

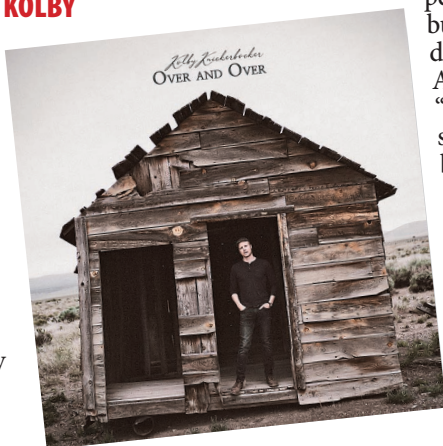
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**“OVER AND OVER,” KOLBY KNICKERBOCKER**  
Self-released

Georgia native and recent Bendite Kolby Knickerbocker blends gospel, soul and folk on the four-song “Over and Over” EP, which officially releases Friday. These deeply introspective songs examine life, love and mindfulness, with themes that take on deeper meanings in the context of COVID.

“Prayer” launches the EP in a near-whisper before the lead single and title track launches into a slow-burning, soul-searching groove. Dedicated to Knickerbocker’s wife, the song is equal parts “Stand By Me”

and Southern R&B, with mature lyrics that examine what it means to be there for the people you love. The album swings in the folkier direction for “Everything I Am” and the string-driven “Grace,” which ends in a swirl of harmonies and ambient sound.



**“DIVINE DARKNESS,” MC RAGTOP**  
Spice Trader Music

Bend hip-hop mainstay MC Ragtop delivers on the promise of last summer’s “It Ain’t Right”/“Closer Walk” single with the seven-song “Divine Darkness” EP. Melding old-school samples and beats with thoughtful rhymes and a conscious mentality, these songs work equally well as club bangers or introspective headphone listening.

“Bounce Like This” and “Bubble” reintroduce Ragtop to the Bend hip-hop com-

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munity at large. The latter is a manifesto of sorts for the whole record, as Ragtop spits, “(I’ve) got you staring down the barrel of deception.” Elsewhere, he shouts out Tupac Shakur and DJ Kool Herc on the jazzy “Clap,” and knocks out a fat funk groove on record closer “The Shine.”

But last year’s singles remain the strongest material here. “Closer Walk” is full-blown hip-hop gospel, as Ragtop takes a deep look inward as he expounds upon his belief. And “It Ain’t Right” is one of the more powerful and personal pieces of music to come out of Bend’s Black Lives Matter movement.

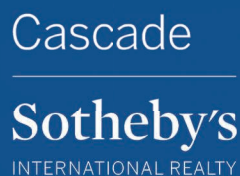


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