

Soulful Songs

Eclectic sounds from Escovedo, and more

Of all the musicians to emerge from the fertile musical breeding ground of Austin in the past couple of decades, maybe the most promising was **Alejandro Escovedo** — and that's saying a lot when you consider that the town spawned or attracted immense talents such as Lucinda Williams, Joe Ely, Nanci Griffith and dozens more. His songwriting is as sensitive as his musical range is wide, ranging from punk (in his 1970s San Francisco band the Nuns) to garage rock (Buick Mackane) to cowpunk (Rank & File), to folk rock (True Believers) to orchestral rock to musical theater (his multimedia stage show *By the Hand of the Father*, which combined songs, monologues, stories and images to chronicle the Mexican American immigrant experience).

He comes from a musical family (his father and brother, Pete and Coke, played with Santana; his niece is percussionist and Prince protégée Sheila E.) and has earned critical raves musicians would sell their amps for; the bible of alt country, *No Depression* magazine, named him Artist of the Decade for the 1990s.

Yet Escovedo's career has been plagued by setbacks from record company politics and collapses, a painful divorce and subsequent suicide of his ex-wife, the Austin disease (i.e. working in a musically rich territory that crosses rigid radio station and corporate music categories), and, most recently, hospitalization due to hepatitis C; a tribute album to help with his enormous medical

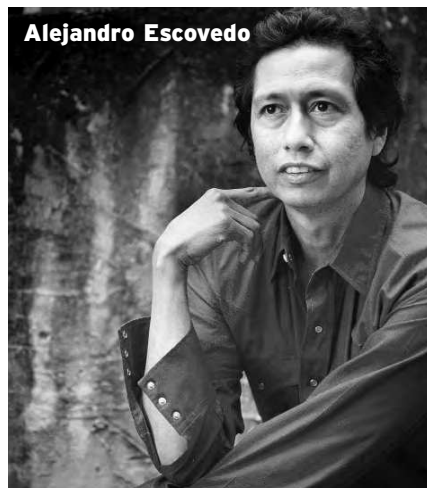
expenses featured John Cale (who played one of his songs here last year), Steve Earle, and many other stars. Now he's back onstage and headed for The Shedd on Wednesday, April 6, and if you like rock, country, folk, or just music, do not miss this chance to hear one of the great songwriters of our time.

The next two evenings, The Shedd returns to its classical roots when the **American Symphonía** and Eugene's favorite soprano, Maria Jette, perform seldom heard music of Samuel Barber and Benjamin Britten. Transatlantic musical soul brothers (both wrote tonal music considered conservative by mid-20th century critics, both chose musicians as romantic and creative partners — the tenor Peter Pears for Britten, the composer Gian Carlo Menotti for Barber — both were inspired by poems, prose, and stories, etc.), each found ways to incorporate modern musical developments without alienating romantic and classical music fans. The April 7 concert features Barber's last work, the elegiac *Canzonetta* for oboe and strings, and Jette singing Britten's setting of Artur Rimbaud's prose poems, *Les Illuminations*, along with his tribute to his teacher, *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, and one of Bridge's own songs.

The April 8 show pairs Barber's playfully pastoral wind quintet, *Summer Music*, with Britten's *Winter Words*, a setting of Thomas Hardy poems featuring Jette, who also sings Barber's settings of poems by Rilke. Some rarely heard works by both composers round

out a program that should appeal to fans of art song and chamber music.

Since The Shedd began hosting the biggest names in jazz a couple years ago, we've been treated to some terrific shows by Wayne Shorter, Jason Moran, Bill Frisell, Dave Douglas, Tomasz Stanko and more. But none burned quite as brightly as the incendiary set by **Dave Holland's** quintet. The veteran bassist/composer and his superb band connected in a way that jazzers always seek but too seldom find. On April 10 Holland brings back the quintet, augmented by the other players in his multi-Grammy award winning big



Alejandro Escovedo

band, for another Shedd concert. Ever since Miles Davis brought Holland over from England to join his legendary band, he's been at the forefront of jazz, working with Stan Getz, Chick Corea, Pat Metheny, Herbie Hancock as well as younger stars, and garner-

ing reams of deserved awards. This is a top recommendation for jazz fans.

For something a little farther out, try the April 12 Shedd show featuring sax/clarinetist **Phillip Greenleaf** and cellist **Theresa Wong**. The duo incorporates text and graphics into their performances, and have scored films and theater works. They're as likely to embark from the music of Pauline Oliveros, Morton Feldman, and Igor Stravinsky as Thelonious Monk. Still more adventurous improv for guitar, voice and other instruments happens at DIVA on April 9, when Eugene's **SIECOX** joins **Speedy Weaver** of the Canadian new music collective Set Fire to Flames.

Speaking of jazzy duos, the UO faculty team of percussion masters **Charles Dowd** and **Tracy Freeze** will celebrate the release of their new CD with an April 7 concert at the UO's art museum, including originals by Dowd and covers of Chick Corea classics. Their often playful, virtuosic vibraphone and marimba duets are as colorful as the Andy Warhol screen prints on the walls behind them. Great chance to hear some swinging music and experience the splendid new setting of our community's crown jewel of the arts. The UO faculty jazz septet plays Beall Hall on April 1, while you have another chance to check out our local creative musicians on April 10 when Beall hosts performances of original works for percussion, brass, piano, strings, flute, clarinet, and sax by another UO faculty pair, retired profs **Hal Owen** and **Victor Steinhardt**. On April 13, Beall will also host the Ukrainian choir **Cantus** and the **University Singers** in contemporary American and Ukrainian music. **EW**

Pabst Blue Ribbon

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