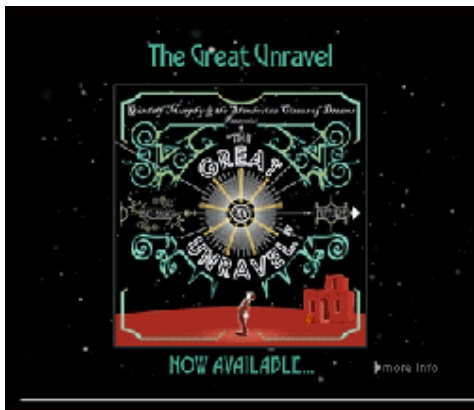


Gandalf Murphy & The Slambovian Circus Of Dreams - THE GREAT UNRAVEL
(High Noon Records SR. 0008)



This "ultimate DIY band", formed in New York's Sleepy Hollow in the late 90s, has since become somewhat of a cult, their music being variously described as a kind of "punk-classical hillbilly-floyd" brand of folk-rock.

An ugly, cumbersome but curiously accurate tag as it turns out, but one that didn't necessarily endear them to me at first when my task was to review their double-disc

offering *Flapjacks From The Sky*, critically-acclaimed predecessor of *The Great Unravel*.

I didn't quite "get it" then, but have since come to appreciate its unpredictability, enjoying the more wilful of its meanderings and its winsome, strangely attractive songwriting.

Perhaps this shift is due to my prolonged exposure to *The Great Unravel*, which presents a dozen new (and wholly accessible) original songs by frontman Joziah Longo which unashamedly (tho' sensibly) run the gamut of styles from Celtic-tinged prog to feelgood folk-rock, with momentary excursions into west-coast psych (*Picture*), singalong country-rock (*Everyone Has A Broken Heart*), Cat-Stevens-era philosophy (*Light A Way*) and smart-ass punk (*Bobby's Kinda Dumb*) along the way. *Summer's Day* is a perfect encapsulation of early Rick-Wright-mode Pink Floyd, while the ensuing number (the title track) even relies heavily on a Lucifer Sam riff, but there's lots more to Gandalf's Circus than that superficial - and wholly unfair - impression of pastiche-Floyd might initially give the listener. Joziah's love-song to fellow band-member Tink (Lloyd) is both epic, economic and genuinely touching, while the eastern-inflected excursion into fuller-blown mysticana (*Clear Channel*) is similarly believably executed.

These guys mean business, and treat their influences and sources with affection and respect. The band's instrumental complement is an ingenious and satisfying conglomeration of standard folk-rock sounds, more traditional folk instrumentation (acoustic guitar, accordion) and occasional more unusual textures like cello, theremin and glockenspiel.

The *Great Unravel* has no seriously low spots (though I warmed less to the opening and closing numbers, which pander to more conventional rock tastes), but importantly there's no excess fat or undue sprawling, and even the little uncredited bonus track (a kind of electric Japanese mantra in the Spirit Beautiful mode) has its own oddball appeal.

I like this band and their music a lot, and I'm only sorry it's taken me more than a few months - and two albums - to finally succumb to their charms.

www.slambovia.com

<http://www.myspace.com/gandalfmurphyandtheslamboviancircusofdreams>