

Frails & Frolics CD by Ken Perlman

Review by David Cotton

It's difficult to know where to start with this review because Ken Perlman plays an astonishing selection of tunes which any self-respecting clawhammer player knows are impossible to play on the banjo. That is to say, Perlman is obviously a wizard, using spells and incantations to conjure up these tunes which are too difficult for the average player to contemplate and yet he dashes them off with verve, joie de vivre and above all, great musicality. And there are tunes a-plenty—46 little gems, largely played in sets and demonstrating a level of virtuosity only surpassed by Ken's enthusiasm for the music. Elsewhere in this issue you can read about Ken's approach to playing and his love for the fiddle tunes of Britain, Ireland, Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island.

In the second part of *Londonderry Hornpipe*, Ken demonstrates the art of holding on to a bass note and letting it ring as the melody dances above it. In *Jenny Dang The Weaver*, his triplet playing is as smooth as any fiddler's. *Carney's Canter* sees Ken leaping all over the neck without missing a beat, and throwing in triplets for good measure.

Jigs shouldn't be possible using clawhammer techniques, but *Omar Cheverie* proves they are and *Hector MacDonald* evokes the skirl of the bagpipes. Track four, including *MacKinnon's Rant*, is a breathless romp through rural Scotland. Then everything slows down for the touching air *Bonniest Lass in A' The World* before the lass in question leaps up and dances a couple of reels.

Dallas Rag is played with great humour and demonstrates that syncopation and chromatic runs are easy in clawhammer style if you practise for 40 years. Set 12, including *Durang's Hornpipe* and set 14, including *Ottawa Valley Reel* are two of my favourites.

There are strathspeys, jigs, reels, rants and hornpipes in profusion here, and the final set includes some beautiful note-perfect playing up the neck.

Throughout the album Ken is supported beautifully by Jim Prendergast on guitar and Janine Randall on piano. The sleeve notes are informative and give details of the various tunings used.

The only way you'll get to experience Ken's virtuosity is to go out and buy his album from his own website www.kenperlman.com, <https://store.cdbaby.com/cd/kenperlman2>, Amazon or iTunes. Whatever your preferred style of playing, you'll find something here. A small appeal to Ken—don't leave another 15 years before your next solo album!

Tracks are as follows:

- 1 Londonderry Hornpipe/Jenny Dang the Weaver/Sleepy Maggie
- 2 Dr Keith Strathspey/Miss Barker's Hornpipe/Carney's Canter
- 3 Omar Cheverie's Jig/Fig for a Kiss/Hector MacDonald's Jig
- 4 Pride of the Ball/MacKinnon's Rant/Lasses of Glenalladale/St Kilda Wedding
- 5 Bonniest Lass in A' the World/Emil Gaudet's Reel/Chetticamp Reel
- 6 Dallas Rag
- 7 North Side of the Grampians/Jack Webster's Reel/Souris Breakwater
- 8 Rose of Tennessee/Don't Be Teasing/Whiskey Jig
- 9 Carlton County Breakdown/Miller's Reel/Trip to Windsor
- 10 Where the North River Flows
- 11 The Marchioness of Tullibardine/Dinky's Reel/ Little Donald in the Pigpen
- 12 Hector's New Dance Hall/Hector's Fancy/Durang's Hornpipe
- 13 Fred Wilson's Hornpipe/High Level Hornpipe
- 14 Ottawa Valley Reel/Lad O'Beirne's/Marie à Pierre
- 15 The Bonny Lea Rig/Shores of Loughgowna/Teviot Bridge
- 16 Tennessee Mountain Fox Chase
- 17 George V's Army/Mr Murray Strathspey/The Marquis of Huntley/Prince Edward Island Wedding Reel

