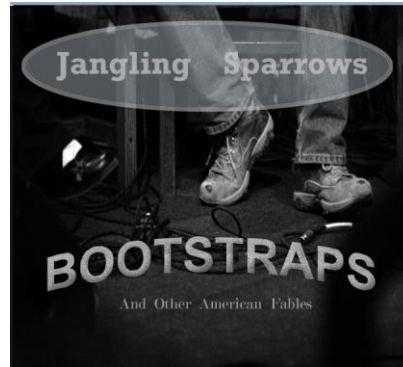


Professor Johnny P's Juke Joint

Jangling Sparrows Fly High with Bootstraps And Other American Fables



I first encountered **Paul Edelman** and his band **Jangling Sparrows** on their 2017 album, *140 Nickels*. That album came my way from a publicist who knew I have a deep appreciation for that amalgamation of music known as Americana. Part rock, part country, part folk, part blues, it's just pure-bred American-mongrel music as my old friend Page Wilson would say.

I have always loved performers like John Prine, and Steve Goodman, guys that weren't satisfied to just play one genre. They wrote and performed music that moved them – some were fun, others deep, and still others pure poetry. Heck, Prine made an a capella gospel number the title track of *Diamonds In The Rough*. I still sing it when no one's listening.

Without hesitation, I put Paul Edelman in that pantheon. I think he's a superb writer and his voice tells a story with every song. Many of you rely on this blog for the latest in blues, but this new album, ***Bootstraps And Other American Fables*** is pure Americana. There's one song that's fairly bluesy, but not in a typical AAB rhyme scheme.

Aside from Edelman as writer, vocalist, and guitarist for the band are Louis Stein on bass and Joe Grey on drums. If there are any overdubs, I missed them, it sounded pretty much like it was recorded live – and that appeals to me very much.

Estuaries opens the album with a sweet psychedelic feel. This is so reminiscent of the lyrics and music of the late '60's – a time when rock was unpredictable and more than a little challenging. Edelman is a songwriter that is steeped deep in the tradition of the bard poets and singers. Enjoy this ride, but be prepared to expect the unexpected, this is not prefabbed music with a lot of autotune and sanitized for your protection. These are musical artists with a lot of muscle behind their art.

Next up is *All That I Was Never Afraid*, and I would like to ask a question: Who among us have done something when we were younger that continues to haunt us for the rest of our life? Probably every one of us. This is a song of an older person telling a younger person that he knows what they are going through from experience. Strong song.

The Jangling Sparrows then follow that with *Carolyn*. It's a sad part of human nature that when someone from the wrong side of the tracks finally makes good, that can trigger all kinds of deep seeded insecurities. Can people actually see us for what we are or for the illusion we've become? She is easily one of the greatest American Heroes, and the JS pay homage to her in *Hey! Hey! Harriet Tubman*. Born into slavery, she escaped and managed to help some 300 plus slaves make their way to freedom along the underground railroad. She deserves an anthem, and now she gets one!

Speaking of moving on down the road, *Highway Jawn* breathes new life into the "life on the road" trope. It's not just about traveling and playing, it's about meeting new people, making new connections, making people feel special in their own hometown and discovering the magic in every new place. I spend a number of years on the road and always enjoyed getting out and seeing every new town. I hated coming into a town and going straight to a hotel and then to the venue rinse and repeat. Take time, find your world.

After that is *Follow Me Down*. This one is a dark country flavored tune with some of the best poetry in the lyrics on the album. It reminds me of some of Bukowski's favorite subjects: women, muses, bars, and a slow descent into the hell of madness. Very cool, and if I had an Americana show, this one would be getting played pdq.

From there the band moves onto *True Fine Now*. It's a good follow up to the previous song, they connect through the idea that life flies by quickly and all we really have are moments that are strung together on some kind of connecting thread. We hope and pray that we will collect as many of those moments as we can so that we can feel like we have accomplished something by the end of our life.

Violynne follows and it's a song about being knocked down and getting back up again. Resilience is something more people need in their lives, but it's often in short supply. But if we don't get back up, we really surrender our ability to control our own life. Maybe I read too much into Edelman's lyrics, but I find him to be a first-rate songwriter and it's a shame that music like this rarely finds its way onto our airwaves.

I actually had to look up the subject of the next song, *Joshua Chamberlain*. Chamberlain was a highly educated man – a college professor who spoke nine languages and who joined the Union Army and fought in the Civil War, most notably at the Battle of Gettysburg. After the war, he returned to his teaching, became President of his University, and served four terms as Governor of Maine. Edelman brings the story up to date and personalizes it and it inspires us to be those who serve to preserve our country. Impressive, and makes a nice book end with *Hey! Hey! Harriet Tubman*. Politics aside, it would be nice to have a few more leaders like Joshua Chamberlain. After that is *Label's All Mine*, a story of an old man who runs a still on his property and guards it jealously. The opening cackles sent a chill up my spine. It's definitely a swampy story song and a lot of fun. The next time I catch the JS, I really hope they open with this one. I may have to sneak this one onto [Time For The Blues](#).

They close out the album with *Bootstraps*, a song for those who have hit rock bottom and continued to dig deeper. It's the American Success Story to be able to pull yourself up from those metaphorical bootstraps, and damn near impossible to do. Still we continue to believe in myths and try again and again. Try and fail, it's a sad cycle and it makes a great ending for this surprising album.

The **Jangling Sparrows** are based out of Asheville, North Carolina, one of my favorite cities in the entire world. For those of you who have never experienced this jewel of the Smoky Mountains, it's a lovely town filled with eccentrics, poets, and dreamers. The closest city I've found like it is Portland, Oregon. The art life in Asheville is vibrant and accommodating and is a perfect place for an artist like Paul Edelman.

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