

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

HOLY GHOST TENT REVIVAL FINDS INSPIRATION IN COLLABORATION

What is it that makes a family? Sure, it means sharing a bloodline, but family is not just something we are born into. It is equally of our own making, of people that we invite into our lives. It includes those with whom we share our experiences, our loves, our fears, our triumphs and our defeats—those with whom we have drank and danced and sang and laughed and cried. This spirit of family is what connects the members of Greensboro, NC's Holy Ghost Tent Revival to each other and to their audience.

The six-piece band boasts a lineup that includes guitar, banjo, bass, drums, trombone and keys. The instrumentation and arrangements bring to mind a varied confluence of musical styles. One hears strains of Dixieland jazz, ragtime, country and bluegrass, but the songwriting and presentation are thoroughly modern. They sing about steamboats one moment and break into a spirited Beatles cover the next. This embrace of different styles combines with a passionate stage presence and leads to some captivating performances of a unique brand of shambling indie-Americana.

HGTR shows are not merely attended but also experienced. “Three of us were theater majors so we understand the necessity of performance,” says keyboard player Mike O’Malley. “We’re all of the mind that there has to be a visual accompaniment to the music.” This attention to performance is what separates the band from other like-minded musicians in the Southeast. The band push each other to summon forth every available reserve of energy. They sweat and sing and scream and stomp until the last note has fallen to silence. As such, a HGTR show is just as much a physical manifestation of the emotion behind the music as it is about recreating the songs themselves. At its best, the band careens along picking up momentum, pushing the limits



COURTESY HOLY GHOST TENT REVIVAL

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— Mike O’Malley, Holy Ghost Tent Revival —

of pace and energy and the crowd follows right with them, creating a communal frenzy that blurs the line between performer and audience.

In September, the band will release a new EP titled *Family*. The songs were recorded live with a minimal amount of takes, and the spontaneity and energy created in this environment imbues the tracks with a ragged veracity. *Family* is loose and comfortable like an old frayed couch, which perfectly complements a batch of songs that at one point held an uncertain future. These

were songs that the band had been working on but had not completely polished. They had fallen out of rotation within the band’s live sets, leaving the band unsure of how to tap their potential. The solution was to turn to their extended family of musicians for help. “The idea was to get all our friends together and see what happened. It was all very playful,” says O’Malley. With a relaxed approach and the perspective gained by allowing others to contribute, the songs found freedom and a home.

The EP features the Lonely

HOLY GHOST TENT REVIVAL

WHO'S WHO

Stephen Murray (banjo, guitar), Matt Martin (guitar, banjo), Hank Widmer (trombone, euphonium), Mike O’Malley (keys), PJ Leslie (bass), Ross Montsinger (drums)

FORMED

2006 in Greensboro, NC

LABEL

Goodship Records

LATEST RELEASE

Family (2009)

ON THE WEB

www.holyghosttentrevival.com

Hot Starving Street Band, a troupe of N.C. musicians that includes members of groups such as Lost in the Trees, the Never and House of Fools. These friends shared their time and talent and broadened the palate of a band with an already expansive sound. The result is an album with an undeniably joyous feel. The song “Alcohol” is a tribute to the glories and agonies of intoxication that mirrors a night on the town. It begins with a mellow swagger, progresses to a roiling ebullience and ends with a staggering, hiccupping goodnight. The track “Goodbye or Goodnight” featuring vocals from rapper Tab-One, shows that the band is not afraid to push its boundaries to include even a seemingly disparate genre like hip-hop. It works because everyone is having such a good time. And that is what the band is all about. Whether it’s in the studio with a dozen friends, or in a club packed with fans, Holy Ghost Tent Revival draws strength from family.

—Dylan Solise