

Cori Brewster
Buffalo Street

Living as we do among the placeless landscapes of Starbucks and Walmart, *Buffalo Street* is more than a proverbial breath of fresh air. Cori Brewster's latest CD resuscitates our dulled sense of place with the crisp air of the Canadian Rockies. Geography tells us something about a place but sounds and stories are what make us dwell in it, feel attached and alive to our surroundings. Brewster's original songwriting saturates the Rocky Mountains with this sense of place, immersing the listener in "the thousand hues of Lake Louise" and "the winds of Kananaskis". We follow the fiddle's haunting lines into the backcountry of Banff National Park, to the Seven Sister's Falls, to Ya-ha-tinda and up the Spillimacheen. Along the way, we encounter big horn sheep, wolves and the eponymous buffalo, we walk through yellow larch and jack pine and we hear not only the mighty Bow River but the surprising big band sounds coming from the Banff Springs Hotel. The luxurious specificity of place makes this CD feel like an old familiar friend after only one listen. But it's the stories, in the end, that give the landscape its particular iconic heart and soul.

Brewster's finely researched and lovingly crafted tales of the Rockies are not the oft-told epics about explorers and railway workers but alternative and lesser-known stories, many of which emerge from the musician's own family history and are supplemented with photographs and narratives in a spectacularly beautiful booklet, worth the price of the CD itself. Her great-great-grandfather John Brewster settled in Banff in 1886 to start what eventually became the family's outfitting business; 'Diamond Hitch' is dedicated to the rarely acknowledged guides and outfitters who made the mountaineers first ascents possible. 'Written in my Name', with its pistol packin' twang, introduces us to Pearl Brewster, Cori's great aunt, who could hunt, ride and drink whisky with the best of Alberta's cowboys. Like many of the songs, the first-person voice draws us in with tactile intimacy and the listener spends four minutes drinking tea and whisky with Pearl in her kitchen (which, in fact, you can visit since her historic home was donated to the Whyte Museum in Banff).

The CD's rhythms range from the slow sad cries of Bill Peyto (mostly known as a Wild Bill, hunter and outdoorsman but here portrayed as the heartbroken widow lost in a wilderness that once housed his love) to the playful up-tempo beat of 'Trono', a whimsical testament to trombonist Louis Trono who for most of his 95 years serenaded tourists at the Banff Springs Hotel. The most moving tales, however, are not the first-person songs about white settlers, but the more challenging stories of their encounters with the Stoney-Nakoda, told in the complex title song, 'Buffalo Street', and in 'William Twin', short-listed for a 2006 Best Song of Alberta award at the Calgary Folk Festival, about a Stoney family friend who shared his indigenous knowledge of the region with the Brewsters. In a perfect twist of fate, 'My Familiar Sky' a heart-stoppingly beautiful song about the shared love Peter and Catharine Whyte had for each other and for the Rockies, was nominated for the same award this year.

The best art about place is that which attaches a vivid image, an emotion, a sense, to a landscape that never leaves the listener's or viewer's memory, becoming part of that very geography. 'Buffalo Street' does that for me. The title song, with its disturbing reminder of how Canadian indigenous people were betrayed by Treaty 7 and its sacred images, inscribes the past onto the present in such a way that I will always "see that elder walking down/ Down old Buffalo Street". What an exquisite gift to give your hometown!

If you can't afford to travel across Canada to the Rocky Mountains this year, buy *Buffalo Street*. It's almost as good as being there. Plus, you'll learn a little history with your melody.

Three Sisters News- Katherine Binhammer