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Greensky Bluegrass - 'Handguns'

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By Clint Rhodes Weekend Magazine Music |

Winners of the 2006 Telluride Bluegrass Festival Band Competition, this Michigan quintet continues to push the boundaries of traditional bluegrass with a unique progressive style that is part of the newgrass movement.

"Handguns" is the band's self-produced fourth studio album. The organic harmonies found on opener "Don't Lie" and the title track instantly reminded me of the country-rock glory days of the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band.

The band's 1974 self-titled album included well-crafted classics like "Heavenly Fire," "Border Town" and "Believe Me." Impeccable acoustic arrangements highlight the band's versatility and musical expertise on an album featuring 14 new tracks of life, love and loss.

Part of the charm of the new album is that it was recorded with the same analog equipment that was used to record Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird" decades earlier.

Staying true to their free-flowing style, the band launches into nontraditional bluegrass songs like the added horn section featured on "I'd Probably Kill You," to the disorderly drinking ode "Blood Sucking F(r)iends" with accompaniment from Jen Sygit, as well as the hauntingly distorted psychedelic number "Bring Out Your Dead."

Added for good measure is a song about the guitarist's dog. "Hotdogs on Parade" is a quirky instrumental featuring the ukulele, mandolin and kazoo that seems perfect as a Leon Redbone arrangement.

The band consists of Anders Beck on dobro, Michael Arlen Bont on banjo, Dave Bruzza on guitar, Mike Devol on upright bass and Paul Hoffman on mandolin.

Taking a page from the Grateful Dead success manual, the band maintains a hectic tour schedule playing more than 160 shows nationwide for the last six years.

Greensky Bluegrass will be performing Wednesday at the Rex Theatre.

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