



Whapweasel are no longer the best-kept secret on the English ceilidh-dance circuit. The word is out. After seven years of dignified obscurity, the Whaps were propelled into the limelight in 2003 when their third CD, *Relentless*, shifted wagonloads on the back of heavy national radio coverage, unanimously enthusiastic reviews nationwide and indeed worldwide and a series of triumphant gigs at the Sidmouth International Folk Festival. *Relentless* was featured on the prestigious *fRoots* Top Ten Playlist, and the band themselves were interviewed by *fRoots* editor Ian Anderson for the magazine's August issue. Further critical acclaim came at the end of the year with their inclusion in *Mojo's* list of Best Folk CDs of 2003, and their nomination for the Horizon Award (Best New Act) in the annual Radio Two Folk Awards - the only dance band shortlisted in any category.

Not bad for a band that started out as two melodeon players. Robin Jowett and Brian Bell decided in the mid-Nineties that the world was ready for another electric ceilidh band. Needing a rhythm section, Brian switched to bass, and in due course drums, guitars and cittern were added. At this point they adopted the name Whapweasel, taken from a small stream that flows quietly through Hexham Low Quarter in mid-Northumberland; their previous name scores highly in pub quizzes throughout the North of England. In 1998, with a line-up of Robin, Brian, Dave Ainsley, Mike Coleman and Bob Wilson, they recorded their first CD, *Skirl Naked*, and made a second, *Burn*, two years later, by which time the band sound had been augmented by a saxophone section ("The Toots") comprising Stuart Finden and Fiona Littlewood. The addition of brass further accentuated the band's adroit use of elements of jazz and ska. Both CDs had been produced by Steeleye Span's Rick Kemp; and in the course of recording *Relentless* in 2003 Rick added some stinging electric guitar, plugging the gaps left by Dave Ainsley, who had withdrawn from gigging earlier in the year. Rick was thereupon added to the line-up by (rumour has it) mutual agreement. Also joining the line-up at the time of recording was Brian's daughter Heather on keyboards.

The Band won the prestigious Best Dance Band category at the Radio 2 Folk Awards in 2005 and it was after that that Robin decided to call it a day. The Band was fortunate to have met an amazing fiddle player, Tom Fairbairn at Sidmouth the previous year and invited him to join the band. Whapweasels' 4th CD 'Pack of Jokers' was released in the summer of 2005. Tom has now left the band for pastures new. So Whapweasel had another change in personel and reintroduced melodeons in the majestic form of Simon Care (Albion Band, Edward II, Tickled Pink). and Saul Rose Rose (Waterson:Carthy, Random, Faustus) - box players of the highest quality. The twin-box front line has proved a roaring success and given the Whaps' inimitable sound a thrilling edge that you won't hear anywhere else. Both Saul and Simon are now thoroughly immersed in the Whap tunebook, tussling with mercurial melodies designed to push their instruments to the limit.

But why stop at nine? The Whaps have moved into double figures. For selected bookings the band will be enlarging its brass section—the legendary Toots—with the addition of trombonist Joe Fowler. Joe's jazzy slurs and jabs bring exciting new colours to the Whapweasel stylistic palette. Bob Wilson on drums left the band recently and has been replaced by John Hirst, one of the UK Mapex Drummer Of Tomorrow winners. The Whaps have weathered a flurry of personnel changes over the last year or two, emerging even stronger and more dynamic than before.

Their exuberant stage show, wily dance tunes and witty self-composed songs mark them out as a major attraction. They are first and foremost a dance band, but they're likely to be in increasing demand on the concert circuit, and are busy developing pieces designed as much for listening as for dancing (though they have devised a way for audiences to dance while remaining seated; experts are baffled...). Meanwhile, hang on to your hats: the Mighty Wind of Whap is heading your way...

Simon Care-melodeon • Saul Rose-melodeon
Stuart Finden-saxophone • Fiona Littlewood-saxophone
Heather Bell-keyboards
Mike Coleman-cittern • Brian Bell-bass •
John Hirst-drums • Rick Kemp-guitar • Joe Fowler-Trombone

