

Old 97's



Where Have All the Alt-Cowboys Gone?

Let's take a trip back to the mid-1990s, when alt-country bands were ambling out of local barrooms left and right and into the arms of major labels. Y'allternative was a force to be reckoned with, and while bands like Whiskeytown, The Jayhawks, The Bottle Rockets, Wilco and Son Volt weren't exactly shooting up the charts, they were the backbone of a cultural phenomenon. Country music was cool again, and people on both sides of the country aisle, the lovers and the haters, found common ground in the genre's hook-heavy, poppy twang. Some folks argue that the apogee of the alt-country movement is **Old 97's** *Too Far to Care*, and it's hard to argue back.

The Dallas quartet's third album and major-label debut was lightning in a bottle, a sonic shot and a beer, an unparalleled mix of Texas country swagger and tight, catchy pop. Since that 1997 release, the genre's

golden days have disappeared (witness the demise of alt-country magazine *No Depression* and Wilco's metamorphosis into art-pop mavens). And while most of the alt-country purveyors have either lost their roots or ridden off into the sunset, Old 97's have refused to fade quietly into the fickle night. With their seventh album, *Blame It On Gravity*, the now actually kinda old 97's sound as confident as they ever have, trotting out a fine-tuned mix of spry, full-tilt foot tappers, middle-aged ballads and boot-scootin' pop gems. Rhett Miller's voice has matured from its heartache-laced, shoot-the-sun roots to a self-assured, whiskey-tinged swoon, and the quartet's songwriting is as surefooted as ever. Sure, *Blame It On Gravity* might not encapsulate the alt-country zeitgeist that *Too Far to Care* did, but don't blame Old 97's for not trying to make twang relevant again. Old 97's and Langhorne Slim play at 8 pm, Tuesday, Sept. 2, at the WOW Hall. \$18 adv., \$20 door. — Jeremy Ohmes

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