

The Herald
25 May 2009
(19)

**GLASGOW AMERICANA,
STAIRWELL SISTERS
ROYAL CONCERT HALL**

ROB ADAMS

★★★

GLASGOW Americana 2009 reached the sort of conclusion that the festival's admirable director, Kevin Morris, must have relished: a large audience responding enthusiastically to a group whose material goes right to the roots of the music Morris champions and in this instance, incorporated Scottish reels and strathspeys.

San Francisco's Stairwell Sisters, whose tour under the Scottish Arts Council's Tune-up banner neatly coincided with Morris's plans, aren't in the same league ability-wise as other acts who graced the festival's stages over the previous week. But their promotion of sources including the great banjo stylist and chronicler of trouble and despair Dock Boggs and the inestimable Ola Belle Reed alongside their own songs does the music a great service.

Theirs is a homely show, with each of the Sisters and "Mister Sister", Erik Pearson, who is depping while dobro player Lisa Berman takes maternity leave, taking turns to step up to the front of the stage. Songs about trains, hillbilly foodstuffs, wicked step-mothers and too soon

gone natural ones and fiddle tunes inspired by snakes, dances or maybe dancing snakes are their stock in trade as they take up the traditional, bunched-up and cosy string band formation. The highlights were the dances, with banjo player Evie Ladin setting the standard in the first number with an intricate, inventive display of the Appalachian clog dance style of flat-footing. /