

Reviews

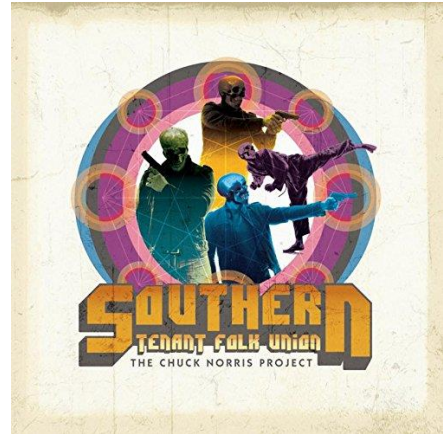
Southern Tenant Folk Union

Album: The Chuck Norris Project

Label: Johnny Rock

Tracks: 13

Website: <http://www.southerntentantfolkunion.com>



One of the things I like about the Southern Tenant Folk Union, is the way their music shows influences of traditions, whilst at the same time never feeling like those influences or traditions are allowed to dictate making you feel that both band and releases are very much their own entity. That seems especially true of new album, "The Chuck Norris Project", but with a title like that, how could it be otherwise?

If you're new to Southern Tenant Folk Union, they are six piece that perform bluegrass style around a central microphone, with "The Chuck Norris Project" being number six is what it must be said, has been a quite prolific pipeline since the band formed back in 2006. Over the years the band have drawn on a number of sources of inspiration, ranging from W.B. Yeats to social injustice, they are named after a sharecropper collective and whilst on the surface Chuck Norris titles may seem like a strange one, it does provide an interesting counterpoint.

Similarly I always like the way that a band that sings with such delightful harmonies, lead by vocalist and guitarist Rory Butler, who co-pens one of the songs on the album, have so many songs in their repertoire that speak of disharmony and struggle. Part of the reason for that comes down to the pen of banjo player, Pat McGarvey, who co-wrote, "Slaughter In San Francisco" with Butler and contributes ten other songs to the project, with another guitarist, Chris Purcell contributing the final two.

As you would anticipate, "The Chuck Norris Project" is a quite dramatic recording, almost cinematic in place, largely down to the arrangements and instrumentation that really give the album lots of moments of shade, giving the unexpected places to emerge from and suddenly appear in the light, be it a delightful harmony, some instrumental phasing or a profound lyric all of which can also seem quite ephemeral and able to slip from your grasp.

At time that makes "The Chuck Norris Project" a challenging album, but it's a challenge while worth rising to. For example there's a spot on the album where I suddenly thought that I was listening to the Specials, which helped to conclude a thought process about the particular song.

That's not to say it's a difficult album to listen to, it's not, ok it is, but really only if you've become too attached to sanitised radio friendly fare, there is something a bit off the convention about both Southern Tenant Folk Union and "The Chuck Norris Project", but ultimately that's quite a reassuring thing.

Neil King

<http://www.fatea-records.co.uk/magazine/2015/SouthernTFU.html>