

Mp3 Ukrainia - World: Eastern European



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Zeppelin meets Taras Shevchenko - a sometimes heavy, sometimes light, always soulful interpretation of Ukrainian folk music. 11 MP3 Songs WORLD: Eastern European, ROCK: Roots Rock Details: It was a childhood typical of Canadian kids. Damian Sawka and Paul Granger well remember growing up in a world of music, mischief, sports and of course summers spent at Ukrainian Camp. That last pursuit, perhaps not so typical for Canadian kids well, not in Ontario anyway; maybe on the Prairies was offset by winters spent in Ukrainian School. It was like two separate worlds, is how Sawka describes it. I still had a bit of an accent, which immediately set me apart from other kids. And at home, I never spoke English with my parents. That, of course, is not so unusual in this multi-cultural society. But Sawka admits leading such a double-life could be a challenge. Yet, the lifelong-pals endured from the age of six until, as Sawka puts it, We were kinda kicked out at 13 or 14 for causing too much trouble. That, he adds, was around the same time that I quit Ukrainian School. Ah, but the lessons learned have stayed with the pair. And as he reflects upon the upbringing his and Grangers Ukrainian parents wished for their sons, Sawka admits, Now, I feel better for it. When you get older, you begin to take pride in your heritage. And that is where Ukrainia! comes in. Singers and guitarists Sawka and Granger had been joined at the hip through countless musical projects in their hometown of Ottawa when asked to perform at a wedding in 2002. And they had continued to cause trouble. But with that proud heritage calling them home, they finally found a use for those campfire songs and old Rushnychok albums. Recruiting pals Tom Werbowetski (drums) and Dave Martindale (bass), the band performed a set of hit songs from Ukrainian hit parades past, complete with introductions spoken in Ukrainian (with pseudo-translation courtesy of Werbowetski). Things progressed quickly after that. Very quickly. In fact, according to Sawka, Wed had one rehearsal when Tom went and got us a gig at a festival. The Montreal Ukrainian Festival, that is a massive annual

event that attracts crowds in the thousands. Ukrainia!, with one gig behind them, were booked as closing-night headliners. (The previous years headliner had been Luba.) More intimate, if no less enthusiastic shows followed. As did a homemade EP, which served as a worthy introduction to the bands revved-up Ukrainian rock. Audiences may not have understood the lyrics, but they could feel the beat of Ukrainias epic songs. Certainly, you dont have to be Ukrainian to love Ukrainia! Thats apparent from the hypercharged opening-track on the bands self-titled full-length album. Ha ha, indeed. Ukrainia! captures the high-octane energy of the quartets live show, with the occasional violin or keyboard embellishment (the latter courtesy of co-producer Michael Dubue, whose band The Hilotrons includes one Damian Sawka among its members). Rollicking tunes to raise a mug to; frantic rockers to get people on the floor; plus a brooding ballad or two all served up hotter than a plate of cabbage rolls. This is the sort of stuff weve always played, Sawka says as he considers the materials place in his and Grangers (you can call him Yogi) past. But it never occurred to us to put a band together until that wedding. We were too busy being in rock bands. Theyre still in one. Two, in fact. (Sawka, Granger and Martindale also play mighty rock as The Double Pumpers.) But Ukrainia is no ordinary rock band. Sawka is pleased to see a wide range of ages at Ukrainia! shows and to note that the presence of even a few Ukrainians in the crowd invariably ensures a lively gig. The older generations appreciate that were getting the kids into it, Sawka says of his bands quest to keep Ukrainian music alive. Music and the arts are so important to Ukrainians; without the arts, Ukrainian culture would have died years ago its been so repressed for so long. I like that were doing something to help keep it alive.

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