WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN – Monkey's Fist (Own Label MF CD 004)

Here's the long awaited second recording by the current lineup of Monkey's Fist, who are fast gaining a well-deserved reputation as one of the country's premier groups specialising in maritime music. And as a natural successor to Sailing On The Evening Tide (which was an impressive disc in its own right), it does them full justice in my opinion, for it plays right to their strengths while also providing an accurate (technical) representation of their live presence within the studio environment.

It also presents a varied and balanced set-list that demonstrates Monkey's Fist are much more than just another shanty crew. Quite fairly though, just under half of the items on this new disc are performed unaccompanied: sure, these are primarily shanties, and good solid bread-and-butter (or should I say ship's biscuit!) fare from the "very worthwhile but not often done by the regular crews" category. The choice of lead singer for each shanty is invariably well made for the relevant compass and degree/type of attack required, and each of the leaders has a distinctive vocal character (though I've always thought Colin Devey especially suited to the role of shantyman!).

Another big plus is that Monkey's Fist make a point of carefully researching and annotating the versions they choose to sing, and this is reflected in their concise yet informative booklet notes.

They do a particularly good job on the shanties from the Menhaden Chanteymen (and it's quite an achievement to distil I'm Gonna Roll Here into three and a half minutes from the rambling nine-minute source recording – I know, I've tried it!); but none of the other shanties on the disc (which include Old Moke, Cheerily Man, Sundown Below and Hooker John) receive what might in any way be termed a weak performance. From the grey area of sea-song that lies between forebitters and shanties, Monkey's Fist turn in lusty accounts of Hob-y-derri-dando, Ten Stone (complete with rumbling bodhráns in tow!) and Heave Away Me Johnnies. The latter is one of the three tracks which sport a magnificent concertina accompaniment from John Horsey, whose guitar playing is no

less able and well-judged; Alan Collier adds some sensitive whistle to Braw Sailing On The Sea, while John brings a suitably wistful harmonica counterpoint to the crew's account of Ewen Carruthers' Was It You? towards the end of the disc. (I believe in giving credit where it's due, so it would've been good to have included those personnel details in the booklet notes, but this is a minor point of presentation I realise.)

Tempos are generally well considered, although there's arguably a slight tendency to briskness on occasion (I do feel Richard Grainger's mighty Death Of Nelson loses a little gravitas by being shoehorned into just over two minutes). And the recording is faithful, exhibiting a good sense of internal balance that also copes well with the subtleties of the crew's ensemble work.

In short, anyone who's experienced the keen enthusiasm and vital force of Monkey's Fist live will find When The Sun Goes Down a truthful – and irresistible – memento.

http://www.monkeysfistshanty.co.uk/