

## Mp3 Horseplay - Roughshod



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Horseplay dig deep into their English regional roots to create a wall of sound powered by Border and English bagpipes, driven by rhythmic guitar and edgy fiddle with grungy accordion and the sweetness of the wooden flute. 11 MP3 Songs FOLK: Traditional Folk, WORLD: Western European Details: 'scintillating CD.. it's an absolute knockout' (David Kidman, netrhythms) 'real verve and spirit' (Alistair Anderson) 'horseplay had me jumping out of my skin' (audience member) Based in County Durham in the North of England, Horseplay bring a new fire and excitement to Northumbrian music. Their sound is original, upfront and uncompromising, a 'wall of sound' powered by Border and English bagpipes, driven by rhythmic guitar and edgy fiddle with grungy accordion and the sweetness of the wooden flute. Digging deep into their regional roots, Horseplay breathe new life into powerful old Northumbrian and border tunes, combining these with original compositions and tunes picked up on their travels abroad. Quite simply, they sound like nobody else. Horseplay are: Paul Martin (border bagpipes, English bagpipes, mandolin, whistle) Trish Winter (wooden flute, whistle) Nikki Williamson (fiddle) Simon Keegan-Phipps (accordion and a range of budget instruments) Ged Lawson (guitar) Review by David Kidman (netrhythms) Horseplay Roughshod: Horseplay is a young Co. Durham-based five-piece who play pieces from their own regional tradition, injecting abundant energy and excitement into the music. I encountered them for the first time not on disc but live at this year's Durham Traditional Music Weekend, and even though they were "one musician short" they managed to bring the house down! Their uncompromisingly upfront "wall of sound" approach can on first acquaintance be mildly overpowering (but in a totally nice way of course!); it both arises from and conditions their instrumentation, the impact of which relies heavily on the drone of bagpipes of the border and English varieties (Paul Martin), boosted by what the band call "grungy" accordion (Simon Keegan-Phipps) and the heavy rhythmic drive of a guitar (Ged Lawson). And

as if that weren't enough, there's also an edgy fiddle line (Nikki Williamson) and a precisely contoured yet vital wooden flute/whistle part (Trish Winter) to accommodate in the texture - which Horseplay carry off with aplomb and skill without it ever seeming over-egged. The band's repertoire cleverly mingles and intersperses varied sources, nowhere more persuasively perhaps than on the spanking opening set (which melds one of Paul's original tunes with a sword dance and Elsie Marley and a march from the Playford collection!) and the intriguing combination of a 18th century Scottish flute tune with a curious yet fascinating piece by Simon. Even the "simple old Northumbrian tunes" from the Minstrelsy get given a refreshing new coat of paint on Roughshod (which is, unbelievably, only the band's second full-length CD release), especially when (as on track 9) they're combined with a triptych of Kopanitsas (don't ask! - you gotta hear it!), and Horseplay seem to know intuitively just when to vary the texture too, as on the Boning The Turkeys set (track 8), which gets revenge by showcasing banjo and fiddle amidst all the pipery. "Quite simply", says the band's press release, "it sounds like nothing else": and that's not an entirely extravagant claim, as you'll hear should you purchase this scintillating CD - which I'd recommend heartily to anyone who wants their jaded tune-buds completely reinvigorating (or anyone who considers themselves allergic to all-instrumental records). It's an absolute knockout! Review: The Living Tradition (No 71, November 2006) Horseplay is a new English quintet with none of the electronic props and light-weight songs this normally entails. The opening track is a fair indication of what's to come on the debut recording from this young Durham band. A powerful pipes-led medley starts with the bransle-like and original Redback Ball, then the North of England jig Old Wife of Coverdale followed by the Tyneside favourite Elsie Marley, and finally Washington's March, a lovely air which I haven't heard in years. The mix of Northumbrian pipe tunes, English classics, Borders dance music and the occasional new composition runs throughout the eleven tracks on Roughshod. Like I said, no songs. Interestingly, none of the pipes played here are Northumbrian. Piper Paul Martin plays two sets on Roughshod, both by Deerness Pipes. Most tracks feature Border pipes, generally with a deep mellow tone, balanced dynamics, and perfectly in tune. There's more of a Scottish pipe sound on The Black Cock of Wickham, maybe because of recording conditions. The small-pipes give a very good approximation to the Northumbrian sound for All Night I Lay with Jockey. Of course, Horseplay is more than just pipes: there's flute, mandolin, fiddle, accordion, banjo introduced rather late, and the usual back line of drums, guitar and bass which for once stay at the back where they belong. There's a charming pipe-free pairing of the

air Lovely Miss Weir and the 11/8 jiggle Late Tuesday Morning, followed by one of several Playford tunes which Horseplay inject with their own version of Botox. Having said that, it's the piping that makes this album special: the timing and dexterity of Paul Martin's playing is exceptional, and you have to listen hard to catch the rare hiccups. Things slip a little on The Third Drink, which is appropriate enough, and the Bulgarian pieces threaten to break loose, but this is still a top-quality debut. One thing I do miss on Roughshod is a bit of improvisation and spontaneity. There's only so much entertainment in trotting out traditional tunes, no matter how well played. The element of surprise is a great fillip for any album, and it's not too plentiful here. New compositions such as Flutecase Suitcase and Boning the Turkeys provide a touch of the unexpected, and the penultimate track takes the pace off nicely with a pair of slow tunes: 11.30 in Mallaig and Lost Canoe (been there, done that). The final set returns to the big Northumbrian tunes, and leaves a very strong impression of Horseplay as unapologetically traditional musicians. Definitely a band to watch: they even managed to bag horseplay.org.uk for their internet presence! Alex Monaghan

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