



Todd Snider hosts Folk My Ride.



Los Lonely Boys: Spanish for "the lonely boys."

FOLK OFF!

TOP WISEASS SALUTES HOOKERS AND EX-CONS

TODD SNIDER

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW ☆☆☆½

NEW DOOR/UME

AT 39, AUSTIN-SCHOOLED, Nashville-based Todd Snider has been barnstorming the Southern guitar-bard circuit for nearly 20 years. Say he's a tough-'n'-tender singer-songwriter who convinces the roadhouse crowd he's a hang-loose rogue. Either way he's smarter and funnier than his main claim to fame, 1994's "Talking Seattle Grunge Rock Blues," a Woody Guthrie-styled novelty about an alternative band whose gimmick is refusing to play.

Snider broke through in 2004 with *East Nashville Skyline*, and *The Devil You Know* is at least as terrific. John Prine and Steve Earle are reference points, but Snider's got his own just-folks shtick—he's at once more critical of his chosen losers and more celebratory. "There's a war going on that the poor can't win," the title song shouts, and whether band-backed or solo acoustic, the feckless drawl Snider has nurtured is perfect for detailing and embodying "a different kind of American dream." A drifter connects with a hooker he dated in high school; an ex-con warns his new boss to watch his mouth if he wants his drywall hung; and a tweaking stickup man talks his buddies into doing it again: "Did we get arrested? No we did not/We didn't shoot anyone, we didn't get shot."

Snider even utilizes the same drawl and logic to throw a chill into a different kind of war report. "You Got Away With It" begins by recalling a prank in which three drunken frat brothers beat up a cry-baby with zero consequences: "Aside from that one hippie, we never really hurt anyone/Well, there's that other thing that I won't even say." Only a Camp David reference makes clear which Yale chum the narrator is addressing. If only it were as clear just what "new thing" he expects the chum to get away with next.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "You Got Away With It," "The Devil You Know," "The Highland Street Incident"

after sharing Beyoncé's shadow on the 1999 hits "Bills, Bills, Bills" and "Say My Name." On the Houston singer's long-awaited (at least by her) debut, she trumpets a simple refrain of self-worth: I'm good enough, I'm hot enough and, doggonit, local rappers like me. LeToya's pinched, insecure voice adds humanity to her litely sizzurped anthems of emotional resilience and romantic dedication, with a bevy of H-Town heavies (Slim Thug, Paul Wall) to toughen up the sense of strength through struggle. If talent got her only so far, the homies keep her whole.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Torn," "I'm Good"

LOS LONELY BOYS

SACRED ☆☆☆

EPIC

The mighty men of San Angelo, Texas, rarely let a solo run longer than it takes to finish a beer

Los Lonely Boys have a vision for America: a lime in every Corona, a wah-wah guitar solo on every jukebox and what happens in Texico stays in Texico. The brothers Garza—guitarist Henry, bassist JoJo and drummer Ringo—remade pedal-stomping jams as dinner-date pop by streamlining stodgy Lone Star axe-slinging into tight packages that don't confuse proving their manhood with testing your endurance. *Sacred*, the follow-up to their multiplatinum 2003 debut, adds flourishes like the country-tinged rocker "Outlaws" and the Havana slow dance "I Never Found a Woman," but the bros stick to the script they wrote three years ago—Santana solos minus girly cameos, Los Lobos vocal warmth minus L.A. artsiness. Just *tres hombres* messing with the blues as politely as any real man can.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Diamonds," "My Way"