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Musichound Folk: The Essential Album Guide

Neal Walters Brian Mansfield Gary Graff
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What is folk music? Is Woody Guthrie folk? How about Bob Dylan? The Byrds? Clifton Chenier? Are klezmer, zydeco and Celtic fiddling folk music? Luckily, there are some folks at MusicHound who have been working on these questions and have created what they call a “first-ever guide to folk music”.

The book is organized alphabetically around a group or artist. A short biography is followed by “What to buy” (great stuff), “What to buy next” (great stuff if you’re a groupie) and “What to avoid” (great stuff if you’re wealthy and eccentric). “Worth searching for” and “Influences” follow. Each recording includes the date and company. Recordings are rated from a high of five bones (nirvana) to Woof! (self-explanatory). There are a list of classic tunes, web site URLs, record labels, radio stations and festivals.

Is there klezmer and zydeco and Celtic fiddling? Yes, there is. Is there a comprehensive selection? I suspect that they cover the bases better than most, but a purist in some of the smaller niches should go elsewhere. The excellent introduction by Neal Walters explains that he took the Anglo tradition approach embraced by most local record stores. That means little world music, few imports, etc. Considering the thousands of CDs released yearly, a little selectivity is a good thing. Highly recommended.
PETER TERRY (June 15, 1998)

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