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Happy Land
Musical Tributes to Laura Ingalls Wilder

Riders in the Sky . Dave Olney . Andrea Zonn . Pat Enright .
Doug Green . Butch Baldassari . Keith Little . Deborah Packard .
John Mock . Jep Bisbee . The Princely Players

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This recording is an effort to pay some small musical tribute to Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867-1957) for her efforts to illuminate, explain, and capture the place that music-making once occupied in the family life of ordinary Americans. Her famous series of eight *Little House*® books traces her own family's history, with settings in Wisconsin, Kansas (Indian territory), Minnesota, and South Dakota (Dakota Territory) that cover a period from 1867 to 1885. The books have rightly become cornerstone classics in American children's literature, read by millions the world over.¹

Embedded in Wilder's stories are references to 126 separate songs and tunes. *By the Shores of Silver Lake* alone contains mention of 37 songs. *These Happy Golden Years* is titled after a song, and six of the books close with music-making. Furthermore, the types of music Wilder employed are extensive. The *Little House*® books embrace parlor songs, stage songs, minstrel show songs, patriotic songs, Scottish and Irish songs, hymns, spirituals, fiddle tunes, singing school songs, play party songs, folk songs, a Child ballad, broadside ballads, Christmas songs, catches and rounds, cowboy songs, and make reference to "Osage war dances."

Throughout, the guiding musical spirit is Laura's father, Charles "Pa" Ingalls (1835-1902), who missed few opportunities to sing and play his fiddle. And it's "Pa's fiddle," carefully wrapped, stowed in its fiddle-box, and cushioned by pillows, that accompanies the Ingalls family through all its adventures and comes to symbolize the endurance of the family unit in an often wild and threatening frontier world. Indeed, Wilder wrote to her publisher that "(t)here is one thing that will always remain the same to remind people of little Laura's days on the prairie, and that is Pa's fiddle."²

There may be no books in American literature of comparable standing and popularity where America's music is so central to the themes, assumes such a major narrative role, and is found in such rich abundance. If Laura Ingalls Wilder penned what have become the books that best express "The

¹ The books are: *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932); *Farmer Boy* (1933); *Little House on the Prairie* (1935); *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937); *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939); *The Long Winter* (1940); *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941); and *These Happy Golden Years* (1943). All are published by HarperTrophy (New York).

² Letter to Harper & Row, Collections of the Laura Ingalls Wilder-Rose Wilder Lane Home and Museum, Mansfield, Missouri. Pa's fiddle is still extant and on display at this same museum.

Great American Family,” then the music she referred to in those books has become an important part of that mythology too. This recording is an effort to give new voice and sound to music that has lain silent on the page for far too long. For as Wilder herself wrote, “if you want the spirit of these times, you should [hear] these old songs.”³

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³ Quoted in the unpublished “Pioneer Girl” manuscript, Wilder Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri (microfilm). My thanks to Nancy Cleaveland for directing me to this source.

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A special measure of thanks to the musicians, past and present, who were present at the creation of this music.

All selections published by Cackle and Splash Music, BMI/Slocum Hollow Songs, BMI, but for ones featuring Jep Bisbee, which are public domain

HarperCollins Publishers, which owns the trademark to *Little House*®, has not been involved, either implicitly or explicitly, in the production of this recording.

There are 126 songs and tunes referenced in the classic *Little House*® books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, many of them among the finest in all of American music. This recording is of a selection drawn from those songs, performed in such a way that the music of yesteryear is made new and fresh for both children and adults alike.

1. The Girl I Left Behind Me (Jep Bisbee) 0:37
2. The Girl I Left Behind Me (Pat Enright) 2:48
3. Sweet By and By (Andrea Zonn) 3:28
4. The Blue Juniata (Riders in the Sky) 2:04
5. Oh! Susanna (Keith Little) 2:24
6. Roll the Old Chariot Along (The Princely Players) 4:07
7. Highland Mary (Deborah Packard) 3:17
8. The Arkansas Traveler/The Devil's Dream (Pa's Fiddle Band) 2:25
9. Captain Jinks (Riders in the Sky) 3:13
10. Oft in the Stilly Night (Deborah Packard & John Mock) 2:37
11. The Big Sunflower (Doug Green) 2:47
12. Happy Land (Peggy Duncan Singers & Pa's Fiddle Band) 2:30
13. Barbara Allen (Deborah Packard) 5:23
14. Nelly Was a Lady (Dave Olney) 3:45
15. Uncle Sam's Farm (Doug Green) 3:21
16. Promised Land (Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp Singers) 0:39
17. On Jordan's Stormy Banks (Walnut Grove Church) 2:35
18. Bonus Track: The Devil's Dream (Jep Bisbee) 3:03

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