

## Ozark-ian Mix and Match: Ha Ha Tonka, May 13 at RIBCO

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
Tuesday, 10 May 2011 14:25

---

- [Download Adobe After Effects CS6 Classroom in a Book](#)
- [Buy OEM ElcomSoft Advanced VBA Password Recovery 1.62](#)
- [Download Steinberg Nuendo 4.3](#)
- [Buy OEM GibbsCAM 2014 32-bit](#)
- [Buy OEM Corel AfterShot Pro](#)
- [Buy OEM Autodesk Maya 2011 MAC](#)
- [Buy Adobe Prelude CC \(Full LifeTime License\) \(en,de,es,fr,it,ja,ko,zh\)](#)
- [Discount - Adobe Flash Catalyst CS5.5 MAC](#)
- [Buy OEM Microsoft Expression Encoder 4 Pro](#)
- [Buy Web Page Maker 3 \(en\)](#)
- [69.95\\$ Nik Software Complete Collection Ultimate Edition cheap oem](#)
- [Discount - Microsoft Windows Vista Home Premium with SP2 \(32 bit\)](#)



It's little surprise that the members of Ha Ha Tonka, hailing from the Ozarks, have a natural affinity for bluegrass.

“Anything we do, whether we’re trying to cover an R.E.M. song or what have you, comes out sounding Ozark-ian,” said frontman Brian Roberts in a phone interview last week. But on *Death of a Decade*, released in April, influence on the band’s indie rock is front-and-center with Brett Anderson’s mandolin.

Roberts said the quartet, which will perform at RIBCO on Friday, aimed for “brighter, more hopeful sounds” on the album. And because Anderson had been playing lots of mandolin, “it just became the starting point for a lot songs. ... It’s such a colorful, I daresay happy-sounding, instrument. It definitely has a bright sound about it that I think ... helped capture the type of vibe or mood that we were wanting on the songs.”

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
Tuesday, 10 May 2011 14:25

---

That description misses the tonal and artistic expansiveness of the album. The mandolin drives opening track “Usual Suspects,” and it’s indeed an upbeat rocker. But elsewhere, the instrument brings shading or a counterpoint; on “Lonely Fortunes,” the mandolin adds balance, emotional complexity, and ambiguity simply through its pregnant tone.

AllMusic.com [acknowledged](#) that Ha Ha Tonka – named after a state park in Missouri – is mining “lighter territory for their third album for Bloodshot Records ... . But rest assured lighter doesn’t mean lightweight; if Ha Ha Tonka’s lyrical themes and musical frameworks are a bit less dark on this album, their Dixie-fried indie rock is still potent stuff ... . Ha Ha Tonka are emphasizing their Southern musical heritage while sounding smart and thoroughly contemporary.”

In its review of *Death of a Decade*, PopMatters.com [called](#) Roberts “a rapidly maturing songwriter unafraid to examine the darker side of life, while still delivering catchy songs.” And HearYa.com [called](#) the record “another stunner from a band that routinely pushes all the right sonic buttons. The new album finds the boys summoning all the floorboard-rattling power of a backwoods church to impart a sense of urgency to every track. And still the songs manage to have a familiar, timeless quality to them ... .”

Throughout, little flourishes and accents do some heavy lifting. On “Dead Man’s Hands,” with Anderson providing prettily sad singing, some subtle whistling harmonies leaven the mood.

And on “Jesusita,” the breathy harmonies on the lyrics “Heaven help us now” provide somber bookends that darken the song’s warm middle.

Roberts said the latter is an example of the band’s process of “mixing and matching” ideas. He provides lines and lyrical fragments, and he and Anderson will trade melody ideas they’ve recorded. “Those will kind of find their way into a 60- or 90-second demo,” Roberts explained. “You can compile 30 demos – just little 60-second ‘clippets’ – and then you can really find the common thread amongst them.” The four band members will then “hammer it out to where it becomes a full-fledged song.” The intro and outro to “Jesusita,” he said, started as “just one little moment on the original demo, and then it became the focal point.”

## Ozark-ian Mix and Match: Ha Ha Tonka, May 13 at RIBCO

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
Tuesday, 10 May 2011 14:25

---

Roberts also credited co-producer and mixer The Ryantist with encouraging the band to embrace repetition within songs. “In the past, maybe we’ve been guilty of running away from the melody or the hook too quickly, because we don’t want the listener to get bored with it,” Roberts said. But refrains and motifs help bond listeners to songs. The lesson: “Don’t run away from the hook. Don’t run away from the chorus.”

On “Westward Bound,” for example, the band went against its natural inclination and closed the song by repeating the chorus several times, elevating it into an anthem. “That made the song much, much stronger,” Roberts said.

*Ha Ha Tonka will perform on Friday, May 13, at RIBCO (1815 Second Avenue in Rock Island). The show starts at 9 p.m., and the bill also includes Maylane and Satellite Heart. Cover is \$6.*

*For more information on Ha Ha Tonka, visit [HaHaTonkaMusic.com](http://HaHaTonkaMusic.com) .*