

Mp3 Boxcar Saints - Last Things



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The sanctity of loss and the majesty of failure grace these 13 songs. Featuring a host of accomplished San Francisco musicians, this is the album the SFWeekly calls, "A masterstroke of delicate, autumnal Americana." 13 MP3 Songs ROCK: Americana, ROCK: Acoustic Details: From sfweekly.com Originally Published By SF Weekly Wednesday, December 1, 2004 2005 New Times, Inc. All rights reserved.

MUSIC Tales From the Dark Side Dave Hudson's deep, doleful world comes alive on the Boxcar Saints' Last Things By Silke Tudor Cigarettes, leather jackets, sweet cars -- yeah, the Boxcar Saints make that kind of music. There was a time when epilepsy was known as "the sacred disease." The mild olfactory, visual, and audio hallucinations that often herald an attack (much as they do in migraine sufferers) were considered calling cards from the gods, invitations from a less secular world. The more potent visions and "absences" of self that follow during the twilight state of some seizures were thought to be divine and/or demonic forms of inspiration ("inspiration" being derived from the Latin word *spire*, meaning "to breathe"). Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, is thought by some to have experienced his awakening during such a fit. A great many others -- Dostoevski, Dickens, Dante, da Vinci, Flaubert, Aristotle, Bud Costello, Isaac Newton, and Michelangelo, not to mention Neil Young, Ian Curtis, and Joan of Arc -- are said to have drawn inspiration from the quietude following these episodes. A dear friend of mine who has suffered attacks since childhood describes the experience as "having the slate suddenly wiped clean," and he admits that some of his most fertile artistic ideas have risen in the wake of a temporal storm. The first time I heard a rough mix of the Boxcar Saints' Last Things, I thought about my friend, about epilepsy, quietude, and the dark, poignant insights born from violent upheaval. So it seemed more than a felicitous coincidence when the mastered version of Last Things arrived compliments of the upright bass player's label, Grand Mal Records. The Boxcar Saints are essentially a trio, though one might not guess it from a

typical show since their live dates so frequently become a cavalcade of session musicians and notable guest performers such as Margeaux Ostrovsky, full-time violin player for the Pickpocket Ensemble, or Colin Stetson, a fearsome dervish of a man whose sax and bass clarinet are brandished for the Transmission Trio when they are not being put to use by Tom Waits. Still, the core of the Boxcar Saints remains upright bassist Jason Schwartz, who writes film noir scores and records bands like Seattle's Cobra High in his homespun studio; drummer Rich Douthit, who also plays for Odessa Chen, Rykarda Parasol, and Winfred E. Eye; and singer/guitarist Dave Hudson, who has the onerous task of living through the material that fuels the Boxcar Saints' music. "When I was younger, I wrote songs based on experiences I wished I had had," chuckles Hudson over the phone. "Now, I stay closer to my own experience. I want to be as honest as possible." Such honesty cannot be easily won. Hudson, who looks like an insomnia-suffering car mechanic from the Midwest, is reluctant to share many details about his past, but it's telling that his bandmates have affectionately dubbed him "Happy," something akin to calling a fat man "Slim." "I'm mostly just very even keel," defends Hudson, "but I guess my temperament can be sad. I do have a really easy time accessing those emotions. There are some things to draw on in my life, some experiences growing up that maybe your average kid with a trust fund who wants to sing the blues might not have." Hudson picked up a guitar when he was 13 and living in Santa Rosa. By 14, no longer satisfied with the confines of his bedroom, he started sneaking into bars for open mikes. There, he soaked up music and free beer from elder musicians. "Those guys were my heroes. They knew so many songs, old country, blues, and folk songs. I, of course, was really, really awful, but I got an education in those bars." By the time Hudson crossed paths with Schwartz, he was far from awful, but he wasn't exactly approachable. "I've kind of kept my distance from people throughout my life," acknowledges Hudson. "Jason moved in next door to me when I was recording my solo CD. He heard me playing in my apartment and said, 'If you ever need a bass player' I think I told him, 'Maybe I'll just borrow your bass.' I was really wary of other musicians. I think he thought I was a jerk. I probably was." With Schwartz came Douthit, who was already playing with the bassist in another band in San Francisco. Both musicians instinctively gave Hudson and his songs the space they required, lending the tunes the quality that dominates the Boxcar Saints' music today: The weight of lifetimes seems to hang off a single phrase or lingering note. "That has so much more to do with their talent than mine," says Hudson. "It's their sensitivity, their ear. They are just incredibly intuitive, incredibly talented musicians. But we're all on the

same page. There's never any need to fill things up, to make a song big or bloated. We just keep the space, enjoy it, and develop a relationship to it." Much of the material on Last Things grew up, in fact, in the space left by the demise of Hudson's 10-year relationship, and it addresses the subjects that naturally rise in the aftermath of such an emotional upheaval. Shadowed by the trinity of religion, love, and booze, Hudson's world-weary voice seems to shudder under the impact of it all, shrugging its shoulders between elegant melodies and soft drum rolls. "There was a time/ When we were sacred/ There was a line/ That I wanted to cross/ And there was a map/ That I thought I followed/ Now, there's no signs/ And I am lost," rasps Hudson over his understated but urgent acoustic guitar on "Back Across." "Remember me, I used to be," he whispers on "Stranger in God's House" as a plaintive sax line rolls in with the fog and Douthit and Schwartz paint the night noir with fine aural strokes. "There's this war inside my head/ That can never be won/ And my rage is sweet and secret/ Like sugar on my tongue," sings Hudson with a seductive bedroom drawl that devolves into a bestial howl on "I Think I'm Done." "If the whiskey don't kill/ Somethin' else will," he concedes on "Ain't Gonna Sleep Tonight," as a drunken violin staggers across the stage. A masterstroke of delicate, autumnal Americana, Last Things is subtly but precisely influenced by Southern Gothic literature, biblical verse, Spanish flamenco, French chanson, and big-top reels. Despite the proliferation of such influences in the current musical climate, the Boxcar Saints distinguish themselves from their contemporaries, displaying too much vitality and ferocity to be neo-folkies, too much restraint, care, and originality to be part of the Southern Gothic alternative set, and too much wisdom, maturity, and imagination to be a rock band. In the end they are quite simply inspired. By demons or deeds, it matters not.

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