

Editor's Corner

DAVID OLDS

I'm writing this on my 72nd birthday, so I'm going to indulge myself a little. But actually, it seemed as if my birthday came early this year. On an unseasonably mild day in early March the telephone rang and a voice said, "This is **Ken Whiteley** and I'd like to bring you my new CD."

I've been a fan of the Whiteley clan's various musical adventures for more than half a century but had not previously had the pleasure of making Ken's acquaintance. As I said it was a nice day and so I decided to sit on my porch and play my 1966 Martin D12-20 12-string while I waited for him to arrive. After initial pleasantries, much to my delight, Ken said he'd like to try out my guitar – see the accompanying photo – and commenced to demonstrate how such a venerable instrument should be played. I'm a pretty good strummer but man, my Martin has never sounded as good as it did under his finger-picking finesse. What a treat!

Last June at Hugh's Room I attended the 60th anniversary/reunion celebration of the Original Sloth Band's first gig back in 1965 in Bracebridge. It was the first two LPs by this band, featuring Ken and his older brother Chris with Tom Evans, that began my interest in these multi-instrumentalists and their eclectic repertoire that spans roots, blues, early jazz, gospel and folk traditions. The eponymous first record came out in 1973 and in the intervening years Ken has released more than three dozen discs, many under his own name, others with family (The Whiteley Brothers), friends (Mose Scarlett and Jackie Washington) and such sundry groups as The Beulah Band and Junior Jug Band.



Although Ken contributes the lion's share of the accompaniments on most recordings, he is always joined by a host of stalwart journeymen (and women) and his latest CD, **Keep Going** (kenwhiteley.bandcamp.com/album/keep-going), is no exception. It's an engaging mix of cover versions, original songs, and Whiteley arrangements of traditional tunes. He's joined by brother Chris

(harmonica and cornet), Bucky Berger (drums), Gord Mowat (bass) and vocalist Ciceal Levy, whose distinct harmonies blend marvellously and give an edge to Whiteley's lead vocals. Eva Goldberg co-wrote and sings on the closer *At the End of the Day*, which features a haunting bass harmony by Pat Patrick.

Whiteley's notes are like a masterclass, giving the origin story of each tune and how he came to learn it. A case in point is Noah Lewis' *Going to German* which Whiteley first performed in the 1960s as a member of Tubby Fats Original Allstar Downtown Syncopated Big Rock Jug Band. The backstory: German is a place just outside of Memphis where a state penitentiary is located. Another confusing title is *Aberdeen*, not in Scotland, but a town in Mississippi where Bukka White lived in the 1930s.

On the opener *Everybody's Got to Be Tried* Ken plays National steel guitar, Hammond organ and Fender bass, with Berger on drums and Chris on harmonica. On *Going to German* he plays 2 mandolins, mandola and mandocello, harmonica and bass harmonica. Other tracks find him adding string bass, washboard and piano.

Although vocals and well-articulated lyrics are front and centre on most tracks, there is one instrumental, Whiteley's own arrangement of Benny Goodman's *A Smooth One* played on a Laskin acoustic



David Olds, left and Ken Whiteley

guitar, which he says he believes is the first totally solo guitar piece he's ever released. It's sweet!

Of particular note is the title track, a balladic anthem that came about after a fall on the ice in 2025 that resulted in a broken ankle. "Take my rest when I'm tired; I'm not fighting with nature's laws; When I'm done I'll keep going; This rest is just a pause; ...While my heart keeps on beating; I'll get back up when I'm down; Keep going, keep going..." Advice to live by.

Concert Note: Ken Whiteley will celebrate his 75th birthday in a concert with friends (and family no doubt) at Hugh's Room on May 2. It's on my calendar.



Many of my most memorable concert experiences have been shared with my dear friend André Leduc. For many years of my tenure at New Music Concerts (NMC), André was our photographer and documented the residencies of some of the most distinguished composers of our time. He and I agree that top among these were Witold Lutoslawski, who conducted the NMC

Ensemble in 1993 just months before his death, and Pierre Boulez, laureate of the Glenn Gould Prize in 2002, who led our ensemble in the programme at Glenn Gould Studio during which the prize was presented. The ceremony also included the Toronto Award, given to a "protégé" selected by the winner, in this case the Montreal-born cellist **Jean-Guihen Queyras**, who has a thriving career in Europe.

Lutoslawski - Concertos for Cello | for Orchestra; Bloch - Schelomo (Harmonia Mundi HMM902714 store.harmoniamundi.com) features **Queyras** in Lutoslawski's cello concerto and the Bloch, with the **Luxembourg Philharmonic** conducted by **Gustavo Gimeno**, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's current music director.

The *Concerto for Orchestra* is given a stunning performance to open the disc. It's a relatively early work, written between 1950 and 1954, and owes an obvious debt to Bartók's masterpiece in the same genre, while adding some contemporary stridency.

Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo: Rhapsodie Hébraïque for Violoncello and Orchestra* was completed in 1916, before the Swiss composer's move