

Alt-Country Legends Change Lanes with New CD

I'll admit, when I threw on the latest **Drive-By Truckers'** release, *Go Go Boots*, my first thought was: *What the fuck?* Gone were the crunchy, fuzzy walls of distortion, the thudding beats and angst-driven vocals that so vividly capture the cultural and historic ambivalence experienced these days by young Southerners. And disappeared in a cloud of cloy was the inward-driven loathing and choked pride of such high-concept, low-down gems as *Southern Rock Opera*, *Decoration Day* and, especially, *The Dirty South* – a holy trinity of albums that sound like the books of Daniel Woodrell and Larry Brown set to a three-guitar assault of smart, swampy and socially conscious hard rock. I wanted "Tornados," not the "Dancin' Ricky" of this watered-down band I once loved. I wanted bad cops and meth, fighting and fucking, not waltzes, weak men and a go-go boot up my ass.

I was mistaken, thankfully. After several grudging plays, I suddenly couldn't stop listening, and the Drive-By Truckers once again sideswiped me, throwing me into the ditch – only this time from the other side of the road. *Go Go Boots* is evidence of a great band refusing to rest on their laurels by continuously playing foil to the legacy of Lynyrd Skynyrd. An eclectic, loose-jointed collection that hauls in elements of juke-joint rumble, jukebox pop and spare acoustic balladry, the album takes a step forward by taking two steps back into the rich, eclectic past of country music. On the opening track, Patterson Hood (channeling Top Petty) sings "I do believe, I do believe, I do believe," which serves as a sort of mission statement for an album that delves into familiar territory – guns, violence, hardscrabble men, put-upon women – with a more tender, yet no less assured and engaging, touch.

The Drive-By Truckers play with Heartless Bastards at 7 pm Wednesday, March 9, at McDonald Theatre. \$20 adv., \$25 door.

– Rick Levin



Bringing it Back Down to Earth

There's a different valley down south in Fresno. It's not marked by the lush green hues of the Willamette; it's all sun-scorched concrete beige and oily asphalt black. There, the California heat radiates into pools of urban desert during the summer, and finding an escape usually means cranking the AC. But as uninhabitable and brutish as that may sound, these are the same streets, sidewalks and artificial cooling systems that **Fashawn** grew up with that shaped what his music is today.

In an industry dominated by mid-thirtysomethings, you almost forget the days when rap was about youth, rebellion and workin' the game to put food on the table. At just 22, Fashawn brings back something fresh to the West Coast repertoire – something that isn't guns, girls and "bottles of Mickey's and dutch."

Granted, there's an obligatory dose, but what stands out most are Fashawn's biographical themes and his strain of pure survival instinct. The absence of a father figure, a cracked-out mother and being of smaller stature all played into a childhood that was troubled but that also planted inspiration, evidenced on tracks like "Hey Young World," where he chimes: "I know it might sound a little bit like preaching/ But ain't a star in the sky that ain't worth reaching/ Already done caught a few and threw some back/ I shook them up in my fist and threw them out like craps." Fashawn contemporaries, such as Wiz Khalifa or even L.A. rapper Nipsey Hussle, lack that sort of optimism and authenticity.

Fashawn plays with Evidence, Curt@!n\$ Gilbere Forte and L&A Music at 9 pm Thursday, March 3, at WOW Hall. \$10 adv., \$12 door. – Andrew Hitz

Smile, Said the Whale

There is a whimsical sort of feel to the music made by Vancouver, B.C.-based band **Said the Whale**. Their indie rock sounds are paired with decent if not unremarkable lead vocals, and there's a loose, unrestrained quality to the songs that allows them to go wherever they feel they need to go. Ditto on the lyrics, whose topics range from the sacred to the outlandish. It all makes you wonder if the members simply woke up one day, decided to be a band and then ran with the idea, just to see what would happen.

Tracks like "Black Day in December" are representative of many of Said the Whale's efforts: a jangly, easygoing rock rhythm, sing-songy vocals that at times feel like little more than clever spoken-word musings, and lyrics that focus on everything from an old man kneeling in prayer to a mermaid observing life in Vancouver. "The Light is You" is an up-tempo acoustic guitar and handclapping tune that sounds ready-made for a beach campfire, and "The City's a Mess," while short on creativity and long on repetition of the title lyric, almost makes the urban plight sound like something to be happy about.

It's hard not to listen to the band's tunes and smile despite yourself. The material comes off a bit silly (especially, for instance, the way it's sung on "Out of the Shield"), but it's delivered with such straight-faced sincerity that it ends up being endearing.

Said the Whale play 9 pm Monday, March 5, at Black Forest. – Brian Palmer



A Guitar Fairytale

Eric Clapton, Joe Satriani and Eddie Van Halen walk into a bar. After high-fiving over the cosmic unlikelihood of these three rock guitar legends finding themselves in the same drinking establishment, they order up a round of Keystone lights. As the trio begins to share stories of rock-'n'-roll shenanigans and general guitar-wanking, the lights of the venue dim and a young woman makes her way to the stage. Her name is **Kaki King**, and she has the distinction of being the sole woman and youngest musician on Rolling Stone's 2006 list of "New Guitar Gods." King is wearing black jeans and a black tank top. Across her chest is strapped an acoustic guitar. She looks focused and intense in the spotlight, her piercing dark eyes staring out from under severely cut bangs.

Just as the triumvirate of guitar gods starts comparing the size of each other's capos, King begins to play. Sparks and shafts of light spring from her guitar, as her hands move up and down the neck and body of her instrument. King uses her custom-made instrument for both percussion and melody, effortlessly transitioning from traditional finger-style playing to fret-tapping and slap-bass techniques. But

it's always at the service of her songwriting, which ranges in sound from folk, to the sonic experimentation of Thurston Moore, to the lushness of Scottish post-rockers Mogwai. Soon a band has joined her onstage, and the crowd has quieted down to listen as her sound transforms again into melodic and arresting pop songs.

This is the guitarist about whom the Foo Fighter's Dave Grohl said: "There are some guitar players that are good and there are some guitar players that are really fucking good. And then there's Kaki King." On this night, after she and her band have finished playing, Clapton, Satriani and Van Halen applaud, pay their bill and humbly make their way home to practice their instruments.

Kaki King plays an acoustic show with Washington at 7 pm Wednesday, March 9, at WOW Hall. \$15 door. – William Kennedy



Fashawn