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The Sadies

In Concert, Volume One
 Yep Roc
 2006
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Despite their Canadian origins, The Sadies have proved to be perhaps the foremost contemporary torch-bearers for a wide array of genres that might be considered uniquely American. While the wind-swept plateaus of Arizona and formerly decrepit plains of the dust bowl are now filled with more modern and manufactured sounds, the fertile crops they once yielded have been exported northward. *In Concert, Volume One* shows the Sadies at their best, running the gamut from down-home country and spaghetti western to California surf and Southern gospel, with a little cowpunk rock flair thrown in for good measure.

Recorded by Steve Albini over two nights, the album is a breathless, no-stop document of a performance that sounds more like a church group sing-a-long. The spirit of community and collective participation that the Sadies engender by hopping genres and welcoming over a dozen guest musicians to the stage makes the concert feel like a real pickup jam, the kind that many early rockabilly musicians would have cut their teeth on. The band's versatility is admirable, but also makes apparent the connections between artists and styles that one might not think about otherwise. When the Ventures-like surf excursion "Snow Squad" segues into "Leave Me Alone," a raucous rave up in the style of Bo Diddley, the contiguous elements that carry over feel right. The same goes for the opening track, "Cheat," which sounds like a Rowdy Yates cast-off, yet sits well among the diverse collection that follows it.

The communal, revival meeting feel of the performance is epitomized on the first disc by a cover of the Louvin Brothers' "Higher Power," whose call and response *amens* might lead one to believe that the percussion was thumped out on a bible. The song also marks the entrance of the rest of the Good family, with mother Margaret lending her thick, seasoned voice to a verse here and there. Her contribution is solid, and gives the song far more strength than the rather flippant and bouncy enunciation of son Dallas. That's not to say he gives it a bad reading; his take is full of grinning grit, like the winking homily of an off-kilter whisky priest, but Margaret's matronly and pious delivery would surely make old Charlie and Ira a little misty. Her lead take on "Eastern Winds" only elaborates on her power as a vocalist, conveying the fear of the imperiled sailors and the foreboding of the song's storm clouds with eyewitness accuracy, as if she were the ship's figurehead maiden come to life.

The band expands further, adding scene luminaries like Kelly Hogan and Andre Ethier, as well as frequent collaborator Neko Case, who offers up a live version of her own "Hold On, Hold On" in addition to backing vocals on disc two. Her performance is naturally impeccable, but aside from her own track, she is fully committed to aiding the Sadies in deploying their own agenda. She duets with Gary Louris of the Jayhawks on a beautiful version of "Tailspin," a sweet love song accented by the warm twang of pedal steel guitars. Perhaps the Sadies caught the live-recording bug from their duties as the backing band on *The Tigers Have Spoken*. They certainly didn't catch that album's penchant for brevity, cramming 41 tracks onto what is allegedly only the beginning of a series of live releases. While brevity may be the soul of wit, the Sadies choice to let their sound sprawl out was a good one.



Reviewed by: Michael Patrick Brady
 Reviewed on: 2006-07-12
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