

Old Blind Dogs

Reviews for 'Room With A View' (OBD Music – OBD013)

Released 2017

Tim Carroll – FolkWords Review (March 8th, 2017)

"Define an oft-used word like 'dynamic' ... constant change, activity, or progress; positive in attitude, full of energy and new ideas; a force that stimulates change or progress ... adjective or noun, it pretty much sums up Old Blind Dogs. With self-penned assurance and equally confident interpretation, tradition, sparkling innovation and boundless energy surges through their music. Old Blind Dogs have through many albums, delivered heritage and invention bound perfectly together. Their latest offering due for release at the end of March, is 'Room With A View' ... a fine blend of songs and tunes carried by trademark percussion, fiddle and pipes.

As one would expect, 'Room With A View' offers both exhilarating rhythms and thoughtful melodies, still combining old and new in a flawless configuration of history and progress. Dynamism has ever flowed through the band's line-up, which with this latest album features the foundation of Jonny Hardie (fiddle, guitar, vocals) with Aaron Jones (bouzouki, guitar, vocals) and Ali Hutton (Border pipes, whistles, vocals) now joined by Donald Hay (percussion, vocals).

From the much-travelled tune 'Bunker Hill', vibrant lushness of the tune sets 'Newe' and 'Nevertheless' to the Breton experience 'Gavottes Des Montagnes', through the beautifully delivered narratives of 'A Ring On Her Hand' and 'Earl Of March's Daughter' to the darkly grotesque tale of 'Sawney Bean' the enchantment never waivers ... 'Room With A View' is an utterly absorbing, perfectly-formed piece of work."

Andy McMillan – Bright Young Folk Review

"Old Blind Dogs have been performing for some 25 years, and their new release, Room With A View, is a fresh, spirited, yet mature powerhouse of an album. Their first recording in over six years, it is a real cracker.

Jonny Hardie (fiddle & vocals), Aaron Jones (bouzouki & vocals), Ali Hutton (pipes & whistles) and Donald Hay (percussion) create such a tight sound with rhythms, harmonies, melodies and lyrics that sweep you along in whichever direction they choose.

Earl O March's Daughter, an historical tale rewritten in song by the late, great Lionel McLelland, is one of the album's many highlights. Atmospheric low whistle, fiddle and bouzouki accompany touching vocals which convey a real sense of emotion in this Scottish story of love and life lost.

Nevertheless is a joyous set of three jigs each of which showcases the band's skills and musicianship, from the interlinked precision fiddle and bouzouki playing in Billy Rush's,

through the atmospheric low whistle in Nina's Jig and culminating in the driving power of Hutton's mesmerising pipe playing in the fantastic The North Star.

Napoleon does not fare well in the retelling of the traditional song Warlike Lads of Russia. A somewhat merry tune with infectious melody and rhythm, it recounts Bonaparte fleeing the battle and leaving his men to be defeated by the Russian forces. Sawney Bean, however, tells a rather dark and more sinister tale where the low whistle and fiddle create a menacing backdrop for this strange Scottish story.

Old Blind Dogs clearly draw much inspiration from Scottish traditional tunes and songs, however in their music other influences are also evident. Bunker Hill has a very traditional Scottish feel with pipes, fiddle and low whistle interweaving and complementing each other whilst bouzouki and percussion provide the driving beat and rhythm building into a steam train of a tune with distinct bluegrass, country overtones.

Room With A View brings together traditional songs and tunes with those that are newer, but which sit and balance squarely with tradition. Each is arranged and performed expertly by a band who are masters of their trade, honed over years of recording and performing. The pace and sheer complexity of some of the playing will leave you gasping, whilst other gentle harmonies and accompaniments will leave you touched.

This album that will move you emotionally and of course physically... as you get out of your chair to dance along to those fantastic jigs and reels!"

Ian Cripps – Fatea Review

"Old Blind Dogs celebrate their 25th anniversary with the release of their pledge funded new album "Room With a View".

Twenty-five years that have seen the band become a well-loved Scottish institution. From the opening "Bunker Hill" the talent of the individuals shines through, Jonny Hardie(fiddle), Aaron Jones (bouzouki), Ali Hutton (pipes and whistles) and Donald Hay (percussion) all create a sound which is both fresh and wholesome. They weave patterns effortlessly, the music flows and carries you foot tappingly along.

A mix of sparkling tune sets and songs delivered with enthusiasm follows.

Highlights for me are the two Lionel McLelland songs. McLelland, a poet from Moffat, sadly passed away a number of years ago, his legacy though continues. Here, the Old Blind Dogs bring us the tragic love tale "Earl O March's Daughter" and the deeply dark and gruesome "Sawney Bean" which tells the story of a renegade cannibal family living in a cave who preyed on travellers. Both are song beautifully in a lilting Scottish accent by Jones who also hails from Dumfries.

"Nevertheless" a tune set joining "Billy Rush(trad)/Nina's Jig (Niall Keegan)/The North Star (Brian Finnegan)" is an absolute joy as each member of the group showcases their

considerable skills, Hardie's precise fiddle, the breath-taking low whistle of Hutton underpinned by driving percussion from Hay and the bouzouki of Jones.

"Gavottes Des Montagnes" is a swirling hypnotic beast of a tune, the way this track keeps floating back to the top of my "must play list" it almost defies gravity. It is worth the price of the album along.

A rendition of the traditional "Warlike Lads Of Russia" stands the test of comparison with Phil Beer's version, the diction here is perfect you can pick out every single word.

The band are undertaking a UK tour in April, predominantly Scotland and the South Of England, on this showing they are well worth catching."

Marc Higgins – Northern Sky Magazine

"From first sight of the digi-pack sleeve this is clearly a considered album. A sense of timelessness and a sense of place seeps though everything. There is a playfulness through the presentation of the album, did the title suggest the sleeve or did the sleeve suggest the title, either way it works. A postcard from a magical and musical place. The landscape, the surreal sense of ancient but modern, the prog rock album cover juxtaposition of the parlour chairs, the hearth and the heather, the little touches of humour, the whisky label lettering and the weathered feel it all works together, like a cypher the clues are there, you know what it is before you play it and it does not disappoint. With nine tracks it might at first feel like a short album, an afterthought. But the tracks are slow builders, given time to breathe and mature, like a fine single malt. Part way through a track the walls melt, the front room fades away, till all that remains, like the Cheshire Cat's grin, is the hearth and your arm chair. Suddenly you are sat in that landscape with the music blowing through the gorse.

Track one is nearly six minutes of slowly building Celtic Music, but it is twisted by the band's recent American travels with some decidedly Appalachian fiddle playing. A Ring On Her Hand opens with a beautiful bubbling sound, sampled pipes?, treated whistles?, think interlude from Terry Riley. The whole track is a perfect blend of vocals and layered guitar an understated rhythm with some heavenly pipe playing. Newe is an exercise in restraint. Pipes and whistles swirl, with all the breaths and burrs of the player punctuating the tune over another masterfully understated delicate rhythm. The intensity and pace of the playing builds through the track, ending in a gloriously furious fiddle part. This music gets in your synapses like wind in the wires and before you know it your feet and fingers are not your own.

There is a wonderful sense of space around the guitar part in The Earl O March's Daughter. Like John Renbourn's playing, it's the air between as much as the notes themselves. Old Blind Dogs have a wonderful way to subtly layer vocals, that is used to great effect to accent and emphasise on this track and pm Warlike Lads of Russia and A Ring On Her Hand. It's not showy virtuosity, it always serves the song and the atmosphere, but it is quietly perfect, a smoothly blended whole. Sawney Bean is another hybrid, infectious traditional music, but the staccato guitar and rhythms recalls riding the rails across an endless mid-west prairie. Gavottes Des Montagnes features a gloriously dark phased acid folk fiddle, a brooding intro

to a captivating pipes and fiddle duet. Again to these ears the pipes drift towards becoming bubbling electronic keyboards, illustrating that fine music has no boundaries. The final set of tunes Died And Gone starts slowly with layers of plucked strings, fiddle and pipes, it all feels effortless, but like a zen brush painting everything is in the right place. Again like Newe the tempo and intensity builds, pauses in the playing like gear changes. You know this is going to be amazing live. While the ruined hearth might be hard to source, listeners are recommended to find a comfortable chair, their own glass of what almost certainly isn't cold tea or honey and lemon and get lost in the music of Old Blind Dogs. All that's missing is a fireside hound. "

Folk All Blogspot

"Eclectic and global is the simplest way to describe Old Blind Dogs' new album. The music and the influences driving the nine tracks on this, their thirteenth album, come from far and wide snared in the dream catcher of their travels; from right under their feet in the earth of Scotland and from wider traditions, culture and legends.

All but three of the tracks are multiple tunes so no one can complain they have been short-changed. OBD even has a new line up to give the tunes a fresher look. Jonny Hardie is now making music with Aaron Jones, Ali Hutton and Donald Hay.

Opener Bunker Hill/Sandy Boys has a strong feel of Scotland with a tune akin to Tossing the Feathers and the pipes, from Hutton, though going full pelt remain subtle. Then there is the switch to Jones on bouzouki which brings a definite bluegrass feel underpinned by Hardie's fiddle. For the big finish they throw everything into the pot before suddenly pulling the plug.

Another doublet follows with A Ring On Her Hand and Cairo Day. The electronics bring in the tune with a gentle touch from Hutton's whistle before Hardie's smooth tones begin the tale. With the lyrics dropping out, in comes the deep rasp of the fiddle driven by Hutton's pipe playing keeping pace with the hopping beat underneath.

Newe is a triplet of John McCall's March to Kilbowie Cottage/Joel Turk's and An Iuchair. Hutton's understated and wind gentle tones on the whistle are accented precisely by the picked strings. A drawn-out note indicates a change of pace and the whistle brings a livelier dance. The percussion pushes to drive it into the third part where Hardie's playing takes up the mantle before cranking it right up with a galloping beat matched by the pipes.

As if to give the listener a breather there is the single tune of Earl O March's Daughter, a smooth ballad from Hardie. His voice lies somewhere between the nasal tones of Kris Drever and the soft singing of Ewan McLennan. This makes for a very pleasant song.

The band goes back to a triplet with Nevertheless which is Billy Rush's/Nina's Jig and The North Star.

Jones kicks things off with his lovely, light and dancing strings before being joined by Hardie's fiddle. It's the kind of tune which can lift your spirits on a dull day. Hutton's deeper whistle adds texture through to the second part.

This is picked up by the jerky, sawing sound of Hardie's strings which are an introduction for the pipes to catch anyone who might be getting too relaxed.

Sawney Bean comes in almost like a snake charming tune before the vocals begin the dark tale of the song. It's a delicious and complex tune with the subtle but definite percussion from Hay holding up the strands of fiddle and whistle as they weave in and out of each other like insects in an aerial mating ritual.

The throaty sound of the fiddle brings in Gavottes Des Montagnes and once again the band bring their respective talents together in a dance for this instrumental with a tangible eastern flavour and almost sees the whistles and strings fighting for prominence, but of course the winner is the listener.

From the title of Warlike Lads of Russia you almost expect a marching sound but instead this is a tale of war with a distinctive light touch with the feel of a poem in its own right which has been set to music. What you get is a great tale of over the top of music which accents the story for a double treat.

The band keep the biggest chunk for last with Died and Gone which is a set of four tunes Abair Thusa Mi Bhi Tarraig/Highland Harry/Died and Gone to Prague and Sisters Reel.

The tune gently eases the listener in with the liquid sound of fiddle, whistle and strings with the occasional Will O' Wisp thrown in as a wee treat. the pipes at not long in coming starting slowly but then setting a grand pace for what is a fitting end to an enjoyable album which is Scottish enough to make you crave an Irn Bru but cosmopolitan enough to have wide appeal.

Fans have had to wait six years for this album but it's been worth the wait, however let's hope they don't leave those who want to enjoy what seems to be a new wave of traditional Scottish music, gasping for another six years."

Paul Matheson – fRoots Magazine

"The current line-up of this veteran Scottish folk band is original member Jonny Hardie (fiddle, vocals), Aaron Jones (bouzouki, cittern, guitar, vocals), Ali Hutton (pipes, whistles, vocals) and Donald Hay (percussion, vocals).

Incredibly, this is the Old Blind Dogs' twelfth album in 25 years, and they show no signs of losing their touch. We are treated to a blistering traditional tune-set Bunker Hill / Sandy Boys, led by the rocket-fuelled bagpipes of Ali Hutton. And Aaron Jones' superbly expressive guitar /bouzouki-playing and Jonny Hardie's sensitive, soaring fiddle-playing are impressive throughout the album.

But the Dogs' distinctive USP is – as ever – their ballad singing. They really understand musical storytelling, and know how to hold our attention, riveted, to each twist of the story. Standout ballads on this album are the beautiful song The Earl O' March's Daughter

(composed by the late, lamented Lionel McLelland of Moffat), and the traditional ballad Warlike Lads of Russia (made famous by Nic Jones).

Here's hoping we'll hear lots more from Jonny Hardie and the Old Blind Dogs over the next 25 years!"

Tony Hendry – Living Tradition Magazine

"Watch out! The mighty mutts are back on the road, with their first album in six years. Some 25 years after fiddler Jonny Hardie set up Old Blind Dogs with Ian Benzie and Buzzby McMillan, he is joined by Aaron Jones (bouzouki, cittern, guitar), Ali Hutton (pipes, whistles) and new boy Donald Hay (percussion). They are in good fettle, delivering a mix of songs and powerful tunes with a fizz which makes you look up where to catch them live.

The opening Bunker Hill set is a triumphant nod to their times touring in America. Later, there is a less successful set of Breton gavottes. The other tunes are traditional or contemporary from Scotland and Ireland. The Newe set includes Joel Turk's by Jonny's old partner Gavin Marwick. Ali is an exciting piper, much in demand, and the band's tight rhythms allow him to soar on sets such as Nevertheless and the closing Dead And Gone.

Aaron, who lives near Moffat, sings two songs from local poet Lionel McClelland. Earl O' March's Daughter, in Border ballad style, shows why you shouldn't ride past your true love without recognising her, even if she is looking a bit peaky. Sawney Bean is about the lovable Galloway clan of cannibals. Jonny sings Brian Cromarty's A Ring On Her Hand about the Maid of Norway on her ill-fated voyage.

The album cover shows the room with a view. Glasses of whisky are ready to drink on a table in front of a stone hearth and chimney which are all that remains of a moorland bothy. Slàinte! Here's to plenty more years."

Alex Monaghan – Folkworld

"The Dogs seem to have hit the jackpot with this line-up: there isn't a disappointing moment on Room with a View, and it has a bit of everything. In fact, it could well be a contender for Scottish album of the year. Four songs and five great sets of tunes span the ultra-contemporary to the totally traditional. Although only fiddler Jonny Hardie remains from the original OBD members, his sidemen are extremely well chosen: singer and guitarist Aaron Jones, piper Ali Hutton who eschews guitar here but performs wonders on the whistle, and percussionist Donald Hay.

Fiddle and pipes kick off with old tunes Bunker Hill and Sandy Boys, getting a bit of that OBD stateside funk into the second of a pair which crop up in traditions on both sides of the Atlantic. Newe is a medley of relatively recent compositions: John McCall's March to Kilbowie Cottage by Pipe Major Willie Lawrie (1881-1916) is followed by the Gavin Marwick fiddle swagger Joel Turk's and the march An luchair by Alasdair White whose music combines piping and fiddling.

Earl o' March's Daughter may be a play on words after the previous set, but it's a great ballad, based on a tragic eighteenth-century romance, deftly sung and played. The next set of tunes is probably my favourite here, the gorgeous old jig *Billy Rush's* and then Ali's smoky whistle on a fine Niall Keegan composition, before the pipes kick in for a setting of Brian Finnegan's shining *North Star*. OBD's trademark percussion is again to the fore, hitting all the right spots. Another Border ballad in the gruesome form of *Sawney Bean* - not for the faint-hearted - makes you realise what a grim place those lawless lands could be: this everyday story of murder, incest and cannibalism around Kennedy's Pass is ground out low and dangerous on fiddle and fretted rhythms, with a cheery wee whistle tune to brighten up the pools of blood.

Then it's off to Brittany, a much less threatening place, for a rousing set of Gavottes des Montagnes on pipes and fiddle. The final song is an English classic delivered here with gusto, a great chorus song and another historical story: Warlike Lads of Russia gets the full Dogs treatment, a second highlight for me. As if that wasn't enough, the lads add a last blast of tunes: old favourites Highland Harry and The Sisters Reel, plus a jaunty wee number by Allan MacDonald and a storming modern reel by Finlay from the same clan. Died and Gone to Prague? Died and gone to heaven, more like, with music this good!"

Boston Irish Reporter – Newspaper

"OBD sometimes seems like an under-the-radar band, despite the fact that they have been around for 25 years and have 13 albums to their credit. Perhaps that's because the band's lineup has changed considerably over the years – fiddler Jonny Hardie is the sole original member – although this particular roster has been largely intact for most of the past decade. But OBD albums are invariably a reason to celebrate, and to luxuriate in the band's rootsy yet cosmopolitan sound, definitively Scottish with hints of African, Caribbean, and American/old-timey.

One of OBD's hallmarks has been a prominent role for percussion – not of the regimented Scots pipes-and-drum corps variety, but a rock-influenced freestyle that works around the contours of the other instruments. And their newest member is one of the best in that capacity: Donald Hay, who has played with the likes of Kate Rusby, Nuala Kennedy, Shooglenifty, and The Transatlantic Sessions. He's settled in quite well, thank you, with Hardie and the two other OBDs, Aaron Jones (vocals, bouzouki, guitar) and Ali Hutton (pipes, whistles, guitar).

The opening track, "Bunker Hill", is about as dead-on an introduction as there is to OBD's dash and skilfulness: Jones and Hay lay out a slowly churning riff that becomes a backdrop over which Hutton and Hardie play, at double speed, the reel "Bunker Hill"; and then Jones lets loose on a Scottishized American tune, "Sandy Boys," with Hay going full bore (his bass drum at the beginning is positively propulsive), and after Hutton and Hardie join in, the band slides effortlessly back to the opening theme to close out the set.

Those who like imaginative, challenging arrangements will find plenty to admire here. Hutton's flute is at the center early on in the "Newe" set, easing along on a slow strathspey, then powering up for a dynamically accented reel that Hardie takes up to great effect. On

"Nevertheless," Jones and Hardie team up for a glorious rendition of the traditional jig "Billy Rush," and then Hutton (on low whistle) and Hay shift into "Nina's Gig," followed by "The North Star," Hutton's pipes leading the way. There's also a set of French gavottes to broaden the spectrum and add texture.

OBD offers up an equally enjoyable selection of songs, all splendidly voiced by Jones (and harmonized by the other three), notably Brian Cromarty's chilling "A Ring on Her Hand," built around the machinations of an arranged royal marriage, and "The Earl O March's daughter who pined for her exiled lover – and died broken-hearted when, upon his return, he failed to recognize her because she had so deteriorated (she's now said to haunt the family castle). The band also does a most creditable job with the traditional Napoleonic ballad, "The Warlike Lads of Russia" which somehow seems a bit more relevant nowadays.

Despite the occasionally grim subject matter, "Room with a View" has an overall positive outlook and shows that Old Blind Dogs continue to be blessed with a strong vision."

Jon Bennett – Shire Folk Magazine

"Here's a veteran band from Scotland simultaneously associated with cutting edge sounds and a true empathy for the tradition. Since forming in the 1990's, Old Blind Dogs have been stalwarts of the Scottish roots revival and are particularly associated with an energetic mix of dynamic percussion and stirring instrumentation that makes you sit up as soon as they are playing. Twenty-five years on the road, this is the Dogs' thirteenth release and their first in six years. And yes, it's damn good.

The lineup comprises original member Jonny Hardie (fiddle, vocals) and long-term partners Aaron Jones (bouzouki, vocals), Ali Hutton (pipes, whistles) and Donald Hay (percussion). You can enjoy great storytelling through Aaron's well-crafted interpretation of songs by Galloway poet Lionel McLlland. I particularly liked the Scottish story of love and life lost in the 'Earl O Marches Daughter', a historical tale rewritten in song. The atmosphere is much aided by the low whistle, fiddle and bouzouki accompaniment, which convey a real sense of emotion both here and on the darkly sinister tale of Sawney Bean.

The Dogs are not shy to let rip with the dance numbers. The joyous set of three jigs – 'Billy Rush's', 'Nina's Jig' and 'The North Star' – showcase the band's skills in interlinking precision fiddle with bouzouki and culminating in the driving power of Hutton's mesmerising pipe playing. Their mastery, honed over many years of recording and performing, shines through every track on this album."

Tommie Black-Roff – Songlines

"The Scottish canines return, as barking as ever.

After six years, Old Blind Dogs are back. Founded by fiddler Jonny Hardie in 1990 while busking in the Highlands, Old Blind Dogs also feature Aaron Jones (bouzouki and vocals) and Ali Hutton (pipes and whistles), while a new percussionist, the excellent Donald Hay replaces

Treacherous Orchestra powerhouse Fraser Stone. There's a discernibly more delicate yet expansive in overall feel for the 25-year old group.

Room With A View opens with 'Bunker Hill', in which the eponymous piping reel meets and American old-time tune, 'Sandy Boys'. Thereafter tunes are universally strong and wide-ranging, including a Breton gavotte that succeeds in both assimilating and breaking the tradition. Songs are delivered with clear diction with some fine moments of instrumental interplay, not least 'A Ring On Her Hand'. Their instrumental precision tied with the close-miked production occasionally hampers a sense of raw spontaneity, but for a studio album this is finely crafted, accomplished fun and sits impressively alongside its Scottish contemporaries."

Dai Jeffries – R2 Magazine

"My first thoughts on hearing this album were on the changes I Scottish music over the last fifty-odd years. Think back to the skirl of the pipes, the swish of the kilt and 'Donald, Where's Your Troosers?' and shudder.

Room With A View exemplifies all that has happened in the intervening years. New instruments: Aaron plays bouzouki and cittern; new songwriters are Lionel McLelland and Brian Cromarty and new ways of approaching old tunes. The opening set, 'Bunker Hill', combines two traditional tunes, opening with cittern and Donald Hay's percussion before Ali Hutton's pipes make their entrance.

The first song we hear, 'A Ring On Her Hand', concerns Margaret, Maid of Norway and is, in part, 'Sir Patrick Spens' told from a different point of view while the second, McLelland's 'Earl O Marches daughter' could be traditional based on the principle that if a song about an event doesn't exist someone should write one.

McLelland applies the same principle to 'Sawney Bean'. There isn't much information on sources. That minor caveat aside, this is a very fine album."