

# DERROLL ADAMS

**Live In Haarlem 1977** Strictly Country SCR-78

The late 'Zen banjo' master Derroll Adams is revered by folk music people of a certain age in Europe, but is usually the subject of blank looks from Americans – hardly surprising since he left his native country in the late 1950s to meet up with his old buddy Ramblin' Jack Elliott over here, and never went back. More unhelpfully, the credit for his classic anti-war song *Portland Town* was often claimed by others as a 'trad arr'.

He eventually settled in Belgium and after a dicey patch in his personal life, Derroll hit peak form again in the early 1970s and this CD is a fine quality recording (not quite capturing the lowest rumbles of his deep voice, but beautifully rounded and balanced), made in a small venue in the Netherlands when he was very much at his best. He makes his intricate but gentle – more brushed than picked, the antithesis of bluegrass clank, and sometimes in minor tuning – old-time banjo playing swing wonderfully, while sounding completely effortless, propelled by the rock-steady but unobtrusive tap of a cowboy boot. And his singing is typically sublime.

For Derroll fans of that era – and those who've heard the name but not the reality – this will be like gold dust. Many of his favourite, regular songs from the Jack & Derroll era and early '70s albums are in the set – *Muleskinner Blues, Darling Corey, Rich & Rambling Boy, Freight Train Blues, The Valley, Cluck Old Hen* and of course *Portland Town* – and it's a complete performance with all his lengthy and typical song introduction stories.

Now, to be fair, spoken introductions – even by the wondrous Derroll – can get pretty irritating after the second or third play in the privacy of your living room. But good thinking by the producers has zoned the intros, all 30 minutes of them, as separate credited tracks, meaning you can then grab or programme the music as a freestanding twelve-song, 45 minute album.

The only shame, since there has been so little Derroll available in recent years, is that the packaging concentrates on photos of the club, its owner and the recordist and reminisces more about the people who put it together than tells Derroll's story for a new audience. Well, it'll be up to us long-term fans to keep doing that then, armed with this excellent evidence.

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*Ian Anderson*