



Ashleigh Flynn,
Peter Wilde

9 pm Saturday, Feb. 23
Sam Bond's Garage • \$5
21+ show

Flynn's American Dream

Ashleigh Flynn celebrates her new release

When I caught up with Ashleigh Flynn recently, her normally supple voice with the Kentucky twang was gravelly from a lingering cold. Despite being under the weather, Flynn was excited to talk about her brand new CD, *American Dream*. "It's like a bunch of chapters that tell stories about different facets of America, I guess through my eyes," she says. Those stories reveal that Flynn is an optimist at heart, and she's become troubled by what the "American Dream" has come to symbolize, politically and socially. "A lot of the stories on the record are about people who have suffered as a result of the American dream, yet they are still able to see the good side," she says. "And then deeper within that there's a part of me that believes that the American dream as I see it where peoples' needs are met ... is still possible."

In 2006 Flynn released a live album, *Live From Mississippi Studios*, out of dismay with how easy it is to create inauthentic music in the digital form. "I love having live musicians come in and

actually play through their heart and soul," she says. *American Dream*, though a studio album, didn't use many "tricks": "It's all instruments that have been played by humans who are attached to the story."

It's hard to pinpoint what's most enjoyable about *American Dream*. Part of it is definitely the slide guitar that slithers through everything, giving each song an easy sort of groove. Flynn's voice is

equally appealing whether she's belting out the rocking, untamed "Evangeline," gentle "Dressed and Ready" or melancholy title track. And the instrumentation is simple and unfussy; each song gets the attention it needs and nothing more, yet a really full, warm sound comes through on everything. The key element uniting all of this is Flynn's poetic lyricism and her unvarnished voice.

Flynn's CD release show features some

faces that Eugeneans will remember from early Ashleigh Flynn days. She will be joined on slide guitar by Chris Funk, who plays in a little Portland band called The Decemberists. Fellow Decemberist (and former Calobo member) Jenny Conlee will be playing Wurlitzer and accordion. Dandy Warhols producer Greg Williams will back Flynn up on drums, and Boxset's Jim Brunberg appears on bass. **EW**

Not Your Average Depressed Dude

Anthems for all our pain

In our hyper-hypochondriac culture, I'm not sure what counts as "troubled" anymore, but I'm fairly certain that John Darnielle could fit the bill. I'm no psychiatrist, but the Mountain Goats' main man has a musical résumé that would seem to satisfy any crisis-counseling checklist. Has he composed a concept album about a dysfunctional couple who move to Tallahassee and drink themselves to death? Check. Has he written a gut-wrenching, sonic memoir about his drunken abusive stepfather? Check. Has he penned the bleak soundtrack to the brokenhearted days after his girlfriend left him? Check. Any one of these might get your average mental case placed on suicide watch, but Darnielle is by no means your average mental case. As the sole songwriter for the Mountain Goats, he has a knack for making the miserable endearing and the disturbing downright enjoyable. As far as I know, not many musicians could inspire people to skip down the streets caroling at the top of their lungs, "And I hope you die ... I hope we all die," but that seems perfectly appropriate in the dark yet droll world of John Darnielle.

The majority of the Mountain Goats' 12 or so albums (and that's not counting seven inches, bootlegs and other ephemera) are less conceptual and/or autobiographical than Darnielle's last four records. Most consist of character sketches about anyone from Cassius Clay to Leo Tolstoy to LeAnn Rimes and quirky vignettes about anything from cooking to gardening to death metal bands. On his new album, *Heretic Pride*, Darnielle returns to the episodic skits-ophrenia that defined his earlier lo-fi, tape hiss days, but he hangs on to the glossy production that's graced his most recent records. Over cellos, pianos and punchy guitars, the songwriter sings in his high-pitched, highly literate voice about pulp spy novelists, scandalous love affairs, slasher films and breakup sex ... and that's just getting started. On "San Bernardino," the cinematic orchestration and plucked strings help unfold the story of a young unmarried couple giving birth in a cheap motel off a California desert highway. "Lovecraft in Brooklyn" is Darnielle's take on the horror writer's move to New York City, and the song's careening tempo and dissonant, howling strings evoke the paranoia and xenophobia in Lovecraft's life and works at the time. The poppy, organ-accented "Autoclave" draws parallels between the sterilizing instrument and people who smother their emotions. Darnielle sings in his distinct sardonic phrasing, "I am this great unstable mass of blood and foam / And no emotion that's worth having can call my heart its home / My heart's an autoclave." Like most Mountain Goats material, the song is sad, happy and slightly unhinged. In other words, it's just another anthem for our collective crises. — *Jeremy Ohmes*



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