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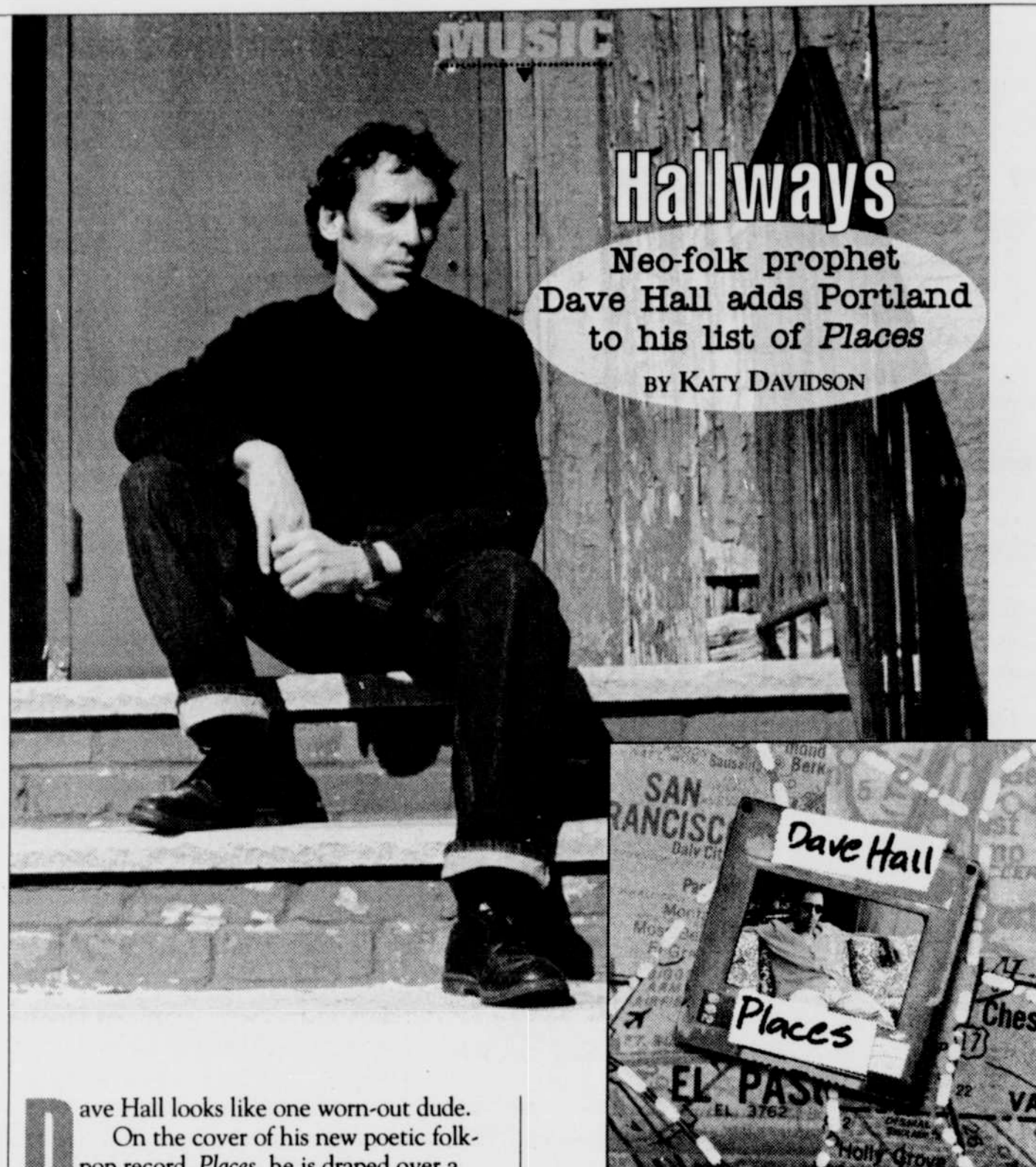
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Hallways

Neo-folk prophet
Dave Hall adds Portland
to his list of *Places*

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Dave Hall looks like one worn-out dude.

On the cover of his new poetic folk-pop record, *Places*, he is draped over a paisley couch with his mango-colored shirt unbuttoned halfway. His face expresses a combination of travel weariness and heat exhaustion—he looks like he has been on a non-air-conditioned train for three weeks and just got beat up, mugged and abandoned in a cheesy foreign hotel.

Well, maybe that's not quite what he was trying to capture. But you certainly get the feeling Hall has been somewhere and figured some things out.

And that's what *Places* is all about.

The record, his second released by his partner's Brooklyn-based Giuseppe Joe label, is a deeply resonant machine of rootsy sounds. Obviously enough, it's about places—cities and towns Hall has lived in, conjured up, thought about.

It's about Saugerties, N.Y., and the plight of its trapped-feeling residents. It's about Hall's recurring dreams regarding Jerusalem. It's about his fictional hometown of Dullsville and the mayor, Hall's brother. It's about the small town where two men, Biff and Tony, got married to each other.

In a phone interview, Hall tells me he's always interested in telling a story, making a point through the use of metaphors. He says he doesn't have a lot of formal training as a writer but became interested in metaphorical language while studying Shakespeare.

"Lyrics are really important to me," he says. "My stuff is largely about words."

Though Hall is clearly more into the lyrics than the chord changes, the record is still a well-oiled musical production. This could have something to do with his degree in composition from the Manhattan School of Music. There, Hall learned classical guitar and how to write music in his head.

His insight is evident on *Places*. The various percussive instruments on "Seven," the opening track, give it a deeply urgent, tribal, spiritual kind of feel. "Saugerties" is an ambient musical journey supported by an intense chorus of backup singers. "Jerusalem" is highlighted by a set of trippy electric guitar meanderings. "The Mayor of Dullsville" sounds like "Weird Al" Yankovic ripping off the Buzzcocks.

Perhaps the track that most embodies the

idea of *place*, both musically and lyrically, is "Ya Gotta Go Easy." This is a journal of a song—it captures Hall's view of the nation through the windshield of a Toyota. The guitar part chugs along for nearly eight minutes, though the whole feel of the song is sweeping and nostalgic. At the end, Hall surmises: "No, I didn't go easy / No, I didn't go slow / The voice inside me sang / I heard it grow."

Hall says the song took him two years to write. Whereas many others come together instantly, "it took me a while to figure out what I was trying to get across," he adds.

Hall was faced with a similar challenge when he wrote a coming-out tune about his partner, "His Name Is Joe." He says it was a tough decision to perform it live, but he eventually did, knowing he would be artistically linked to the gay and lesbian community from then on. "It would have been censorship and internalized homophobia if I didn't play it," he says.

In many ways, coming out has paid off for Hall—he was nominated for Best Male Artist at this year's Gay and Lesbian American Music Awards. Though he didn't win, he says, "I was kind of psyched to be nominated, because there was a lot of good competition."

Riding the wave of this new exposure, Hall slowly and surely has been gaining the ears of America while sticking with a do-it-yourself spirit. His attitude and acute attention to lyrics have critics calling him a male version of Ani DiFranco.

One critic called him a prophet. Hall says the comment was ironic because he developed a fascination with prophets while growing up in a Catholic family. "I always thought the prophets were interesting, railing about things wrong with society," he says.

A couple of decades later, Hall has found himself in a position where he's allowed to do that very same thing: He's a good ole American folk singer. With an edge.

■ DAVE HALL will play 8 p.m. Aug. 8 at Portland's Tugboat Brewing Company, 711 S.W. Ankeny St.