



GRITTY GRASS

Three years have passed since Eugene's perennial favorite rock-grass outfit, **Alder Street** (formerly Alder Street All-Stars), released its last album. With the debut this month of *Americannibal*, rest assured, it was worth the wait.

"In three years you have time to get your shit together and write songs that are solid," says Ian Royer, guitarist and a songwriter for the band. "We're happy with every single song."

Getting their shit together includes bringing in new band members — mandolinist Jesse Lawton (formerly of Conjugal Visitors) and drummer Emily West (of Douglas County Daughters) — adding to Royer, Jake Beckwith on fiddle, Chris Kelley on banjo and Aaron Nelson on bass. And the band recorded at Portland's Fluff & Gravy Studios, whose roster of artists includes Oregon staples Hillstomp and Sassaparilla.

Shacking up with Fluff and Gravy was a departure for

Alder Street; up until this album (their third), the band used live recordings.

"Everything is really different on this album," Royer says. "We put way more time and money into it."

Americannibal is a tight, polished study on the frontiers of contemporary bluegrass — a raucous place where drums and trumpets are as welcome as banjos and mandos. The album takes off with a rerecording of an old song — "The Skinner," a bouncy, klezmer-inflected instrumental — before settling into Lawton's "Meat Wagon." On "Meat Wagon," and elsewhere on "Cross Eyed" and "Satan's Mandolin," Lawton acts as the Robert Plant of modern bluegrass vocals, pushing past the high lonesome sound to a shrieking fever pitch.

"We sort of started veering away from traditional bluegrass," Royer notes. "We're trying to do more rock ... it's almost like metal vocals sometimes."

On the other end of the spectrum is the cool, silky voice of West, who wrote and sings "Girl with a Curl" — a playful,

doo-woppy ditty about being a free-spirited woman in the 1930s.

"It's huge to have Emily singing with us too," Royer says. "She wrote one of the songs on the album, which is pretty cool to write a song as a drummer."

Preceding West's song is Royer's "Preacher," a sort of antithesis to religious themes in traditional bluegrass. "The only heaven that I ever see is to be held by my friends and family/ 'Cause I don't need no fucking priest," Royer sings over Kelley's rolling banjo. Royer says the song was a reaction to the sign-waving repenters hanging around Seattle's Northwest Folklife Festival last year.

"Those people just drive me crazy," says Royer, noting that the song is more anti-harassment than anything else. "We don't want to come off as anti-religious per se. We'll play gospel songs."

Preach on.

Alder Street hosts a CD release party with **The Billy Blues** 9:30 pm Friday, June 6, at Sam Bond's; \$6. — Alex Notman

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