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## Ghost Trains Album Launch @ Bad Apple Studios 28th January 2011

Article by John West

Image courtesy of Ghost Trains



It's a bitterly cold night as I arrive at the studio located not far from the City Centre and pitch black as I approach the stairway to the inner sanctum, thinking to myself I hope the security light clicks in...It does. There's a loud thudding rhythm emanating from the building as it vibrates the icy cold air, a band is coming to the end of their practice session at Bad Apple tonight. The nearby takeaway tantalizes my senses reminding me that I'm hungry, it's been a long day, having come straight from the day job and in need of replenishing the soul, but alas music is the food of love tonight, I can get the physical sustenance later. I switch off and will deal with that later as I ascend the steps to find shadowy figures at the summit, I say hello enquiring where the band are – "they're along the corridor mate" as I make way for musicians exiting with guitar cases, amps and kit.

I walk along the top floor and hear the sound of the Stones greatest ever song "Gimme shelter" oozing from behind a curtained doorway. The song itself is a perfect entrance for me as I escape the biting icicle tentacle fingers of Jack Frost outside as he spreads his gossamer chilly blanket across the streets and hidden corners of Staffordshire and beyond.. I make my introduction to the band and receive a warm welcome. The room is a glow with candles enhancing the relaxed atmosphere however we all acknowledge the fact that it is very, very cold tonight.

I accept their hospitality as we situate ourselves in a quiet corner of the room complete with a portable heater! A candle is lit as we begin and exchange a few pleasantries, making me feel very much at home as I explain it will be more a brief chat about the band and the new release as I don't wish to impose as they prepare for the evening launch. So who are Ghost Trains? Well there is the principal songwriter Tim Ellis, guitar and vocals (who also runs Bad Apple rehearsal rooms); Elijah Wolfenheart, lead guitar and piano and the bands newest member percussionist Greg Wood. We discuss the music and how I'm new to their sounds but having been very much impressed by what I've heard so far.

It's not really a question and answer session I just want it to be relaxed so I can get a

flavor of what the band are about. I banter with them discussing other musicians, music generally and I express my own thoughts on where I feel they're coming from. Elijah and I talk about guitarists, Americana folk/blues and alternate tunings naming Nick Drake, John Fahey, John Martyn, Davy Graham and Robby Krieger amongst others. I mention that I hear echoes of a number of influences amongst the recordings – the Beatles (acoustic stuff), Richard Ashcroft, Difford and Tillbrook, CSNY, the Buffalo Springfield. Acoustic Magazine recently cited the Finn Brothers and the Eagles as a source but there is more to this band to my ears, I hear a lot more from within these recordings.

I mention to Tim that I feel that the songs seem very personal and that they resonate certain feelings within oneself and certainly hit home to the listener, touching on themes which we can all identify with, 'Set in stone', 'Dark clover' 'Love is dead' and 'Angel Heights' resonate perfectly for me; they are quite simply beautiful songs - goosebumpy, in fact. They delve deeper with the song 'Godfather' the song is almost spiritual, with a subtle piano from Eli complimenting the guitars. Is it a questioning? A re-awakening of our consciousness? I'll let you come to your own conclusions. These songs hit on all levels as you absorb the serenity, sentiment and feelings of the human psyche contained within. Yeah its deep I guess and Eli is upbeat about this, taking it in his stride yet being very humble at the same time as are the rest of the band.

The new self produced album 'Sniffing round L.A.' is now playing in the background as other guests arrive. The title itself reflecting a previous visit to the States to promote and gig their rootsy harmonic music. Percussionist Greg informs me that he's come from a more rock based background with a grungier edge so it's quite a departure for him to be involved in a more stripped down affair having only joined a mere six months ago. The opening track on the album is 'Michael Caine' a song which they first performed together as the new line up - the concept of less is more is their working ethic as they gelled together to perform the new songs and take the band to new horizons. Tim echoes that it was a natural progression from their 2010 debut 'Where Lovers Die' although some of the tracks had been around for a long time before being recorded and being heard by a wider audience. This certainly paid off for Ghost Trains as they appeared at the Acoustic Festival of Britain last year and were described as "the highlight of the whole event" by Acoustic Magazine. High praise indeed for one of our own home grown talents.

As with their previous recordings everything is done at their base here at Bad Apple with Tim as producer, a DIY ethic which has to be admired. It very much reminds me of the Independents of yesteryear when music lovers actually went to record shops excited by a new release and physically held the record in their hands, admiring everything about it from the artwork to the music being taken from within its sleeve and placed on the record player. You don't get that buzz with a download folks!

I take my leave to mingle with the guests as the band make their final preparations for a mini gig of sorts, just a handful of songs. Interestingly as I chat we talk about the band and bizarrely the Staffordshire delicacy that is the Oatcake, there's a bakery nearby,

must have heard my stomach rumbling. A debate ensues, what is the best sauce to top said delicacy - the UK favorite "HP" or a particular supermarket brand , I quip there's only one way to find out "Fight!". What's this got to do with rock 'n' roll you shout , nothing really but we all have to eat ha ha and it passes the time as we wait. We are ushered into a small room close by as the band decide it's too cold to be in the larger one and this is cozier and even more intimate.

Tim and Eli spark off each other as they wait for a friend to appear, Tim takes control and starts his introduction thanking everyone for turning up quipping that we'd only come for the free beer. Eli is to his right clutching his guitar and warming up, Greg sits atop his beatbox with his trusty percussion at hand. They perform the afore mentioned 'Michael Caine' it is simply mesmerizing to witness this, Tim's voice is emotive and powerful, filling the room as the guitar interplay is a joy to behold as Greg keeps percussive rhythm at the back. It really is an unplugged session tonight, just instruments and vocal harmonies.

Next up is a song from their debut called 'Miss Emily' as Tim introduces it as the song to which Andy Hughes of Acoustic Magazine has recently placed in pole position of a top ten list of the all time best acoustic songs ever! They're in esteem company here, placed above the likes of the Beatles 'You've got to hide you love away', Neil Young's 'After the Goldrush', Crosby Stills Nash and Young 'Helpless' and the Stones 'Angie' to name but a few. Tim jokingly says its all bollocks but is honored by the praise I'm sure, he is sincere in the support they're getting from the magazine as is the rest of the band. What follows next is "the cheesy pop song" as they put it, not me, called 'Liar' which apparently is being played nonstop on a Russian radio show. Their appeal is certainly growing beyond Stoke and appropriately the weather reflects those Russian climbs. Tim shamefully plugs the new album, "It's on sale tonight folks. You had the free beer so buy a copy". I like this approach, and as his former kitchen salesman pitch is highlighted by Eli. Someone shouts out "you never sold any of them either".

They conclude the evening with another personal highlight of mine from the new release 'Deathdance' again the vocal harmonies are to the fore with some wonderful intricate guitar and subtle vibrant percussion. So there you have it, I felt privileged to have been there it was the perfect antidote for what had been a challenging few weeks for me personally it certainly lifted my spirits as do the songs. Ghost Trains are currently out on tour across the country and will be off to Russia in April, appearing at UK festivals in the summer. You can catch them locally at Fat Cat Cafe Bar, in May. Their appeal is getting global with a possible return visit to the States in the summer too, from the Bad Apple studios SoT, near Forest Park to the Big Apple Central Park NYC who knows where they'll be over the next 12 months. Let this album become the soundtrack to your lives, it's already a serious contender for one of the albums of the year for me and we haven't even started yet. I strongly recommend you buy a copy.