

# The Lonesome Road Review

Bluegrass, Country, Americana, Blues, Rock and anything else that sounds good



**Chris Vallillo**

*Abraham Lincoln in Song*

**Gin Ridge Music (GR-1009)**

4 stars (out of 5)

**By Donald Teplyske**

An album of old-time folk music from and inspired by the times of Lincoln; now there's a commercial bonanza just a-waitin'! Fortunately, folk singers don't worry about such matters.

Recently endorsed by the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, Illinois songwriter and musician Chris Vallillo celebrates on his fifth studio release the times and music of the early- to mid-19th Century.

In the detailed liner notes, Vallillo outlines the connection each track has to Lincoln, whether a personal favorite of the 16th president, an artifact of the time, or a contemporary piece reflecting a historical perspective. Anticipating the bicentennial of his birth, *Abraham Lincoln in Song* presents thirteen tunes and songs from the familiar- "Lorena," "Hard Times," and "Dixie's Land"- to the less known- "El-A-Noy" and "Let the Band Play Dixie."

The album works most completely as a unified listening experience. Although not placed chronologically, one traces the events and times through Lincoln's life in the songs.

Individual performances do stand out, however. Vallillo's treatment of the Civil War standard "Lorena" is especially effective. The steel guitar work by Vallillo on "Shawneetown" fits the melancholy mood of the tune ideally, and the additional guitar picking on this number — either by Vallillo or accompanist Gary Gordon — complements the phrasing of the steel bits.

Vallillo's voice is ideally suited to the timbre of "Lincoln's Funeral Train," and he conveys the song with such conviction that one may be forgiven for believing he wrote the Norman Blake song.

Vallillo has a pleasant, masculine voice that is fully capable of carrying the nuance of a popular sentimental melody while bringing a bit of bombast to more inspirational numbers. Vallillo's guitar arsenal is large, and he is accompanied by mandolin, fiddle, bass, and harmonica.

Beyond the stellar musicianship and singing, *Abraham Lincoln in Song* is further impressive because of the care that has gone into packaging the album. From the cover art featuring an uncommon photograph of Lincoln's hat and glasses, to the multiple panel fold-out featuring the notes and additional photographs, Vallillo has elected to place emphasis on creating a product that puts quality over profit margins.

Those interested in the aural tradition and historical basis of familiar songs within a stunning acoustic context are well advised to investigate *Abraham Lincoln in Song*.