

Telling the truth: Todd Snider to strum harsh realities and humor at Dickson Theater

BY EMILY KOSCHESKI

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Soul-searching tales of aging, drug addiction, thoughts of suicide and even the death of a best friend are what make Todd Snider's newest album, "East Nashville Skyline," perhaps his best, he said.

Thankfully, he knows just how to pepper the laments with a few laughs.

"The next [record is] just going to be crap. I gotta go out and get beat up or something just to make another album," he joked in a telephone interview from his home in Nashville, Tenn.

Released last summer, "East Nashville Skyline" was named one of the best albums of 2004 by the Associated Press, The Tennessean, Blender, Rolling Stone and many others. Encompassing styles Snider calls "Chuck Berry to solo guitar folk," the songs speak of the singer-songwriter's innermost thoughts, opinions and hard-to-believe life experiences, such as the time he was hauled to jail in Tillamook County, Ore., for misunderstanding where to stop in a construction zone en route to visit his mother.

Those attending his show on Saturday at Fayetteville's Dickson Theater will be treated to a solo rehashing of all those tales and more.

"I really like doing the storytelling," Snider said. "I ramble a lot É especially if they're giving me free drinks."

Snider, who ran away from home in high school, spent part of his life sleeping on friends' couches while trying to get by. He gained a new direction in life after a Jerry Jeff Walker concert inspired him to buy a guitar and learn to play.

"He was just singing about being free," Snider said. "I was really poor. He sang about living on people's sofas like there was a freedom to it. Like É I could do whatever I wanted. So I did, and I haven't had to get another job yet."

He played small venues in Texas for a while and then moved to Memphis, Tenn., where he drew a following with frequent performances at the Daily Planet club. An audience member who happened to be a record company scout mentioned his name to Jimmy Buffett, who invited Snider aboard his label and allowed him total independence.

"No one has ever told me what to do," he said. "I've had songs I wish I wouldn't have done, but I learned from them. I have [Buffet] to thank for that."

On "East Nashville Skyline," that same freewheeling attitude has inspired songs such as "Conservative Christian, Right-Wing Republican, Straight White American Males," in which he employs about every possible stereotypical descriptor to tell both sides of the political party divide.

Another track, "Play a Train Song," serves as a tribute to Skip Litz, Snider's friend and former tour manager, who died of stomach cancer in 2003.

Although he doesn't know which tunes he'll play in Fayetteville -- the set list depends on his mood and his memory of what it was like to play a particular venue -- this show, like all others, is sure to be a good time, he said.

"I've been doing it so long, my favorite gig is a 3,000-way tie for first," he said. "I enjoy them all."

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TODD SNIDER

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Dickson Theater, 227 W. Dickson St., Fayetteville

Tickets: \$12.50 in advance, available at Sound Warehouse and Clunk Records in Fayetteville; \$15 at the door

* For details, call 575-0500