banjonting, with Mike Eberle doubling the melody on fiddle while Levy sings and plays. Each one sounds as if it has a "simple" melody with repeated words. Making it sound easy is something that good musicians know how to do; a construction project seldom looks complex once the scaffolding has been taken down.

Levy is also fascinated with the low tones of the cello-banjo—as in "Doctor Levy's Walk-Around," an original minstrel-style tune, and the "Walk Into the Parlor" medley, also done in the minstrel style of the 1850s. He extends his fascination with bass notes by play-

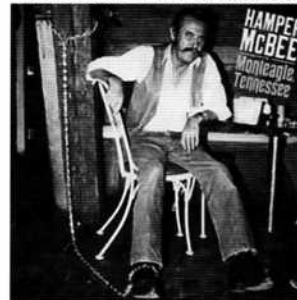
ing a six-string banjo with an added low bass string, allowing melody notes to be played an octave below the banjo's normal range. (This has already been mentioned while praising "Sandy Boys" above.) In fact, the only cut on this CD done with a "standard" five-string banjo is Ola Belle Reed's "Boat's Up the River." Two nice fiddle tunes, both done with two fiddles with Mike Eberle, and a cover of the Rolling Stones' "No Expectations," round out the CD.

I think of this CD as an opportunity to follow some of the roads taken by a fine traditional musician (in several widely differing traditions) who has found his own balance between honoring tradition and creating new music. Many of these roads I would never have found for myself, and I am glad Levy showed them to me.

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The unsuspecting music buyer might think he knows what he's getting into when he buys this new album from Twos & Fews and Drag City. A collection with a homey title like 'The Good Old-Fashioned