

Folk musician Davidson features idea-driven lyrics

Davidson's latest release, 'Don Quixote de Suburbia,' is an album that moves away from mainstream music

CD review

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Pulse Reporter

Ethan Daniel Davidson's sound can be described in so many ways that after a while, it becomes fun to imagine numerous permutations of who and what he sounds like. The tracks from his latest album, "Don Quixote de Suburbia" run the gamut. But mostly, he is a folk musician, and he would probably be comfortable with leaving the description at that.

The songs of "Don Quixote" are supported by Davidson's lyrics as much as the instrumentals. They are idea-driven, presented in the accessible form of mostly short tunes. A sly awareness saturates what he writes about. The second track on the disc is "Kill All Pop Songs," a bluesy folk-rock tune that kicks off with an Allen Ginsberg reference alluding to the lack of originality in mainstream music. He sings: "I saw the best minds of my generation/Starting off songs with

stolen quotations." Irony abounds.

Later, on "Kaldonia," Davidson channels brusque, Warren Zevon-like tones, singing "A democratic moon rages/We're but the worn rags of time." In "Hard Times for Ishmael and Issac," his style immediately harkens back to late Morphine singer Mark Sandman.

"Ghosts of Mississippi" contains a tune reminiscent of Ani DiFranco's collaborations with Utah Phillips. Davidson delivers a story of touring in the south. Computer loops and programming spew forth but are subtle enough to be effective and simultaneously interesting.

If you haven't guessed yet, Davidson mostly plays guitar, but he's no one-trick pony, as he throws down a mean mandolin, banjo, accordion, bass and harmonica. This is not to mention his supporting crew, which contributes on the steel guitar, bouzouki, banjos, accordions, organs and penny whistles that can be heard throughout the album. The list goes on and on.

The use of multiple instruments isn't as blatant as it sounds, but it rounds out this album, distinguishing "Don Quixote" from other more traditional folk albums. An oddball track, "Joys of the Koyukuk," is an example of this approach. It is an

all-instrumental, folk jam that's given an edge by, of all things, an electric guitar.

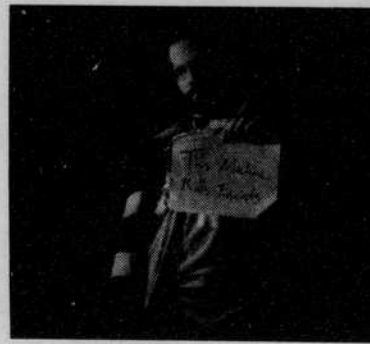
Liner notes get extra credit for providing the details of each instrument's brand and types; this is a practice that should really be more commonplace these days.

If you haven't guessed yet, the words frequently take a turn for the political slant. The last track, "Globalize Your Local," raises an interesting question about when — just when — "We will govern them in the end?"

Of course, this isn't the final track. There's the obligatory "secret" track, a sing-along styled around "The Continuing Ventures of Kid Folk."

Further setting himself apart from the mainstream, Davidson has made his albums available for download in MP3-format on his Web site, www.ethandanieldavidson.com. Oddly enough, all the links are broken. However, after the designers fix the links, "This Machine Kills Fascists," his previous release in 2001, is a reasonable place to start downloading. It is a cover album mixed with Davidson's own spoken stories.

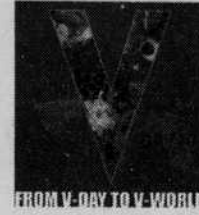
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Davidson's recently released "Don Quixote de Suburbia" (right) follows his 2001 album, "This Machine Kills Fascists" (left). Courtesy

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