

# New music from Fastball and 16 Horsepower

By Mac Randall



## 16 Horsepower

*Secret South* (Razor & Tie)

There's spooks in them there tunes, and presumably that's just the way 16 Horsepower's leader David Eugene wants it. *Secret South*, the Colorado-based band's third album, is chock full of death and ghosts, God and Satan, curses and premonitions—all the good stuff, basically. Although it's not a radical departure from 16 HP's usual moody hybrid of rock, folk and country (heard previously on 1996's *Sackcloth 'n' Ashes* and 1998's *Low Estate*), it does bring the formula to a new level of refinement. Opening with the roar of "Clogger," driven by a viciously distorted bass line, Eugene declaims like a possessed preacher calling for the final judgment. On "Wayfaring Stranger," he sings about crossing the Jordan over a spare Appalachian backdrop that delves into the same haunted corners similarly explored by Harry Smith's famed *Anthology Of American Folk Music*. Through 11 weighty songs, Eugene's singing maintains an almost maniacal sense of yearning that's also reminiscent of such other no-holds-barred vocalists as Tim Buckley and Ian McCulloch. The album reaches its climax with a remarkable rendition of Bob Dylan's "Nobody 'Cept You," transformed from its original, tentative reading on *The Bootleg Series* into a swelling anthem of devotion, whose images of distant church bells and cemetery dances makes delicious counterpoint with Eugene's spiritual vision. If you're a fan of the dark drama of Nick Cave or PJ Harvey, you owe it to yourself to check out *Secret South*. •

## Fastball

*The Harsh Light Of Day* (Hollywood)

It was only two years ago that Fastball was ruling the airwaves with a catchy ode to rootlessness called "The Way." Bouncing back from a barely noticed 1996 debut, *Make Your Mama Proud*, this hard-working Austin, Texas trio turned themselves into one of the surprise success stories of '98 with their second full-length release, *All The Pain Money Can Buy*. One platinum certification later, the trio has returned to a shockingly different pop landscape. Rest assured, they haven't gone disco or hired Max Martin to write up a few Britney-style numbers. Instead, they've stuck to what they do best: old-fashioned guitar-powered pop with a premium on melody. As in the past, bassist Tony Scalzo splits the singing and songwriting with guitarist Miles Zuniga. The former's chipper delivery of wide-ranging tunes contrasts nicely with the latter's gruff introspectiveness: check out the way Zuniga's pensive ballad "Vampires" explodes into the euphoric chorus of Scalzo's "Wind Me Up."

More ambitious than Fastball's previous two albums, *The Harsh Light Of Day* piles on strings, mariachi brass, and guest appearances—legendary pianist Billy Preston on the jaunty "You're An Ocean," nouveau swinger Brian Setzer on "Love Is Expensive And Free." In the end, the focus is squarely on first-class songwriting. Though there isn't a single track that sticks out as obviously as "The Way" did, the album as a whole is their strongest yet. •



For label, fan club and music information for both bands, go to [steamtunnels.net](http://steamtunnels.net)