

# Vermont Life

SPRING 2003

## Vermont-Made Music, From Oldtime to Rockabilly

By ROBERT RESNIK

**T**HERE'S NO LACK of traditional music being played in the Vermont hills, even though the definition of what exactly is traditional varies widely depending on who you ask. What's your pleasure? Bluegrass? English ballads? Rockabilly? Irish reels? Franco-American? It's all found right here in Vermont.

Without too much effort, it's easy to discover a mind-boggling assortment of styles and traditions. On a typical week last May, you could see and hear a live contradance band playing in North Tunbridge; a woman's multicultural choral concert in Norwich; contemporary singer-songwriters performing in Hinesburg, Bellows Falls, Burlington and South Stratford; a fiddlers' meeting in Barre and a wide variety of open mike events at coffeehouses, restaurants and taverns throughout the state.

One thing at the outset: The task of describing home-grown Vermont music and musicians is an intimidating one. Since Vermont has become an undeniable cultural melting pot, attracting new arrivals from urban centers throughout the United States, it is now possible to find everything from Japanese taiko drumming troupes to Balkan singing groups here. To make our subject a little more manageable, we are going to explore (and recommend) a few choice Vermont musicians and groups who are playing styles of music that you would have been able to hear played in Vermont 50 years ago. With a clear conscience we could spotlight many more, but here are just a few.



Jack Rowell

*The Starline Rhythm Boys put on a rocking rockabilly show. From left, Al Lemery, Danny Coane and Billy Bratcher.*

### Starline Rhythm Boys

The Starline Rhythm Boys, formed in northern Vermont in 1998, is one of the newest groups in our overview, but their rockabilly and country music roots run deep. Lead singer Danny Coane was the front man for the popular Vermont party band the Throbulators from 1982 to 1991, and bassman Billy Bratcher was one of the founders of Buck & the Black Cats, a top-flight rockabilly outfit. Lead guitarist Al Lemery rounds out the trio.

The Starline Rhythm Boys have released two rockin' discs on their own Tin Town label. "Honky Tonk Livin'," which was released in mid-2002, was named 2002 Album of the Year by an organization called Freeform American Roots, and the band packs 'em in at bars in Montpelier and Burlington, which, if you happen to be a bar band, is what really matters regardless of what the charts say. "Honky Tonk Livin'" is good sweaty fun to listen to. It's available from Hep Cat Records (800-404-4117) or at [www.hepcatrecords.com](http://www.hepcatrecords.com).