

# LEFT of the DIAL

## band width



**Drive-By Truckers**  
*A Blessing and a Curse*  
(New West)

Sometimes rock-and-roll bands can get away with being a one-trick pony, cuz if the trick is good, people will pay for it again and again and again. This, for example, is the story of the mighty AC/DC. This also seemed to be the case of the Drive-By Truckers. The punk-country-rock ensemble issued a pair of solid pre-millennium records with *Pizza Deliverance* and *Gangstabilly*, which included the epochal melding of country and punk in "The Night G.G. Allin Came to Town." By the band's 2001 breakthrough album, a meditation on "the duality of the Southern thing" called *Southern Rock Opera*, they had not only hit their stride but also cemented a style from which they seemed unlikely ever to break. Again, the successful one-trick pony will make you want that trick over and over. The Truckers managed that and continued with another pair of solid, honest, raucous efforts that explored the depths of deep southern Americana. They certainly had the trick down well enough to keep me showing up. Then along comes *A Blessing and a Curse*. This 11-song set sees the Truckers stepping back just enough from the old formula—tales of the struggle from below Mason-Dixon complete with Neil Young flourish and Skynyrd bravado—for what is a formidable, if not complete, break from their past. It's their most consistently satisfying set of songs to date. Fans of Patterson Hood's detailed storytelling or Mike Cooley's inimitable brokenhearted drawl need not worry, it's not like the band has turned to ambient knob-twiddlers or anything. *A Blessing*, however, does mark the first outing where the band has stopped pulling away the brush of backwoods Georgia, ceased wading the swamps of bayou and is no longer crashing the guard rail of Florida's highways. While the Drive-By Truckers have, against the odds, become one of the great arbiters of the lost art of the concept album, they've shrugged it off this time around. What has clearly happened along the way is that they've morphed into a modern equivalent of the Band: three diverse songwriting voices who each take turns with stinging perfection. Largely written in the studio, *A Blessing* drops the focus of tying all the songs together yet reveals their most cohesive album as a whole. Hood's opener "Feb 14" makes a fine bid for stadium rock in its big hooks, singalong simplicity and tunefulness, while "Aftermath USA" is a loose Faces/Stones stomp about a less-than-perfect household. Jason Isbell's "Daylight" is the most un-Truckers piece on the record but could also be the best. Isbell conjures a blissful but bittersweet taste of pop reflecting a touch of 1970s AM. Cooley makes a 180 from his usual with the tender acoustic ballad "Space City." This is still the Drive-By Truckers and the ragged, perfectly Crazy Horse guitar workout finds Hood asking, "Is that how yer gonna write yer story?" *A Blessing* shows how the DBTs are writing their story; it not only continues to get better but shows the authors have more than expected stashed just up their collective sleeves.

—donny kutzbach



**Bruce Springsteen**  
*We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*  
(Columbia)

If adopted into the Seeger family, Bruce Springsteen would be the brazen, grizzled nephew who takes old family standards and puts a little extra hitch in their proverbial giddy-up. In fact, consider yourself forgiven if *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* leads you to believe that Springsteen had an affair with Pete Seeger's music that extends deep into his childhood, his father crooning "Old Dan Tucker" as they drove that big ol' Buick into town to pick up the morning paper, lumber and redemption. The Boss looked deeply into Seeger's catalogue only after being asked to record "We Shall Overcome" for a Seeger tribute album in 1997. What he found made an impact. Over the course of the following eight years, Springsteen and a group of cohorts put their own stamp on the music that helped shape folk and they did it live. It lends the album the feel of a backwoods front porch in August, as well it should—it was recorded at Springsteen's farm. Springsteen takes songs as old as the 16th century and excels at what Seeger, who only wrote or co-wrote two of the album tracks himself, did best—owning them. If the Boss's version of "John Henry" doesn't make you want to swing a 30-pound hammer on the tracks all the livelong day, you probably left your soul on the wrong side of the bed. Springsteen's selections are brilliant: "Jesse James," "Erie Canal" and "Mrs. McGrath" radiate with the type of storytelling he's done with "Stolen Car" and "Lost in the Flood." It isn't just the richness of the stories he embraces. On "We Shall Overcome," Springsteen is almost just a member of the band. The Boss can be heard cuing solos ("Let's bring up a b-flat," he hollers halfway through "Pay Me My Money Down"), arranging banjo, fiddle and accordion with the deft hand of an old pro, even adding his signature harmonica to 1549's "Froggie Went A Courtin'." *We Shall Overcome* isn't just a must for the Asbury enthusiast—it's a backyard BBQ waiting to happen.

—nicholas mendola



**Fruit Bats**  
*Spelled in Bones*  
(Sub Pop)

One-time Califone collaborator Eric Johnson has described his concept of Fruit Bats as the link between the Holy Modal Rounders and *Rumors*-era Fleetwood Mac. While that may have been true up to a point, their most recent recording, *Spelled in Bones*, finds the band definitely knee-deep in the latter's influence. This could have been a bad thing, but fortunately for Fruit Bats, they happen to excel in writing catchy yet extremely off beat songs. The first track, "Lives in Crime," sets the tone for the record. Recalling the vocal stylings of Doug Martsch of Built to Spill, Johnson weaves tales of nostalgia across a blend of folk, psychedelia and desert soundscapes. *Spelled in Bones* is Fruit Bats' most accomplished record to date, one that Lindsey Buckingham would approve of. It's no wonder there's a wistful ode called "Born in the '70s" on it.

—tracy morrow

Fruit Bats perform at Mohawk Place, 47 E. Mohawk Street (855-3931), on Tuesday, May 2 at 9pm with Amandine and Sam Jayne.

### Group Name:

Temporary Dream

### When/Where playing this week?

Friday, April 28th,  
at Mohawk Place w/ Tanakh  
and Little Dipper.

### Band members/names

#### /instrument...

David Gracon—bass, keyboard, effects.

Greg Greg—keyboard, effectron jr.

Greg Genco—drums

and (a little) percussion,

Jeff Fose—guitar, effects.

### When did the band form?

Fall 2005



### You might like our music if you like...

Brian Eno, Yo la Tengo, Glenn Branca, Spacemen 3, No Wave, My Bloody Valentine, Neu!, Trans Am, Lo-Fi, The Ventures, Minimalism, Drones, Booker T. and the MGs, noise, staring into space, emptiness, sleeping in.

### List of Recorded Releases

*Temporary Dream S/T, Cicada* (sub)

### Upcoming events:

Mini tour of New York State in August.

**Worst show the band ever played:** We like all our shows, "good" or "bad."

**Best show the band ever played:** This week's show could possibly be the best. It will be a full multimedia experience with film projections by Brian Millbrand.

### Anything else you would like our readers to know about the band?

Our new CDR with hand screened covers is finished (see image) and contains 12 lo-fi recordings of various home and live performances. Our live set is mostly improvised and is a mixture of ambient, experimental and vaguely pop sounds. Also, we challenge the Goo Goo Dolls to a battle of the bands. Anytime, anywhere.

### Contact information:

davidgraconub@hotmail.com

To respond to this article, e-mail [editorial@artvoice.com](mailto:editorial@artvoice.com) or write to: Artvoice, 810 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14202

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