



The Ragpicker String Band

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Back in the day we had so-called supergroups, bands of big-name musicians jamming together, producing big-selling albums and reaping huge financial rewards for their collective efforts. An era now seemingly long gone and partly forgotten.

The Ragpicker String Band breathes interesting life into that previous historic theme with a decidedly acoustic, 1930s ragtime-blues tradition at its core. The fourteen track album has no title, instead simply singling out the individual stylists and band members on its front cover: acoustic guitar picker and singer Mary Flower, easily one of the finest ragtime-blues pickers in the USA today, here joined by Mandolin/resonator mando-master Rich Del Grosso, again probably the finest blues mando-man on the road and Martin Grosswendt, yet another superb acoustic bottleneck-guitarist-cum-mandolinist-cum-fiddler.

Tracks include mighty fine takes on a few John Estes standards, 'Clean Up At Home', 'Milk Cow Blues' and 'Black Mattie', together with 'Lonely One In this Town' from the Mississippi Sheiks, a Mary Flower-driven old traditional winner, 'Trimmed and Burning' and even a surprisingly successful stab at an unexpected jazz classic with Thelonious Monk's 'Blue Monk'.

The musicianship is always rich, powerful and talented, allowing the individual skills of each player to rip to the surface when needed while always remaining part of a tight, cohesive group format. As an album this works remarkably well, highlighting three wonderful US roots and blues musicians clearly ripping it up, jamming comfortably together and each and all having a ball doing it. This is a refreshingly different release bursting at the seams with rewarding music, feel and blues-flavours.

Iain Patience