

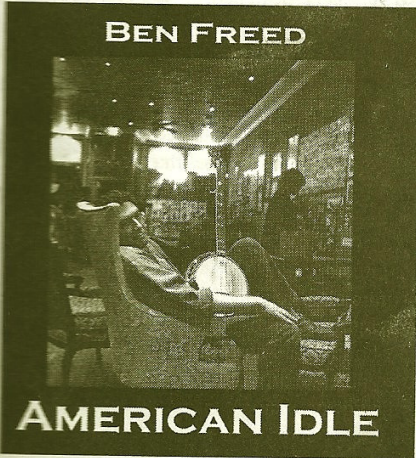
REVIEW

American Idle by Ben Freed,
www.banjoben.com

Review by Scott Anderson

The first time I heard Ben Freed's playing I didn't even know who I was listening to. I was watching the Coen brothers' "Raising Arizona," which is one of the funniest movies of all time (if not the funniest.) The banjo music was very prominently featured and almost became a character itself. I wondered then who was supplying such great banjo playing to the soundtrack but it was actually a number of years later that I learned the player's name. Such was my introduction to the music of Ben Freed.

With *American Idle* (get it?) Ben



AMERICAN IDLE

again shows his amazing imagination and creativity with a great batch of original banjo tunes. His sense of humor shows through in the names of the tunes (*American Idle Hornpipe*, *Farmacology*, and *Foggy Mountain Shakedown*) and he provides solid and inventive playing throughout. He drives it when it needs to be driven, plays it sweetly when it should be sweet, and adds the right amount of flash when some flash is required. And he does all of this while maintaining great tone and timing. Ben wrote every tune, and they're all really good ones. In short, Ben is the real deal.

American Idle Hornpipe is a really nice medium-tempo melodic tune with some cool bluesy touches added by Ben. *Clearwater* (previously tabbed out in *BNL*

March 2009) is a really catchy melody with an old timey fiddle and banjo introduction as well as some really lively support from the accordion. (Remember, even Bill Monroe had one of those in his band at one time!) *Song for M & L* starts with a pretty banjo intro and then kicks into a spritely tune with a nice bounce and banjo tone that reminds me of some of my favorite Alan Munde tunes. Again, some nice accordion makes everything even happier.

And the hits keep coming! *Ghost Dance* is a minor key breakdown with a real Middle Eastern flair. It's the kind of tune you might hear at any Turkish hoedown I suppose. It sounds to me like a real finger-buster, too. *Home* is a nice bouncy tune with some pretty changes and great interplay between the guitar and accordion and Ben on both banjo and Dobro. *Banjo Island* is a rocking banjo tour de force with a danceable rhythm and some sweet changes over a grooving percussion and bass. On this one Ben goes all out on both acoustic banjo and his electric Telecaster banjo.

"*American Idle*" also features great support for Ben's tunes by some great players including Jon Sholle on guitar; Rich Brodsky, Ethan Kende and Mark Murphy on bass; Bill Christopherson and Kenny Kosek on fiddle; Terri Conti on accordion; Wayne Fugate, Barry Mitterhoff, and Michael Sassano on mandolin; and Eric Puente on drums. Ben also plays Dobro, guitar, bongos, mandolin, and bass on this project himself, and he does so quite well. What a showoff!

This project offers a number of different moods and feels and helps to show what the banjo is capable of in the right hands. If you enjoy good instrumental music or good banjo sounds with a fresh slant, you'll love this one. Recommended.

Visit www.banjoben.com

Scott Anderson has been a fixture on the Southeastern bluegrass scene for two decades. Scott recently released "Another Day" with his daughter Amanda, and his newest solo project, "Tales From the Swamp," features more of his originals.

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American Idle Hornpipe

Key of G, G Tuning:
gDGBD. By Ben Freed.

A Part: G C G D

B Part: G

Em C G

Em C D

G

Tab Notes: *American Idle Hornpipe* was written with a fairly square melody with the intent that it could be other instrumentalists alike. On the banjo, the "B" part has fretted at the tenth fret. I use my thumb to do this. —Ben

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