

Folk WORKS

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THE BI-MONTHLY NEWSPAPER ABOUT THE HAPPENINGS
IN & AROUND THE GREATER LOS ANGELES FOLK COMMUNITY

WADDEN CASEY of the Wicked Tinkers

Artist: CLIFF WAGNER AND THE OLD #7
Title: TAKE ME BACK TO THE DELTA
Label: SELF RELEASE - Release Date: MAY 2003

Let's start with an understatement: Southern California has not been known as a breeding ground for traditional bluegrass. Stalwarts such as the Dillards, the Country Gazette and the Kentucky Colonels were certainly innovative artists, but not traditionalists. Current crop of groups like the Laurel Canyon Ramblers are truly fine, but again, not traditional.

Cliff Wagner and the Old #7 could change this. With a driving, hard bluegrass sound, a fine hand at re-interpreting standards and an equally first-rate ability to pen new songs that sound traditional, Wagner and company have created a debut disk that deserves to be heard.

All the players are adept. Patrick Sauber, of the New Main Street Singers (*A Mighty Wind*) and the progeny of skilled pop Tom, plays very tasteful mandolin and sings baritone. Jesse Harris is the guitarist, son of Greg Harris, one of the long line of Flying Burrito Brothers. Jesse's style is for the most part rather understated, more Charles Sawtelle than Clarence White, and although guitarists may drop jaw when they hear his solos, he is foremost an ensemble player. His tenor vocals are strong. Adding to the mix is Lucas Cheadle on bass fiddle and a couple of baritone vocals; Ross Landry on mandolin on two cuts, and Bob Kensinger on bass fiddle on one.

A Greenwood, Mississippi native (yep, just like that ol' bluegrass Robert Johnson), Cliff Wagner has the ability to pick the banjo and saw the fiddle in equally raw but appealing manner. In fact, the rough edges in Wagner's singing voice and the band's general sound are part of their overall traditional charm. Some modern bluegrass bands venture into Beach Boys with banjos territory, but Cliff and company never make that expedition.

Wagner attended Berklee College of Music in Boston, but it has not kept him from keeping his roots fresh. He moved to California two years ago and played with the popular Southern California band The Redliners before starting The Old #7. *Take Me Back to the Delta* is their first CD, and it's a fine mix of traditional tunes like *East Virginia*, *Banjo Special* and *Black Mountain Blues*. Wagner penned 5 of the 11 tunes, including a burgeoning standard, *Little White Chapel*, a hang dog country tale of a Vegas romance gone wrong. Reminiscent of Country Gazette cut, Chapel combines deft wordplay and country harmonies throughout. This one wouldn't sound out of place rounding out a George Jones set, and with a little justice in the world, maybe it will. Wagner's instrumental *Rump*

Full of Buckshot is a fine showcase for his chops on fiddle, and gives the rest of the band some show off segments as well.

This is a fine product, a tad on the short side at just under 30 minutes. One assumes that the honest, uncluttered production values ensure that the live Cliff Wagner and the Old #7 are a fine outfit.

The CD can be purchased online at www.oldnumber7.net

