



## Merry Hell - Head Full of Magic Shoes Full of Rain



When Wigan based folk rockers Merry Hell released their debut album, *Blink and You Miss It*, a couple of years ago it garnered across the board approval with, strong melodies, stellar performances all round and clever production. What approach to take with the follow up?

It might have been tempting for the Kettle family & Co to stay with more of the same. No one would have complained. Instead, there's been a subtle shift in presentation.

*Head Full of Magic, Shoes Full of Rain* has less of the frying pan around the back of the head wallop of its predecessor. There's a slightly softer sound, with the folk influences more obvious, perhaps as a result of playing so many unplugged gigs around the clubs.

The output from twin vocalists Andrew and Virginia Kettle has changed

too, with each being given more solo time. Andrew Kettle has one of the more interesting voices. 'Gravel' is a word often mentioned, but that's only with eyeballs out. In more mellow fashion he demonstrates a warmth and expressiveness that's not matched by many. In keeping with the overall feel, the latter attribute is in evidence here, no more so than on the stand out track *Roseanna, Let Me In*. If you thought that Alison Krauss had the market cornered on minor key songs with a hefty back beat and pretty chorus then think again.

The band can still do anthemic though. The old Tansads number *Iron Man* rounds things off in full on rock mode, and then there's the music-hall waltz of *Bury Me Naked*, one of eight songs contributed by Virginia Kettle, who makes the astonishing admission, that women buy more shoes than they need. This has never been acknowledged by a female before. Gather friends around, link arms and sway for this one. It's compulsory.

*Let's Not Have A Morning After ('Til We've Had A Night Before)* adds yet more variety. It's a swingy, country style affair, that features fiddle from a certain Dave Swarbrick. When Swarbs arrives, you know that you have as well.

As on *Blink and You Miss It*, each band member puts in more than a shift, and with John and Bob Kettle and keyboard player Lee Goulding also writing, there's no shortage of quality material to underpin the musicianship. Fourteen tracks. Bang for your buck.

The release of a second album can be a time of nervousness. There's no need on this occasion. The last two years have been ones of success for Merry Hell. With *Head Full of Magic, Shoes Full of Rain* that will continue.