

Joe Mansfield & The Temperance Two are an outstanding old-time country trio based in Bristol who have recently released their debut album, *First Time At A War*. As fiddle player and vocalist Joe Mansfield explains, the three-piece is something of an economic necessity. "Bars and music venues are facing hard times and often rely on passing the hat to make things sustainable for performers, meaning the fewer the people in the split, the better. We do bring along a double bass player a few times a year when asked, including at festivals, which is a treat."

Joe reveals what specifically attracted him to American old-time music: "It has a sound that can be so hypnotic that it draws you in. Tapping into the different rhythms, which can be subtle but have huge impact, is very addictive. Also, playing this music is such a social thing, with collaborative sessions where musicians are their own audience and the tune is the star."

Based in a cosmopolitan city like Bristol means the trio performs to a wider audience than one might expect, including performances at the Red Lion pub, more recognised for rock and punk events. "We did get odd looks in the early days but it helps that our instruments are well set up for projecting – we go through a lot of fresh strings – and that I have a naturally loud voice. Punk and folk music share a DIY approach; also, Bristol has an appetite for all music and a very diverse folk scene."

A personal highlight for Joe from the trio's history to date occurred last year. "We were asked to perform as part of Bristol Radical Film Festival at the Cube Microplex to celebrate the UK premiere of independent documentary film, *Open Country*. It was such a fun evening. We started playing in the bar, then took to the theatre stage – all unamplified – and then stayed to watch the film."

For practical rather than anti-social reasons, Joe Mansfield & The Temperance Two have been fairly separate from the rest of the old-time scene in the UK. "We are more used to playing for non-folk audiences, which means we bring more of a rock music energy that may not be there with other acts. It sometimes throws me when we meet a listening room, as I am so used to having to experiment to cut through drinking crowds."

The trio hasn't visited the USA to perform yet but they acknowledge that it's something of a dream for them. "Portland, Oregon has an amazing scene with bands like Foghorn String Band. Also, the Appalachian String Band Music Festival known as Clifftop in West Virginia is a Mecca for old-time. It's somewhere every fiddler has to go at least once in their life!"

Until that happens, they continue to perform as much as possible throughout these Isles. "It's been an incredibly busy year for live performances, so we are looking forward to resting! Yan [Allerton,

banjo player, and Kai Carter on guitar complete the trio] has actually got a trip to the Himalayas coming up; then we are going to regroup and get working on the next album.

"We plan to get over to Ireland sooner rather than later, hopefully to Westport Folk & Bluegrass Festival, which is a particular highlight of the scene there. Despite our humble origins in bars and DIY events, we are excited at the prospect of getting traditional acoustic music onto bigger stages."

STEVE CASEMAN

