

Hayes Carll

Hayes Carll is an odd mix. Wildly literate, utterly slackerly, impossibly romantic, absolutely a slave to the music, he is completely committed to the truth and unafraid to skewer pomposity, hypocrisy and small-minded thinking. In a world of shallow and shallower, where it's all groove and gloss, that might seem a hopeless proposition.

Carll connects with music lovers across genres lines. Playing rock clubs and honkytonks, Bonnaroo, Stones Fest, SXSW and NXNE, he and his band merge a truculent singer/songwriter take that combines Ray Wylie Hubbard's lean freewheeling squalor with Todd Snider's brazen Gen Y reality and a healthy dose of love amongst unhealthy people.

"I guess you could say I write degenerate love songs," Carll says. "That, and songs about people who're wedged between not much and even less; people who see how hopeless it is and somehow make it work anyway. And the best kind of irony, sometimes, is applying no irony and letting reality do the work."

Letting reality do the work has sure worked for the lanky Texan who walks slow and talks slower. Born in Houston, he went to college at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas – getting a degree in History, then heading back to Crystal Beach to play for a wild assortment of people either hiding out, hanging on or getting lost in the bars along the Texas Gulf coast.

After releasing *Flowers & Liquor* in 2002, Carll was voted the Best New Artist of 2002 by The Houston Post. He would go on to release *Little Rock* on his own Highway 87 label, which became the first self-owned project to top the Americana charts.

Fiercely individual, Carll's banged-up take on classic country is honed by the road – sometimes as a man and guitar, sometimes with his scrappy band, but always taking in the vistas and humanity before him.

"It comes down to the songs and the people," he says. "You write about what you see, the things that cross your mind... and then you wanna get out there and play it back to 'em. You kinda know how you're doing when you see how the people respond."

See above. Hayes Carll is the transmutable jester whose incisive songs and funky beats play as well in shitkicker bars as they do hippie festivals, somewhere as organic as American Public Radio's "Mountain Stage" concert series and middle America as "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno."

Maybe it's the influences – Kerouac, Dylan, Guy Clark, John Prine, Hubbard... Maybe it's the fact that somebody has to say something... Maybe it's just the fact that some people are born to play...

But for whatever reason, over a decade into a recording career, Hayes Carll shows no signs of having arrived at his creative apex. Each album expands on his already extreme vintage country, extreme thumping bad road boogie, extreme heartbroken ache – and finds new ways to take on the fate of the nation. Whether it's the GI protagonist in the propulsive title track of KMAG YOYO, the train wreck objet d'amour of "Drunken Poet's Dream," also recorded by Hubbard, the road warrior of both "I Got A Gig" and "Little Rock" or the stoner liberal and the uptight Republican vixen of "Another Like You," Carll paints vivid pictures of humanity as it really is.

Thick-headed. Avaricious. Squalid. Hungry. Angry. Getting by.

Like so many Texans before him, there's no agony in the ecstasy – just the wonder of capturing the perfect character in the song. When you're 6 beers down on a 12 pack night, you know Hayes Carll understands. At a time like that – whether in your own backyard or some jam-packed bar – that's the best kind of friend to have.