

PennyBlack Music

Foghorn Leghorn: Not Before Time

Reviewed By: Cila Warncke

Label: Slammer Records

Format: CD

There is something a bit disconcerting about proper, old-fashioned, whisky-in-the-jar bluegrass straight out of Clerkenwell. But that is exactly what you get on 'Not Before Time' the fourth album released by London outfit Foghorn Leghorn in the course of their 21-year career.

Forget for a moment the London connection; this is as juicy and satisfying a jaunt through the musical traditions of rural America as you're likely to find. Listen closely and you'll hear fiddle, mandolin and plenty of finger-flying guitar picking. Lyrically, 'Runner Up' does a fine job recounting the tale of a woman who is inexorably drawn to the "lights of town" leaving the lovelorn troubadour the "runner up in love's cruel game." There are plenty more tales of love gone wrong, notably 'Either Or' which cries, "the more you love/ the more you're alone."

Elsewhere, 'My Lord' is either a deeply religious song, or a semi-blasphemous ode to romance – personally, I hope it's the latter. Completing the triumvirate of thematic touch-points (sex, God and death) is 'Smoking Gun' a ferociously catchy murder ballad that serves up a messy dish of betrayal and brutality. Foghorn Leghorn saves the best for last though with the moving, hymn-like 'Brother O Brother', whose stately pace does a lot to offset the sometimes frenetic fretwork in tunes like 'Nobody Knows'.

'Not Before Time' is admirably, unabashedly niche and a winning testament to the skills of a band that has honed its craft over two decades of hard gigging. Aficionados of bluegrass, Americana and old-fashioned country will revel in the virtuoso musicality and the deft lyrics. Hopefully it will inspire a new audience to see Foghorn Leghorn live on their every-second-Thursday-of-the-month residency at London's Betsey Trotwood pub because this is music best experienced with a jar of bourbon in one hand and a sweaty grip on your gal, or guy, with the other.