

its lyrical and brilliant aspects. The Ysaye is well done, and an unusual choice presaging his later willingness to champion unfamiliar literature. Michael Press's transcription of Rachmaninoff's beautiful wordless song also receives an expressive performance.

HMV's decision to group these two young artists was probably a marriage of convenience more than anything else, and it inspires musings about the ways of fate and fortune more than instructive comparisons of their playing. We should be very grateful for both sides of the record. The Hassid, however, is a unique event in the world of historical reissues that should be heard by anyone with an interest in great string playing, and in what might have been. *Reviewed by John Swan*

The Greatest Songs of Woody Guthrie.

Sung by Joan Baez, Country Joe McDonald, Jack Elliot, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Odetta and the Weavers. Vanguard records VCD 35/36 (CD).

Woodrow Wilson Guthrie was born in Okemah, Oklahoma on July 14, 1912. His life experiences as a hobo in early years, survivor of the Great Depression and the dust bowl, merchant marine during World War II, and union activist are reflected in his more than 1,000 songs and musical adaptations. After being "discovered" by Alan Lomax in 1940, his particular brand of song writing became familiar through recordings and radio broadcasts which had a powerful effect on singers and song writers of the Folk revival during the 1960s. Guthrie believed that songs should have a message, and was not shy to speak out against social injustice and tout his favorite causes. After all, he did inscribe "this machine kills fascists" on his guitar. His interest in Communism (he wrote a column for *People's Daily World*) made him a target of the McCarthy witch hunts, but he remained a folk hero who actively performed and composed until he was hospitalized with Huntington's chorea in 1952. After fifteen years of slow, painful decline, he was laid to rest in October 1967, leaving the world with a legacy of music that endures to this day.

Of the recent collections highlighting the career of Woody Guthrie, perhaps the most familiar are the Folkways recordings *The Original Vision* and *A Vision Shared* which contain the songs of both Guthrie and Leadbelly. *The Greatest Songs of Woody Guthrie* and *A Vision Shared* contain Guthrie's songs performed by other people; the only person heard on one of four songs found on both recordings is Pete Seeger singing "This Land is Your Land."

The Greatest Songs of Woody Guthrie contains 23 songs (mostly from earlier Vanguard recordings) that serve as a showcase, not only of Guthrie's diversity, but also of the many ways in which his music has been interpreted by others. Several performers are friends and contemporaries of Guthrie's who appeared on stage or recorded with him. Performances range from the bluesy, earthy style of Odetta singing "Pastures of Plenty" to the tense, high-pitched style of Joan Baez singing "Pretty Boy Floyd" (probably from *Joan Baez in Concert*, Vanguard VRS 9112). Between those extremes fall the Weavers, whose vocal harmonies and instrumental playing provide a change of pace from the usual solo voice with subdued accompaniment. Cisco Houston, a close friend and traveling companion of Guthrie with a similar vocal style, appears on eight tracks while Guthrie himself sings on five.

This good selection of songs explores Guthrie's broad repertory, ranging from his popular children's songs represented by "(Take Me) Riding in My Car," to his songs of social commentary such as "Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)." The performances also are impressive, with a classic Weaver's rendition of "The Sinking of the Reuben

James" (most likely from *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, Vol. 2, Vanguard VRS 9010), a spooky version of "Buffalo Skinners" by Jim Kweskin, and a chuckle-invoking performance of "Talking Fishing Blues" by Jack Elliot.

There are two serious drawbacks with this collection. First, some distortion occurs in the vocal tracks, especially when the volume increases. The second problem is an almost total lack of documentation by Vanguard. Many cuts appear to be concert performances. "This Land is Your Land" contains an abrupt entrance by the Weavers which is not acknowledged. Several recordings are probably more than 30 years old, especially some of the Guthrie tracks which have a tendency to pop and hiss, but no mention is made of their provenance. Considering that Houston died in 1961 and taking into account the heyday of the Weavers' popularity, one can guess the age of some tracks, but it would be nice to know the particulars. The Guthrie tracks are acknowledged as having been recorded by Moses Asch, yet no additional information is provided. This is not the first time that Vanguard has slapped together a collection of greatest hits without documentation, as observed in the Vanguard twofers. If enough people complain, perhaps they will be more careful with their future products. *Reviewed by Elaine Bradtke* 