

## **Creaking Tree Sings from its Roots**

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I had to laugh. It was too perfect. Having been alternately lulled and riled by the textures and harmonies of the rest of the album, this track was a braying, lowing cacophony of sounds that was at once distinctly barnyard and characteristically string. The track was called "Moo Moo."

Then I checked the album title and it all made sense. The Soundtrack, the Creaking Tree String Quartet's latest offering, is as much an assemblage of musical scenes and stories as an instrumental album. Sitting strictly between genres, it has some of the hot-stepping intricacy of blue grass fiddle lines, the tonal clarity of classical, the lyrical melody of folk music, but all subsumed in a scenic flow that is best appreciated from a comfy chair with eyes closed.

Unified by the vibrating string, the instrumentation spans a canyon-like width of timbre variation in its use of violin, mandolin, guitar and bass. A big warm bass sound grounds and tempers all the upper register melody and harmony. On the fast and furious side is "Phoenix Lair," whose guitar chucking and slapped bass provide percussive structure that evokes leaping flames around the mythic bird. The driving sharpness of mandolin plucking and pitch-bending longer tones of violin combine in a whirlwind melody like the crackle and sigh of fire and flight. Way over on the other side, "John & Edna" evokes the old couple in rocking chairs on a porch, looking back on a life well-spent together yet not without its chronic complaints.

My favourite track was the sprawling 10-minute "Spacehead". It starts with the pedestrian sounds of footsteps trudging through snow, getting into a car and turning on the radio. After flipping past a few stations, the musical composition proper begins with a haunting guitar ostinato that then is weighted with bass accents, before being joined by the eerie and distance-evoking long tones on the violin. Images of a frozen road, the passing street lights, the few winter birds on the telephone wires, float through my mind's eye as the piece shifts and changes time, tempo and mood, while somehow pursuing the thread of one same journey.

Listen to this album at the first snow fall from a warm indoor place by a window, with a hot sweet drink at hand and a sketchbook at the ready. Let the images burble up from the music, and let yourself be carried away.