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Richard Leo Johnson & Gregg Bendian - **Who Knew Charlie Shoe?** [Cuneiform - 2007]

The days of a big budget being a prerequisite for recording an album are long gone. Homerecording may be cheaper, good instruments are still expensive and there's enough gear fiends drooling over the newest models or its opposite: the most vintage and authentic. Richard Leo Johnson and Gregg Bendian show on this album that good musicianship is not in the gear.

Johnson's guitars are a collection of the cheapest he could find on eBay and Bendian uses whatever he could find lying around for percussion. The album suggests that we're entering an entirely different world, that of Charlie Shoe. The credits for 'that world' read Junk Fish, Charlie Shoe and Charlie Shoe, sr. as personnel. Charlie also made the drawings scattered around in the booklet. It's a personal world of sometimes abstract soundscapes of found sounds, a stadium solo for pull-down attic stairs played by Junk Fish for instance (*Junk Fish Out Of Water*). Most of the time fairly traditional bluegrass and Americana with an occasional sidestep to for instance Hawaii (*Where The Rivers Meet*). The album is a warm and friendly fantasyworld where it's quite easy to feel at home, even if you're not born in the USA.

Some aspects of the music being 'avant garde', primarily by means but not so much by execution. *Who Knew Charlie Shoe* primarily is a charming and sonorous mix of Americana injected with some exotica and experimentation. The marriage of Johnson's fingerpicking and slide guitar skills with Bendian's playful junk percussion is very successful and unique and dripping with a joy for playing.

KUDOS:

Martijn Busink



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