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Celebrating 15 Years of Spillage

Following the sound to success

Two months ago, Warner Bros. released a single documenting Northwest staple **Built to Spill's** brief foray into reggae: "Rearrange," a cover of The Gladiators, and "They Got Away," an original tune that clocks in at just under seven minutes. I assume that's what we'll be hearing at the WOW Hall on Sept. 19 — that, and maybe some stuff from their 2006 full-length, *You in Reverse*.

But when I speak with frontman Doug Martsch, who's preparing to perform in Aspen, he informs me that in fact the band played those songs during their last tour (whaaaa?) and is now laying them to rest for a while. Far be it from me to claim that perhaps a release tour should include performances of whatever it is you're releasing, but at least Built to Spill has new material to offer its adoring Eugene public. Martsch calls the new stuff "melodic, slower tempo, softer sort of songs." Actually, he said "poppy" before correcting himself and using "melodic," but after 15 years of toeing the line between underground fame and mainstream stardom, Martsch can do whatever the hell he wants. And he has — from bluesy solo stuff to reggae to, well, pop. This genre-hopping per-

plexes music reviewers, who ascribe generic terms like "college rock" and "jam band" to Built to Spill's brand of layered guitars and enigmatic, hoarse vocals. Sure, the band improvises live (what talented band doesn't?), but the jam band feel is likely a result of a songwriting process that starts with jamming.

"The last time we made a record, I would just record all of our jams, and then I'd go back through it later on and see what things sounded sort of interesting," Martsch says. "I'd make CDs that were just little snippets, just 15 or 20 seconds of a jam, and then I'd listen to those and see which ones really stuck with me." Then, the band puts together the pieces, and a song is born. It's much the same with the lyrics; those, too, come in separate, unrelated parts that acquire their meaning after the fact. "There are only a handful of our songs that are about something," Martsch explains. "A lot of it's just about how the words sound, not what they mean." **EW**



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