

Southern Tenant Folk Union "The New Farming Scene" (Johnny Rock Records, 2010)



Through cross-pollination of bluegrass music with traditional Scottish folk music, the Southern Tenant Folk Union's third album travels a crooked and interesting road. No, they make an enriching sound to bring an exciting new element to Celtic music!

It wasn't until recently that I became aware of Southern Tenant Folk Union. I came across them via a compilation entitled 'Divided By A Common Language — A Collection Of UK Americana' on Clubhouse records and wasn't it an eye opening experience. Was it not! Such was the talent on offer.

After forming in London, the band relocated to Edinburgh. A scenario that works well, and why not since the unit featuring esteemed songwriter, musician (banjo, guitar) and vocalist Pat McGarvey (Sid Griffin), Adam Bulley (mandolin, guitar, Dobro) Silas Child (double bass), John Langan (Cajon, percussion, vocals) and Chris Purcell (guitar, vocals) are heavily influenced, vocally on some tracks by that of north of the border. Joining the band on the recording we have the fabulous fiddle of Patsy Reid that contributes to help make 'No Work Today'; one of ten songs from McGarvey into something rather special. So special is the song it would not be out of place if it appeared on an album of their peers from across the pond. It does not stand-alone either. So good is the band's music. Cameron Henderson from Black Diamond Express who shares the load with Reid of Breabach likewise, is aided by brief entries by Roddy Neilson and Jed Milroy as the band time and again make top scores.

Recorded in Edinburgh using old Germany microphones the music is strong and the standard achieved is first-class throughout, as the lead vocalist shape the respective lyrics. Few cases any finer I hasten to add than a finely crafted Celtic steeped 'Let Me Wipe The Tears From Your Eyes' (that possesses magical mandolin, Dobro, fiddle and wonderful shuffling rhythm). Acappella gem 'These Little Grains Of Sand' that though written by, McGarvey it could just as easily be a famed Scottish traditional ballad. On never allowing the format become predictable, but at the same time holding it together the music vies between various strengths of a bluegrass presentation. As they scamper along a series of acoustic back roads that could just as easily be set in the Appalachians as the Scottish highlands or lowlands. It matters little which road they pursue, it all comes out sounding refreshing as warm spring rain.

Whatever your preference in acoustic Americana or folk bluegrass music I urge you to give the STFU serious consideration, and subsequently the support their musical merits.

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Reviewer: Maurice Hope

Reviewers Rating: 8 out of 10

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