

Tuesday, April 20, 2004



**Cross Canadian Ragweed  
"Soul Gravy"  
Universal South**

Cross Canadian Ragweed has once again struck gold with its newest album, "Soul Gravy." The album debuted in Billboard's top five country albums nationwide, even though the album is anything but country.

Lead man Cody Canada announced before the album hit stores last month that it would be a little more rock 'n' roll than the band's previous albums, and he was a man of his word.

The group even included Ray Wylie Hubbard's "Wanna Rock 'n' Roll," one of the many foot-tapping, steering wheel-pounding tunes that will keep this CD in your stereo player for weeks at a time. The track is also the only song on the album that is not written or co-written by Canada.

Canada's songwriting has improved yet again with the new album.

The debut single, "Sick and Tired," was written for his little sister and has done well on the charts so far. After hearing it for the first time, it's easy to understand why.

As is the case with most of Canada's songs, it is easy for listeners to identify with.

But that's about the only track on the album that the group slows down a bit for.

With pounding tunes such as "Number," "Again," "Hammer Down" and a new version of a CCR classic "Alabama," the group had to take a breather at some point.

The album is produced better than any of the band's previous albums. You'd be hard pressed to hit the skip button while listening.

The group also includes a live DVD with the album from a concert which was shot at Shadow Canyon here in College Station last August.

The video is full of live shots of fans, the group and some of their fellow musicians.

The album and DVD could each sell thousands separately, but packaged together, it's amazing that it can ever be found in a Texas Country music hotbed like College Station.



— Jacquelyn Spruce

**South Austin Jug Band  
"South Austin Jug Band"  
Independent release**

The South Austin Jug Band is difficult to categorize. It might be called bluegrass, "newgrass," neo-Jug, acoustic country-folk, Texas roots unplugged, swinging Lone Star beatnik country or anything else that strikes you, but it might as well be placed under the category of "essential albums for the human race."

It is a completely acoustic string band that brings back many traditional aspects of country and folk music while blending in new ideas and influences of today. A five-piece band that includes two guitars, mandolin, upright bass and an "if-you-want-to-play-in-Texas- you-must-have-one" fiddle.

The thing that is the most striking about SAJB is how "rootsy" it sounds. It could easily be sitting on your back porch drinking Lone Star and spitting some chew as it plays its songs about lost love and ties to the land. The band's honest sound is refreshing, and its lyrics represent its love for Texas.

The band's most popular song is the catchy "The Ballad of Eddie Mullet," which tells the story of a group of mullet-wearing, bait shop-robbing societal miscreants. The clever lyrics say: "Now Hank's mullet ain't too long / it's just a five and 10 / He got it cut nine months ago / down at the county pen."

Do not be turned off by the humorous tones

of this song. It is tight musically and is the only "silly" song on the band's titled album. There is a divine song about Texas at night called "Hill County Nights" will blow listeners away and sweep them a blanket of stars out west. Another song is "My Baby in the Sunshine."

One of the standouts on the CD is a cover of Jimi Hendrix's "Little Wing." The version turned out different enough to be the band's own, but contains enough elements original to pay homage to an influential player.

This CD can easily be played all the way through in any setting. It is a great album, infectiously Texan music. This is a young band that is just getting started and hopefully around for a "dam tootin'" long time.



**Robert Randolph & the Family Band  
"Unclassified"  
Warner Brothers Records**

Pedal steel guitar and wild, upbeat honky-tonks backing up country acts, is a strange combination for those not exposed to it, but for many East Coast church attendees it's the usual Sunday service. For Robert Randolph and the Family Band, this is what does best and what brought it into the limelight of today's music.

The steel guitar, which is usually heard honky-tonks backing up country acts, is called "sacred steel" in the House of God Church. Used instead of an organ for many reasons, it has become a staple in this church and placed into the hands of young Robert Randolph — what some would call a "divine intervention."

On its first major label release, "Unclassified" RR and the Family Band prove that it will not put in a box. Drawing from funk, blues, rock, jam, gospel and Louisiana Zydeco, "Unclassified" is a relentless, powerful album filled with energy.

But what the album does lack is direction. Randolph, lead vocalist, occasionally gives up his microphone to bass player Daniel Morgan and some of the backing vocalists Larnelle Randolph and Ricky Fowler. The album is not stylistically consistent, with very up-tempo songs being followed by acoustic numbers. These changes of style and vocalists work like the Grateful Dead and many other bands, it is not a major concern.

Because four of the 11 songs are instrumental, these boys get their point across without words. "Good Times" and "Nobody" are examples of what Randolph can do with his instrument and how he has assembled a solid band to back him up. "Why Should I Feel Lonely," which describes the strange effect of being surrounded by large audiences who love you but still feeling completely alone, is another great ditty.

Randolph's searing steel guitar solos are simply euphoric. A master of the instrument at a very young age, he will hopefully be going nowhere but up. Currently on tour with Eric Clapton, Randolph has gained a worldwide following almost overnight.

"Unclassified" should appeal to large audiences which appreciate upbeat, soulful music. With an album that won't stay on the shelves, crowds keep swelling, it will be exciting to see what Robert Randolph and the Family Band does next.



— Daniel Co

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