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music

BY SARA BRICKNER



Chris Brecht, Montana Slim
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Recording to Tape

Chris Brecht writes country music for the ages

If Austin alt-country songwriter Chris Brecht's debut record *The Great Ride* seems born of another era, that might be because Brecht himself is a little old-fashioned. He writes his songs on a typewriter. He doesn't own a TV. And though digital recording is standard, Brecht committed *The Great Ride* to two-inch tape rather than computer memory.

"I don't think I'll ever make a digital record, anymore," Brecht says. "I don't think that tape really makes [music] sound old or vintage; I just think that tape adds such a warmth and beauty that digital can't quite capture." Brecht sings songs about traveling by rail (trains show up in about half of his songs, something he attributes to living near them for a good portion of his life) and love lost. You know, the same stuff that Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan sang about. But while these themes could seem gimmicky or contrived in the wrong hands, Brecht's songs feel genuine, his lazy drawl a cross between the soulful North Carolina slur of Ryan Adams' early work and Dylan's nasal, off-pitch utterings. But in his processes as well as his day to day existence, Brecht prefers the old school to the new. "I grew up listening to, like, the records I found in the box in the basement. And a lot of those were Stones

records, and Simon and Garfunkel, the Yardbirds, the Youngbloods, a couple Dylan records ... they just had a sound that I always loved," he says. "As I got older, the industry kind of made its way from analog to digital records. And there just seemed to be something missing to me sonically."

Part of that, Brecht says, are the errors, the foot taps and the guitar clicks that can't be taken out of a taped recording. "The artifacts inside the music, to me, are so much more important when I listen to records, and that's kinda what I wanted on my own record," Brecht says. "You're trying to create something substantial in the artifacts that are left behind, rather than having an album exist solely on a MacBook hard drive. It's more fun to have 35 pounds of reel to reel tape sitting there." Preferences like Brecht's can be cumbersome and inconvenient, or more expensive, as tape recording is. But to Brecht, they're worth it — and for the uber-modern naysayers who might call a love for dusty vinyl records and tape recording pretentious, Brecht says this: "There's a certain amount of effort that goes into creating something. There's more artifact. There's the residue. I don't think an artist is pretentious for holding onto that."

EW

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