



BATTLEFIELD BAND: 'Zama Zama...try your luck...'

Temple Records COMD2102, Reviewed in Froots Magazine Nov/Dec 2009

I've had to invent new vocabulary to describe this album. You've heard of film noir? Of course you have. Well, this is folk noir. The feisty new album from the Battlefield Band sees them in absolutely peak form, and we've got the Global Banking Collapse to thank for it. The band has been galvanised into creative fury by the shamelessness of the financial barons of our banks and the greedy politicians of our parliament.

The current line-up of Scotland's flagship folk band is: Alan Reid (vocals; songwriter, keyboards, accordion, Hammond organ), Mike Katz (Highland bagpipes, small pipes, whistle, bouzouki, electric guitar, electric bass), Alasdair White (fiddle, whistles) and Sean O'Donnell (vocals, guitar).

The band wanted the theme of this album to be wealth and greed, and this has led them to make some delightfully eclectic musical choices. Sean O'Donnell does a cover version of Nina Simone's *Plain Gold Ring*, and Alan comments in the sleeve notes that "We all liked the darkness and bleakness of this tale of unrequited love" - which lets you know the mood the band were in when they were making this record!

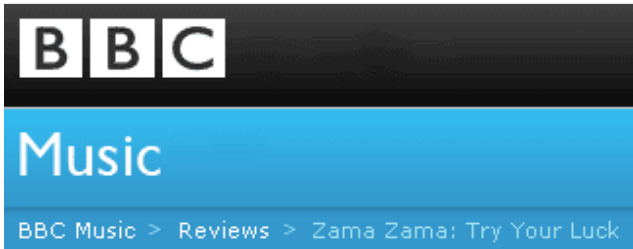
Yep, this album is filled with unflattering comparisons between today's parcel of rogues and the exploiters and plunderers of previous ages and places. The melodic influences on this album are global, with lots of satisfying pentatonic tunes and complex rhythms, such as the wild and wailing *Bulgarian Red*. The opening set *The Mines Of Golkonda* is riveting: the howling pipes, ululating fiddle and crashing keyboards are as darkly magnificent as anything the Battlefield Band has ever recorded.

The ballads have accompanying arrangements that are brooding, edgy, staccato. For example, the band sings Norman Buchan's mining-disaster song *The Auchengeich Disaster* over a repeated, menacing, hypnotic, hallucinatory riff on bouzouki and fiddle.

Inspired by the credit crunch, Alan Reid has composed three new ballads on the consequences of greed: *Three Brothers*, *Gold Town* and the incandescently angry *Robber Barons*.

The biting socio-economic comment extends even to the titles of the tunes: Alasdair White has named a new fiddle tune after Bernie Madoff: *Bernie's Welcome To Butner* [Butner Federal Correctional Complex].

Paul Matheson



BATTLEFIELD BAND 'Zama Zama...try your luck...' BBC Review

"New collection from one of the great institutions of the Scottish music scene."

There's nothing like anger to concentrate the mind, and it's the global banking crisis, along with the bonuses claimed by bankers and MPs alike, that provides the inspiration for this impressively varied and entertaining album by one of Scotland's great veteran bands.

The theme here is greed, and the tragedies that the search for wealth can bring. The best track, *Robber Barons*, written by Battlefield Band's founding member Alan Reid, sums up the mood. It's a song of quiet and thoughtful fury, rather than furious polemic, in which he's backed by accordion, pipes and whistle to tell the story of medieval robbers who made a fortune by extracting dues from merchant ships travelling up and down the Rhine. They are compared to those in present-day banks who helped to cause the banking crisis, but have continued to award themselves with huge salaries and bonuses, and there's an added attack on those British Members of Parliament who abused the expenses system.

It takes a mature and sophisticated band to do justice to such a song, but Battlefield Band are just that. Founded 40 years ago in the Glasgow suburb of Battlefield, they have become one of the great institutions of the Scottish music scene. They have experimented both in their instrumental line-up, matching fiddle and bagpipes against guitar and keyboards, and the way they have mixed traditional and contemporary songs. But though they have toured widely, playing everywhere from China and India to the USA, they have never quite earned the level of success they deserve.

This album should help to put that right. Half of the tracks are songs, which range from the bleak whaling story *Greenland's Icy Waters* and an equally dark story of unrequited love, *Plain Gold Ring* (originally sung by Nina Simone), through to a song in Gaelic (again concerned with gold) backed by a haunting combination of fiddles and Highland pipes.

The other half consists of instrumentals that show off the band's classy and varied playing. The tunes range from quicksteps to Irish jigs, featuring fiddle, bouzouki, guitar, keyboards and pipes. But even here it's anger at the corrupt fat cats that provides the inspiration: *Bernie's Welcome To Butner* is a 'salute' to Bernie Madoff, convicted of the largest investment fraud in Wall Street history, as he begins his new life in Butner Federal Correctional Complex, North Carolina.

Robin Denselow 2009-11-02

www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews



this review appeared in



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Battlefield Band – ‘Zama Zama...Try Your Luck...’
(Temple Records COMD2102)

For thirty years now Battlefield Band have been making their own distinctive blend of Scottish traditional and Celtic music and have released almost as many albums in that time. Now pretty much settled into their current line up of founder member Alan Reid together with Highland piper Mike Katz, fiddle player Alasdair White and guitarist Sean O'Donnell, we are once again dazzled by the band's intuitive playing and thought provoking lyrics. Their new release ZAMA ZAMA TRY YOUR LUCK probably has the most curious title of all Battlefield albums to date, but once you take a closer look and lend an attentive ear, it all becomes much clearer.

With extensive sleeve notes, the listener is invited to ponder over the reasons, whys and wherefores of how gold has figured in our lives, from the little band that cuts off our circulation, metaphorically and literally, to the definitive symbol of ultimate greed. Alan Reid's *Robber Barons*, the first single release from this collection, compares for instance, the greed of yesterday to that of today and argues that not much has changed since the Middle Ages. The purpose of the cover photograph of a cigar-chewing tycoon at the poker table becomes abundantly clear as the songs reveal our inherent obsession with this most sought after bling.

In *Uamh An Oir (Cave of Gold)*, Allan MacDonald makes a guest appearance accompanying himself on small pipes and singing a beautiful air in Scottish Gaelic, which segues into Mike Katz's plaintive *Zama Zama Boys*, accompanying himself on the Highland Pipes. The Zama Zama Boys (Zama Zama translated from the Zulu for 'try your luck') refers to illegal gold miners working in impossible conditions north of Johannesburg and whose endeavours eventually cost them their lives, when disaster inevitably strikes.

Battlefield Band always like to surprise us; who could forget their reworking of the old Creedence Clearwater Revival classic *Bad Moon Rising*? On this album, Nina Simone's *Plain Gold Ring* is given the Battlefield treatment and re-assesses the song, using it in the overall context of the album, as another sign of the power of gold, and not just a song of unrequited love. The album when all said and done has the potential to be recognised as the Celtic soundtrack for our current economic downturn and financial Armageddon .

If the Reverend Willie G was ever in search of a Highland Piper to join ZZ Top, he would need look no further than Battlefield's Mike Katz who would fit quite nicely into the hot rod scene aesthetically if not quite musically. Mike's assortment of whistles and pipes help to give Battlefield Band their distinctive sound and nowhere better on the instrumental pieces throughout the album, such as *The Mines of Golkonda*, *Black Ruairidh's* and *The Pretty Apron*, the closing track, which incidentally features a tune called *The Flirting Brown Maid*, the chords of which suggest *Purple Haze* of all things. Now there's a thought, Battlefield plays Hendrix. Wouldn't put it past 'em.

ZAMA ZAMA TRY YOUR LUCK is a timely release, which should provoke at least a moment or two of reflective thought, whilst at the same time, stimulate our musical senses.

Allan Wilkinson, October 2009

BluesBunny Music Reviews

Battlefield Band: 'Zama Zama...try your luck...'

Temple Records COMD2102



Of all the great British and Irish folk bands to have appeared in the past forty years, it's not unfair to suggest that the Battlefield Band have been one of the most overlooked. It is with their latest release, *Zama Zama...Try Your Luck*, that I suggest they are the most relevant composers of Celtic music today. In essence an album of modern day rebel songs, the Battlefield Band shoulder their past and walk on proudly. Their contemporaries may have passed on or split up but the Battlefield Band evidently still have a lot to say.

Any vitriol to be felt on this album is emphasised not so much through music as through words. Taking aim at stupidity and greed in our world - that's you, Mr. Banker - songs such as "Robber Barons" remain true to the Battlefield Band sound, but the lyrics carry such populist themes as perhaps are to be expected of protest songs. Indeed, the original theme for the album was that of gold-mining as suggested by track titles such as "The Mines of Golkonda" and "Baile An Or (Gold Town)". However, it seems that the recent pollution within political quarters has led to a broader lyrical spectrum for the band. Whatever the reason, it has worked to their advantage.

The Battlefield Band probably get less credit for their services to world music than they're due. I feel twice as intelligent as I did before researching all their song titles. From issues close to the heart ("The Auchengeich Disaster") to songs about Hawaiian fish ("Ku'ula-kai") to the title itself ("Zama Zama Boys"), there's a lot more to this album than music. It is testament to the quality of this CD that it can be so historically and lyrically diverse while never threatening to be anything but an album of Celtic music.

Although Alan Reid stands as the only original member still remaining in the band, his current band-mates are more than capable of composing new and relevant material, as this latest release only proves further. This is essential listening.

Peter McGee, Oct 2009

Folkwords



Battlefield Band – ‘Zama Zama...try your luck...’

An inspired fusion of ancient and modern Scottish traditional music cut with a modern edge

Is it 30 years? I've listened to Battlefield Band play their inspired fusion of ancient and modern Scottish traditional music cut with a modern edge for all that time – and now here comes 'Zama Zama' celebrating 30 years of Battlefield's music. (Released on Temple Records.) There's no doubt that Battlefield Band fans old and new will relish another outing. A unique blend of superb song writing, powerful, emotive vocals enriched with instruments ranging from Highland pipes to the 'traditional' Scottish synthesiser tell stories of excess, greed and exploitation.

'Zama Zama' once again shows what fine musicians settle in Battlefield – combining both old and refurbished tunes (in Battlefield Band style) with new and sparkling songs to create a perfectly balanced album.

Battlefield Band is Alan Reid (keyboards – piano, Hammond organ, vocals, accordion) Mike Katz (highland pipes, small pipes, electric bass, bouzouki, whistle) Alasdair White (fiddles, low whistle, backing vocals) and Sean O'Donnell (guitars, harmony vocals). There's so much to enjoy it's impossible to cover it all. The opening collection of tunes 'The Mines of Golkonda' sets the tone for the rest mixing formidable tunes from Mike Katz with traditional offerings from Ireland and Brittany. 'The Auchengeigh Disaster' is a potent song that tells the tale of men killed by the coal mining industry. There's an ominous treatment to the tune that fits with the dark sadness of the lyrics. 'Ku'ula-Kai' includes 'Johnny Allan MacDonald', 'The Procrastinator' and 'Counting Cowries' to deliver another superb Battlefield medley of tunes to drag you from your seat.

'Robber Barons' is a compelling piece of song writing with Alan's moving voice delivering the vocals. It tells the story of dissipation from brutish medieval Rhineland barons through modern-day corporate financial rapists to the undisciplined hedonism of our MPs. This one is a great anthem to the results of insatiable avarice. The band enlists the help of Allan Mac Donald and his small pipes to deliver a moving version of 'Uamh an Oir' – a Scottish Gaelic song about the mysterious so-called Cave of Gold in the South of Skye. 'Three Brothers' (another great song written and sung by Alan) tells of yet more hunger for wealth as folk joined the late 1890 stampede for gold in the great Alaskan Gold Rush.

As ever, Battlefield Band deliver old and modern messages blended with music from either end of Scotland's timeline to create yet one more excellent album.

Tim Carroll
September 16, 2009



ZEITGEIST

Battlefield Band: 'Zama Zama ...try your luck...'

CD & Digital Download
Temple Records COMD2102

I was a latecomer to the Battlefield Bands party, being one of those Scotchmen inherently embarrassed by all things Scotch, but after seeing them play a show in Musselburgh, the arrival of this put a skip, if not a jig, in my step.

Of all things, this 30th anniversary album, has turned out to be a concept album! It started out as a collection of songs and tunes about gold, but was developing into ideas about about wealth and greed. Then. Boom! The world economy begins to collapse. Now I'm not saying the Battlefield Band are to blame, but.....co-incidence?

As always it's a mixture of originals and trad arrs, with some fiery instrumentals, plaintive ballads and social history. Of the latter, 'The Auchengeich Disaster' strikes a chord as I trace my family history through the Lanarkshire oil and coal fields, of the former I have an especial fondness for 'Bernie's Welcome To Butner / King George IV'.

To continue the family theme, 'Greenlands Icy Waters' also struck a chord, with its tale of the whaling, and if you're looking for a guid old blaw on the pipes, then you'll be heading for the medley that starts with 'Ruairidh Dubh (Black Rory)'.

It's a fabulous album, with the whole band at the top of their game. Maybe I'll pass Wee Fat Ecks Scotch test yet!

Stuart A Hamilton



allgigs.co.uk

Battlefield Band:
'Zama Zama ...try your luck...'

CD & Digital Download
Temple Records COMD2102

Scotland's alternative to Ireland's Chieftains / Dubliners, has made a concept folk album. No wait - it's really rather good...and it's all about 'gold'. Inspired by the magical colour and effect on the human psyche that this precious metal has, the Battlefield Band has chosen to explore the mines and the minds behind the gleaming phenomena by researching songs from around the Isles and beyond.

This rich and engaging treasure chest certainly sounds like the result of 30 years of recording and gigging experience, and the opening quartet of self-penned and traditional jigs and gavotte only serves to strengthen their enormous reputation as respectful patrons of the world of folk music. "The Mines Of Golkanda" is one of many originals on the album written by pipesmaestro Mike Katz and is a stirring intro to the follow-up pieces, one of which is entitled "Gavotte Ar Menez" and based on a trad Brittany dance. Although the album is based on gold, the value of other riches is touched upon during "Quetzalcoatl", a Galician 'muniera' (dance), a homage to cocoa beans so beloved of the Aztecs.

Extensive sleeve-notes explain the stories surrounding the various songs on here, not least the single "Robber Barons" inspired by the recent greed portrayed by certain financial tycoons who 'still drink their wine within these walls'. Another interesting tale is told on "Greenland's Icy Waters" concerning the heinous practice of whaling in Scottish waters many years ago by a well-known fishing-turned-haulage company thus ending the cruel tradition for good.

But it is the amazing jigs, reels and strathspeys that really warm the heart and soothe the soul on here. "Ballarat Jig / Eadar I's Leodhas" and the simple, whirling fiddle dervish of "For Two Friends" canter along toward a carefree and technically-adept gallop and if you fail to get all dewy-eyed during Allan MacDonald's Gaelic rendition of "Uamh An Oir" (Cave Of Gold) and the air of the adjoining "Zama Zama" (Zulu for 'try your luck'), then you need ear transplants.

A lustrous and illustrious collection of aural trinkets played effortlessly.

Paul Pledger



REVIEW

Battlefield Band

'Zama Zama ...try your luck...'

(COMD2102 Temple Records)

Greed is not good as far as the Battlefield boys are concerned on their latest album, which commemorates 30 years (sic) of the band's existence. These are all songs and tunes focused on gold and wealth, like the acid tongued diatribe Robber Barons, where the scheming bankers and politicians of today are likened to ruthless landowners of olden days, or Greenland's Icy Waters, which laments the trade of whaling.

Bringing Scottish folk music bang up to date, the Battlefield Band are always evolving.

D.E.



NetRhythms.co.uk

Battlefield Band - 'Zama Zama ...try your luck...'
(Temple Records COMD 2102)

What is it about the mighty Battlefield Band? Album upon album they produce unchallenged top quality, with excellence of musicianship an absolute given – so by rights they should be setting the conscientious reviewer an impossible task – what else is there to say? Follow that! But yet, every time they release a new album the band manages to ring the changes in some measure and there's another layer or two of interest on which to report. And with their latest record, Zama Zama, there certainly is something really special “on the cards” for the listener.

The album finds the band fired up anew at the state of Britain at the time of the latest economic crisis, giving vent to their anger at the nation's present-day “parcel of rogues” in a forthright, and often distinctly dark, collection of songs and tunes (the record's original connective thematic premise, gold, had over its gestation broadened to embrace cutting socio-political commentary on the universal theme of the pursuit of greed).

The band's keyboardist Alan Reid contributes no fewer than three exceptional new songs: the first of these, Robber Barons, draws parallels between the unscrupulous tycoons of every age (with the Twa Corbies voraciously dining in the sinister instrumental coda!). Alan's other two songs both deal with prospecting for gold in the literal sense: Baile An Or concerns a gold rush which occurred on the Duke Of Sutherland's estate in 1869, while Three Brothers is a particularly fine story-song with a twist, set at the time of the Alaskan Gold Rush of the late 1890s.

The album's remaining songs all strike artistic gold too in some way: Allan MacDonald (brother of the band's former piper Iain) adds his characteristic warm vocal tone (and smallpipes) to a keenly observed rendition of the allegorical fable of the Cave Of Gold (Uamh An Òir), and guitarist Sean O'Donnell takes lead vocal on three songs – a persuasive account of Norman Buchan's tale of The Auchengeich Disaster (a coal mine rather than gold, admittedly), Plain Gold Ring (a bleak tale of unrequited love from the singing of Nina Simone), and Greenland's Icy Waters (from the pen of one of the Battlefields' founders Brian McNeill).

The musical settings the band provides for all these songs are well managed, often quite ominous, with plenty of imaginative touches. As well as the songs, Zama Zama contains a whole clutch of interspersed instrumental tracks: compelling tune-sets, with gold connections in the titles to be sure – several of these having been composed by the band's ever-enterprising piper Mike Katz and fiddler Alasdair White. Tunes are conceived with the benefit of a variety of influences, including Breton, Galician, Bulgarian, Zulu, Hawaiian and Irish sources as well as traditional Scottish, and they exhibit an abundance of life while retaining momentum and musical interest throughout each magnificent set. And a sense of fun too – Mike steps into his “amazing dancing shoes” for one tune!

The band's aptitude for instrumental colour, timbre, balance and internal dynamics is if anything sharper than ever, and I continually marvel at how attractively – and believably – they integrate a diversity of keyboard textures into their arrangements (unlike the majority of bands who use keyboards). As ever, Temple's presentation is first-rate, the accompanying booklet containing full personnel credits and informative notes – but there's even more nuggets buried within the pages of the band's website. The playing's seriously on fire, the arrangements blaze, the singing is uniformly strong and entirely committed – this really has got to be the band's finest hour on record to date.

David Kidman