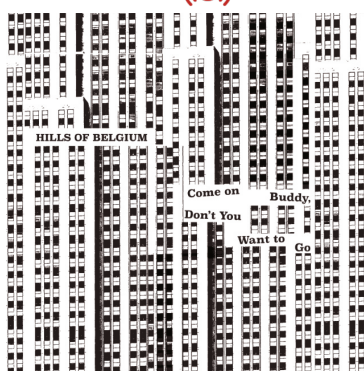


Hills of Belgium (🎵)



Come on Buddy Don't You Want To Go

Jérémie Fraboni : Banjo and lead vocals

Lorcan Fahy : Fiddle and vocals

Alice Riberolles : trombone

Antoine Rotthier : drums

Pauline Leblond : trumpet

Diamond Joe/Sourwood Mountain/Hesitation Blues/Come on Buddy Don't You Want To Go/Single Girl/Little Birdie/Goodbye My Honey I'm Gone/Ida Red/4AM at Felts Park/Poor John/Yew Piney Mountain/Jogue au Plombeau/Richmond Blues/Martha Campbell

It's always interesting to listen to musicians who you have seen before, in the case of Jérémie Fraboni and Lorcan Fahy it was at the Gainsborough Festival where they performed as an old-time duo, The Hills of Belgium. This time round they have added a brass section and drums to their lineup; this gives a dynamic particularly when applied to some of the traditional tunes. I am a bit of a traditionalist so am not 100% sure if it's something that sits easily with me but having said that I do acknowledge that sometimes you have to push at the boundaries to make a difference and their music is still much in the traditional style, sung and played really well.

The first track, *Diamond Joe* sets the scene for the album, a steady competent rendition of a traditional folk song. The tune is quite recognizable and has been covered by a number of artists in the past including Bob Dylan, albeit I think, with different words but that's folk music. It's where you first become aware of the percussive effect of the drums which does add a certain drive to the tune.

Sourwood Mountain is the second track and is a tune I suspect we have all at the very least heard if not played ourselves, surprisingly it's played as a tune, which I quite like and it's where the brass section make themselves known.

Hesitation Blues is played with what I feel is a really strong blues swing effect produced by some great banjo and fiddle playing. The tune is a really old one, pre 20th century but it has a fresh feel with just the voice, fiddle and banjo.

Come On Buddy Don't You Want To Go, the album's title number is an upbeat

version of the Uncle Dave Macon classic, with the brass and drum section taking a part to drive the tune on and change the feel of the number into something much more jazzy.

Single Girl features some great vocals sung over a really nice piece of old fashioned banjo playing later to be joined by the fiddle that again drifts towards a jazzy/old-time fusion. For me one of my favourite tracks on the album.

Little Birdie features what sounds like a banjo playing a sequence of open string pull offs that are joined by the fiddle and voice. The effect is to give the track a slightly aggressive rather than smooth feel that you might expect from this traditional tune. The tune builds to a crescendo to resolve and finish.

Goodbye My Honey I'm Gone is another traditional tune that I think dates back to the early part of the 20th century, this version is played and sung well and kept traditional all the way, the repeated chorus begs you to sing along. A great demonstration of performance skills by the duo.

Ida Red is another traditional tune that doesn't get played much mostly I think because as a tune it dies a little so needs to be sung as it is in this version. It starts with a military style drum roll which is soon joined by some very effective banjo and fiddle playing before the voice also joins. The drums continue on through the song and in effect lift the whole tune, so perhaps for the exception to the rule on percussion in old-time.

4AM at Felts Park is a tune that again pulls in the drums, but on this occasion played very much as you would expect to hear a bodhran in Irish music. In fact, for most of the tune it could be Irish, but when the brass joins in near the end it becomes a bit chaotic musically.

Poor John is an up tempo ballad in a more folkie style with changes in tempo and as in most ballads words that tell a story.

Yew Piney Mountain is a well known old-time tune, here played with a complex dance between the fiddle and banjo over a background drone, a variation to other versions of the tune normally heard.

Jogue au Plombeau is a cajun tune sung I assume in French with the full brass section employed to the full, I don't mind a bit of Cajun but I think I would have enjoyed it more a bit faster but not knowing what the words mean may not have been appropriate.

Richmond Blues is a popular old-time tune that gets a good airing here in the traditional style with fiddle and banjo. The restrained but up-tempo playing fits the tune well and all in all is a great version of the tune.

Martha Campbell is another old chestnut we probably all play and I personally never tire of hearing. This is a nice fast tempo

version with some great fiddle playing supported by the banjo; some nice subtle variations near the end make it a great piece to end the album with.

This album has a few things that traditional old-time listeners may not enjoy but the fiddle and banjo work is good and if you want something slightly different this would be worth a listen.

* While the duo still draws inspiration from the oldest sources (Uncle Dave Macon, Roscoe Holcomb, Burnett and Rutherford...), they are also inspired by current and innovative creations that keep this music very much alive today (Sam Amidon, Rhiannon Giddens, Joseph Decosimo...). In this debut album, Lorcan and Jeremie assemble these influences to venture into new directions. With several new compositions and the addition of guests - a brass section and drums the duo gives birth to 'Old-time & Brass' with a Belgian twist while staying true to the purest Appalachian tradition.

*Extract from Hills of Belgium bio.

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