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MUSIC BY VANESSA SALVIA

Mofro Rising

JJ Grey and Mofro return to Eugene

JJ Grey & Mofro and Reeble Jar
8 pm, Wednesday, 4/4
McDonald Theatre, $14 adv., $16 door

Y'all remember JJ Grey: He and Daryl Hance call themselves JJ Grey and Mofro, and the last time they were here, they played to a huge crowd at Secret House Winery in September 2005. Those North Florida boys have traveled a lot of miles since then and released a new CD on Alligator Records, *Country Ghetto*.

They've been on the road supporting their third CD since mid-February, and when I caught up with Grey, they were just leaving Amarillo, Texas, heading to Colorado. Like all of Grey's music, *Country Ghetto* was inspired by his hometown in Lochloosa, Fla. "The world has always recognized urban ghettos, city ghettos," he says, "but nobody's ever thought about the country ghetto, ever. A classic example of that is what's going on in Louisiana and Mississippi. New Orleans is torn up and needs help, but so does Mississippi, and nobody's helping the country ghettos there."

Country Ghetto rolls from soulful ballads like "Circles" to rump rockers like the opening track, "War," which is as funk-a-fied as a white man can get. Grey got his family's gospel group to sing on the track "And The Sun Is Shining Down," which surprisingly but effectively adds strings to the mix. The title track captures the feel of backwoods Southern life with a foot-stompin' sing-along beat.

Grey wears his rock, blues and R&B influences plainly on his sleeve; they just don't all come out at once. Throughout each song he weaves in observations of life in Florida but doesn't alienate anyone not from there. It's obvious Grey cares deeply about his connection to his home in North Florida's swamplands, and he approaches songwriting much as a storyteller would.

"[North Florida] was one of the last frontiers in the U.S. in a lot of ways. Andrew Jackson went down there and took it from the Spanish," Grey says. "He came back and said, 'It ain't worth living there.' The people who did go there were so sick of everywhere else that they were willing to put up with rattlesnakes, alligators, 100 degree days, hurricanes, malaria, water moccasins, everything!" *EW*

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