

Accent

Rockin' country band

No radio, no worries

Group gets no airplay but has its fans

By Cathalena E. Burch

Arizona Daily Star

Cross Canadian Ragweed is, from left, Grady Cross, Jeremy Plato, Randy Ragsdale and Cody Canada.

Preview

Cross Canadian Ragweed

- Where: Club Congress, 311 E. Congress St.
- When: 8 p.m. Wednesday.
- Tickets: \$14 in advance; \$16 at the door. 622-8848.
- Online: www.myspace.com/crosscanadianragweed.

The liner notes make it abundantly clear: "Back to Tulsa" is in no way to be mistaken for Cross Canadian Ragweed's greatest hits live.

"Why? Because we don't have any hits. We just have song after song," the quartet wrote.

And on two discs, 24 songs in all, the band blasts out its rock-influenced country music with its whispered nods to traditional twang and blaring blasts to guitar-driven rock with garage sensibilities.

It's the kind of music that attracts devoted fans, who seek out the band.

They have to: You can't flip on a radio or tune into CMT or GAC and catch Cross Canadian Ragweed — you can't really shorten that to CCR; it would be tantamount to sacrilege. The band is signed to a major Nashville label — Universal South — but acts very much like an indie act.

Which is exactly fine for lead singer and guitarist Cody Canada, who pens many of the band's songs.

"Our main focus is getting on the road and making music. We don't worry about TV or radio," Canada said from home in Texas last Thursday, a few days before the band loaded onto a bus for a jaunt that includes a stop Wednesday at Club Congress.

The quartet counts its blessings every time it boards that bus.

"We spent half of our career in a van and trailer that smelled like a foot," he said, then laughed.

Canada and three buddies — Grady Cross, Randy Ragsdale and Matt Wiedemann — got together in high school 13 years ago to form Cross Canadian Ragweed. Wiedemann left three months later, but not before the guys used part of his last name to create the band's name. Jeremy Plato, another lifelong friend, replaced him.

The band recorded four albums on its own before signing with Universal South in 2002. It's released four albums since, including "Tulsa," and has a new studio effort, "Mission California," waiting to drop. The band recorded it in March in San Diego.

It's the band's best effort to date, said Canada, the father of nearly 2-year-old Dierks Cobain Canada — named after Canada's best friend, Dierks Bentley, and his inspiration, Kurt Cobain. Canada realizes it sounds like a cliché: "Every band says this is the best record we've made," he allowed. But he means it, and there's a reason: This is the first time in the band's baker's dozen years that it has had any amount of time to invest in a recording.

"Instead of just banging through a song, we would sit down and do it the old-school Tom Petty way," he explained. "We come up with parts of a song instead of playing a G, C, D all the way through a song. It was just a thought-out record."

The end result is simple, driving rock — common-man's poetry set to music.

"It's us," Canada summed it up.

So does he think it will make a commercial splash, spin off a radio hit?

Who knows. Who cares. Here's what matters: A year ago, on a frigid, snowy Monday night in Minneapolis, 400 people showed up to a space that easily fit 2,000 to see a Texas band that hasn't had a radio hit.

"Four hundred people on a Monday night and you live in South Texas?" he wondered aloud. "I told the guys, 'Man, I'm never going to worry anymore.' It was a Monday night and crappy weather, and I had a feeling we made it."

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