

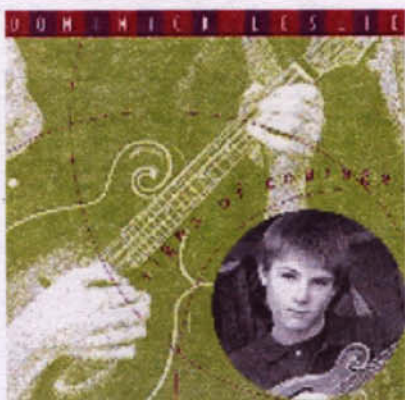
DOMINICK LESLIE - SIGNS OF COURAGE [April 2006

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As any good mandolin debut record should, Dominick Leslie's clearly establishes his credentials. He gives a bow to Bill Monroe by including three of his tunes, "Lonesome Moonlight Waltz," "Old Ebenezer Scrooge," and a version of "Boston Boy" taken at between 160 and 170 bpm. Since Monroe is the man who set the standard, everyone is going to ask how



you handle his work. They're also going to want to see how well you compose your own tunes. Leslie includes six of those, including a solo piece, "The Millenium Caprice," to showcase his light, woody tone. He also covers three fiddle tunes, "Ducks' On The Millpond," "Kitchen Girls," and "Golden Eagle Hornpipe." Finally, there is the obligatory nod to swing, in this case a cover of Django Reinhardt's "Swing 42."

All of this Leslie handles quite well and with confidence, and he is wellsupported by fiddler Stuart Duncan, bassist Gene Libbea, guitarists Ross Martin and Jon Stickley, banjoist Noam Pikelny, resonator guitarist Todd Livingston, and mandolinists Justin Hoffenberg and John Frazier. His takes on Monroe are rather modern, not at all Monroesque in either tone or technique, but in them, particularly "Lonesome Moonlight," one hears an understanding of his style. On the Django piece, on the other hand, he could have used a bit more fire; he does however have the swing, the ideas, and a jazzy tone. With the more difficult task of composing, he shows remarkable ability. The most ambitious would have to be "The Raven," a tune full of crosspicking and alternating string figures. "Closer To The Stars" is his sort of newgrass tune, "Jokerville" is the minor key number, and "Las Brisas" acknowledges the latin tinge. All are wellconceived and expressed, but my favorite cut is leaning toward his "Signs Of Courage," a nice, uptempo, semitraditional bluegrass tune made all the more interesting by its catchy "B" section.

Oh, and did I mention Dominick is only 15 years old? That makes this disc all the more impressive. (Dominick Leslie, 2278 Hiwan Dr., Evergreen, CO 80439, www.dominickleslie.com.)

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