

Futurebirds, Blowing Minds, c. 2010

07/26/2013

**Brian Holton
Henderson***Writer and Photographer*

I was a happy man when Futurebirds rolled through San Francisco. They played at the Independent, one of my favorite venues, and they shredded the place apart. I can't ever go back there again. It is in ruins. I'm not mad.

I loved their 2010 full-length debut, *Hampton's Lullaby*, when I discovered it this past winter. For the most part I was a goner from the start -- I'm a patsy for some crystalline, lilting pedal guitar, and Futurebirds ladle it copiously over the rest of their instrumentation. They're endearingly adventurous, both in their lyricism and in their sound. The vibe jumps from sun-soaked folk (the song "Johnny Utah" is like floating in a warm lake) to full-throated Modest Mousey shout-rock to striking moments of crisp, animated peace.

This might have something to do with the fact that there are five songwriters in the band, and there seems to be little in the way of hierarchy. It's an excellently sustainable model for a band, though apparently not without its troubles. The 'birds recorded their new album *Baba Yaga* over 45 days, supported financially with relentless touring. For a time they doubted it would get picked up by a major label. After some assorted melancholia and despair, Fat Possum waddled in to save the day and place them with the likes of Andrew Bird, Spiritualized, the Smith Westerns, Townes Van Zandt, the Walkmen, and the Black Keys. Righteous company.

The new album lives up to its obscure, vaguely menacing Slavic-myth-reference of a name. The chaos of their recording experience is palpable. There's a lot of energy behind it, and it slaloms all over the place, alternately moody and sanguine, preternatural and lucid. "Dig" is a good example -- the song starts out sailing through benign clear skies; turns steadily downward through turbulent downstrokes, placidity shuddering; and then crashes metalically into a malignant, exuberant, stormy subversion of its melody.

This trusty wildness is certainly borne out in their live performance. To this point, when I saw them, they were touring with a band called Diarrhea Planet. I'm a big fan of this. "Yeah, it's this band called Diarrhea Planet, you probably haven't heard of it." Excellent strategy to ensure that your fans will never be able pretentious about your band. When I walked in, one of their guitarists was psyching himself into to stagedive from an amp. He ate shit, popped back up, and starting riffing with his teeth. Great stuff.

Futurebirds were the hit, though, and their fans were a rapt, happy bunch. The personalities on stage were so disparate, their styles both of dress and of music overtly clashing, and they played cosmically, relentlessly well. Check out some photos after the jump, and go see them whenever you can. Rock on, 'birds.



