



National Grain's Debut

By Trey Wood

NEW MUSIC

At a time when rap rules the airwaves of popular radio, it can be wonderful to encounter new and talented singer-songwriters of a different stripe. Truth be told, there is a greater variety of musical artists working today and accessible to a wider audience than at any time the world has ever known. Nevertheless, with the seemingly ever-growing and changing avenues for music, it can be difficult to find the new flavor that appeals to one's own tastes. And then, from Atlanta-based National Grain, a fine new CD arrives.

National Grain, a five-piece band led by singer-songwriters Ben McAllister and Jeff Moore, as well as multi-talented musician and singer David Cone, has delivered a first-rate honky-tonk debut. Their alternative country-style music is not exactly new. However, with many of these 12 songs, one is reminded how Glen Campbell played around with the Bakersfield sound of the late 1960s or how REM sounded like everyone and no one when they first hit the college scene in the early 1980s. There's a lot of effective borrowing of styles throughout National Grain's work on this CD. And, they do it marvelously.

Many may bristle at categorizing this subtle-sounding group as a country band. Some may prefer Americana as a label. Or, others may hear an early Eagles, Guy Clark or even Jackson Browne influence. Whichever bin the music stores decide to place National Grain's work in, the band's self-titled debut is an easy-to-listen-to pleasure. Filled with tales of long-distance love, barroom living and painful lessons learned, the songwriting provides storylines that those who long for such will happily embrace.

"Pretty Women Won't Give Me the Time of Day" begins the collection and puts the listener in just the right frame of mind. Cuts like "City Lights," and "High Country Twilight" will delight most anyone with their combination of harmonies and toe-tapping choruses. But the uninitiated listener be warned: The whining pedal steel and sometimes overused banjo give the songs a strong twang that may not appeal to everyone.

The band's appearances around the Southeast have been creating a bit of buzz over the last couple of years. Here's to hoping this very worthwhile CD finds its audience and encourages these young men to give us more.