



Railroad Earth "**Elko**" Sci-Fidelity Records

I really wasn't expecting "**Elko**" to hold my attention. For me the long, long drum/bass/guitar solo was born, lived and took its final breath back in the nineteen-sixties. And amen to that! Furthermore, bluegrass music has never excited me. Often too many notes appear in too short a span of time, it's like disco for folkies, so the thought of Railroad Earth jamming across two albums on tracks that were much shorter when studio recordings filled me with dread. I actually traversed Disc 1, including a rendition of the new "The Hunting Song," unscathed and far from bored. All in all the guys fluidly picked some pretty hot stuff, and closed with an almost sixteen minute version of "Head" a Todd Sheaffer composition with a long, long history. The tune first surfaced on two albums by Sheaffer's previous band From Good Homes, "**Open Up The Sky**" [1995] and the live recording "**Take Enough Home – Farewell Concert 1999**" [2002]. Railroad Earth took a tilt at the tune on "**The Black Bear Sessions**," and here John Shekan's mandolin playing towards the close of the cut is practically orgasmic. On the earlier cut "Colorado," also from "**The Black Bear Sessions**," the six players draw the cut to a close by injecting some Celtic rhythm into an otherwise south-western sounding number. So onward we plough.....

Sadly, things failed to hold up on Disc 2. Musically speaking the sparkle factor faded to mostly grey and dreary, the six tracks lacking the aforementioned quicksilver flow of the half dozen on Disc 1. Disc 2 features a pair of numbers new to Railroad Earth's canon. The opening cut "Elko" is a fairly innocuous country-flavoured hoedown, and while the sentiment of the fifteen-minute long "Warhead Boogie" may be laudable [and leavened lyrically with ridicule] musically it comes off as a sloppy and undisciplined jumble – post ten minutes I nodded off. Just prior to "Boogie," the initially flute and fiddle heavy track "Like A Buddha" from "**Bird In A House**" meanders aimlessly, just like Norman Thayer Jr. once got lost in the wood near his lakeside, summer cottage. While Norman did finally make it home, the smiling rotund guy is still lost somewhere out there in the woods. Towards the close of the cut the band tips its hat to the music of Gustav Holst with a few bars of the Jupiter melody. You know, the bringer of jollity. Get it?

While the band's often repetitious lyrics never even mildly test the intellect, Disc 1 makes for a mighty fine "big sky," easy listening, aural backdrop for anyone undertaking a long road trip. Henceforth Disc 2 will remain fixed in the CD case tray. Once bitten.....

Folkwax Score 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 03/06.