

IS THIS TOMORROW

2009 CD/DVD by The Henrys

Slowly, slowly, a sultry revelation emerges ★★★★★

The music of Don Rooke and his lovely crew is about the suspension of time

Brad Wheeler, From Tuesday's Globe and Mail, Wednesday, Jun. 24, 2009 05:13 AM EDT

Is this tomorrow? Well, in a tomorrow's-another-day way, yes, this is tomorrow. But, as far as today being what yesterday planned, tomorrow is only slightly less elusive than a carrot on a stick.

Today does bring a new album from the Henrys, that much we know. In a review of the Toronto ensemble's last album, the elegant and ambient roots music that was *Joyous Porous*, one critic asked why the band didn't make records more often. That was in 2002.

In addition to the Henrys' peacefully pleasing *Is This Tomorrow*, albums from hip-hop acts 50 Cent, The Roots and Lil Wayne were supposed to hit shelves today. For various commercial and artistic reasons, all were postponed. Tomorrow – maybe they'll arrive tomorrow. When you're Curtis (Fiddy) Jackson, and you can't really sing, dance, or play a musical instrument, you can't be too meticulous when putting out product.

On the band's website, the Henrys compare the creation of their new album – 15 sublime tracks – to the teenager who wouldn't move out of his parents' basement. "Seasons passed," the band explains. "Winter turned to summer, and back to winter. Slowly there was a maturation process. Then one fine day, it up and moved out Just like that."

Was it worth the wait? I suppose it would be, if anyone truly were waiting. But the music of Don Rooke and his lovely crew is about the suspension of time and the relaxing of clocks. This band doesn't know from wrist watches.

The Henrys are known for their masterful instrumentation, and while Rooke (on dobros, konas, lap steels and various acoustic slide guitars) is as artful as ever, vocalists shine softly on *Is This Tomorrow*, an album generally less ambient than *Joyous Porous*. Becca Stevens, in particular, is a sultry revelation – she could make Norah Jones envious of her range on *Swan Song*, a sublime, slow-moving tune concerning admiration and perseverance. She's earthier and wordless on the National slide blues of *Train to Funeral*. And it's her heavenly voice solista on *Him & Carol*.

Mary Margaret O'Hara is wonderful as always, but Martina Sorbara (from sexy electro-pop outfit *Dragonette*) surprises with her country-waltz tear-jerker *Chair by the Window*. Well done, Martina.

Odds and ends: Just a couple of songs have back beat; bassist John Dymond adds a funkier element to the tracks on which he appears; Nite Skule is a brassy curveball; fans of guitarist Kevin Breit will cotton on to this album.

"Tell me if a song can save us day to day," Stevens asks, hopefully, on the sombre *Northland Holiday*.

It can, and tomorrow can wait.