

Robbie Fulks



Sass Mouth

Country musician **Robbie Fulks** grew up on bluegrass and folk music. He also had a plethora of instruments to choose from: From one aunt, a banjo; from another, a fiddle. He eventually settled on the guitar, packed his bags and by 1983 high-tailed it out of Pennsylvania for a more musically rich life in Chicago. There he became a music junkie and joined the bluegrass band Special Consensus.

Fulks has been recording since the mid '90s and has at least four albums under his belt. His biography on Yep Roc Records says, "While some might try to copy old-style country music, Robbie Fulks not only knows it and loves it but brings its spirit, humor and otherworldliness to his own work."

From reading reviews and interviews, I had a completely different idea about Fulks' sound. Since he was described as an alternative country singer, I was ready for something like Cub Country or Old Crow Medicine Show. The writing on his website (www.robbyfulks.com) even hints at a layer of arrogance. In a comment about music he writes, "I like to think that what I am missing out on is Rock Music. That is a term, like 'govern-

ment,' that connotes everything and nothing, a big, bland badness."

All this combined, the last thing I expected from him was a straight-forward, right out of Nashville sound, especially since his 1997 release *South Mouth* admittedly pokes fun at Nashville. Where's this revisionist attitude I've heard so much about?

But that aside, Fulks is a phenomenal writer. I'd say even more so in his blogs and CD booklets. And his songs cover all the familiar themes from adventuring into wide-open spaces to cheating hearts. Robbie Fulks and Peter Wilde play at 9 pm Friday, Feb. 16 at Sam Bond's Garage. \$12. 21+ show. — *Amanda Burhop*

Not Your Grandpa's Circus Music

Circus music — this is the default explication you find in nearly every review of *Boo Hoo Hoo Boo*, the debut album from Vancouver based septet **They Shoot Horses, Don't They?** Yet considering that circus music is barely ever replicated in popular music, it's a spurious and superficial assessment of a band that may employ a few horns but in no way scripts for the big top. Would you call Neutral Milk Hotel's *On Avery Island* "circus music?" No. There's a degree of whimsy and bombast in *Boo Hoo Hoo Boo*, but there's no calliope and no elephant wails — not circus music.

To slightly validate those critics who've dreamt up this description, there have been a few bands as of late that may echo some of the aesthetics of the circus in their music. Listening to the dramatic vocal styles and garishly eclectic instrumentation of groups such as The Dresden

Dolls, Celebration or Sleepytime Gorilla Museum, it's possible to see how one may arrive at such a label. But with those bands and with They Shoot Horses, Don't They? the assertion is much too simplistic.

There is precedent for the music of TSHDT rooted right here within the last 30 years, deeply entrenched in the annals of 1970s post-punk. Right away, traces of Liquid Liquid, Devo and Roxy Music can all be heard in *Boo Hoo Hoo Boo*'s first few tunes. Take into consideration the cabaret-like musings of groups like Madness, and all of a sudden the horns and keyboards on "Emptyhead," the album's opening track, don't feel too out of this world anymore. It's just so hard to connect pop music to the circus, which may haunt our memories but really has been dead to our American culture for many years. The angular, cabaret-punk/punk-funk of They Shoot Horses, Don't They? is quite alive and kicking.

They Shoot Horses, Don't They? plays at 7:30 pm Friday, Feb. 16 at Cozmic Pizza. \$5-\$7. — *Steven Sawada*

They Shoot Horses, Don't They?



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