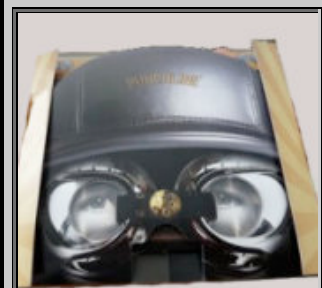


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Punchline
 by
Boulder Acoustic Society

Nine Mile Records

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Playful Americana, (07/22/09)



Perhaps the greatest casualty in the mp3/digital music revolution is album art. When we were in high school, a good friend convinced my brother and me to always buy vinyl rather than cassettes, solely for the larger record covers. These days, we're often forced to make do with an icon, which leaves me longing for the good old days (if I'm even old enough to say that).

Imagine my joy when the new disc from **Boulder Acoustic Society** arrived in the mail. The case for *Punchline* comes with instructions for unfolding it, then refolding it into a box with lenses on the front. Once assembled, it's a stereoscope, the Victorian predecessor to the Viewmaster. Insert the accompanying cards into the back of the box, and you're looking at 3-D images of the band while listening to some outstanding Pop Americana.

Album cover aside, the Boulder Acoustic Society is anything but a novelty. The disc is full of varied takes on Roots music. The sound runs the gamut from traditional string band to Celtic to Blues to Top 40, and there's even something about a couple of numbers that evokes Old World Folk songs, all run through an Americana filter.

Songwriting duties are shared between the four band mates. The songs on *Punchline* have been in the works since the completion of the last BAS disc, *The Caged Bird*. A couple of tunes were written in the studio, according to **Scott Aller**. "It was all about how it felt," he says, "just trying to capture who we are as musicians." And they do seem to capture that with honest songs and a variety of sounds and instrumentation.

Scott McCormick's accordion and **Kailin Young's** violin often carry the melody and trade leads, in fact dominating much of the disc. Percussion is heavy throughout the set, and Aller assures me there's nothing more than a drum kit on the disc, proving him to be a more inventive drummer than some. **Aaron Keim** seems to be the hardest working of the bunch, or at least the most versatile, playing guitar, bass, banjo, uke, and some horns. Yes, horns in an Americana band.

The band doesn't shy away from controversy on "Give It Away," one of the edgier tracks. McCormick, with ragged Punk vocals, makes a pretty strong statement without pointing fingers. This might be the best track on the disc for its energy and sentiment.

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I found several of the tunes stuck in my head after a day or two, notably "A Life For Two," which sounds like a cross between a shampoo jingle and Broadway musical number. "Slip Baby Slip" is heavier, no less infectious, and slightly more danceable.

Speaking of dancing, there's the instrumental "Frog Pajama Waltz" that leans toward the sounds of old Paris more than American traditional music. Both Yong and McCormick shine, overlapping, taking turns harmonizing.

One production curiosity: there is no space between tracks, each cut runs into the next. Sometimes this works, but sometimes I want a breather in between to digest what I've just heard, especially when there's a big difference in the songs.

From start to finish, there is a tremendous variety of textures on the disc. Some of it is high energy, and some of it is just plain fun to listen to. The simplest track on the disc is a bonus track, hidden at the end. Fueled by Maker's Mark, the boys harmonize live around one mike on "She Ain't No Good," and you get a sense of the playfulness that's at work in this band. Especially if you're still looking at pictures through your stereoscope.

Eric Wisley is a contributing editor at FolkWax. Eric may be contacted at folkwax@visnat.com.



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