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Solas and Reckless Kelly

By Barry Gilbert
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It's a pretty good time to be a music fan. Quality independent bands are finding homes at sympathetic indie labels, and legal downloading is exploding. Labels big and small are fighting shrinking CD sales by adding value to their jewel boxes and DVD cases.

Two very different bands on artist-friendly labels have gone the value-added route, and their fans should be thrilled. Reckless Kelly, a road-hardened, Austin, Texas-based roots-rock band, and Solas, a dizzyingly talented Irish-American band from Philadelphia, are in the stores with combo CD and DVD packages recorded live that take advantage of surround-sound technology.



Reckless Kelly

The Braun brothers - Willy (guitars, lead vocals) and Cody (fiddle, mandolin) - came out of Oregon at the end of the grunge era, already full of experience playing in their father's band. They relocated to Austin in 1996 and, as Reckless Kelly, produced five albums before this exceptional double-CD and single DVD set, which was recorded before a raucous and adoring hometown crowd in March at the club La Zona Rosa.

"Reckless Kelly Was Here" captures every ounce of stage energy and deserves to be listed with the great, live rock-era albums, alongside the Who's "Live at Leeds," Janis Joplin's "Cheap Thrills" or even Warren Zevon's rare, never-been-on-CD "Stand in the Fire." It's that good.

The band, which includes guitarist David Abeyta, bassist Jimmy McFeeley and drummer Jay Nazz, jump genres with ease, performing covers and originals alike with confident swagger.

Two rockers, Willy Braun's "Sixgun" and Alejandro Escovedo's great "Castanets," kick off the show before RK deftly changes gears to the band-written country of "Motel Cowboy Show."

Richard Thompson's "1952 Vincent Black Lightning" follows, the tune continuing its pilgrimage from Thompson's Brit-folk original through Del McCoury's mountain bluegrass to RK's fiddle-fueled stomp. A Celtic reel, "Seven Nights in Eire," gives way to the hard-country ballad "Break My Heart Tonight" - and these are just among the first several tunes.

RK makes more stops at country and rock, adds some Tex-Mex and delivers a thoroughly convincing, nine-minute cover of the Beatles' "Revolution."

The DVD, recorded in six-channel surround sound and including a bonus tour feature, documents the entire concert without a break but oddly omits the "Revolution" encore.

It's a terrific package that's as good to watch as it is to hear, equally involving on a couch or on the road. This band was meant to play live.

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