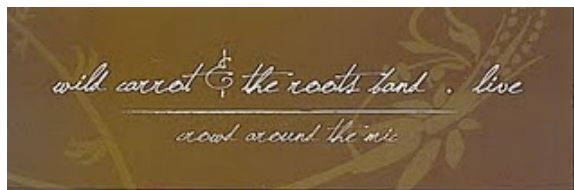


## WILD CARROT TENDS FRESH BLUEGRASS GARDEN



### **WILD CARROT & THE ROOTS BAND**

#### ***Live: Crowd Around the Mic***

Chocolate Dog Music/Blue Jordan Records M001

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A lot of people will wince at this statement, but the musical truth is that bluegrass music has been mired in predictability for quite some time. Other than hybrid pioneers such as Béla Fleck and the Alisons (Brown and Krauss), there's been too much same old/same old: affected nasal twangs (even if you grew up in Kansas rather than Kentucky), a bit of chipmunk-like harmony, and then cue the mandolin and banjo breakouts. The great irony is that bluegrass music is in the process of being rescued by acts from north of the Mason-Dixon Line: Railroad Earth, Dan Tyminski, Crooked Still.... To this list add Wild Carrot.

Okay, so their Cincinnati base is just over the Mason-Dixon Line, but Wild Carrot (Pam Temple and Spencer Funk) have joined forces with the Roots Band (Brandt Smith and Brenda Wolfersberger) to create something far more fresh and hip than the stale winds blowing from the hollows. There is, first and foremost, the mighty vocal wallop of Pam Temple. When you've got a set of pipes as glorious as hers, it would be silly to dress them up in rented garb and she does not. Her Midwestern warmth comes through in every syllable and she's not afraid to air things out instead of trying to sound like a mountain waif. There is next the fact that Wild Carrot draws from many musical wells, not a set of pre-programmed expectations. "Bits & Pieces" infuses some Latin backswing that Temple picked up from her time in the Peace Corps; "MacPherson's Lament" fuses a bluegrass arrangement to a Scottish tune, "I've Heard That Song Before" is a reworked Sammy Cahn jazz classic, and "Blackbird" covers the eponymous Beatles' song.

This twenty-four-track live album covers lots of bases. Wild Carrot's take on "Pan American Boogie" is like the Andrews Sisters go country, "Hello Hopeville" is a sweet cover of a Michelle Shocked song, "Adieu False Heart" is a Temple/Wolfersberger tour de force, and "Shut de Do" is a touch of folk gospel. There are moments of whimsy—as in their cover of Guy Clark's "Homegrown Tomatoes"—and inspirational anthems such as "What Have You Done to Lift Somebody Up." There are also superb original compositions from the multi-talented Temple that range in themes from explorations of folk customs ("Blue Bottle Tree") to a country love song inspired by locusts ("Golden Wings"). And, yes, for traditionalists there are also a few mando and banjo solos, though I personally preferred Brandt Smith's Dobro to these.

This is an album that is simultaneously lovely, clever, and swingy. Above all, it's not predictable and is easily the most exciting bluegrass album I've heard since the last Crooked Still release.—LV