



Music Review: Caravan Of Thieves - *Bouquet*

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For all that I'm liable to complain about the system of labelling musical performers by genres, I find that I end up doing the same thing in my own way. It's only natural, I guess, to categorize music in some fashion — how else are you going to differentiate one piece of music from another? However, that's still a personal choice based on my own likes and dislikes and an understanding of the type of music I like to listen to when I'm in a certain frame of mind, not something that I'm going to use in order to answer the question: what kind of music do they play?

While it's true there are some musicians you can say play blues or rock fairly easily, there are other bands who just aren't going to fit into anybody's neat little categories no matter what you do. In fact, I'm discovering the music I'm enjoying most these days is that by performers who can't be pinned down as belonging to any single category. In some cases the number of genres they fall into is so great that they'd have more backlashes in any attempt to label them than the average website has in its address: they play a punk/jazz/folk/acoustic/blues/country/gypsy/swing sort of thing with some classical influences. By the time you get finished reciting a list like that it becomes meaningless and you might just as well have said they play music.

One of the most recent examples of this I've come across are the band [Caravan Of Thieves](#). After having listened to their latest release, [Bouquet](#), I could no more give you a one word answer to "what kind of music do they play" than I could explain higher physics equations. Even telling you that the four core musicians play guitar (Fuzz and Carrie Sangiovanni), violin (Ben Dean), double bass (Brian Anderson), and are occasionally joined by Bruce Martin on accordion, isn't going to help, as a lineup like that could indicate anything from a country group to a folk ensemble from the streets of Paris.



So what can I tell you about their music if I can't tell you what it is? I can tell you that lyrically they are sly and witty and musically they are full of life and vigour. I can also tell you that the singing of the Sangiovannis is perfect for the music as they harmonize beautifully without trying anything overly fancy, and have voices equal to the task of expressing the ideas, emotions, and humour in their songs. They are sufficiently skilled at playing their instruments to play fast enough to make your head spin and be equally effective playing something more pensive. Their music hops, skips, jumps, and swings through the twelve songs on the disc without once missing a beat or striking a discordant moment.

One of the interesting things about *Bouquet* is how they've divided the disc up into three acts, and an intermission; an instrumental piece appearing to be called "Zu Zio Petals". (I say appears because the text is so stylized that I couldn't tell you whether the first letters of the first two words were a Z,Q,J, or even something else - I don't know why bands insist on using type that is almost indecipherable when reproduced at the size required for CD liner notes) The impression this creates, when coupled with some of the other song titles, especially considering the name of the band, is that they are a group of less than reputable carnival hustlers.

While the opening track's title "Ghostwriter" might not at first glance appear related, when you realize the lyrics are referring to someone who is dead, not just someone hired to write something for you, they complement the overall theme with its suggestion of mediums and communicating with "other side". However it's songs like "Freaks" with its paean to the different in the world, and "Box Of Charms", which when opened has cures for everything and whatever ails you. Although not without risk of side effects - spontaneous combustion, decapitation, loss of limb, or turning you into a flesh-eating zombie.

However, you do begin to wonder whether it's not a medicine show or carney after all, after you listen to "Angels In Cages". The show that they describe in this song sounds suspiciously too much like the state of the world for it to be just some low rent carnival. "It's a lovely show with fire and explosions./We are sure you will all be charmed to death." Not what you'd call the most enticing of blandishments. I personally would think twice about stepping right up to see a show where the clowns are in charge of the heavy guns no matter how much I'm reassured that it's all in fun.

There's something about listening to Caravan Of Thieves' new CD *Bouquet* that put me in mind more of what I'd expect to hear from a European group than one from North America. While there are plenty of groups from this part of the world following the same configuration of instruments as Caravan, few of them ever play anything aside from zydeco or other music which has roots here. It was only because they sounded like a musical tour of Europe, rather than being from one specific point on the continent that distinguished them from European groups or ensembles who tend to only play the music of their homes. For not only can you hear sounds from the streets of Paris, there's also music that could only have come from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, plus a liberal sprinkling of swing spicing up certain songs.

Bouquet could have been recorded in New York City or Bucharest, but what really matters is the fact that the music is a pleasure to listen to and the lyrics are witty and intelligent. While there aren't many people who can play more than one style of music, the number who bounce around between quite a few on the same disc and yet maintain a continuity of music is very rare indeed. When it comes to this Caravan Of Thieves the only thing you have to worry about them stealing is your heart, as their music sweeps you across the dance floor and then bounces your around quite a bit.

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