

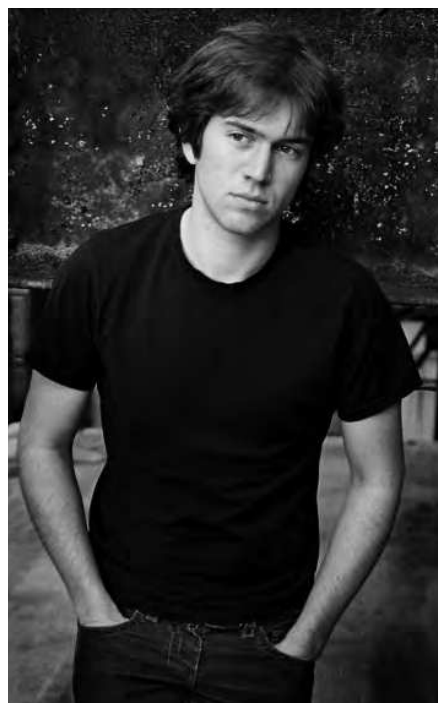
Boy Wonder of Blues

Feeling over flash

It seems like every few years, a fresh-faced wunderkind struts onto the blues scene to inject a bit of Botox into the wrinkled genre. The guitar chops and husky voice sound far beyond the kid's years, and the next thing you know, the Doogie Howser of blues is holding his own on stage with the greats and bottlenecking his way onto the radio charts. The '90s had teenage blues sensations Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Jonny Lang while the aughts have Oregon's own David Jacobs-Strain. Differences abound between Jacobs-Strain and his blues prodigy predecessors, though: He is rooted in Delta blues compared to Shepherd and Lang's more commercial Texas/Louisiana style. He isn't as technical or solo-inclined as his counterparts, either. But the blues is about feeling, not flash, and unlike the other boy wonders, Jacobs-Strain has substance to go with his style.

The 24-year-old Jacobs-Strain first performed his slide-guitar blues at the Oregon Country Fair at age 11. While still in high school, he released his first solo album and became a faculty member at the Port Townsend Country Blues Workshop. By the time he finished his book learning at Stanford University in 2006, he had released two more albums and had played the Newport Folk Festival, the Telluride Blues Fest, MerleFest and the Montreal Jazz Festival. He says that he's always been drawn to Delta blues — the raw, distraught, spiritually deep sound of Robert Johnson, Fred McDowell and Son House. "For me, there's something about rural blues that has a transcendent quality, a wide open sound," he says. "Think of the rhythm of a train."

On his latest album, *Liar's Day*, Jacobs-Strain taps into that locomotive rhythm, that expansive rolling sound. On the



David Jacobs-Strain CD release
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McDowell tune "Write Me a Few Short Lines," he thunders and slides up and down his National steel guitar, puffing out coal-black phrases and picking up momentum along the way. Backed by Joe Vitale and Kenny Passarelli (Joe Walsh's rhythm section in the '70s), he manages to sound both raucous and subdued, creating a restless disturbance with subtlety and grace. On the subterranean rumble "Old Tennis Shoes," Jacobs-Strain sings like a man three times his age. He laments, "I don't want to go home / You can leave me here / On the side of the road / Just leave me here." But he doesn't come off as completely hopeless or fatalistic. There's a whiff of possibility in his dusty voice — a voice that at times sounds youthful but understands that just being young is enough to give anybody the blues. **EW**



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