

The MUSIC SCENE

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Whoreshoes — A New Band On The Trail

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The Music Scene

There's a phenomenon coming soon to the 5th Avenue Marina Music Festival. Three quarters country and western, a quarter honky-tonk, and a dollop of bluegrass for good measure, The Whoreshoes are grabbing California by the stirrups and giving her a good ride. The five ladies hail from all points in the Bay Area, from Marin to Oakland, and their playing and singing can rustle up the cattle that haven't been seen since they got lost in the ravine last fall. Playing twelve instruments between them, the band's repertoire ranges from traditional bluegrass and Carter family covers to original songs about love and loss and most importantly, liquor.

The members of The Whoreshoes are as eclectic as their song selections. Camilla Lincoln, a beehive sporting blonde who also plays with the Runaway Truck Ramps, tickles the plastic ivories, croons to her ukulele, talks a world of trash, then cleans up on her fringed-washboard. Lala Hulse, former member of the legendary punk band Cypher in the Snow, is a self-taught musician who plays banjo and lap steel and practices constant infidelity to the other fifteen instruments in her home. Eve Bekker's diverse musical pedigree includes everything from pop to noise, but here she plays mandolin and sings a mournful lead as often as she can steal the mike. Emily Stuckey, guitar and spoons, was a member of the Americana supergroup ZZ Kitty and the Two Dollar Shoe Band, and played her first public performance in a converted chicken coop in Sebastopol. Joni Reuter started playing the fiddle after she found hers in a dumpster. She loves bluegrass, country, Iron Maiden, her accordion, and her sailboat.

The Whoreshoes met in the regular Old West way: the Craigslist posting. Camilla Lincoln posted the ad looking for members for "The Lady Muleskinners" (a name that was quickly abandoned for its punnier alternative), and they met just over a year ago in a living room in Oakland. Remarkably cohesive from the very beginning, they've just been getting better as the months go by, adding more originals to their playlists and blending harmonies in a way that could break a bank robber's heart. They can swing from the traditional "I'll Fly Away" right into their own "Gay Rodeo" (written especially for their performance at the actual gay rodeo) with nothing but a wink and a leer. And while it's mostly all belt buckles and fancy fringe, their version of "Fat-Bottomed Girl" brings down the house.

I had the pleasure of seeing The Whoreshoes a few weeks ago at Smiley's Saloon in the one-horse beach town of Bolinas. The old tavern has seen a lot of country music over the years, most of it blaring from the jukebox that keeps Lyle and Johnny right next to Dolly and Loretta. When I got there, I was the only female at the bar. A couple of tanned surfers played rowdy games of dice at the bar. Four guys looked like they'd been sitting on their stools since Prohibition. Other than leaning backwards to catch a glimpse of the girls' backsides as they walked by carrying mikes and amps, they gave the band no mind. One young fellow was actively annoyed that the jukebox was going to be shut down, and sat back on his stool looking sullen. But over the course of the show, his face moved from bitterness to acceptance to interest, and finally to solid grinning enjoyment. By the end of the night, he was on his feet, clapping and swaying, his jukebox forgotten, unable to decide which member he had the biggest crush on.

It's obvious when watching from the crowd that the band actively enjoys being together. You can tell by the way that Joni dances with her accordion and the way that Eve laughs when Camilla rings the bell on top of her washboard that they just like making music together. That night in Bolinas, Joni actually put the accordion down and stepped into the audience to dance with Roy, the elderly poet laureate of Bolinas. The band played on as they waltzed, and more dancers joined in to fill the floor.

That night they played for almost three hours, and the audience still wanted more. I watched as newly-converted fan after fan approached the gals, asking where they were playing next. The bouncer told me to tell Joni that he was single, and that he cooked really good bread, and that he could wait for her. He was totally serious. The next morning, surfers were spotted wearing The Whoreshoes tank tops as they carried their boards to the water.

The Whoreshoes have recently cut a demo, and this summer all the cool kids will be wearing their tank tops. So grab your pardner and come out and see the gals in the Marina. You'll be able to say you knew them when.

Bio: Rachael Herron lives, works and knits in East Oakland. She can be reached at her fiberliscious blog, <http://yarnagogo.com>



The Whoreshoes — "...Eclectic As Their Songs..."
By: Rachael Herron