



**Billy Cowsill**  
**Live from the Crystal Ballroom,**  
**Calgary, Ab., 1985**  
**★★★½ out of five**

Back in 1985, Calgary was an economically recovering oil burb of 625,000, New Coke was inducing nausea, and most people thought roots music was the soundtrack to a TV miniseries starring that guy who wore weird glasses in *Star Trek: TNG*. Thankfully, Billy Cowsill knew better.

Years from his Partridge-family-inspired beginnings, he found himself opening a gig for k.d. lang in the

swanky Palliser. With a baby-faced guitar protege soon to be known as Colin James in his band, Cowsill tossed all the branches of the American music tree — country, bluegrass, blues, rock and rockabilly — into a heap and sparked it with his weathered voice. And there at the back was a cassette tape picking it all up.

Cowsill has since come to define roots music in Calgary, and as his health fails, recordings such as this — which sounds remarkably vibrant considering its age and low-tech origins — become crucial cultural artifacts. Cowsill could see the connections between Hank Snow, Elvis Presley and The Clash, and, like Capt. Picard, he made it so.

— Tom Babin