

MODERN. UNDERGROUND. COUNTRY.

Manzanita band the Cedar Shakes release new album on vinyl, cassette and digital



Submitted photo by Justin Baillie

Manzanita band the Cedar Shakes is made of Travis Champ on guitar and vocals and James Owen Greenan on pedal steel.

There I was, nearly broke, slightly hungover, driving my beat-up pickup truck down the Oregon Coast in the rain after my girlfriend had dumped me, when I pushed in a cassette tape recently sent to me in the mail and cranked up the volume. A cassette of new country music.

A few hours later, I had listened to the album three times and had heard some exquisite throwback musicianship and uniquely immortal lines like: “Sometimes true love sends postcards to the ocean / sometimes you’ll wish true love was overseas.” Or: “Jesus saves in Helvetica / last chance for diesel till you hit the state line,” from a song called “Helvetica.”

Yes, someone wrote a country song about the generic ubiquitous font Helvetica!

So let me declaim here: I have now heard the new best voice of fresh country music you’ll never hear on clichéd country radio stations, and I heard it on a cassette tape released by a Manzanita band called the Cedar Shakes. And I haven’t stopped listening to it since that inaugural play.

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Coastal Life

Story by MATT LOVE

bum, their second, is called “This Western Road” and it contains 10 stellar songs in the genre that Champ calls, “modern underground country.”

“I pulled influences from various decades of country music,” said songwriter Champ, “including George Jones, Ernest Tubb, Waylon Jennings, Townes Van Zant, as well as mid-late 20th century rock ‘n’ roll like Buddy Holly, The Band and Richard Hell.”

There was another significant influence to the sound of “This Western Road,” explained Champ. “I listened to Bob Dylan’s ‘Highway 61 Revisited’ on a regular basis, and the recording process owes a great deal to that record: the grittiness and immediacy of a live studio band, the simplicity of song structure allowing musicians with limited familiarity to the songs to sit down and allow their acquired musical tendencies to fill the space.”

“This Western Road” was recorded at Estuary Recording in Austin, Texas, over three days. The tracks were recorded live on 2-inch tape, and mixed down to quarter-inch reels. The entire process from the recording to the mixing to the mastering was entirely analog.

Champ and Greenan were joined in the studio by some high-powered Austin sidemen in Bryan Mammel on piano and Rhodes, David Longoria on electric guitar, Matt Simon on drums and Aaron Goeth on bass.

“We only had one full band practice the day before stepping into the studio,” said Champ. “None of the final tracks are first takes, but most of them are second or third



Submitted photo courtesy the Cedar Shakes

The Cedar Shakes record their second album in Austin, Texas.

takes. The vocals were done on the third day. The tracks were mixed on the fourth and fifth days. We had a total of five studio sessions.”

The Cedar Shakes’ new album is available in 12-inch vinyl record released by Whatbang Records of Quilcene, Washington, with digital downloads ripped from the vinyl. For the time being, digital downloads will not be available without purchase of the vinyl. The tape release is a short-run edition of 75 copies, and there will be no compact disc.

In other words, you have to seek out the Cedar Shakes music, but believe

me, it’s worth it, especially live. And fortunately, in the coming days, local area music fans have a chance to see the band perform.

For the time being, the Cedar Shakes will be playing out as a two-piece with the possibility of full-band shows in the future. They toured aggressively around the area in the winter to support the record and are back on the road this spring with performances in Astoria at the Voodoo Room on Friday, March 20; in Manzanita at The Lighthouse on Saturday, March 2; and again in Astoria at KALA on April 10. Records and cassettes of “This Western Road” will be available at the shows.



Submitted photo
The Cedar Shakes have released their second album, “This Western Road,” on vinyl, cassette and digital.