

FORGET THE WATOOSI, AND THE BUGALOO
FORGET THE SHAG AND THE SHAKE AND THE SHUFFLE TOO
FORGET ABOUT THE MONKEY AND THE MASHED POTATO
EVERYBODY'S DOING THAT FUNKY TOMATO

Todd Snider

You don't expect barrelhouse boogie woogie, straight up garage rock or power pop from the ratchety voice who gave you "Talkin' Seattle Grunge Rock Blues," the iconic *East Nashville Skyline* or the Great American Taxi-backed *Time As We Know It: The Songs of Jerry Jeff Walker*. Yet fresh from fronting the freewheeling social commentary of the jam-meets-Tom Petty Hard Working Americans – featuring Widespread Panic's Dave Schools and Chris Robinson Brotherhood's Neal Casal – Todd Snider's *Eastside Bulldog* suggests there's a new kinda rumble under the hood of the iconoclastic troubadour.

"I think if you work so hard to be taken seriously, you've missed the rock and roll," Snider says with a wry smile, equal parts Shakespeare's Puck and naughty teenager. "What's wrong with uptempo and positive? This is Saturday night: crank it up when you're ready to go out, drive too fast, get yer ya-yas out. Just let it go, and dive in -- and get rockin'."

Random notions sunk into the East Nashville soil when the cabin-fevered folkie would spend time at home. Knowing you can't saturate the market, he'd call up friends like Elizabeth Cook and Kevin Gordon, and hit various bars under the moniker Elmo Buzz & the Bulldogs. The randy, rousing group – "kinda like the Rolling Thunder Review, with horns and girls" – quickly became a hipster's favorite, mating Jerry Lee Lewis' fraught rock with the Kingsmen's swing'n soul.

Never intended as more than a local kick-out-the-carbons joyride, the Bulldog buzz infected more than East Nashville's 5 Points neighborhood. A day of recording with Emmylou Harris' steelman/original Mavericks' producer Steve Fishell – for a master class he runs – captured the combustion and kinetics in a way that merged crazed music lovers, alcohol and freewheeling musicians.

But it wasn't until manager Burt Stein encouraged Snider to take his Dogs to Cash Cabin to try and catch lightning in a studio one more time that the music from the "mythic" Elmo Buzz, the never-made-it bar-rocker whose schtick the Peace Queer creator "stole," was crystalized, and was finally committed to tape. *Eastside Bulldog* is romp, a stomp and one hell of a party.

"This," Snider enthuses, "is the *afterparty after the party*."

From the Bo Diddley grindhouse bully smackdown "Enough Is Enough" to the freewheeling "Secret Agent Man"-style pep club rally "Eastside Bulldogs," the bass heavy, horn squonking instrumental "Bocephus" that evokes the Champs' "Tequila" with its own feverish cry of Hank Williams Jr's nickname to the Fats Domino meets Little Richard rager "37206," which proclaims "I got the tshirt – and the bumper sticker," this is Snider unbridled.

"We're kinda like the Kingsmen: they're always blazing and they barely make it when the vocal kicks in. Like the end of the solo on 'Louie, Louie,' that's my favorite musical moment ever... Because just when you think it's all gonna fall apart, it comes together and explodes. It's so good!"

One listen to the careening refrain of "chicks and cars and partying hard," with Jen Gunderman's pumping piano and Snider's slamming surf guitar on the

music business skewering “Hey, Pretty Boy,” it’s obvious that spun-out fishtailing is where it’s at for the man whose writing’s been hailed by John Prine, Jimmy Buffett, Kris Kristofferson, Keith Sykes and Guy Clark. Snider sees no compromise or contradiction in these euphoria-pumping party songs.

“To me, it’s a deeper thing: If you don’t think ‘Whomp Bop A Lu Bop’ is genius, you’re missing it. As a person in folk, I think ‘Sha na NA na NA’ or a bunch of ‘shadoobies’ are the lyric that’s *got* it! ‘Tuttti Frutti’ is deeper than ‘Blowin’ In The Wind,’ even as the guy who *wishes* he’d written ‘Blowin’ In The Wind.’ It says more about everything, love, rage, sex – *all* of it.”

It doesn’t hurt that Snider’s current cavalcade of songs includes the barbed-wire surf guitar strewn trog-pop “Are You With Me,” the burlesque-y churn and shuffle of “Come On Up” in full carny barker exhortation or the farfisa power-pop pogo delight of “Ways & Means,” which invokes “Private Eyes” songwriter Warren Pash’s cash. Even the cacophony meets freefalling “Check It Out” suggests a meth-addled percussive-driven “Land of a 1000 Dances.”

“That’s the whole idea: it’s the opposite of what you expect from me. But I like songs that say, ‘Hey, baby, let’s rock and roll..,’ *especially* more than once. I like there’s lotsa spots to yell. I like that the whole record is over in less than half an hour – *and* it’s *all* fun!

“I hope my artsy fartsy friends can hear this and like it. For some people, if it’s not super-serious and talking about the things they think they should worry about, then it’s not art. But you know, the real art is stuff that makes you *feel*!

“You listen to this, and it’s not going to matter – as long as it’s *tonight!* And *ALL* night! As long as my baby’s *with* me, and we’re getting it, and...”

Snider almost runs out of breath. He’s fired up. He’s ready to party. And for the man who’s the post-modern troubadour state-of-the-world pulse taker, it’s simple. “This is genuinely my political statement to the world: if you ask me about the election or the state of the world, I’m like Our Party is – We Party Balls! Turn It Up, Man! We’re Doomed; Let’s Dance!

“Oh, and all those kick ass, wicked sweet leads? Those are *my* wicked sweet kick ass leads for the *first* time! I play about as good as a kid in high school – and that’s exactly what we’re looking for.”

So as the sax bleats and sweats, the tempo bunches and catches, kick off your shoes and drop your center of gravity. For Snider, it’s just thus. Get your “Funky Tomato” and go.

PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR,
DO NOT RESIST ARREST
NOW SHAKE YOUR DARE-EE-AIR
FROM EAST TO WEST
LIKE YOU KNOW EAST IS BEST
NOW PUT YOUR HANDS OUT WIDE
AND TRY TO TOUCH YOUR NOSE
'CUZ IF YOU CAN'T DO THAT
YOU CAN'T DRIVE HOME
BUT NOW YOU GOT IT, LOOK AT YOU GO
NOW YOU'RE DOING THAT FUNKY TOMATO