

earache!

Best of 2011, So Far

By Jim Caligiuri, 1:40PM, Mon. Jul. 11

Despite the myth that I hate everything, I've been making these mixtapes for years. The past few have come semi-annually, usually with 20 to 40 of the songs I wanted to remember and share with friends.

The first half of 2011 didn't seem that impressive until I sat down to make this. Then I discovered I had enough music for almost two discs. While favoring Austin artists, there was still room for the Cars, Emmylou Harris, Ha Ha Tonka, and Abigail Washburn, while leaving off such favorites as Sarah Jarosz, Jim Lauderdale, the Drive-by Truckers, and Ralph Stanley.

What's surprising to me is the amount of banjo on the tracks I've chosen. At this late date, it's proving to be a remarkably versatile instrument. Who knows what the rest of the year will sound like. Let's just hope the good year we've had so far continues. The download link is [here](#).

- 1) Ha Ha Tonka, "Usual Suspects," *Death of a Decade (Bloodshot)*
- 2) Black Joe Lewis & the Honeybears, "Livin' in the Jungle," *Scandalous (Lost Highway)*
- 3) Suzanna Choffel, "Racecar," *Steady Eye Shaky Bow*
- 4) The Cars, "Hits Me," *Move Like This (Hear Music)*
- 5) Emmylou Harris, "New Orleans," *Hard Bargain (Nonesuch)*
- 6) Jason Isbell & the 400 Unit, "Heart on a String," *Here We Rest (Lightning Rod)*
- 7) MilkDrive, "Soho," *Road From Home*
- 8) Hot Club of Cowtown, "Osage Stomp," *What Makes Bob Holler (Proper American)*
- 9) Abigail Washington, "Chains," *City of Refuge (Rounder)*

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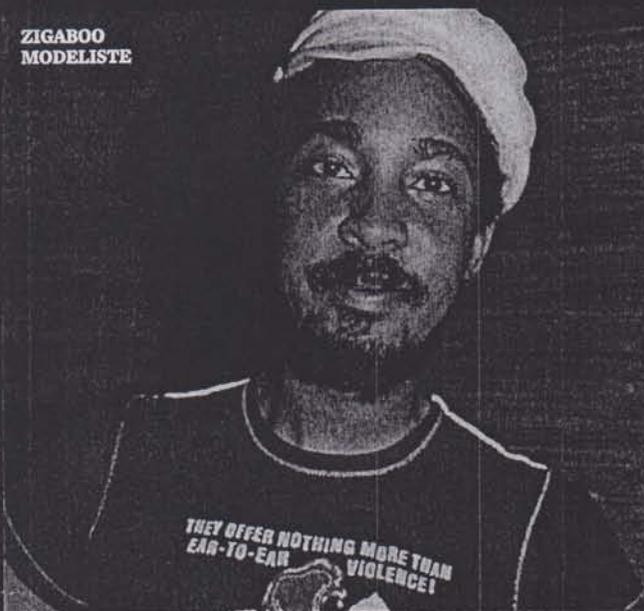
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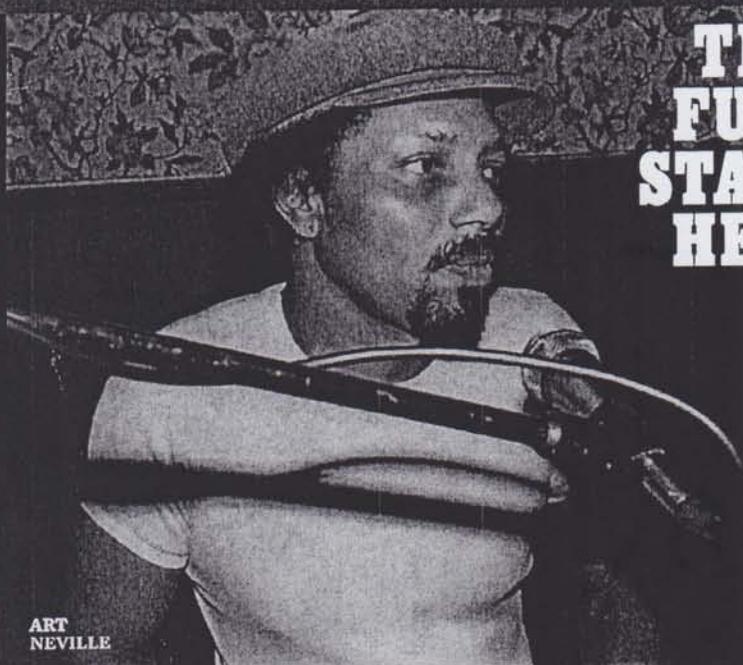


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Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks

Ha Ha Tonka

Death of a Decade

BLOODSHOT



Death of a Decade, the ominous title of Ha Ha Tonka's third record, misleads with their promise of dark retrospection. This Missouri quartet fuses folk-rock, four-part vocal harmonies and mandolin together to form an upbeat, energetic mix of melody and musical precision. Hailing from Ozark country, and signed to Bloodshot Records, Ha Ha Tonka has often been labeled as Southern alt-country, but that title no longer fits—if it ever did. Between Brett Anderson's busy mandolin lines, the group's rich, gospel harmonies and a pulsing tinge of electronica to boot, this band revels in their multi-hued, modern sound. *Greg Gaston*

Handsome Furs

Sound Kapital

SUB POP



Warning: Handsome Furs' third album contains a gimmick. The band wrote the disc's rollicking nine tracks entirely on keyboards and fleshed them out in the studio with drum machines and, of course, vocals. Here's the kicker, though: the album doesn't sound like it's missing any instruments. That is, you wouldn't know that husband and wife duo Dan Boeckner and Alexei Perry had eschewed most of the typical rock elements when making this disc. In some cases, like on "What About Us," the result is obvious synth beats and a sense of dancefloor readiness, but in others, like "Cheap Music," the layers of sound act in a similar manner to traditional guitars and drums. It almost seems like an exercise to prove how varied a keyboard can sound, particularly on aforementioned propulsive rocker "Cheap Music" and closer "No Feelings," which is almost

glam rock in style, as the keys lend themselves to an early '80s style that fades out in an extended buzz of static. The album, as anticipated, lacks the raucous dynamic that Boeckner and Perry share onstage, but their energy translates into the songs.

Emily Zemler

Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks

Mirror Traffic

MATADOR



Pavement fans know that Stephen Malkmus cranks out soulful and incisive alt-rock songs the way that most of us bitch about our problems—loudly, passionately and often. His solo work with the Jicks has sometimes hinted at his former band—2008's "Baltimore" might be the best stretch of Pavement since "Cut Your Hair"—but now that he's got the much-hyped reunion out of his system, *Mirror Traffic* has the feeling of a creative breakthrough. Produced by Beck, there's a stirring intimacy to the unplugged "No One Is (As I Are Be)" and the Rhodes keyboard melodies of "Asking Price," while songs like "Tune Grief" and "Spazz" harness a retro-garage sound that gives Malkmus free rein to flex his vocal chops. The standout by far is "Brain Gallop"—a loping, summery guitar romp that would be right at home on a '70s beach transistor radio. *Bill Murphy*

Boris Garcia

Today We Sail

PORCHWEEK



Boris Garcia began as little more than a group of friends playing music for fun. In time, however—and much to their own surprise—the Americana troupe found an eager audience across the nation. The outfit even caught the attention of Railroad Earth's Tim Carbone, who produced this record and has performed on several of their albums, including *Today We Sail*. The group's

Ha Ha Tonka

Death of a Decade

(Bloodshot)

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[Review](#) [21.Apr.2011]

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Ha Ha Tonka

Death of a Decade

At this year's Wakarusa Music and Arts Festival, there was a Backwoods Stage that turned out to be exactly what its name suggested: an off-the-beaten-path setup far removed from the crowds and sweltering Arkansas heat that dominated the weekend affair. With some welcome shade and a well-suited low-key environment, it was there that my friend and I first encountered Ha Ha Tonka, a four-piece outfit from nearby West Plains, Missouri. Since then, neither of us can get enough of *Death of a Decade*, an album that chronicles the uncertainty and loose footing that accompanies the growing up process, where the familiar is left behind and young men grow up and take an attempt at making something worthwhile of themselves. Over a bevy of mandolin, acoustic strum, driving bass lines, pulsating drums, and harmonic harmonies, the four men of Ha Ha Tonka make a racket of sound that lends credence to the chaos of the "coming-of-age" story. Their Ozark heritage and penchant for provincial aphorisms help them stand out from some of their likeminded contemporaries, and set them high atop a list of artists to watch over the next few years. ©Jeff Stowe

ROUGHSTOCK

Ha Ha Tonka - Death of a Decade

By: Stormy Lewis

Last Updated: May 12, 2011 10:05 PM

Despite much moaning and groaning to the contrary, it is actually a pretty good time for rock and roll. It is a rich genre that still embraces its indie spirit and cherishes both its diversity and unique sound. Lately, a number of rock and roll bands have been turning their hands to music that is more country inspired. Certainly, it is nothing new to have country music mixed with rock, or even country music blended with Grunge. Ha Ha Tonka is a bit different. For starters, the country they pull their influences from is the more polished edges of bluegrass, closer to Bill Monroe and Rickey Skaggs than OCMS or Irish Mountain Ballads. The Grunge in their sound is more akin to Pearl Jams supple melodies and Eddie Vedder's rich vocals than Nirvana's crashing guitars and Cobain's mumbled rasp. They blend in Southern Rock, but that Southern Rock is the contemporary version made popular by such bands as The Drive By Truckers. Since singing with Bloodshot in 2007, the band has been releasing music provides a dark and gritty soundtrack to the tribulations of the working class. Their latest, *Death of a Decade*, looks back over the past ten years with a mix of poetry and candor.

The album opens with "The Usual Suspects," a high octane track that is lead by Brett Anderson's mandolin. The track is a scalding look at the men in the life of a wounded and wounding woman. "Westward Bound" finds the band longing for the freedom in simply leaving and recreating your life somewhere else. "I realize that youth is wasted on the young, and I know that I have wasted more than some," Anderson confesses, "but I know now that my wasted days are done." "Made Example Of" is a bit slicker than its predecessors, a bit more polished. The pop sheen offers cheery contrast to lyrics like "I wasn't listening so I was made example of." "Jesuita" brings the band as close to Nirvana territory as they get, all whispered, droning harmonies before it opens up into a racing hybrid of bluegrass and metal. Its contrasts like these that earn the band their own place along side such contemporary legends as The Drive By Truckers and Marah. "We can blame it on the circumstances, but at least we took the chances we had to," Anderson mourns on the lovely "Lonely Fortunes." The desperate, fatalistic lyrics find a perfect compliment in the twinges of Mandolin and almost gong-like percussion. "Hide It Well" features a pretty and simple, country inflected melody, softer and supple vocals from Anderson and positively shimmering harmonies. "Nobody wants to act like they care too much," he muses, "so you hide it well." Anderson's vocal surprises keep on coming when, on "Dead Man's Hand" he showcases a falsetto that would make Thom Yorke jealous. The sweet vocals, high harmonies and lazy guitar melodies give the song a crumpled, gritty Simon and Garfunkel vibe that is at once powerful and soothing. The

band picks up the pace, and Anderson brings back his garage rock voice for "Problem Solver." The track is a solid, straightforward slice of American rock and roll, but surrounded by the stellar songs on this album, it comes off just a bit flat. The title track starts with a cool reverb that serves to both pay homage to the roots of grunge and to mock the ways in which those roots have been ground into the dirt in this new millennium. "Here was the death of a decade," Anderson laments, "I was just about to change." "No Great Harm" pairs nearly Native American styled drums with droning guitars and finger-plucked mandolin to create a sound that calls back to nearly every ancient form of music. The album closes with "The Humorist," a sardonic and swaggering rock ballad. "They used to call me the humorist, of all people to call that," Anderson comments wryly, "I never thought I was all that funny."

Ha Ha Tonka is certainly not the first band to mix country with rock and roll, and they will likely not be the last. They do, however, know how to make their mark in a sea full of bands making music that draws from the same roots. Some of it is merely knowledge, and this band has a wealth that goes beyond the surface to really allow them to break down the music they hear and turn it into the music they want to make. The larger aspect is sheer talent, the skill to make the music and the ear to put it all together in a way that creates a sound that is both unique and gorgeous. Ha Ha Tonka may not be as well known as some of their peers like Old Crow Medicine Show or The Drive By Truckers, but Death of a Decade is another resounding example of why they deserve to be.



<http://www.hearya.com/2011/04/04/ha-ha-tonka-death-of-a-decade-album-review/>

Ha Ha Tonka – Death of a Decade [Album Review]

by Moish on April 4, 2011

Ha Ha Tonka's latest effort, *Death of a Decade*, is another stunner from a band that routinely pushes all the right sonic buttons. The new album finds the boys summoning all the floorboard-rattling power of a backwoods church to impart a sense of urgency to every track. And still the songs manage to have a familiar, timeless quality to them, perhaps due to the 200 year old barn the album was recorded in.

Death of a Decade plays like the work of a more united, more mature cast of characters. Contributions from each member seem more welcome than ever. To be sure, the band leans less on Brett Anderson's wailing guitar riffs and more on his melodic mandolin arpeggios. But fear not intrepid listeners, the songs still have plenty of damnit-all-to-hellness thanks to Lennon Bone's pounding rhythms and Luke Long's chugging bass lines. Both provide the perfect ballast to the mandolin's litheness. I get a sense that Ha Ha Tonka are more comfortable in their collective skin than ever.

The new album spurns the sweeping tableaux of youth from previous albums, opting instead for tales of moving on and the possibilities of "what's next." Brian Roberts' lyrics paint layered stories of optimistic nomads (*Westward Bound*: "Hard times we left 'em back east and the future moves under our feet"), vexing women (*Problem Solver*: "The girl is a problem solver/ There ain't nothing else I think you can call her") and even, himself (*The Humorist*: "Never thought I was all that funny"). And, as expected, Roberts' phrasing and delivery are as infectious as ever.

Like all their works, *Death of a Decade* is best consumed in totality. The album definitely rewards you the more you listen to it. And, I can only imagine, takes on a life of its own in concert. It's an album that takes its rightful place alongside *Buckle in the Bible Belt* and *Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South* in the Ha Ha Tonka canon.

Ha Ha Tonka – Usual Suspects

allmusic

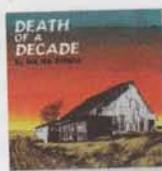
by Mark Deming

After digging deep into Southern gothic territory on their album Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South (a song cycle inspired by the writings of Harold Bell Wright), Missouri's Ha Ha Tonka have moved into lighter territory for their third album for Bloodshot Records, Death of a Decade. But rest assured lighter doesn't mean lightweight; if Ha Ha Tonka's lyrical themes and musical frameworks are a bit less dark on this album, their Dixie-fried indie rock is still potent stuff, and with Brett Anderson's mandolin showing a new prominence in the mix and the group's rich harmonies sounding stronger and more confident than ever, Ha Ha Tonka are emphasizing their Southern musical heritage while sounding smart and thoroughly contemporary. As on their previous albums, Ha Ha Tonka are a band with a very real wit, but they tend to dwell on topics that aren't all that comical, and the troubling spiritual quandaries of "Jesusita," the fierce romance of "Usual Suspects," the forlorn bluegrass-infused art rock of "Lonely Fortunes," and the widescreen drama of the title cut show this group's songs read as clever as they sound. And while Ha Ha Tonka have sounded very good on their previous albums, Death of a Decade finds them playing with greater strength and confidence than ever before. Anderson's guitar and mandolin, Brian Roberts' lead vocals and rhythm guitar, Lucas Long's bass, and Lennon Bone's drums and keyboards come together like some aural jigsaw puzzle, with each part fitting precisely with the others while adding an important detail to the overall picture; Ha Ha Tonka are gifted instrumentalists who have learned how to play together, without flash but with a real feel for complementing one another's contributions, and with a clear, uncluttered production from Kevin McMahon, they're presented to better advantage than ever before. It's hard to imagine how long Ha Ha Tonka can continue to grow on each album, considering how good they've become, but if you're looking for music that's smart, ambitious, literate, and fun at the same time, Death of a Decade could well be your introduction to your new favorite band.

HA HA TONKA

Death of A Decade

(BLOODSHOT)



MISSOURI'S HA Ha Tonka (named for a park in their native state) re-

corded their latest project in a 200-year-old barn in what seems like a logical choice for this 11-song rumination on the passage of time and how growing older beats the alternative.

The four members of the band share songwriting credit on all of the tracks. On "Westward Bound," the feeling of waking one day to realize you're not a kid anymore is expressed by lead singer Brian Roberts as "I realize that youth is wasted on the young/Oh I know now that my wasting days are done."

While his main title is lead guitarist, Brett Anderson's mandolin playing comes close to stealing the show. It doesn't matter if it's out in front or in the background, anytime the mandolin appears, it's captivating.

Ha Ha Tonka have been paying their dues: opening for bigger acts and playing the supporting stages at festivals. *Death of A Decade* is their announcement to the world that they're ready for the spotlight.

STEVE FRAZIER

ACL Music Fest Friday Interviews

Coming down from the Ozark Mountains

By Jim Caligiuri, Fri., Sept. 9, 2011

Ha Ha Tonka

12:45pm, BMI stage

Despite a name most people think is nonsense – try a Native American name for a Missouri state park near their home in the Ozarks – Ha Ha Tonka is a band on the verge of great things. The quartet's third album for Bloodshot Records, April's *Death of a Decade*, is gaining attention for its ceaseless verve, a brand of indie roots-rock shot between Neil Young's stark reflection and Paul Westerberg's punk posturing.

"We had a friend in Chicago who was booking the Double Door," prefaces vocalist Brian Roberts in regards to the band's signing with Chicago's home of insurgent country. "He was also in a band called Treaty of Paris who had a gig at the Metro and got us to play with them at a sold-out show. He also knows almost everybody in Chicago and got some people from Bloodshot to come out and see us. We had a good show in front of a big, basically young crowd.

"Afterward Bloodshot owner Nan Warshaw took us to the bar next door, where she got into an arm-wrestling match with Luke, our bass player. The combination of that show and the arm wrestling got us signed to Bloodshot."

Most recently the band was featured on the Travel Channel, appearing with superstar chef Anthony Bourdain in an episode about the Ozarks.

"Bourdain is a big fan of Daniel Woodrell, who wrote *Winter's Bone*. They wanted some music from the Ozarks, and we're from the same town as Woodrell, so it kind of made sense to have us on as well. They came up to Luke's parents' cabin, and we spent the whole day filming, drinking, playing cards, shooting guns, and hanging out with Anthony Bourdain.

"It was crazy, but he was really cool."

dailypress.com/entertainment/music/mix-position-blog/dp-free-music-friday-modern-folkrock-from-ha-ha-tonka-20110901,0,4970497.story

dailypress.com

Free Music Friday! Modern folk-rock from Ha Ha Tonka

By Sam McDonald

4:29 PM EDT, September 1, 2011

Scruffy, young kids (often bearded) playing folk- or country-tinged rock -- and doing it very well. This is a trend I can get behind. Ha Ha Tonka is a band from Missouri that has, by most accounts, been growing and evolving in recent years.

The band's newest album, its third for the Chicago-based Bloodshot label, was released back in April. It's titled "Death of a Decade." Today's free track, "Made Example Of," comes from that disc.

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Ha Ha Tonka "Death of a Decade" (Bloodshot) I don't think it's their intention (especially not based upon the title and some lyrics) but Ha Ha Tonka's finest achievement is to make Southern Rock sound happy, like music made by possibly well-adjusted, occasionally sober, regular folk. When it swells to Epic-ness (like on "Jesusita") this album can feel pretty grand and moving and jarring, but for the most part it just, despite itself, sounds kinda good and joyful (even when singing about lonely fortune falling or trying to send out an ominous Spaghetti Western vibe [though it gets oddly sombre when singing about "The Humorist"]). "Death of a Decade" is unwittingly the life of the party!

FEBRUARY 14-20, 2013 | FREE | VOL. 32 NO. 33 | PITCH.COM

The Pitch

Ha Ha Tonka

A Ha Ha Tonka performance in Kansas City isn't the rarest thing in the world – half of the members have migrated here from their native Springfield, Missouri – but this special Valentine's Day gig at Kanza Hall feels noteworthy. If nothing else, it's a chance to explore the newish Overland Park venue, which is part of the One Block South development, a nightlife cluster for South Kansas Citians. "Upscale country roadhouse" is the general vibe inside Kanza, which should be a welcome setting for Ha Ha Tonka's uptempo roots rock.

**Thursday, February 14, at Kanza Hall
(7300 West 119th Street, Overland Park,
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Uprooted Music Revue

A Brooklyn-based music blog devoted to promoting Americana, Bluegrass, Country, Roots, & String Band music.

Saturday, April 9, 2011

Brian Roberts of Ha Ha Tonka Talks "Death Of A Decade"

The buzz and overwhelmingly positive praise of Ha Ha Tonka's new album, *Death Of A Decade* has elevated the band to a higher tier of success among faithful fans, new listeners, and music critics alike.

It's an exciting time for Ha Ha Tonka, and judging from my conversation with Mr. Roberts, the band's vocalist and guitarist, the group is committed to pushing forward with their tireless work ethic to convert new listeners, as well as to reward their loyal fans who have followed them along the way. Here's a little piece of the latest chapter in the story of a band on the rise, told by the group's vocalist himself.

For readers that may be new to your work, can you briefly describe Ha Ha Tonka's previous work and the experiences leading up to beginning work on *Death Of A Decade*?

Brian Roberts: We started our band in the Ozarks of southern Missouri and signed to Bloodshot Records in 2007. We have released 2 albums on that label, *Buckle in the Bible Belt* (2007) and *Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South* (2009). We've basically been on tour the entire time we've been signed. We've been fortunate enough to support several incredible acts such as the Old 97s, Murder by Death, Violent Femmes, SSlyby, Langhorne Slim...just to name a few. We've also done several headlining tours.

What was the band's songwriting process for the new album?

BR: As always, it was a very collaborative process. We seem to have edged our way into the modern world in that we all have MacBooks now and thus demoing songs has become much easier. We usually start out with a 60-90 sec rough acoustic demo and will bash that around in Lennon's basement for awhile until it takes shape. We tend to work on several songs at once so there's a bit of mixing and mashing that occurs between tunes. If an idea isn't resonating strongly within the group, we usually abandon it rather quickly.

During the songwriting process, were there any songs that pointed the direction of the new album?

BR: We knew from the beginning of the writing process that the mandolin was going to be featured prominently in several tunes. Songs such as "Usual Suspects" and "Made Example Of" helped give us confidence that it was a sound worth exploring.

Can you describe the band's recording process of *Death Of A Decade*?

BR: We recorded in a 200 year old barn in New Paltz, NY with Kevin McMahon. We set out to make a colorful record with lots and lots of singing. We wanted to combine traditional Ozarkian instrumentation, gospel harmonies and all the barn creaks and noises with a bit of synthetic studio wizardry, which was supplied by The Ryantist at his hAUs Studio in Kansas City.

We did 2 week-long sessions in New Paltz, one in July when it was scorching hot and the barn had no A/C and the second the last week of September when the weather was absolutely perfect. Synthetic elements, additional percussion, and other tidbits were recorded at hAUs Studio in KC with co-producer, The Ryantist, over the course of the intervening months.

How did the mixing process contribute to the album's sound?

BR: Personally, I feel that The Ryantist was our secret weapon this time around. Kevin worked us hard to get a very raw, live sound during the barn sessions and then The Ryantist went about weaving synthetic elements into the mix. The Ryantist kept us focused on exploring the more melodic elements in the songs to their fullest extent and we really couldn't have been more pleased with the results.

Now that the album is finished and out there, how do you think the band as progressed, or grown with "*Death Of A Decade*", compared to the previous recordings?

BR: Without sounding too cocky, I think our sound has grown bigger and better. I also think our songwriting has become a bit sharper. Our goal has always been to continually improve and I think we've moved in the right direction with *Death Of A Decade*.

How do you see the new album in the band's discography?

BR: While it's all a matter of opinion, I think it's the best album we've made. As I mentioned above, we continually want to improve.

Can you describe your impressions of the current music scene in the Ozarks?

BR: The Ozarks' music scene is a very vibrant one. Just in Springfield, MO alone you can find an incredible range of bands, from traditional Ozarkian bluegrass such as Big Smith aka "the best band in the Ozarks" to indie rockers like our good friends in Someone Still Loves You Boris Yeltsin. It's a great scene and we were fortunate to begin our band in it.

How has the history of the Ozarks, and the past musicians from the area influenced Ha Ha Tonka's sound?

BR: I think the Ozarks permeate every aspect of the music we write and our sound in general. We've always tried to write about the people, places and things we know, while (hopefully) still making said things relatable to a wider audience. We couldn't be prouder to be from the Ozarks, or to sing and talk about the area while we're out and about on tour.

Who are your musical influences, both in general and specific to the Ozarks region?

BR: I'd consider the bands I mentioned above as big influences. Mark Biyleu of Big Smith took us under his wing when we started our band and I still look up to him as a musical mentor. Our buddies in SSLYBY are some of the smartest songwriters out there and we try to borrow as many tricks of their trade from as possible when they're not looking.

Who have you been listening to lately?

BR: J. Roddy Walston and the Business, SSLYBY, REM, Phoenix

What's next for the band?

BR: We'll be touring heavily in support of *Death Of A Decade* for the foreseeable future. We're rested up and ready to go!

Friday, April 8, 2011

Ha Ha Tonka "Usual Suspects"

We run in our circles. They are concentric and they radiate out from our homes, but somehow they seem to cover the same turf. Whether it is the work - babysitter nexus, or its the restaurant and club rounds, we tend to go to the same places. Do the same things with the same people. So when John Riedie called me to meet him at Emo's this summer, I said yes, and I don't go to Emo's all that often. But I went both because it was John, who I have known for fifteen years, and because of the band. John was funny, he just told me I should get my butt down there. I asked him who was playing. I had to pry it out of him. When he finally said, "Ha Ha Tonka," I let out a hoot! I loved their 2007 album Buckle In The Bible Belt...it was a jumping and hollering joy.

Ha Ha Tonka's new CD, Death Of A Decade, just came out this Tuesday, and takes the music in a wonderful, albeit different, direction. In case you were wondering, they took their name after Ha Ha Tonka State Park in their native Missouri. They are steeped in the musical history of the Ozarks, effortlessly transporting the fundamentals learned there into the 'anything goes' jubilation of the modern day.

We were blown away by their appearance at the Music Fog Marathon in Austin a few weeks ago. Here is the "Usual Suspects," filmed at Threadgill's World Headquarters.

<http://swampland.com/>

Death Of A Decade

by: Ha Ha Tonka

(Bloodshot)

For those familiar with the novels of Daniel Woodrell (or for those who have seen the films *Winter's Bone* or *Ride With The Devil* which were both based on his novels), it is understood that the Ozark region of Missouri remains one of the Swampland Footprint's unique and compelling places. Missouri has long been America's crossroads, an intersection of cultures and a gateway from north to south as well as west to east. Lying over most of its state's southern half, the Missouri Ozarks retains a sense of history and heritage that seems to largely stay untouched by the outside world.

As Woodrell has captured this region from many perspectives in his writing, Ha Ha Tonka has done so musically over their past three albums. Their music, while thoroughly modern on one level, never loses its sense of place and history. In the same way that *Drive-By Truckers* use their Muscle Shoals roots as a palette for storytelling and musical roots, Ha Ha Tonka has the Ozarks. Both bands represent the best of today's post-punk era of southern rock.

Death Of A Decade continues the promise of Ha Ha Tonka's last two releases, **Buckle In The Bible Belt** and **Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South**, but brings a less overt sense of history and place than either of them. Instead, **Death's** songs look inward and mostly focus on the idea of maturity. The production on the album matches this change in theme as some of the rougher edges of the previous two albums have been sanded down a bit to allow the harmonies and acoustics to shine through more prominently.

Ha Ha Tonka's brand of southern rock immerses in Ozark mountain music - folk instruments with gospel harmonies - rendering a timeless sound without losing a modern edge. This isn't an effort to remake the past, but to honor it and to show how the past continues to live on within the present.

Lead guitarist Brett Anderson puts aside his amplifier and lets his mandolin do a lot of talking throughout as the album kicks off with the raucous "Usual Suspects" and never lets up from there. "Westward Bound" uses the imagery of the initial western pioneers that settled regions like the Ozarks as a metaphor for the idea of change and personal growth. "Jesusita" is a magical track that starts like a gospel dirge before evolving into the jangle rock of pre-Sweetheart era Byrds. Clocking in at a compact 40 minutes, there isn't a bum track to be found.

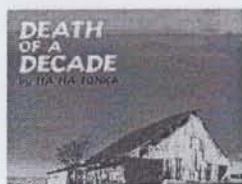
In reading recent interviews with the band, Ha Ha Tonka are a group of settled men. They have lives outside of their music careers that have been woven into the songs on this album. Each one brings a sense of contentment, reflection, and understanding.

There's a decade dead lying behind them perhaps, but one's twenties are a lost period for many men as they journey from boy to man. Some of this same sentiment can be found on Iron and Wine's equally rewarding new album .

Death Of A Decade finds Ha Ha Tonka brimming with confidence. No longer the young pups, they know that they have become men of substance and purpose. In a time when the music industry at large remains obsessed with youth, Ha Ha Tonka brings an unapologetic and refreshing sense of age and experience to their music.

The bar in 2011 has been set high. There may not be a finer album released this year.

- Jim Markel



Ha Ha Tonka - Death of a Decade (album review)

By Kris Perdew, Boise Music Examiner

April 10th, 2011 11:55 am MT

In a way, Ha Ha Tonka are a couple of decades too late. If they had shown up around, say, 1991, with an album as good as their new one, *Death of a Decade*, and maybe they managed to craft a cool video to the leadoff track, 'Usual Suspects', grabbing some airplay on MTV, the name 'Ha Ha Tonka' might've become a household, or at least a dorm-room name, and sold boatloads. But, hey, it's 2011, MTV is no longer a musical tastemaker, and, no matter what the case, making a living solely by selling one's recording is a very difficult proposition these days. So it's a damn good thing that Ha Ha Tonka are a dedicated lot, having practiced their craft as a cohesive unit now for about nine years, with *Death...* being their third full-length outing.

Turns out that *Death of a Decade* is their best yet, hitting us right square in the breadbasket with solidly-constructed tunes, from the right-out-of-the-gate 'Usual Suspects', to the last track on the album, 'The Humorist.' Frontman Brian Roberts, whose lead vocals at times call to mind a young Steve Earle, sings with particular conviction over a band that hangs together like nine-year veterans, but never sound bored or by-the-numbers. Hailing from Missouri (the band takes its name from a state park in the 'Show Me' state), Ha Ha Tonka wear their midwestern-ness on their sleeves throughout, and that's not a bad thing. If you're among the growing number of Ha Ha Tonka fans, you may notice a slight change in direction on the new album. Their previous outing, *Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South*, had a bit of a stripped-down 'concept album' feel to it. *Death of a Decade* also features far fewer keyboards than their previous efforts, leaning equally on the robust acoustic playing of Roberts, and the double duty of Brett Anderson on electric guitar and, more than ever, mandolin. Anderson's mandolin is particularly effective in setting a template for the band as new traditionalists, as heard on 'Lonely Fortunes', 'Made Example Of', not to mention the title track.

The rhythm section of Lennon Bone (drums) and Lucas Long (bass) turn out to be Ha Ha Tonka's secret weapon. Just when you think one of the band's tunes begins to sound cliched, Bone and Long throw that notion out the window, bringing unexpectedly inventive rhythms to the table, particularly on 'Jesusita', 'Problem Solver' and 'Westward Bound'. Oh, and let's not forget the lyrics. There's a fine line between profound and pretentious, and Ha Ha Tonka never come anywhere

Advertisement

near that line. There are some great lyrics throughout, but the best of the bunch may be "They say if you don't change where you're going / You're gonna end up right where you're headed", which can be heard in "Made Example Of". The lyrics on the album are plain-spoken, but of 'The Humorist' have ceased to ring in your ears. Hmm.. Missouri, kinda like, um, Mark Twain? A connection? List 'Humorist' is probably the most adventurous track on the album, and driving guitar work, venturing deep into 'tour de

There's no question that the Ozark region, from which Ha Ha Tonka is tall and short. The band were wise to mine that vein for their music. Of strip-mining, the band have gone in a more 'present-day' thematic direction, while retaining traditional instrumentation and vocal harmonies. The resulting union of the traditional and the modern is what makes *Death of a Decade* an honest-to-goodness gem of an album.

Tags: Ha Ha Tonka, Death of a Decade, americana, Southern rock, Roots Rock

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Tuesday, 12 April 2011 13:08

Charting the Music: Ha Ha Tonka, 'Death of a Decade' *featured*

Written by Joshua Edwards

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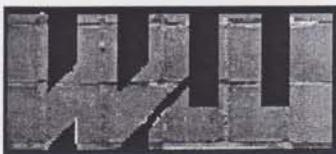
What's a surefire method of putting a fresh spin on an album? Try recording it in a 200-year-old barn. Ha Ha Tonka did just that for its newest release, *Death of a Decade*.

The band hails from the nearby Ozark, Missouri region. Traveling all the way to New York State to undergo the recording process shows the devotion the band has to its craft before the music is even heard. But of course, the music speaks volumes.

On *Death of a Decade*, Ha Ha Tonka manages to blend roots Americana influences with a contemporary edge. Smooth vocals and backing harmonies add further layers to this batch of creativity. Choir-like sounds ooze from tracks like "No Great Harm" and the title track. The heavy presence of mandolin on these songs adds great texture and depth. Meanwhile, the creamy guitars and tight percussion are coated with the natural reverb that only an old barn can provide, something impossible to mimic in a standard studio. It's easy to see why this album has received the ample amount of 88.1 KDHX airplay it has thus far.

Written by Joshua Edwards, Music Department

On the KDHX Charts: #1 on Americana and #3 CMJ Top 30 for April 5, 2011. This album can be heard on: Feel Like Going Home, Sound Salvation and Bittersweet Melody.



Ha Ha Tonka, Hoots and the Hellmouth, Kasey Anderson

JEFF ROSENBERG

9 pm, Tuesday March 29 | \$8 advance, \$10 day of show

Doug Fir Lounge

830 E Burnside St.

[ROOTS ROCK] Ozarks roots-rock outfit Ha Ha Tonka—not named after mirthfully playing with a toy truck, but rather a Missouri state park—doesn't have the most original components to its sound (country, folk, rock, pop), but the aggressive confidence with which it combines those elements in surprising ways definitely turns heads. Tonka's songs are replete with tempo shifts, even stylistic shifts, yet retain a definite band sound and identity: original Americana with brains, brawn and feeling. Blitzen Trapper, Shmitzen Shmapper—here's a rootsy group with substance, character and, in *Friday Night Lights* parlance, clear eyes and full hearts. Can't lose!

Where: Doug Fir Lounge

Phone: 231-9663

Address: 830 E Burnside St.

Website: www.dougfirlounge.com

BROWN JUG MUSIC - Friday, April 1, 2011

Death of a Decade, Ha Ha Tonka (2011) - Big Mama

12:10 PM | Posted by Brown Jug Music | [Edit Post](#)

Initially Jethro did not think I enjoyed Ha Ha Tonka's "Death of a Decade." Truth is, every time I listened to the album, I liked it a little more. The fact that I kept going back to listen again and again speaks volumes about it. I'm very quick to toss something aside if I'm not feelin' it. Irritates the heck out of the guys. They always tell me I don't give some albums a "good enough try." Psh. Here's what I figured out about Ha Ha Tonka . . . if you take all the best things about Vampire Weekend, Langhorne Slim and Young the Giant, mix them together, add a little Ozark mountain flair and bake it (at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes), you get the awesomesauce that is Ha Ha Tonka.

The album opens with a very peppy, Vampire Weekend-ish beat with *Usual Suspects*. I literally wake up some days with this song bouncing in my brain. It'll get your toe tapping and pretty soon your head starts bobbing along (watch the chair dancing at work. . . I was busted getting my groove on today. Not funny). You can check out the track over at [MP3 at 3PM](#) and see for yourself. It's a fantastic sunny day, windows down kind of tune.

Westward Bound is introspective without the slow, touchy-feely trappings most self aware tunes have. "I realize that youth is wasted on the young. I know that I have wasted more than some." It's drum heavy and perfect for road tripping. Even if you're headed in a different direction.

Jesusita begins with an eery little chant accompanied by some guitar pickin' that conjures up visions of a long walk to death by firing squad. But it doesn't stay there for long. I'm having trouble describing this song. Can I just go with Jethro's description? "It's really really good." There.

Hide It Well is one of those songs everyone can relate to. I love songs like this. We've all been there. "Nobody wants to act like they care too much. . ." They're right! This one is stripped down, just the guys and guitars. There's an amazing bass line sung by bass player Luke Long that adds so much depth and warmth to this song (and I'll be darned if you don't start hearing it in all the songs once you notice it in one) that it makes the whole song for me.

I'd like to claim *Problem Solver* as my theme song except that it opens with "she's calm, cool and collected" which automatically eliminates me. Still, it's a very sweet, rowdy, clap happy song.

The Humorist has this hypnotic hook that I'm really diggin. I hear "everybody yell Mark Twain" in my head intermittently throughout the day now. Perhaps HHT has some

sneaky subliminal skill they're using on me? It's working.

I hear people talk about "perfect" summer albums and I usually don't get it. That's probably more to do with the fact that before BJM, I was bad about picking only certain tracks and seldom listened to an entire album. Wow, how that has changed! So for the first time ever I am proclaiming an album perfect for summer (and you get a few spring months as an added bonus. You are welcome). There's not a song on this album that wouldn't be perfect for your summer barbecue, pool party, road trip or just hanging out. The lyrics are smart, thoughtfully written and when you pair that with the hearty energy they put into their music, you just can't not snag this one.

Check out the [Daytrotter session](#) for a taste of why we love Ha Ha Tonka and pick up the new album from [Bloodshot Records](#) Tuesday, April 5th!

Printed from the Urban Tulsa Weekly website: <http://www.urbantulsa.com>

POSTED ON JUNE 1, 2011:

Ozark Proud

Ha Ha Tonka's roots set it apart from its indie rock peers

By G.K. Hizer

It's becoming increasingly difficult to separate styles and classify music these days. Not that it's a bad thing, but it can be hard to explain to someone what your latest find or favorite band sound like when they blur the lines and mix genres.

Take Springfield, Missouri-based Ha Ha Tonka, for instance: is it bluegrass, Americana, indie rock, southern rock or folk? In all honesty, it's an almost bizarre mixture of all of the above. Regardless of where the band falls in an audiophile's genre index, it continues to win over fans with a unique sound and tireless work ethic.

Guitarist and lead singer Brian Roberts said the band originally formed roughly six years ago and worked its way through various names and formations throughout college. After finishing college, the members decided to get serious with the band and settled into the moniker Ha Ha Tonka, taken from the name of a state park in southwestern Missouri. After signing a record deal in 2007, Bloodshot Records re-released the band's independently produced album, *Buckle in the Bible Belt*, and the band's following started to spread as it toured heavily to support the album effort.

Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South garnered the band more critical praise when it was released in 2009, but it was truly the continued roadwork that contributed to the group's continued success. Even with a hard-to-describe sound, or perhaps because of it, the band continued to turn heads and catch ears as it toured tirelessly behind the record.



Sound Reasoning.

"Our drummer said it sounds like a mix of the *O Brother, Where Art Thou* soundtrack and indie rock, and that's probably the best description I've heard," Roberts said. "We've just been very fortunate that audiences have really liked it.

Roberts equates the band's growing popularity to its nonstop commitment to roadwork.

"We did a lot of support work for *Murder By Death* and *Meat Puppets* last year," he said. "Then when we get to play our own shows, we can really see how much the band has grown.

"Along the way, we've had a lot of highlights," he added, mentioning appearances at Lollapalooza and ACL (Austin City Limits) festivals, amongst others. "Looking back, those shows really helped us leap up, not just in exposure and audience, but in our live show."

As popular as the band has become as a live act, its albums have gradually garnered more and more critical praise, especially its latest, *Death of a Decade*. When reflecting on the theory that most bands excel in either the studio or touring, but rarely both, Roberts said the Ha Ha Tonka musicians generally fall on the live side.

"This record really filled that gap," he said. "We initially recorded in an old barn in upstate New York and then in another in Kansas City to add the ear candy.

"We went in with a game plan that we wanted to record that way," he continued. "It took longer, but I think it was worth it."

After recording the groundwork in New York, the tracks were handed over to Kansas City's The Ryantist, who mixed the record and added additional effects and production to songs, creating an intermingling of organic tracks and modern, synthetic layers. It's just that dichotomy that Ha Ha Tonka has become known for: a mix of traditional elements and modern sensitivity and production.

"We credit a lot of that to being from the Ozarks," Roberts said about the band's unique sound. "We're just trying to be a rock

band, but that's how it comes out."

In comparing the Ozark region to the Appalachians, he continued: "It hangs over whatever music we make and seeps into whatever we do. We don't think about it, but it's been a bonus I guess, because it makes us stand out."

When Ha Ha Tonka finally returns to Tulsa with a show at Mercury Lounge this Friday night, June 3, it should truly be a show to look forward to. After making a few stops at Cain's Ballroom as an opening act, the band's last few tours have passed through Oklahoma City, so Roberts and his band members are excited to return to Tulsa, especially for a headlining gig. Add in the fact that we'll be getting the band fresh off a show at Wakarusa the night before and it promises to be a special night.

In my experience, catching a band either going into or coming off of a festival show, usually results in an expansive and enthusiastic set and the group takes an opportunity to stretch out with a longer set. When mentioning this to Roberts, he admitted that festival sets are usually shorter, but he tries to keep in mind that 60-70 percent of the audience may not know Ha Ha Tonka. Instead it's often mostly people waiting to see another band.

"We know that it's a great opportunity and we need to win over a new audience, so it's typically a shorter show that hits people in the face with a high energy show to get their attention," Roberts said. "That said, we try to have a high energy show every show."

With three albums worth of material in hand, including a strong new disc in *Death of a Decade*, I'll be counting on the band stretching it out even longer when Ha Ha Tonka arrives in Tulsa this Friday night.

The new material is a dynamic blend rock backbone, Americana instrumentation and intense delivery and lyrics. That makes for a great recipe when the band arrives at Mercury Lounge, which is once again making a name for itself by booking bands that cross genres and put an exciting new spin on roots rock.

Cover is only \$5 at the door, and one of Tulsa's best songwriters, John Moreland, is opening the show, so you'll want to arrive early. Ha Ha Tonka's songwriting and explosive live show are a perfect fit for Mercury Lounge, so it's sure to be packed out.

URL for this story: <http://www.urbantulsa.comhttp://www.urbantulsa.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A39580>

Brian Roberts of Ha Ha Tonka Names The Five All-Time Greatest Acts From His Native Ozarks

By Kelly Dearmore

published: Tue., Sep. 13 2011 @ 4:10PM

While there's practically an infinite number of ways a band can generate great word of mouth for themselves in this age of social networking, digital distribution and the star-making blogosphere, it seems as though good, old-fashioned touring is as reliable a generator as any.

Springfield, Missouri's Ha Ha Tonka certainly understands this notion, hitting the road in their van on a seemingly constant basis. Not every young act can step out of their Williamsburg walk-up donning a few ironic cardigans and have magazine covers and festival headlining gigs thrown their way, y'know?

Still, the blogs have taken notice of the folk-meets-indie-meets-rock group: Their latest album, *Death of a Decade*, has seen the band justifiably gathering all sorts of raves. That was also the case for the four-piece's previous couple of albums, too. *Novel Sounds of the Nouveau South*

from 2009 and 2007's *Buckle in the Bible Belt* gave the guys something to sell as they made their way from small run-down bars to the stages of some of the larger festivals in the country.

The band will be stopping by to perform in Dallas on Saturday, September 17, for a gig at La Grange, the night after they play the ACL Festival.

At first, we wanted to know which bands Ha Ha Tonka had enjoyed touring with most. But given that Ha Ha Tonka has played countless shows all over the country, with countless acts supporting them, lead singer Brian Roberts had other ideas. After telling us that he's an "Ozarker through and through" and that he feels the Ozark's are often overlooked as a region full of musical genius, he told us he'd rather give us his "All-Time Top Five Ozark-based Artists."

We gladly let him.

Brian Roberts of Ha Ha Tonka's All-Time Top Five Ozark-based Artists

- 1. Big Smith.** Hands down, the best band to ever come out of the Ozarks. They represent all that's good about the area and Mark Biyleu has helped us so much over the years that we are forever indebted to them. Infectious melodies, pitch-perfect harmonies and some of the best lyrics inside and outside of Christian County .
- 2. Someone Still Loves You, Boris Yeltsin.** Yes, these guys may be some of our best friends in rock 'n' roll, and we may have started our bands together in Springfield, but they also happen to be some of the best songwriters I've ever met. Each album has seen them grow into something bigger and better than I could have ever imagined. We've toured a bunch with them and they put on an amazing live show. Plus, "Modern Mystery" may be my favorite song of all time.
- 3. Ozark Mountain Daredevils.** "Jackie Blue." Need I say more?
- 4. Porter Wagoner.** Three of us grew up in the same hometown as Porter Wagoner: West Plains, Missouri. The main cruising strip in town is actually called Porter Wagoner Boulevard. He was a pioneer in several ways in the music industry, both in translating his act to television and discovering new talent (i.e. Dolly Parton). I'm just not sure what caught his eye about Dolly first.
- 5. Dr. Smith's Champion Hoss Hair Pullers.** [Drummer] Lennon [Bone]'s grandpa played in this group. They had to hang it up during the Great Depression, but apparently they were something to behold. Yes, nepotism still runs deep in the Ozarks.

Ha Ha Tonka performs on Saturday, September 17, at La Grange

Showing 2 comments



Emm 1 day ago

I'm originally from Springfield, MO and I can tell you that city has tons of unrecognized talent. Not just Ha Ha

Tonka (who are awesome). Some others to check out: Glass Bottom Boat Ride, The Boot Heel, Jah Roots, Bomb the Bay, Motherstar, Benefit of a Doubt. All awesome bands and likely to go unnoticed living in what might as well be Tiny Town.



me 4 hours ago

How can you talk Springfield MO and Rock n Roll and NOT mention the Great Lou Whitney and The Skeletons is beyond me. Same guys that were Dave Alvins Guilty Men thru the 90s and oos. Mighty powerful music makers.

music

ACL Live Shots

By Jim Caligiuri, Fri., Sept. 23, 2011



Photo by John Anderson

Ha Ha Tonka

Zilker Park, Sept. 16

Roots rock's latest saviors come from the Ozark Mountains of Missouri with the peculiar name of Ha Ha Tonka. What makes the young quartet fascinating was on abundant display in a set crammed with effervescent harmonies, churning rhythms, and smart yet entertaining lyrics that draw heavily from latest disc *Death of a Decade*. Their confidence was brimming midset with an a cappella rendition of "Hangman," which lead singer Brian Roberts lightheartedly dedicated to Kanye West and fatefully brought the first raindrops of the weekend. While the mandolin-fueled title track to *Death of a Decade* has an atmospheric side likely drawing comparisons to other roots-rock come-latelies such as Mumford & Sons, Ha Ha Tonka employs indelible melodic smarts. They finished up with the hit "Usual Suspects," which got the assembled to dance, clap, and sweat themselves into an early afternoon frenzy.