



The Eastern are string band that roars like a punk band, that swings like a gospel band, that drinks like a country band, that works like a bar band, that hopes like folk singers, and sings love songs like union songs, and writes union songs like love songs, and wants to slow dance and stand on tables, all at the same time. Whether roaring as their big six piece string band or swinging the lonesome ballads as a two piece and averaging over 200 shows a year, the eastern can hold it down in all settings for all comers.

Constantly on tour the eastern have played all over New Zealand and parts beyond from Gore to Nashville, Shirley to Sydney they've held it down and treat any opportunity as a chance to plug in a play. They've toured with Steve Earle, the Old Crow Medicine Show and the Lil' Band of Gold as well as opening for everyone from Fleetwood Mac to the Jayhawks to Jimmy Barnes to Justin Townes Earle as well as Jim White, Victoria Williams and Vic Chestnut.

Their self titled debut album was released in 2009 and debuted straight into the top ten of the new Zealand indie charts based only on a ferocious live reputation and a belief in the old fashioned concept of playing for people, having made album of the week status in the Sunday star times and the chch press its sold out of its first run and continues to gather friends for the band far and wide.

In 2010 they released 'Arrows' tight on the heel's of a year which would see most bands wilt at the workload, The Eastern recorded the album in January started touring in February, released the record 1st of march and have been on tour ever since up and down New Zealand. It's been a thrill to see the work pay off with the record selling faster than they can print it, bar rooms full of repeat listeners and new friends alike and a growing audience who seem to care as much about the band as the band cares about them. 'Arrows' has been a watershed for the band and the response to the record has kept them on tour most of 2010 and through the summer of 2011, in may it was released in Australia and the band have hoped in the van and started runnin' round those Australian highways also.

Due to start recording their new album in Feb. plans were waylaid by the chch earthquake, instead they gathered up friends and singers alike in their home town of Lyttelton (chch's port) and begin work on the charity record 'The Harbour Union', just released the album debuted in the top 20 of the Nz Charts and has proved to be a wonderful vehicle through which the eastern and their friends can trade music for donations to the chch earthquake fund.

The rest of 2011 sees The Eastern on tour through Australia, a third trip back to the states and finally the recording of their anticipated third album.

"...you can smell the whiskey and dust on every song...true to the spirits of Bob Dylan, Springsteen, Patti smith and Townes van Zandt" – Sunday Star Times

"Stunning" - Rip it Up

"the first New Zealand band in a long time to do things the good old-fashioned way."
- Dominion Post

"The Eastern are possessed of a sound which is heartfelt, authentic and infinitely listenable..." - NZ Musician Magazine

REVIEWS:

graham reid from elsewhere.co.nz

The Eastern: Arrows (Social End Product/Rhythmmethod)

The Eastern out of Christchurch are new to me although for the past few months their name has been mentioned a lot, always along the lines of, "Oh, you gotta hear the Eastern."

Now I have and I too am saying, "Oh, you gotta hear the Eastern".

Part arse-kickin' Steve Earle (for whom they have opened), part reflective old time country, part Old Crow Medicine Show (for whom they have also opened), part country-styled Dylan and the Band, lots of energy and by all accounts one of the hardest working bands in the country, they impress on every count with this second album.

With two songwriters in their ranks -- banjo player, guitarist and singer Jess Shanks and mandolin player, bassist, guitarist and harmonica player Adam McGrath -- they can also draw on diverse sources: Shanks favours the quieter moods (the very beautiful and understated Maria, The Steeple and Breaks Like a Love Song); McGrath tosses out the country rock narratives and some finger-pointing.

His drawled Talking Advertising Cellular Sellout Blues is about how cynical advertisers hijack or appropriate good songs to sell product . . . and how some musicians go along with this debasing of their work. He has another go at sponsored singers on the Internet in The Needles Eye, and there is a political conscience at work too (Be True).

However he also pens the lovely, lowkey Gospel which wouldn't disgrace a Guy Clark or Townes Van Zandt album, the beautiful opener The Engineers Promise which sounds 200 years old, and delivers some astute poetry: "Oh mystery send me a sordid history of cheap songs and a tale long gone, let her tell me that she missed me . . ."

So with classic country instrumentation (the band includes accordion, piano, double bass, violin and drums), McGrath's dusty road vocals and Shanks' sweet and classic country sound, and 13 originals this is quite some discovery if, like me, the Eastern are new to you.

Really, if you like some of those names checked above -- and Springsteen in singer-songwriter mode -- then yes, you gotta hear the Eastern.

shane gilchrist from otago daily times
The Eastern. Arrows. Rhythm Method.
4 stars (out of 5)

The sophomore effort from this Christchurch band, Arrows revels in all things strung, strummed and plucked and reveals just why invitations to tour have come from Steve Earle, Old Crow Medicine Show, Fleetwood Mac and the Jayhawks.

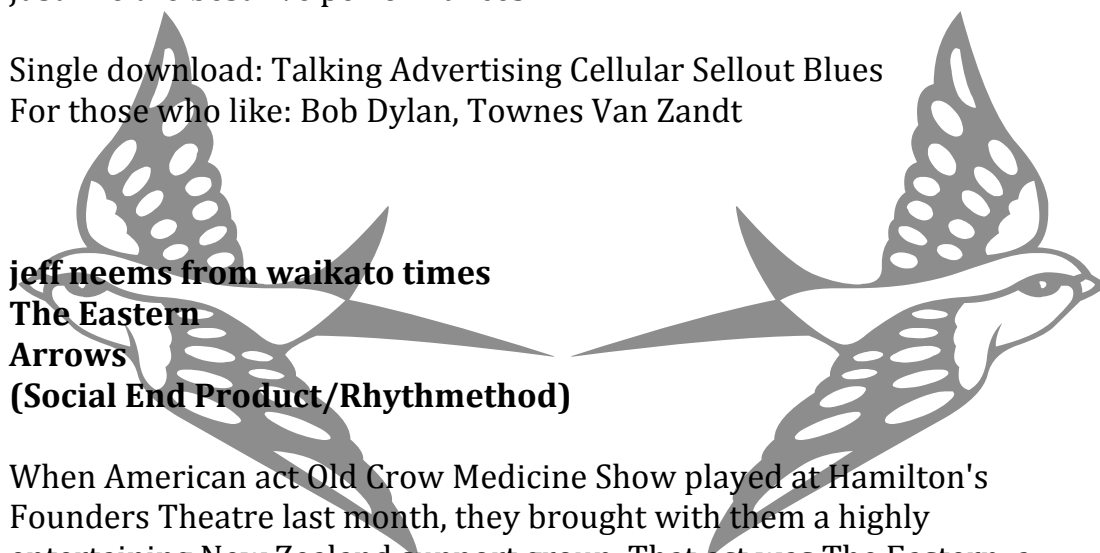
Centred on songwriters Adam McGrath and Jess Shanks, The Eastern mix bar-room country brawlers with dusty, delicate folk and bluegrass-infused stomp.

The key is the unpretentious joy with which songs are delivered, packaged with strong lyrics and tight harmonies but always threatening to unfurl, just like the best live performances.

Single download: Talking Advertising Cellular Sellout Blues
For those who like: Bob Dylan, Townes Van Zandt

jeff neems from waikato times
The Eastern
Arrows
(Social End Product/Rhythm Method)

When American act Old Crow Medicine Show played at Hamilton's Founders Theatre last month, they brought with them a highly entertaining New Zealand support group. That act was The Eastern, a Christchurch-based collective producing their own engaging, sharp and thoroughly enjoyable form of American roots music. To be perfectly honest, they probably upstaged the headliners. Comprising beardy and chatty frontman Adam McGrath, double-bassist John Hopley, fiddler Anita Clark, banjo exponent and singer Jess Shanks plus gorgeous backing vocalists Hadassah Green and Hanna Harding, The Eastern are doing many things very well. The female singers produce wonderful harmonies (as on the opener The Engineers Promise), while McGrath has a vocal style similar to that of Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan (likely to be common comparisons), and he has a knack for touching and thoughtful lyrics which give the tunes a gritty and "tough life" feel. Across 14 tunes on Arrows, The Eastern deliver acoustic goodness, stompin' blues rock (Be True), uptempo country-bluegrass singalong butt-kickers (Winterkill, Oh Mystery, Heart Like A Train) and even something close to spoken word, on Talking Advertising Cellular Sellout Blues. But it's Shanks who steals the



album altogether: she shines on Breaks Like A Love Song, The Steeple and Maria, her vocals mystic and enticing (she'd be great in front of a rock band, in the same role as Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon or Pixies Kim Deal). Blending equal parts folk, country, rock, blues and whisky-soaked tales, The Eastern are not my usual tipples, but they've got the chops and the songs to impress. The album doesn't quite capture the band's live finesse - apparently, they do about 200 live shows a year - but it's still great stuff.

Jeff Neems

simon sweetman
from dominion post album of the week

With two albums and a few EPs in just over a year, The Eastern is one of New Zealand's hardest-working bands. Add to that two national tours in support of Old Crow Medicine Show and support slots for the likes of Steve Earle and Fleetwood Mac. Impressive stuff.

And Arrows, the Christchurch group's second full-length, really captures the sound of the band developing. There's still plenty of road to travel - the male vocals definitely fall a bit too much in the Earle/Springsteen camp, but at least the material is getting close to that territory also.

In fact, The Eastern has released at least half a dozen better Steve Earle songs than Steve Earle has in the last half-decade.

The female vocals are gorgeous.

Mournful violins and sprightly banjos help to evoke the old-time feel and Arrows easily flows across wagon-hitchin' ditties and rousing near cow-punk anthems (Talking Advertising Sellout Blues). There are beautiful ballads and there is a bit of anger.

The Eastern has generated its own word of mouth - rather than falling victim to some lazy record company idea of what will work when a band can be tagged to an ad-campaign and play shows at a zoo.

So these are new country songs that feel like old country songs - that grab from so many masters (The Band, Bob Dylan, Townes Van Zandt) but never feel like a theft should be reported. Well, once they give back Steve Earle's voice and completely craft The Eastern's sound anyway.

But it's almost there - and Arrows is a leap forward, songwriting and arrangement-wise, from the debut.

What I have liked the most about The Eastern's music, particularly in performance, is that the band puts across a feeling of enjoyment, of loving what it is doing. And that is reflected with this album. Album number three can't be far

off.

Remember that's how this industry used to work: An album for the artist to feel their way, an album to extend the fan base, and then the album that announced the act more fully, widening the circle. I think The Eastern is going to be the first New Zealand band in a long time to do things the good old-fashioned way.

SOULSHINE AUSTRALIA

REVIEWER TOM BROOKMAN

Last year this Soulshine Reviewer leapt across the ditch to Aotearoa full of musical optimism after a couple of WOMAD New Zealand festivals and hours of listening to the likes of Kora, Fat Freddy's Drop, Don McGlashan and Crowded House... my move was going to take me to new waters, filled with a myriad of miraculous musical fish... or something like that. What greeted me in Christchurch was, in fact, New Zealand's equivalent to Adelaide when great bands' tour rosters read Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne... Perth! Well, in Adelaide at least there's a wicked local scene to make up for the tour-void, so I set out to find it here and ran smack bang into a wall made of Drum bricks cemented with Bass mortar. I was Odysseus and Christchurch's music scene was Troy... sorry, I ran out of fish metaphors.

I was ready to throw my hands up in despair but some wise dude wrote somewhere 'seek and ye shall find'... and find I did. In the quiet harbour town of Lyttelton just over yonder hill a small community of folk loving folk provided a respite from the DOOF. Standing at the forefront of this folk revival are Jess Shanks and Adam McGrath and their merry band of travelling minstrels, 'The Eastern'. For once, my tongue is not firmly planted in my cheek, for travelling minstrels they are, troubadours of the old school, with more miles than a '73 Kingswood, more gigs than a new computer and a rare ability for telling compelling stories about people and life. In the last 6 months they have played a show almost every second day. Granted, a national tour in New Zealand isn't quite as many k's as the Australian equivalent, but in the past year they have done it four times! Amongst that schedule they have toured in the US, re-released two of their old EP's, cut a 3rd EP and recorded and released their second album, 'Arrows'.

To their credit, The Eastern still play in their local, Lyttelton's 'Wunderbar'. They can even be lured to play small-town community gigs for the promise of nothing more than food, drink and good times! They could easily have departed in search of much greater financial riches; they live in relative musical obscurity in their home city but their musical calibre has been overwhelmingly endorsed by recent opening slots for legends Fleetwood Mac, performing with country music icon Steve Earle and touring with string-band superstars Old Crow Medicine Show. Take these guys to Nashville and you'd have a licence to print money!

The tracks laid down for 'Arrows' provide an insight into the demand for The Eastern as a support act for international acts with of a folk/country/blues ilk;

even through the tinny speakers of my laptop the LP oozes the energy and feeling that The Eastern bring to their live shows. It's not a complex philosophy... heartfelt lead vocals, quality vocal harmonies and, depending on their mood, a lonesome smattering of banjo or a steam-train of strings roaring through the night. It's good, honest music played the way people used to play before video clips got songs to #1, ring-tones made the charts and record labels were about money not music.

Underpinning this record is a sense that 'we don't make it like we used to'; the tracks harken back to musical eras past, starting with the ponderous 'The Engineer's Promise', which could be an early 1950's pop song. It opens the album as a sort of calm before the storm... hard on its heels is one of the working class anthem numbers with a social conscience, 'Be True' which, along with 'The Needle's Eye', seem to channel early Springsteen and Mellencamp with their angsty energy. Springsteen again comes to mind, this time in his folk-chaos 'Live in Dublin' guise, as McGrath's throaty vocals roar through the sea-shanty 'Union S.S.C' and the raucous romance of 'Heart Like a Train'. Even sitting in your chair you feel like stamping your feet!

At the other end of the spectrum, Shank's vocals on tracks like 'The Steeple' and 'Breaks Like a Love Song' are, in the words of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, 'guaranteed to bring you right down'. Full of sweet heartache and a pinch of the gritty despair that Lucinda Williams can bring to a song, the slower tracks punctuated by banjo and steel string provide a nice counterpoint to the energy of the militant up-beat tracks. McGrath also shows his softer side on 'Gospel', a poetic love song delivered with delicate acoustic guitar and just a hint of fiddle.

Appropriately, the album ends in the opposite fashion to which it began. Like 'Winterkill' and 'Oh Mystery' earlier in the album, 'Tiger Town', a bluegrass tale of musical escapades, would be right at home on an Appalachian street corner... or in the Wunderbar in Lyttelton, which is where you're most likely to hear it! If you feel like dancing in your living room then throw one of these on, grab your friend/partner/stranger off the street and start spinning!

Want a bit more of a listen ('Yes!' I hear you say)... then check out The Eastern at their [Myspace](#). If you're really keen then you can truck their album over to the mainland courtesy of [Amplifier](#). Their earlier EP's and LP are also well-worth a listen.

Get on The Eastern bandwagon early so you can ride it as 'Arrows' storms into town with a roar!