



PHOTO BY CLAIRE FLINT LAST

Eugene Balkan-i-ana

SAMPLE THE MANY MUSICAL MOODS
OF MOOD AREA 52 IN THE BAND'S NEW ALBUM

By Will Kennedy

Michael Roderick is feeling modest. “I’m not ambitious to a flaw,” he says, despite the fact his band **Mood Area 52** has released eight studio albums, the latest of which, *Find Some Kind of Light*, comes out June 8, as well as participating in off-beat projects like playing a live soundtrack to screenings of the silent film classic *Nosferatu*.

In October, Mood Area 52 and Ballet Fantastique will collaborate on an Edgar Allan Poe-themed production. With this in mind, I tell Roderick I think he’s selling himself short.

“I’m not house-proud about it,” he says, considering his body of work. “I don’t know that anything I do creatively is necessarily good. It’s hard to assess yourself.”

He will admit, though, he’s happy with the group of songs that made it onto this latest record, calling it different than anything Mood Area 52’s done in the past. Most of all, he wanted the music on the new record to put a little light into the world.

“I wanted to challenge myself to write songs that were positive,” he says — non-cynical and problem-solving songs, but not formulaic.

Since the late ’90s, Mood Area 52 has played everything from Balkan music, tango and hot jazz to sandy Americana, a style maybe best described as Balkan-i-ana or perhaps border music, as if Texas magically shared a border with Eastern Europe.

Roderick grew up in Boise, Idaho, listening to punk. Some of the crowd he ran with as a boy went on to be in bands such as Treepeople and Built to Spill. It wasn’t until he came to Eugene for college that he discovered the music of Astor Piazzolla.

“I would just obsessively listen,” he remembers.

Roderick liked how Piazzolla took jazz and classical theory and merged it with traditional tango. “Really interesting stuff,” he says. Inspired by Piazzolla, Roderick began playing drums and accordion in addition to writing songs on the guitar.

Some Kind of Light surveys the different styles Mood Area 52 is known for, despite leaning a little harder on the Americana, from the Uncle Tupelo-esque album opener “Sugar Cubes” to “Vegan Steakhouse Rag” and even a little gypsy jazz with “Gernika.”

Tango surfaces on the instrumental waltz “Sushito” before the song hits a double-time klezmer-style last bit. Throughout, Roderick’s tired, burnished-leather tenor sings lines like “The stores are all closed/ I’m drinking red wine from the coffee pot.”

Looking back, Roderick says he appreciates that he’s been able to make music with close friends and to have an ever-changing creative outlet.

“I don’t think I’m going to conquer the music world,” he says. His goal instead is to simply keep music alive in his life “on lots of different levels.”

Mood Area 52 celebrates the release of Find Some Kind of Light along with Baroque Betty 9:30 pm Saturday, June 8, at Sam Bond’s; \$6, 21-plus.

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