

Devil's Ruin Records is a wonderful Indiana based label who has put a compilation entitled: "Rodentia: The Best of Dark Roots Music". It's a double disc with 34(!) tracks on it.

Sepiachord: When did you found Devil's Ruin Records?

Devil's Ruin: At the end of 2008 Devil's Ruin came to fruition. Shortly after we signed The Dad Horse Experience to be the first artist on Devil's Ruin. Through a series of recording issues our first release was Damn Laser Vamires' "Gotham Beggars Syndicate."

SC: You've used the phrase "dark roots music" to describe the artists on your label, what exactly does that mean? How does it differ from, say, "insurgent country"?

DR: When the label, and the compilation really, were first conceived to be rooted in the "genre" Gothic Americana. As we moved forward it became increasingly difficult to stay within these self constructed walls. Compiling the artist we wanted to appear on the compilation we had artist such as Botanica, The Scarring Party, and Walter Sickert & the Army of Broken Toys that didn't really fit into the gothic americana title. We did feel, however, that the artists sounds were cohesive enough that they belonged together on this project. So, we stepped back little to try to identify the sound and it became readily apparent that it was dark roots music. Cabaret, polka, folk, bluegrass, country, americana, vaudeville, & gospel all have their places somewhere, with a macabre twist of course, somewhere on the compilation.

Preferring the term "dark roots" to alt-country or insurgent country is an effort to simulanously define ourselves and show that the sound should be taken seriously.

Alt-country, just like the more generic terms country or rock has become too big to really mean anything. You see this happening everywhere in music; what is "math rock"? I don't know. Insurgent country I don't think has ever really meant anything. At first, Bloodshot used it as a label sampler name and then it developed into a term that was just really used to describe dirty country music.

Defining our music as dark roots gives us the ability to consiously seperate ourselves from being identified with the alt-country scene.

*SC: Devil's Ruin recently released a stunning double compilation disc "Rodentia: The Best of Dark Roots Music". This seems like more than just your typical label sampler. What lead you to put out a CD featuring 34 different artists? Did you originally plan on something shorter? And why is thing so d*mned cheap?*

DR: The compilation was one of the first projects we started as a label. We compiled a wish list of artist about 40 names long and started to inquire with the artists, labels, and publishers about the interest. We figured that if we got a success rate of 25% that we would have enough to make an album. To our suprise nearly all of the artist on our initial wish list were happy to appear. This left us with 34 great bands to choose from. The process of eliminating songs from a list like the one we had compiled was impossible, so we started making everyone here by their own toilet paper to use at the office and made it a double CD.

The CD retails for \$13 through Amazon and \$10.00 through Rodentiamusic. com. The reason it is so cheap is because it was always conceived that way. The label and the appearing artist's motivations were never to profit off of it, but to give a voice to a growing "genre".

SC: How did you choose the bands that ended up on the collection, did bands contact you or did you hunt down those artists you wanted to feature? How long did it take you to put the whole thing together?

DR: Everyone appearing on the album was on a wish list we created when we came up with the idea for the comp.

The whole process took about ten months; six of which was negotiating with artists to get the rights to the songs.

SC: One of the things I found most striking about this set is that "americana" no longer necessarily means American. You've got artists from all of the world on this comp, from Germany (The Dad Horse Experience) to Brazil (Damn Laser Vampires). How did you discover most of them? Did you self consciously choose performers from around the globe or did it just work out that way?

DR: I continue to find this amazing myself. Our label only has three artists from here in the States on it and about a third of the artists on the compilation are from outside the US.

By no means was it conscious effort. We just chose the best.

SC: What musicians were you most excited to work with?

DR: There wasn't an artist on the album that we weren't excited to have appear, but personally, the addition of Reverend Gasseye and O'death were the most rewarding. The sound of Reverend Gasseye has so influenced the sound of the other artists on the album; either directly or indirectly, that it would really be a shame to have not seen "Blood O'Lambs" on the compilation. This is an artist whose music inspired us to start Devil's Ruin and being able to see him on the album is really great.

SC: "Rodentia" features a huge range of styles and sounds. Artists like Walter Sickert & the Army Broken Toys seem very different from a musician like Christian Williams. What common ground do you hear in these performers that puts them under the umbrella of "dark roots music"?

DR: Music and genres have always been difficult to define; they are too personal. We define Walter Sickert & the Army of Broken Toys as dark roots, but a lot of death metal fans love them as well.

The dark roots genre is really defined by a twisting of traditional music into something more sinister. Which, although they start at different origins both of the artist you mention do twist a traditional sound. Christian Williams turns a seeming bluegrass song into a much darker warning and Walter Sickert & the Army of Broken Toys deconstruct what could be a beautiful folk song into a macabre, angry self described "death folk" song.

Listening to each independent of the album they may seem not related, but listen to the album as a whole and you'll get it. That is what led us to the chapters in the album.

SC: As you say the album is broken up into ten different Chapters. What criteria did you use to decide if a song was "Battle & Reign" over "Descent Into Town"? What do some of these terms mean to you?

DR: We have gotten a lot of questions about the chapters. Here is the breakdown of the sound behind each chapter:

Chapter I: Marrow Gruel Victuals - "gothic americana" songs

Chapter II: Bit, Barrel, & Rain - "gothic americana" turning to bluegrass

Chapter III: Battle & Reign - the singer-songwriters of dark roots banjo music; also most likely to be included included as a free poster in Tiger Beat.

Chapter IV: Cloak of Darkness - these are the "bigger" songs on the album. If songs on the compilation were to be played in an amphitheatre it would be these.

Chapter V: Revolution: Delusion - deep dark baritones doing what they do

Chapter VI: Preston's Knob - if you are going to get up and dance you had better do it now, because things are going south (down to hell) real quick

Chapter VII: Yeah, they are accordions; dark roots death accordions

Chapter VIII: Diablerie - here is a minute to calm down with a magnum opus, a sad

story, and a meeting of three great artists

Chapter IX: Beseeching Merihem - dying and dealing with the Devil

Chapter X: things have broken down a lot since they started; yelling; noise, and it all comes to an end...

SC: Does the division into Chapters imply that you want the listeners to experience the collection as if it were ten "mini" albums?

DR: We envision it the exact opposite, really. We look at it as being a marathon listening session. The chapters were a way for us to divide it up by sound a little. We spent a LOT of time debating on the tracklisting order. Each song should feed into the next so you don't notice that you started with the fast paced 16 Horsepower sound of Strawfoot and end with songs like Those Poor Bastards "The Curse".

SC: What percentage of Devil's Ruin releases are going to be brand new and what percentage are going to be reissues of hard to find albums?

DR: We never really planned on rereleasing albums, but when good material presents itself we just go with it. Hank Ray's albums were hard to find so we rereleased them. We rereleased Oldboy's DIY album and we are looking into releasing a few other albums for the first time in the US.

SC: The conventional wisdom is that this isn't the greatest time to start a record label, that digital media may make labels obsolete. Why did you decide to start a label now? What are you doing that's going to make your label more viable than other recent start ups?

DR: Conventional wisdom would also say if you do start a label don't pigeon hole yourself in a genre like "dark roots"; do a Backstreet Boys tribute CD or something. We started because we have a passion for this music and there is too many quality artist that weren't being released. Someone had to fill the void and it was us.

Though we may be a niche label, as long as we continue to stay within that niche we will develop a fan base. We already have fans looking to us to see what the next album we have coming out is.

SC: You've just put out albums by Uncle Sinner and Old Boy, and you've got Christian Williams' "Thirty Minutes with..." about to hit the streets. What's next?

DR: Well, we are really busy with our other labels; Recorded Recordings Records is an indie-rock label and Zero Substance is a metal label.

We've gotten half a dozen or so new releases we are working on for Devil's Ruin. The only one that is confirmed and can be announced is that we will be relasing the debut album by Before You Die... whose "Silverfish" is featured on Rodentia and has gotten a lot of attention.

Finally , for the first time we are announcing Volume II of The Best of Dark Roots Music. We are starting to compile the tracklist now and are accepting artists applications. So, if you are in a band or know of a band, let us know and we'll see if we can make sure Volume I wasn't just a fluke and we can do the genre proud a second time.



"Loathsome music for sinners, saints, imps and angels."

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