



STEAM!

Robert Rosenberg, Alice Boyle,
Dave Firestine, and Claire Zucker
Dancetosteam.com



STEAM! CD, Hoodaki Review by Sam Bartlett

I will say that the first tune of the first medley on this album is reason enough to buy the new Steam! CD, Hoodaki. The Ravens, written by fiddler Alice Boyle is just one of those tunes. It fills you with wistfulness, hope, sadness...a cocktail of emotions in a few notes and a simple chord progression. I had to hit repeat three times before I could allow the rest of medley to play. Instant classic tune.

I have loved Steam's music for years. They are one of the great western contra dance bands, anchored in Tucson, but radiating outwards in a huge musical radius. They are all jam masters, so often at the core of an all-night music session at a dance weekend. Their spiritual leader is the legendary mandolinist Dave Firestine, known for his ability to hold a musician captive for hours as he drains their repertoire, which he has the mysterious ability to recall.

This CD starts beautifully and really never lets up. The band is confident. They do not need to pull out cheap devices to get the spirit of their music across. At times, it sounds like deliciously listenable parlor bluegrass, but in muted fall tones. The album is so damn tasteful, it made me start to miss another quality that I associate with these musicians—their great sense of humor and playful exercises in hilarious and.....questionable taste. But then came the Crested Hen medley. I don't want to spoil it, but they quote every song and tune that has the word "chicken" in it that has ever been written. Ha!

More important things: Robert Rosenberg's guitar playing is awesome, as is his banjo playing. All taste and tone, all the time. Claire Zucker is at the center with really tasteful percussion, elevating the music, but never calling attention to herself. She is also a really nice concertina player, especially on the band's medley of An Dros, and on the final, haunting tune, A Thin Time. The latter was written by Alice Boyle for the passing of legendary and much-loved banjo player, Cathy Barton. Very sad but wonderful.

This recording will literally make you laugh and cry and every traditional tune and dance lover needs it in their library! Thank you Steam! *(Do I need to add another Exclamation Point after this exclamation point?)*