

When Fort Collins-based quintet Whitewater Ramble took the stage at Hodi's Half Note Friday, they looked like a typical string band.

Their sound, anchored by the robust tone of Howard Montgomery's upright bass, the deft picking of mandolinist Patrick Sites and acoustic guitarist Damon Wood, and the mellifluous screams of Andy Reiner's fiddle, does build itself upon elements of bluegrass, Americana and swing.

But, the band spread well beyond those roots as the show progressed, until the word "typical" seemed an absurd descriptor.

The encore, which included grass-ified renditions of Weezer's "Say It Ain't So" and Rage Against the Machine's "Killing in the Name," put an exclamation point on the band's penchant for genre-defying adventure.

On such heavier numbers, Montgomery straps on an electric bass, Wood picks up an electric guitar, Sites opts for an electric mandolin, and Reiner transforms his fiddle into a face-melting, distortion-laden weapon, from which he elicits a sound more akin to Hendrix than to any traditional fiddle.

Even meat-and-potatoes bluegrass takes on new flavor in the hands of the band. The bluegrass standard "Midnight Moonlight," penned by Peter Rowan and covered repeatedly by Old and in the Way, featured skillful interplay between Reiner and Wood, and benefited from an extended jam section catalyzed by a seamless key change.

Midway through the set, Whitewater Ramble unveiled a string of new tunes, all of which further evinced the band's versatility. The first developed around a funky, electric rhythm part from Wood, which Reiner supplemented with piercing yet serene legato phrases. Sites laid down a bluesy mandolin solo that gave way to a fiddle solo from Reiner. Wood answered with a succession of distorted licks.

The second debut was an uptempo swing-influenced number that bled into a heavier section built around interplay between Reiner, Montgomery and Sites. Montgomery and Sites adopted electric instruments for the second half of the piece.

The band returned to more familiar territory with a cover of "Paint it Black." Wood's acoustic guitar established the song's classic riff, which Sites and then Reiner echoed later. A dark, flamenco-style solo from Wood paved the way for piercing dissonance from Reiner. The cover channeled the emotion of the original, but Whitewater's instrumentation allowed them to break and explore new ground.

A crisp acoustic solo and a blistering answer from Reiner lent new angst to a cover of Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover." Then, the deep drum rolls that underpin the song blossomed into an extended solo from drummer Paul Kemp.

Whitewater Ramble applies bluegrass sensibilities and instrumentation across a wide range of styles, creating a dynamic and singular sound. They are not quite typical.

