

DON ROOKE

dobro, kona, lap steel slide guitars

leader and songwriter of the group The Henrys (5 CDs); one solo CD.

recording engineer (Pro Tools) with studio. produced and recorded CDs, soundtracks, jingles, magazine compilation (*Believer Magazine*) at 'The Cutting Room'

photographer specializing in b/w. by invitation, showed at Touchstones Gallery, Manchester UK, 2009. also album and magazine images, and layout and editing CD graphics for various artists

performed in Canada, Europe, USA, New Zealand (incl Bottom Line in NYC; North Sea Jazz Festival in The Hague; SXSW, NXNE; Massey Hall in Toronto, Dominion Theatre in London; Roskilde Festival in Denmark, Sweetwaters Festival in Auckland, Olympia in Dublin)

recorded with many artists including Mary Margaret O'Hara (and her CD *Miss America*, voted one of the top 100 CDs of 20th Century by UK's *Mojo Magazine*)

appeared on the TV show *Night Music*, among others. radio appearances (eg. BBC *John Peel Sessions*)

played on TV and movie soundtracks, documentaries (eg. Academy Award-winner *Ryan*). composed for TV, film and jingles

reviewed in *Acoustic Guitar Magazine*, *Guitar Player* ('Rooke is one of acoustic guitar's greatest unsung heroes'), *New York Times*, *Globe* etc.

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Toronto Star
CD Gift Guide, review by Greg Quill Dec 14, 2002

Among all the infectious noise being made by acoustic slide guitar players in recent times, Toronto kona player Don Rooke and his ensemble of like-minded abstract sound architects stand out on their fourth album as the high-minded intellectuals in their class, the quiet scientists scratching away at the borders of the folk/time continuum while the other guys are staging a hootenanny. "Old instruments, new sounds" is the way Rooke describes what The Henrys do - they use sophisticated recording and playing techniques and elaborate audio processes to extract from a resonator guitar and other plucked acoustic instruments the harmonics, overtones and oblique noises behind the rustic notes to create landscapes that are astonishingly romantic, frightening, sexual, spiritual - and quite beautiful. Brave new music.

The Henrys have never been a band keen to sacrifice quality for quantity. Centred on the compelling fretwork of bandleader Don Rooke, the enigmatic septet has released four albums since 1994's excellent debut Puerto Angel. It's been more than enough to secure The Henrys a place as one of Canada's most intriguing ensembles. The long-awaited followup to 1998's Desert Cure, Joyous Porous again delivers the goods in grand fashion: the haunting slide of Rooke's National Steel darts in and out of the cinematic, dream-like instrumentals like sharp bursts of essential dialogue - always refined, soulful and to the point. The Henrys all-inclusive sound - a flickering fusion of languid blues, darting jazz, ambient musings and fragmented folk - is a subtle, organic thing of beauty.

-Ottawa XPress

Thursday, September 19, 2002

Globe and Mail, Toronto

Disc of the Week

Rating: ***½

Music became a thing when the first recording was made, and music ever since has tended to become more thing-like and less situational. A studio recording that feels like a situation is truly a rare entity, and eventful in the fullest sense of the word. Music as situation requires rules, and a shared approach, but also demands enough freedom for sounds to find their way to the places where they need to be. In a word, it needs to be porous, and that's a joyous state indeed on the best tracks of this fourth album from the Toronto-based ensemble The Henrys.

Don Rooke, the group's main writer and lead guitarist, has a soft spot for front-parlour roots music. But he's equally drawn to a kind of cool abstraction that creeps up on his old-seeming tunes, and subjects them to an analytic, postnostalgic fondling.

The rough outlines of the method will be familiar to anyone who has heard a few Bill Frisell records, though the tone and the temper are quite different. Frisell mainly plays electrics, but Rooke's core instruments in The Henrys are the kona, the Weissenborn and the National Steel. These are all vintage acoustic guitars, and they provide him with a range of throaty, atmospheric sounds, and the basis for a meditative slide style. The Henrys love thick natural sounds like those of the pump organ that clacks and surges at the start of the title tune, and juicy old electronics such as the Mellotron, the Theremin, and the Arp synthesizer.

The density of the timbres allows for a kind of short-hand that suits the group's brainy, yet sensual, style. With just a few chords on the Weissenborn, Rooke can open a deep blues space in VF61, the opening track, then follow the groove into a strange pentatonic octave unison with bassist David Piltch, while trumpeter Michael White peppers the scene with distant aphorisms. It takes only a few acid guitar chords and a hustling rhythm line to set the stage for the drawling bluesy arioso that Mary Margaret O'Hara drops into One Body. This track feels like the antithesis of the neatly made studio number, though only on the groove-based Li'l Ms Demeanor did O'Hara (who contributes to six tracks in all) apparently wing it straight to tape.

There are two covers: Maria Elena, a genuinely old and sentimental tune from the thirties, and Charles Mingus's Goodbye Porkpie Hat, in a version so brilliantly understated as to make virtually every note a poem. Almost everything here works on first hearing, and works even better after that.