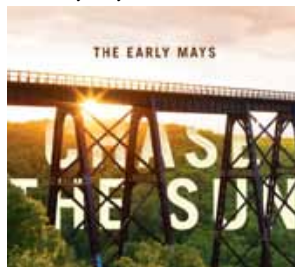


recording-based, traditional old-time, this isn't that. As for me, I'm hoping Andrew will make a recording as a band enterprise to follow this solo one, because this is a very interesting and talented group of musicians. The solo aspect of this album inevitably means there is a bit of separation much of the time, but tunes like *Sadie at the Back Door* and *Catbarsis* offer a taste of treats to come. Andrew, lucky thing, is a good enough fiddler to do just about whatever he'd like with the instrument, and it will be very interesting to see where his musical journey will take him and, given his youth, how his life experiences will feed in to that. He is well placed to make a significant contribution. I guess we watch this space.

Emily Poole Henley
Available from: www.pxrec.com

The Early Mays



Chase the Sun (Bird on the Wing Records)

Ellen Gozion: vocals, banjo, harmonium, piano; Emily Pinkerton: vocals, guitar, fiddle, banjo; Rachel Eddy: vocals, guitar, fiddle, banjo, mandolin; Jason Rafalak: upright bass

Say-O / Oh Babe, It Ain't No Lie / Mannington #9 / Amelia / Chase The Sun / Jeff Sturgeon / I Am A Girl Of Constant Sorrow / Adieu False Heart / Martin's Breakdown / Little Pink / Narrows Of The Year / Evergreen / Borough Of Claysville

The UK old-time scene benefited hugely when Rachel Eddy made her home for five years in Stockholm and would come over and inspire us, teaching workshops, leading sessions, performing gigs, and calling dances with great energy, talent and passion. With her return home, Europe's loss became US's gain – in particular Pittsburgh's female folk trio The Early Mays, whom she joined in 2016. The band got immediate well-deserved success and picked up the coveted blue ribbon in the neo-traditional band competition at Clifftop.

There are rich pickings in this beautiful album. Highly respected, with a deep understanding of the folk genre and successful solo careers behind them, Rachel, Ellen Gozion and Emily Pinkerton reveal their remarkable and diverse talents not only through a traditional Appalachian repertoire but also their own finely-crafted original compositions.

All three women take turns to sing lead vocal. Ellen's *Amelia*, a sweet ballad in praise of love and nature, showcases

her rich, warm alto voice; her fine, fingerpicked banjo accompaniment and the trio's close, high, sweet harmonies. Likewise, in her own bright, up-tempo song on the subject of trust and forgiveness, *Say-O*, Emily's gorgeous, rippling banjo and her clear, bell-like voice combine exquisitely with Rachel's harmonised guitar line. And it is Rachel's strong, mellifluous voice that makes *Mannington No 9*, the story of one of the worst coal mining disasters in West Virginia's history, such a haunting and stirring experience to listen to.

The song that really stands out for me is the Early Mays' quite stunning arrangement of Elizabeth Cotten's *Oh Babe, It Ain't No Lie*. Here the delicate, entrancing harmonies, accompanied by Rachel's rich, charismatic fiddle, Ellen's delicate banjo and Emily's rhythm guitar, touch the sweet spot. Joyful, unself-conscious singing along to the chorus comes naturally.

This is an album bursting with originality. In contrast to the more lyrical tunes, the combination of the steady drone of Ellen's harmonium and Rachel's kick ass, syncopated, powerful banjo playing (*Mannington No 9* / Richie Stearn's *Martin's Breakdown*) gives the music a driving, hypnotic sound – especially enticing to lovers of the old-time tradition.

This is a highly covetable album, which includes in its sleeve notes interesting descriptions and the lyrics of each track. The warmth emanating from every song and tune is proof that the collaboration is a labour of love. Deeply respected for their musicianship, Emily, Ellen and Rachel have hit gold here – this is instrumentalism and harmony singing to make the heart soar. How I wish I could be transported to Pennsylvania for their next gig – or maybe, who knows, they can be enticed over here. Now that would be a privilege.

Isabel Boothby

Available from: CD Baby

The Down Hill Strugglers



Lone Prairie and other Old Time Songs (Jalopy Records)

Jackson Lynch: fiddle, guitar, vocals; Walker Shepard: fiddle, guitar, banjo, vocals; Eli Smith: banjo, mandolin, harmonica, tenor banjo, vocals

Last Shot Got Him / Casey Jones / Lone Prairie / John Henry / Texas Quick Step / St James Blues / Seneca Square Dance / Come Over and See Me Sometime / Goodbye Booze / Going Back to Mexico

/ Stone's Rag / Sally Ann / Three Way Medley

Imagine the sound of an old 78, but without all the scratches, hisses and pops. That's the sound of The Down Hill Strugglers' *Lone Prairie* and other Old Time Songs. Were it not for the sheen of digital reproduction, it would be easy to think that you had stumbled across a recording from 90 years ago. But while the music will transport you straight back to the 1920s and 30s, this is not fusty historical reenactment — this album is great fun.

The Down Hill Strugglers, who describe themselves as based simultaneously out of Kentucky, Louisiana and New York, are all young musicians but they have an in-depth knowledge of the music's heritage. Inspiration here comes from the Skillet Lickers, Charlie Poole, Frank Blevins & His Tar Heel Rattlers, Dock Boggs, and many others. The band has also earned the patronage of John Cohen from the New Lost City Ramblers, who often joins them for live shows. They backed him singing *The Roving Gambler* on the soundtrack of the Coen Brothers' film *Inside Llewyn Davis* and together they performed at the Library of Congress – the footage can be found online.

In seeking to emulate the 78 source recordings, the band made the album on a one-track mono tape machine, moving in or away from the microphone to make the mix as they went along. The results are hugely entertaining and satisfying. *Last Shot Got Him*, taken from the Mississippi Possum Hunters, opens the set, with Jackson Lynch on fiddle, Eli Smith on banjo and Walker Shepard on guitar. This is the band's usual line-up, with Lynch also taking most of the vocals, though there is some trading of instruments and singing further on. The playing throughout *Lone Prairie* is compelling, with Lynch's fiddle a particular joy. A standout track is a gorgeous version of *Seneca Square Dance*, which here he brings wonderfully back to life, taking inspiration from the playing of Fiddlin' Sam Long. There are plenty of great songs too, including a rollicking *Come Over And See Me*, from the Georgia Yellow Hammers.

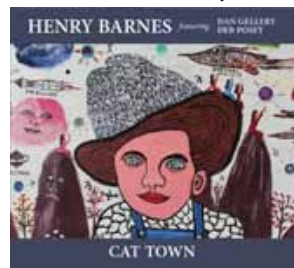
This album is highly recommended, especially if you like your old-time music served old.

Julian Marshall

Available on:

Bandcamp, jalopyrecords.tumblr.com

Henry Barnes, featuring Dan Gellert and Deborah Posey



Cat Town (Brine Collector Recordings)

Henry Barnes: fiddle; Dan Gellert: banjo; Deborah Posey: guitar

Goin Down Town / Untitled Tune / Stonewall Jackson / Natchez / New Money / Turkey in the Straw / Texas Serenade / Sugarfoot Rag / Everybody to the Punchin / Mays Fork / Jonah in the Windstorm / Leather Britches / Say Old Man / Dunbar / New Broom / Bumblebee in a Jug / Steamboat Bill / Little Brown Hand / Old Aunt Jenny

Dan Gellert's name may feature on this album but don't come to it expecting to hear his trademark fiddle and banjo playing. Instead this is a showcase for Henry Barnes, a 20-something fiddler from Columbus, Ohio. Henry's parents were keen bluegrass and country music fans and encouraged him to take up the fiddle at a young age. However, after a few lessons he put it to one side. Fortunately, he later discovered and fell in love with the old-time music of Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky, seeking out WV fiddler Bobby Taylor to learn everything he could from him. Taylor introduced him to the playing of Clark Kessinger, JP Fraley, Ed Haley, Lefty Schafer and others. Those influences are clear in the sweet, smooth fiddle playing across all 19 tracks on *Cat Town*.

Dan Gellert takes up an understated accompanying role on finger picked banjo, with Deborah Posey providing impeccable backup guitar. Only on the last track, *Old Aunt Jenny*, does Gellert switch to fiddle. Expectations readjusted, this is a beguiling and charming record, full of gorgeous tunes and musicianship. So, exactly how does one recruit such a stellar backing band to make an album?

"Dan and Deb came out to the Ed Haley Fiddle Fest in Ashland, Kentucky, a few years ago where we met and started spending time together," says Barnes. "They really enjoyed playing with my girlfriend Libby and I, and always thought it would be great to record us playing together. After talking about it so many times we just started playing tunes in Dan's basement studio instead of in the living room."

Barnes says most of the music on the album comes from spending time around Bobby Taylor. "What is interesting to me is the influence of Missouri and Texas fiddle that is present in the playing of the aforementioned fiddlers as well as my own," he says. "It also needs to be mentioned that 78 artists such as Clark and Doc Roberts were very influential in contributing repertoire and style to the west (and much of Doc's repertoire represents the mingling of the music in states bordering the Ohio and Mississippi rivers: Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri).

Barnes has pulled all his influences together into a collection of tunes learned from nearby musicians and in turn from their favourite old recordings of western fiddlers. There are also tunes he says were common