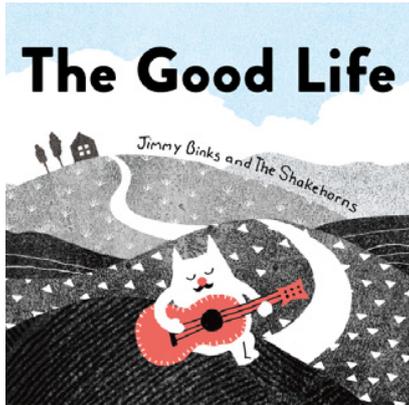


# ALBUM REVIEW



## JIMMY BINKS AND THE SHAKEHORNS THE GOOD LIFE

BY LAURIER TIERNAN

The first full-length album from Jimmy Binks and the Shakehorns bursts open boldly with the buoyant party-folk vibe for which the international collective became famous in Tokyo's expat music scene. Its first several minutes set the stage for the band's wings to be stretched, adding '50s rock leads and some ska syncopation to their well-branded country-folk hybrid.

Track two, "Eureka Moment," adheres to an old-school industry rule of offering the familiar after something unknown, before jumping into double-time feel and a second helping of speedy guitar leads. Their classic humor is found intact and amplified on track three, the phonetically-titled "Waaaaagghhh!", as its verses harken back to '70s country love songs, while the choruses feature triplet simulations of riding a falling elevator. The fourth song, "Cabin Fever," may be the most classic Jimmy Binks composition on this album: a Nashville-style country number adorned with banjo licks and swift fingerpicking, fleshed out by smooth harmonies and wry British humor. "Don't Know Why," the fifth track, shifts down a few gears to a quieter feel, like an early Bob Dylan song about wandering along the open road too long.

"One Drink Away" presents a fictional scene where regret is waiting in the wings, as our hero longs to divulge withheld words to the object of his desire. The drinking theme continues on "Drunk Drunk Drunk," befitting a band that plays many shows in bars, and is ideally destined for festivals. The lyrical theme of quirky couplehood also plays on, as the anti-hero protagonist presents his romantic double life as a "double-down on love." "747s" starts up musically as a modern "Margaritaville" but is thematically opposite, with the main character plotting a course to his beloved. Like "Cabin Fever," "New Vows" harkens back to classic Jimmy Binks, but with more polish and greater skill. And, as a humorous way to begin the album's ending, the lyrics promise, "Sweetheart, I won't let you down ... too much."

The actual album closer, "Paintings," develops on the "sweetheart" theme, while presenting a lovely new set of building blocks: a smidgen of Weezer's "Butterfly," a latin-sounding mandolin, lullaby-like fingerpicking, and even a dash of glockenspiel. The lyrics then dispense with all humor to introduce a proposal of marriage, while keeping things light, with a final suggestion that they should "get in the car and just drive." If the pop culture myth is true that you can predict a group's near future by their new album's last song, then we can expect even greater things from a band that's already great.

**The Good Life** available Sep 21 on Bandcamp and other online music stores, and physically at HMV Shibuya.