

PerformerMAG

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Victrola for Sale

Produced by David Barrick and Wheelhorse
Wheel to Reel Records

By Monica Arrington



To listen to Wheelhorse is to bare witness to a true study of popular American music. The five man group started out in the early 90s as a blues/rock band. They played the club scene only to fizzle out soon after. At the time, it was widely believed that their break-up would be a permanent hiatus. The group is back together again, but with a different sound. Wheelhorse has introduced bluegrass along with a potent dose of southern rock, gospel, and the blues into their work. Now the Kentucky based group has released their debut album entitled *Victrola for Sale*, which proves to be an introspective into a life filled with misfortune. The opening track kicks off with soulful sentiment and blazing guitars in "Plow." The following songs keep your foot tapping as lead singer Chris Stewart howls about loneliness and regret (*My Name*), (*Two Thousand Dollars*). One observation to note is that even though Wheelhorse sounds like a lively rock outfit, the imagery and subject matter of their songs are picked up from the basics of country music. The usual topics are covered, from bad break ups to alcoholism, along with songs about traveling

and others rich with religious overtones. This selection of topics makes them more in-depth and a bit tortured, though not mortally so. The whole affair could still be much bleaker, and the quality of songs keeps the album from dragging down the listener. The band also includes various other country-inspired instruments such as the jazz organ on "Leaving Train" and "Baptist Town", and the fiddle and mandolin on songs like "Joy Ride)". There is a final sense of hopefulness at the end of Wheelhorse's CD. The final tune, "Beads and Mirrors", has a redeeming though still gritty southern rock melody. We see that these guys hold on to the idea of finding peace despite leading the troubled lifestyle. Perhaps it is the gospel spin in their presentation that really sells them as an artistically accomplished act, but in any case, Wheelhorse deserves praise from their brilliant debut.

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