

# MOJO

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## Shovels & Rope



By Blood

DUALTONE CD/DL/LP

**Americana duo's raucous study of human connection.**

The duo who comprise Shovels & Rope – Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst – aren't just musical partners, they're a married couple from Charleston, South Carolina. So, there's a special logic, and risk, to the subject matter of their latest songs. Most explore the messiest consequences of human connection – the jealousies, cruelties, and betrayals – redeemed, to varying degrees, by the intimacies and love. As always, S&R stress character studies, from the envious and deluded guy in Mississippi Nuthin' to the broke-down elder in Hammer. On the group's fifth collection of original songs, there is less violence than usual, though they do include one murder ballad, and many of their characters maim themselves with guilt, shame or regret. In characteristic form, the rootsy music mirrors the scarred characters: The acoustic-based instruments blare, yelp and pound. Likewise, the two singers deliver everything in ragged tandem, the better to stress the connections that can't be broken, no matter how choking or flawed.

*Jim Farber*

