



A sad rumble of piano keys....

...paired with a nice scotch... maybe a fragrant cigar burning away forgotten in an overfilled ashtray.

These are the first mental pictures drawn, my initial thoughts....my musings as I listen to the first track on this new record I have been tasked (asked nicely) to review.

Later, I'll be trying to tie my minds eye to the task at hand. A band of misfits with the shared soul of a gypsy....the whiskey jerks have a new record and I'm headed to the basement to see it unfolded live.

Brad and the Oranges hit the stage first which pull me from my Bukowski channeling as I guzzle my first whiskey.

Short and neat just like me.

They are a jazz ensemble pulled from amongst the city finest high schoolers and they pull it off to supportive applause from the small club. These kids can jam.

I'm nestled into the best seat in the house at the very back, in the corner. Enjoying the vibe and the (mostly) smooth jazz coming from the stage.

It's been a while since I sat my cheeks down at this place, it's the best place in town for this sort of night.

The picture in my mind's eye of what type of venue suits these jerks differs slightly from this reality. They are at home here for sure in this classy little joint. The bar at the end of the path, beside the gutter would also work. This is no slight, they have an authenticity to them that would be at home in any smokey old dive bar.

This room is full tonight. Gillian Snider knows this room well. A sea of familiar faces mingles amongst the new and curious. The whiskey jerks have been coming here for a decade now but they are as fresh as ever with a brand new record to share.

Solid Gold. The name of the record and the theme for this evening. The first track (as previously started) is a mouthful and also a full glass of something special. Double Buckled Dusty Mary Janes. A tune named for a favorite pair of worn-in shoes. The jerks bring it to life as a familiar klezmer style song, complete with Snider's signature accordion and bourbon strained vocals. They pour it out in style and I'm very excited to see this one live. It even features a wonderfully unexpected guitar solo plucked right from Brian May's song book. The interpreter this time around is one Peter Abonyi. The multi-instrumentalist and incredibly talented Abonyi being just one spoke in the whiskey jerk machine.

The lights dim after the intermission and the jerks take the stage. Half of them are decked out in sparkly gold outfits and it makes the stage shimmer.

I get what I want and they start the show with that same piano rumble. Not sad live but engaging, especially when the band kicks in. Snider is at the piano, a bit of a change for those familiar with her energetic accordion stylings.

Sara Scharf (Goldie tonight as she's clad head to toe in gold sequins) jumps in with a great sax solo halfway through before she hands it off to Abonyi for said twanger ripping. Violinist extraordinaire Anna Bekolay finishes the song with a lovely solo.

Gillian introduces the next song whilst again picking up her signature accordion. A solid gold accordion. With Scharf now on flute, they kick into an old favorite...baba was a bootlegger. A true tale of Snider's own sweet whiskey distilling grandmother.

The band locks into the double bass and the bounce of the drum. They are warmed up and having fun now. Gillian switches accordions back to old faithful.

This six piece always surprises as they are as eclectic as it comes and refuse to be bound by silly things like genre. I struggle to define them as Bekolay cracks into another splendid violin riff, trading licks this time with Abonyi.

Gillian lovingly introduces her drummer and son, Aidan Weiman. It's quite charming as she threatens stories of his youth.

Instead, mother and son lock into the wonderful bass groove of Nevin Buehler and Snider croons to her audience with her unmistakably smokey vocals.

Then the band catches the memo and the song changes direction once more. It's hard to keep up, Snider is now scatting. I think she's enjoying herself.

Next up is a number penned by guitarist Peter Abonyi. It has a feeling ripped from the jive dancing swinging 30's and the whole room is here for it. A rat race born on stage as it the first time being played live.

They continue with another instrument switch and another new song from the new EP, which also happens to have been released this very day.

Snider is back on piano, Goldie is back on the sax and now they are rocking. Every head is bobbing, every toe tapping.

A thunderous round of applause erupts from the high schoolers, now sat in the front row.

They answer with a murder ballad. Switching gears and genres once again.

You never know what to expect or where the turns of this long road will take you. That's what you are in for when you get on this wagon. And it goes fast, almost off the rails. You don't have to worry much, however. These whiskey jerks know exactly where they are going. We're just lucky to be invited along.

Solid gold is available everywhere, pour a glass of something stiff and (double) buckle in.... You're in for a wild ride.

As I crawl out of the club I hear Snider and her jerks leading the crowd in a spirited version of Gloria Gaynor's, I will survive.

Survive and thrive I'd offer up. Seems to me like they are just getting started.

Words by Chris Vasseur

Pic by Jessica Deback