

AT LEAST A FEW DAYS OF PLEASURE

Fractured Fairy Tales

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By Bradley Bambarger

"Borrowed Arms"

2 Foot Yard

(Yard Work)

The songs of 2 Foot Yard are like skewed fairy tales set to music, equal parts sweet and spooky. An octopus pledges one of its three hearts to a lover, arms and eyes are borrowed, time empties out like a bottle and whistling past a graveyard may not save you. The tunes echo the circus one minute, a Casbah the next.

A bicoastal trio -- violinist-vocalist Carla Kihlstedt, cellist-vocalist Marika Hughes, drummer/guitarist Shahzad Ismaily -- 2 Foot Yard draws from a wide world of folk songs, avant-classical pieces and pop iconoclasts like Bjork and Tom Waits. Along with sterling musicianship, the group's long-brewing second album, "Borrowed Arms," has a theatricality woven into it, as if the soundtrack to a lost Tim Burton film.

Although its music has an otherworldly ache, "Plane Song" is a dark joke about the joys of air travel. Kihlstedt half-sings, half-whispers, "the small boy in 21F lets out a holler/ he cries so hard that there's not enough air in the whole damn plane to feed him." Maybe, though, the kid knows something the adults don't, maybe the melody slopes down for a reason.

Kihlstedt -- who also plays in the longstanding folk-chamber group Tin Hat and the avant-rock outfit Sleepytime Gorilla Museum -- warbles the vows of affection in "Octopus," its dreaminess punctured by a noir-guitar solo by guest Jim Campilongo and her own sawing fiddle. The trio careens through "Seven Houses" like a Gypsy caravan on the run, while "Drizzle" gets an outburst of klezmer from clarinetist Ben Goldberg and Hughes pairs a honeyed vocal with a jazzy cello solo on the title track.

Most beautiful is "Hold My Own," in which a treasure hunter can't bear to part with his catch, even if it sinks him. The seasick strings and heartbeat percussion echo the atmospheric of the Gavin Bryars classic "The Sinking of the Titanic," although Kihlstedt's voice has a haunting quality all its own.

Download this: "Hold My Own"

2 Foot Yard plays May 1 in New York's Look & Listen Festival, held at the Robert Miller Gallery (524 W. 26th St.).