



Witty storyteller wises up with age

by Fred Mills

Dimple Records

It's easy to dismiss Todd Snider as some latter day slacker prince, cute in an Eddie-Vedder-meets-Jon-Bon-Jovi kind of way and blessed with a genial, aw-shucks vocal style—but maybe a few couplets shy of an enduring oeuvre, y'know? This is the guy, after all, who struck alterna-gold in '94 with the oh-so-ironic "Talkin' Seattle Grunge Rock Blues" and, more recently, ruled Triple-A and college radio airwaves with the explanatorily titled "Beer Run" (from 2002's *New Connection*).

But a funny thing happened on the way to the kegger: Snider grew up. (Overdosing and landing in the hospital will do that to you.) Admittedly, on his sixth studio record Snider's stock-in-trade remains strummy tuneage delivered with the self-effacing charm of a young Arlo Guthrie. The alt-country twanger "Conservative Christian, Right Wing, Republican, Straight, White, American Males," a cross between the Byrds' "Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man" and Ray Wylie Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother," is a shoo-in for this election year's most hilarious ditty, while the overcaffeinated "Incarcerated" mines the same yahoo-boogie vein that Mojo Nixon tapped during the '80s. Yet Snider's become increasingly adept at wielding subtlety and poignancy. In "The Ballad of the Kingsmen" he connects the cultural dots between "Louie Louie," "Hail, Hail Rock & Roll," Marilyn Manson, Eminem and the Columbine massacre with such storytelling finesse that you wonder why this guy isn't an in-demand lecturer. Come to think of it, the stage is Snider's podium. Here's hoping people are listening.