

## 16 HORSEPOWER

The recipe for stew should never be written down. Good cooking is always intuitive. Somehow listing ingredients subverts the magic of inspiration, and the whole point of simmering up a stew in the first place is to conceal the components, to make something distinct out of the unknown. Still, some kind of explanation will be required for 16 Horsepower, for theirs is an altogether new cuisine.

This is what it comes down to, then: You've got your basic French punk rock drummer, who comes complete with a classical music education and could (theoretically) double on flute in a pinch; you've got your basic Denver punk rock rebel gone country, and he sings, plays guitar, five-string banjo, and an antique push-button accordion called bandoneon that turned up in a junk shop; and then there's the rogue luthier (guitar builder) who can play anything with strings but settles for stand-up bass and an acoustic bass of his own construction.

That would be, in order, Jean-yves Tola, David Eugene Edwards and Kevin Soll. And, yes, that won't be an easy recipe to copy.

Tola's story - the short version - begins in a suburb of Paris. "I was into music when I was eight," he says, "playing classical music. It was part of the family tradition, everybody had to learn an instrument. I used to play flute, and I can play piano, too." Except that he ended up a drummer. "My family was listening to what was hip when I was growing up," he says, [Leonard Cohen](#), [Bob Dylan](#), [Patti Smith](#). And one of my brothers was a [Led Zeppelin](#) fan, [Beatles](#), [Stones](#), that's all I heard. When I was 15 years old it was the late '70s, and I got into [punk](#) rock, but, on the other side, I was going to [jazz](#) music school."

A decade later Tola ended up in Los Angeles drumming with Passion Fodder, who put out a couple pretty fair albums on Beggars Banquet before calling it a day. Meanwhile, back in Denver...

David Eugene Edwards was in a band called the Denver Gentlemen. His wife was from Los Angeles, and somehow that was enough to move the whole outfit to California. Tola ended up drumming with the Gentlemen, but, as Edwards succinctly puts it, "I hated Los Angeles and wanted to go home." Edwards and Tola had already begun conceiving 16 Horsepower by then (the Denver Gentlemen continue in their absence), and followed Edwards to Denver a few months later. Kevin Soll (who changed his last name from Warner a while back, to honor a late grandfather) worked as a luthier and "played in bands as a hobby." Actually, he played whatever he wanted, quietly admitting "I pretty much can play all kinds of instruments with strings, mandolin, violin played guitar before, and started playing bass when this project came up."

And it made some kind of sense that Soll should build his own bass, so long as he was about to pick up an instrument he hadn't really played in anger since high school; he and Edwards have been friends longer even than that, though. "I made a flat-top acoustic bass," he says, "it's just like a guitar, kind of a cross between a Mariachi bass and an acoustic guitar."

Some of 16 Horsepower's songs go back to the Denver Gentlemen. "Yeah, I wrote them like six years ago," Edwards laughs. "Right now we have about 40 songs, probably enough material for two more records."

Edwards' songs are built around a distinct collection of vintage instruments. His guitar is a 1930s Orpheum, the bandoneon was made in Germany around the turn of the century, and he favors an antique banjo but tours with a newer model. The bandoneon is a squeezebox with buttons, instead of piano keys. "It's diatonic, I think that's the word," Edwards says. "You have a different note when you push in and out, each button has two notes and there's like 60 buttons. I don't know how to play it the way you're supposed to play it."

16 Horsepower, then, have taken a punk rock, do-it-yourself approach to traditional acoustic music. "I was in a bunch of hardcore punk bands until I got tired of it," Tola laughs. "The progression of bands, when I think about it now, was getting softer and softer and more toward acoustic instrumentation. My whole dream was to play in a trio with just acoustic instruments." He pauses. "Actually, I was really lucky. Every band I've been in has at least had one record, which is pretty amazing."

16 Horsepower already have two records, a six-song self-titled debut in Ricochet, and the twelve-song Sackcloth and Ashes on A&M. Which leaves twenty-odd more songs to sprinkle through the set list, as they tour with bands like [Innocence Mission](#) and the [Violent Femmes](#). "Lately we've been playing more of what's out," Edwards admits, "just because that's what people want to hear." All well and good, so long as they don't tinker with the recipe too much.

## Haw

(QUICKTIME 1.2MB) - taken from the self-titled EP

## Black Soul Choir

(QUICKTIME 1.2MB)

<b><u>Black Soul</u></b>	<b><u>Black Soul</u></b>	<b><u>Black Soul</u></b>
<b><u>Choir</u></b>	<b><u>Choir</u></b>	<b><u>Choir</u></b>
<b>(AIFF 0.4MB)</b>	<b>(WAV 0.4MB)</b>	<b>(AU 0.4MB)</b>