

Land Speed Records

The pick & twang of Jackstraw.

Jackstraw's high-energy bluegrass tunes have two speeds, fast and faster. With more than the usual display of musical competence and skill, these four guys play, pick, twang and sing songs that zip along with the velocity of the TGV, France's high-speed rail with top speeds exceeding 200 mph.

Actually, that's not a totally fair assessment because it might make you think these Portland-based players just noodle away on their instruments. Not so. The songs on their self-titled 2002 release have lilting melodies and harmonies performed with joy, utterly lacking in pretense. "Ballad of Jamie Lynn," "Train 24," and "2,000 Miles" are slower songs that reach into your soul and hang on, leaving the voice of the vocalist still playing in your head long after the music's stopped.

Jesse Withers (bass), David Pugh (mandolin), Jon Neufeld (lead guitar) and Darrin Craig (guitar) all sing and play with passion and bring a freshness as green as the smell of newly cut grass. They grew up sitting on the knees of acoustic musicians and falling asleep to those harmonies and melodies

drifting through the night air.

Raised in Kansas, Rhode Island, Colorado and Chicago, they first got together in 1997 and spent a lot of time experi-

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Jackstraw
Sam Bond's, 9 pm
Fri., Jan. 28

menting, discovering the path away from the electric guitars, keyboards and drums, the sound so characteristic of the '80s and '90s, and back to an earthy homegrown sound.

Jackstraw remains strongly rooted in traditional bluegrass harmonies and the topics of their songs rarely stray from the standard fare. But their sound is a little different, filled with a youthful energy that has lead many critics to call them the new generation of bluegrass. **EW**



If you haven't heard of **Modest Mouse**, you're woefully behind the times. Sorry. It's true. Whether you like indie rock or not, the name should ring a bell. If not, now you've read it and you know they're a BFD in the music scene today. They're up for two Grammy's for cripes sake. But there's no point in writing a whole big thing on them since both shows at the McDonald Theatre sold out and they're working on their tans right now and aren't available for interviews.

But Cass McCombs, their opening act, has received little ink and he is available. See how that works? Pairing the late '80s Brit, psychedelic, drone pop sound with today's leaders of indie rock seemed a little strange at first listen. But McCombs' music combines modern-day lyrical style and rise-and-fall harmonies with the darker grit of post punk and snakey little twists that make it work, at least most of the time.

McCombs prefers to conduct his interviews by e-mail. Maybe that's because it's pretty hard to end up misquoted. Anyway, his quirky personality comes through even in type. Here are a few excerpts from our e-interview.

How have your musical tastes changed over the years?

I have no musical tastes. Taste is the destroyer of music. How disgusting it is to impose personal style and preference upon a thing of ultimate beauty! The only way to love music is with an infinitely open mind. Just as the only true love is platonic. I regard taste as I do racism: with spite.

So did you think being a rock star and opening for a two-Grammy nominee would be more glamorous? I hear you've been couch surfing?

Glamor is always seen from an outsider's perspective; the grass is always greener; which is terrible and ungrateful way of thinking. I wouldn't wish to try on anybody else's shoes. and with what problems I do have, I'm perfectly able to deal with them myself. No fear.

If you're lucky enough to have scored a ticket to the show, get there early enough to at least catch a few of his songs and position yourself strategically amidst the mob. **EW**

Three's Just Charming

Trés Chicas bring country girl rock to Eugene.

Somewhere between Houston and Dallas, the ladies of Trés Chicas were having a grand old time. One might say that for a band on a grueling 18-stop tour that stretches from South Carolina to Texas to Washington, they were having way too much fun.

On tour with Grammy nominee Tift Merritt, the Trés Chicas Caitlin Cary, Lynn Blakey and Sara Bell (sitting in for Tonya Lamm) take their backgrounds in rock, Irish, and folk and create a sound that's a mix of Southern girl rock and country.

Their ballad-like tunes, with strong melodies and an even stronger blend of rich, gorgeous harmonies, draw on love, loss and life for inspiration, then throw in a decidedly soft feminist twist. The tunes are catchy — good for driving and singing along. The opening track, "Sweetwater" draws you in like an oasis of

cool in the scorching desert, soaking you with sweet heartache and the beauty of moving on.

But these ladies are no wilting wall flowers. They have nerve, I tell you. Lamm can't join the tour because she's got a newborn — a month in a 16-passenger bus would be a little much. Now if they had a real bus, she could come. So one night, after a few drinks, the Trés Chicas decided that the best way to get that bus would be to write Dolly Parton a letter asking if they could borrow hers.

"We thought she'd understand the dilemma of women musicians trying to travel with children," Blakey said. "The letter that we wrote has a lot of things crossed out because we kept saying, 'oh we can't say it like that.' We wanted to be respectful, not too pushy."

If that letter is anything like their music, they'll get that bus. Their sweet melodies work their magic with subtlety. **-MB**



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