

Review

***Mushroom World*, by Steve Roberts (2009), CD. A collection of original mushroom songs for serious (and not so serious) Mushroom Hunters.**

Exuberance is beauty said William Blake, and this charming collection of folk songs about mushrooms has both in full measure. Steve Roberts is the exuberant singer, guitarist, harmonica player, and composer. A Tennessee resident, his rhapsody on the ways of mushroom hunting captures the intimate pleasures of the moment and the full beauty of the seasons. The title song of *Mushroom World*, rooted in plaintive melody, is a down-home tribute to autumn where the circumambient tone of falling leaves, a hint of frost in the air, and fungal earthiness provoke memories of good times in the woods on the mushroom trail. Mushrooms are the common focus of all ten songs here, and the entire effect is to redirect the listener to that “other world” where the mushrooms are calling us. That other world may be a favorite bolete hunting spot, or it might just be a state of mind. In any case, here is a set of tunes whose populist vision of mushrooming is informed by long experience in mycology and music, and the result is utterly splendid.

Anyone who has had the great good fortune of hearing Steve Roberts perform at a foray knows firsthand his spirited musicianship. Like other singer/songwriters who have worked in the folk arena, he has covered a wide range of subjects from the meaning of home and family to political critique. Steve is a bluesy improviser and knowledgeable chronicler of song. In *Mushroom World* one hears elements of Bob Dylan, John Prine, James Taylor, and Neil Young, but these influences are all subtly intimated in eclectic settings. Steve has assimilated everything from Johnny Cash to the Feelies and made it his own – *and he added the mushrooms!* His accompanists, who include his wife Toni and their daughter Addie, achieve a perfect balance in a production whose clarity is sustained throughout.

Steve Roberts knows his mushrooms; in *Mushroom World* he proves that he also knows the kinds of folk who are crazy about them: myco-gypsies, Johnny Appleseed types, cock-eyed obsessives with toadstools in their beards. Where else will one hear a musical reference to *Vibrissea truncorum* (“I even found one growin’ in a stream”) but in the songs of an experienced mushroomer? The cautionary tale of *Amanita virosa* (“The Angel”) is catchy and compelling (“*it’ll fry your liver!*”), and “The Old Mushroom Road” finds violin and harmonica in delicate counterpoint to piano seeking out that melancholy moment that, deep down inside, all of us surely know. Here are exuberant songs that are kid-friendly, funny, and wholly original – a toe-tapping elegy to your favorite patch of mushrooms. *Mushroom World* is *just* what the world has been waiting for! The mushrooms rule and the music rocks!

Find out more about *Mushroom World* at www.myspace.com/musicbysteveroberts and via email at oldwoodenfence@gmail.com.