



Drive-By Truckers:
"Yup." "Yup." "Yup."
"Uh-huh." "Yup."

SOUTHERN MAN

Down-home rockers question their Dixie masculinity

DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

THE DIRTY SOUTH ★★☆☆

NEW WEST

THE 1977 PLANE CRASH that snuffed Lynyrd Skynyrd, Southern rock's greatest band, also seemed to douse Southern pride; the next generation of Dixie musicians, such as Tom Petty, forsook their daddies' slide guitars and imitated Brits, and in their hurry to assimilate, they couldn't move to California fast enough. As Confederate flags disappeared from album covers, only rappers were left to celebrate life in Dixie. Drive-By Truckers, Southern rock's greatest living band, take the title of their fifth studio album from the hip-hop phrase that toasts the region, but for the Truckers, the South isn't a land of stripper poles and sipping sizzurp.

Instead, their homeland is full of poverty, guns, jail, whores, cursing and death; add some corpse-eating pigs, and you'd have an episode of *Deadwood*. Last year, the Truckers began their great album *Decoration Day* with songs about incest and tornadoes, and they start this slightly less great follow-up with songs about moonshine and tornadoes — the trio of singing guitarists (Patterson Hood, Jason Isbell and Mike Cooley, ranked in order of vocal assurance) play with Southern stereotypes the way rappers play with African-

American stereotypes.

If a northerner wrote these songs, he'd be lynched at the Mason-Dixon line. But the Truckers, as backwoods philosophers, want to figure out where masculinity goes wrong and leads straight to jail. They're obsessed with their daddies, with the past and with myths of virility. In one sequence, Cooley sings about addiction and brotherhood among the founding fathers of rock ("Carl Perkins' Cadillac"), Hood connects World

War II to John Wayne ("The Sands of Iwo Jima") and Isbell follows with the lovely ballad "Danko/Manuel," speculating sympathetically about the debauched

deaths of two '60s musicians.

These rough, bitter, ruminative songs are slower, longer and wordier than those on *Decoration Day*, with fewer unshakeable riffs, though "Lookout Mountain," a Neil Young-style stomper with guitars that reek of petrol, is gloriously cathartic. After so many traumas, the narratives feel predictable: When the unemployed narrator in "Puttin' People on the Moon" starts dealing drugs to pay the rent, you know his story won't end happily. Bring on the corpse-eating pigs.

ROB TANNENBAUM

DOWNLOAD THESE "Lookout Mountain," "Danko/Manuel," "Boys From Alabama"

SONGS OF GUNS, JAIL AND DEATH.

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