

The Crooked Jades - SHINING DARKNESS (Jade Note Music CJ. 008)



The Crooked Jades take primordial mountain and old-time string band music into areas where even the most inventive of the alt- and Americana outfits don't dare to tread - and with deep musicality too.

But even if you know the Jades' matchless 2006 World's On Fire album you may still think Shining Darkness a very strange record, for its sound-world is even more tellingly spare, with every strand of the texture counting for an enormous amount.

It would seem that the band's now been trimmed down to a four-piece; it still centres round founder member Jeff Kazor, but otherwise it's all change, with Canadian uke/guitar player Leah Abramson now the principal co-vocalist, supported by Seth Folsom (fiddle, banjo, harmonium, guitar) and Charlie Rose (ukes, cello, bass), with cameo instrumental contributions from four extra musicians. The actual instruments used this time may include fewer in the way of real obscurities (just a couple of Vietnamese ones), but the vintage, antique ambience is retained through a perennially inspired use of conventional old-timey instruments (in conjunction with the multifarious ukes and harmonium) and the careful placing of textures and timbres on the blank studio canvas.

A significant proportion of the material on Shining Darkness originates from Jeff; delicately poised, sharply defined and often seriously beautiful, every single one of its 19 tracks has a distinctive character, whether it be eccentric, dark-toned old-time hooley (Lost In The Woods), skewed bluesy holler (Let It Show), instrumental sketches both insistently atmospheric and weirdly microtonal, or an extended spiritual mantra (the closing title track, which wouldn't have sounded out of place on The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter). Call It Something Else (with Leah's eerie ululating vocal) mirrors its very title, while Jeff's lead vocal combines spinechillingly with Leah's unearthly tones on the (Swift-As-The-Wind-)swept incantation Visible Is The Night.

Rustic, quaintly oddball and yet often quite disturbing, and totally unlike anything else on the dusty soil of Planet Americana at the moment: that's the Crooked Jades.

www.myspace.com/crookedjades