



With a Juno nomination, a Western Canadian Music Award, two WCMA nominations and two Canadian Folk Music Award nominations to his credit, Joel Fafard has proven that he can take a niche genre like instrumental guitar music and make a significant name for himself at it.

So why not take a step in yet another somewhat niche direction? Like, say, vocal covers of old Southern roots and blues songs?

For his new album, *Cluck Old Hen*, Fafard has done just that, offering up classic-sounding renditions of instantly-recognizable numbers like “Come on in My Kitchen” and “Don’t Let your Deal Go Down,” all sung in a weathered baritone that proves Fafard’s entrée into instrumental music was not for lack of singing chops. The guitar work – mostly national steel – is every bit as wicked as one would expect from Fafard, and violinist Richard Moody brings the arrangements to life with some tasty playing of his own.

Among the songs Fafard covers on the recording are Muddy Waters’ “I Can’t Be Satisfied,” Willie Dixon’s “Spoonful” and the traditional Appalachian pieces “John Hardy” and “Angeline and the Baker.” He also includes a couple of more recent classics: Richard Thompson’s “Vincent Black Lightning” and Lyle Lovett’s “If I had a Boat.”

None of the tracks is actually new to the Fafard repertoire. He has been including them in his live set for years. “Everybody was asking which albums they were on, and I got tired of saying ‘none of them,’” he says.

After taking a couple of months off playing at the end of last year – a creative breather he tries to make room for once a year – Fafard found himself drawn to his dobro and to his collection of Southern gems, and he decided it was time to commit them to record. In the process, he says, he found his voice as a singer like never before.

Though Fafard sounds like a natural blues vocalist, with a voice that is sure to seduce fans of Kelly Joe Phelps, he has always been an instrumentalist first and foremost. He picked up the guitar at 15, took a few lessons from celebrated prairie musician Jack Semple, then went on to study for two years at the well-respected Capilano College music program in North Vancouver.

He launched his professional career in the mid-90s as a member of Scruj MacDuhk, the predecessor of the Juno-winning Grammy-nominated Duhks. Later, he established himself as a solo singer-songwriter, releasing three albums, touring coffee houses and earning praise for the maturity of his songwriting. However, Fafard was never happy in the singer-songwriter role, and decided to take a chance on the career path he really wanted but never dreamed would pay: being an instrumental guitarist.

As it happens, it did pay. Fafard's sophomore instrumental album, ...and another thing..., earned a Western Canadian Music Award for Outstanding Instrumental Album and was nominated for both a Juno and a Canadian Folk Music Award. Its follow-up, Three Hens Escape Oblivion, received a second CFMA nod and was a runner up for an International Acoustic Music Award. Meanwhile, Fafard's music was featured in the TV shows Alice I Think and Road Trip Nation, and he co-scored the Middle of Somewhere TV series with Jason Plumb. In 2008, he was commissioned by The Globe Theatre in Regina to write a one-man show of tunes with tales.

Fafard's love of the blues goes back to his coming of age in Regina, when the local biker bar Georgia Fats was a destination for musicians from the Chicago blues scene. Canadians like Amos Garrett and Sue Foley also passed through the joint, as did Delta bluesmen like Charlie Musselwhite.

Blues music has always influenced Fafard's instrumental work, but now, it takes centre stage as part of his newest musical direction. Fans of the blues will be thrilled to discover Fafard's new sound.