

You could call it an attraction...a curiosity...an anticipation of surprise and delight.

But there's a better word to describe what the music of **The Greencards** inspires.

Fascination.

If you've followed this multinational threesome over these past five years, you know the feeling. From their personal histories through the content of their work, grounded in deep musical tradition but elevated by breathtaking technique and conceptual adventurousness, there is ample reason for interest ... for excitement ...

For Fascination.

Now, with their Sugar Hill Records debut, it's official. Fascination describes the essence of this band. It was, first of all, their fascination with American roots music – bluegrass especially – that drew singer/bassist Carol Young and multiple string-instrument master Kym Warner from Australia to Austin, Texas, where they began performing together, and later to their current home base in Nashville.

That urge to challenge themselves, to test the limits of any established genre, guided them on their first three albums. It kept them focused as they accumulated awards and acclamations, from the Americana Music Award in 2006 for "Emerging Artist of the Year" through tours with Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson to last year's "Best Country Instrumental Performance" Grammy nomination for "Mucky The Duck," a track from *Viridian* in 2008, and another in 2010 for "The Crystal Merchant" from *Fascination*.

All of which leads to *Fascination*, the band's most daring accomplishment to date. Meticulously crafted arrangements serve as springboards for exhilarating improvisations. Acoustic textures shimmer in the light of Jay Joyce's innovative production. On a dozen tracks, a dozen vistas open: an urgent urban scene on "The Avenue," a dreamy shadowland on "Three Four Time," a fiddle-sweetened reverie on "Outskirts of Blue," a hallucination, as much silence as substance, equal parts jazz, blues, and *Pulp Fiction* on "Into the Blue," a blaze of virtuosity unleashed on "Little Siam," a mesh of pizzicato pulses on the title track that sounds something like a reggae jam inside a grandfather clock.

Complex and rich as *Fascination* is, the motivation behind it couldn't be simpler. "We set out to make this music different from anything we did on our first three albums," Young explains. "So we wrote accordingly. And we took much more time than we'd ever taken before. Normally, we start writing a couple of weeks before recording ..."

"...and this time, we took eight or nine months," says Warner.

Writing on the road, The Greencards rode an accelerating current of creativity. They produced more prolifically than ever and, more important, evolved their sound beyond anything they might have anticipated even just a few years ago. Almost apprehensively, they tried out some of this material at bluegrass festivals, beginning with the title track.

"There's nothing bluegrass about that song," says Warner, laughing. "We played it live just two days after we wrote it, and I was really surprised at how well it was received."

"This older gentleman came up to our merchandise desk and asked specifically for 'Fascination,'" adds Young. "He actually said to me, 'Hey, I like what you guys are doing – even the weird stuff.'"

Armed with an array of bold new songs, and signed to Sugar Hill--whose support for innovative acoustic music is well established--The Greencards decided to relinquish the production role they had reserved for themselves on previous albums. Even bolder was their choice of Jay Joyce for that role – a producer of impeccable credentials but a relatively short track record at helming all-acoustic projects.

"We'd heard all these great records that Jay had made with Patty Griffin, John Hiatt and so many artists we love," Young says. "But how would he utilize the fiddle, cello, mandolin, bouzouki, and bass – the core of the band – without putting layers and electronic sounds on it? We were very pleasantly surprised at how he just wanted us to play the songs and let our instruments speak for themselves."

"Most of the people who've heard *Fascination* have said the sum of its parts is greater than the parts themselves," Warner points out. "That's exactly what we wanted from Jay. In the past we've played the tracks as a band and then revisited them, adding things here and there. With Jay, we did a song a day. We wouldn't even look at another song until the next day. That

was a great way to treat each song on its merits.”

Young, who lofted two singles as a solo artist to the top of the Australian country charts prior to leaving for the States, more than meets the demands of this varied repertoire. Warm and reassuring on “Water in the Well,” wistfully romantic on “Lover I Love the Best,” eloquent in interpreting the epic lyric to “Davey Jones,” her vocals intersect perfectly with the string wizardry of Warner, four-time winner of the Australian National Bluegrass Mandolin Championship.

These efforts don’t break down as simply as lead vocals and accompaniment. Rather, think of Fascination as a puzzle whose pieces form one varied but unified image, whose music speaks as one voice, directly to the heart.

More than that, Fascination represents the band’s achievement of its primary goal, which is to draw from the roots while also advancing the possibilities of the music that inspires them, with each side of this equation nourishing the other. Just as important, it challenges The Greencards to maintain this process onstage and in its future visits to the studio, by raising the levels of what they expect from themselves.

“We went into the studio on Fascination from Day One that this wasn’t The Greencards two years ago – this is us moving forward,” Warner insists. “The issue with us now is where that’s going to take us over the next year.”

“We have so many new songs to play and a new approach to present to audiences,” Young says. “That gives us something to work for. But that also makes it so much more interesting.”

Is it really just about interest, though? Not with The Greencards. Their future goes beyond that; from this point, it’s about Fascination.

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