

Tuesday, 03 February 2015

By Ian Fildes



## SOUTHERN TENANT FOLK UNION "THE CHUCK NORRIS PROJECT"

*Johnny Rock, 2015*

- 
- *Gently expressed political disdain from Scots folk collective*
- 

Acclaimed Edinburgh collective The Southern Tenant Folk Union approach their sixth album of lush acoustic folk with a concept that found its genesis when band leader Pat McGarvey was following the last presidential election. Perturbed by the titular Hollywood action movie goon's unhelpful comment that "A vote for Obama would bring a thousand years of darkness", each of the songs that make up this new album take their title from a film from the Norris catalogue as a simple starting point for freer ruminations on various political ideas and thoughts, such as firearm control, and extremism. Again, the record is an all-acoustic affair, with banjos fiddles and acoustic guitars its solid core, but it is impressive, occasionally breath-taking in its breadth and scope. The beautifully arranged orchestral string quartet sounds add layers of slightly cinematic quality, while elsewhere they just bath the already rich melodies in blankets of ethereal and unexpected sonic heaven. Overall the sound has been expanded to include clarinets choirs and modernist classical ideas to great effect.

The opening tracks such as 'Walker' and 'The President's Men' sport sprightlier rock rhythms, while elsewhere the styles branch out to take in Bluegrass, Jazz, and even disco ('Delta Force' is, stunningly, Chic with fiddles and banjos), as well as the familiar folk elements of the band's core. Highlights include the wonderful 'Slaughter in San Francisco' is Nick Drake gentle and tender, over alternating plaintive chords and the most fragile chorus lift. Rory Butler's softly melodic croon underpinning everything expertly. Elsewhere, 'The Wrecking Crew 2' cuts up snatches of speeches from Obama, Reagan, Clinton, Nixon and beyond. Obama's comments about citizenship and unity are particularly striking within the thread of the narratives elsewhere on the record and seem to speak loudest. Despite its original concept, which may initially appear baffling, then themes of the album, and the wonderfully expressed sentiments of the personal and the political really resonate and demand deeper listening and thought; all over the most beautifully orchestrated, organic music. 'The Chuck Norris Project' doesn't so much seethe with political rage, or spout political ire, but gently and soberly asks questions, discusses feelings and maybe even suggests possibilities.

<http://www.americana-uk.com/index.php/cd-reviews/item/southern-tenant-folk-union>