

Jeff Ray & the Stakes



A “roots and blues oddity” is a very deserving description for the Minnesota-based acoustic roots and blues musician Jeff Ray. Ray’s quartet, **Jeff Ray & the Stakes** materialized in the Minneapolis area over the past 5 years with no formal rehearsals and no pre-determined musical ideas. Their first gig together was on Minnesota Public Radio’s Radio Heartland, again, with no rehearsal. The gig was quickly followed by a string of shows that started out as “get-togethers on stage” and quickly developed into full-throttle improvisations on tunes they barely knew. The band reworked the songs as they went along. Their music developed naturally and unforced, something that is rare and hard to find these days.

As the band became a well-oiled machine they released a live in-the-studio recording called VALHALLA in October 2015. The album quickly became a fan favorite and was released at a sold-out performance in Lowertown St Paul. The musical oddity of this band becomes clear when you realize how much rhythm is pounded out with every note played: Mikkel Beckmen’s one-of-a-kind syncopated washboard foot-stomp combo, joined with Nick Salisbury’s homemade foot shaker contraption and 60’s soul-style bass, Harold Tremblay’s pulsing train style harmonica, joined with Jeff Ray’s thumb thumping alternate-tuning east-meets-west fingerstyle resonator slide-guitar. The band is definitely an earful and a true musical oddity; but they are strangely fun, sometimes confusing, and always inspiring.

The band’s songwriter, Jeff Ray, has released 6 CDs to his name and has received accolades in Europe and North America. The Duluth News Tribune says Ray’s music is “fresh and original” and his bottleneck playing is “so well honed and has such an alluringly liquid quality that it puts him in a league with the best on the planet”. Rootsville (Belgium) says that Ray is “another great artist that we should not lose sight of”.

You can learn more about Jeff Ray & the Stakes at <http://www.jeffraymusic.com>.

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