

Dead cowboy's society

The Dead South's specialty bluegrass cocktail



Meet The Dead South: from left to right, Danny Kenyon, Scott Pringle, Nate Hilts and Colton "Crawdaddy" Crawford.

BY MAXFIELD MORRIS / maxfieldm@newsreview.com

Still, there's a unique sound and energy the band brings that feels plucked from a different time. The band could have replaced ZZ Top's cameo in *Back to the Future Part III* without even stopping by wardrobe—and yet there's something timeless about their sound.

"Some of them are a different era-esque," Hilts says of the band's songs. "Some of the other ones are just written in a room, sitting by yourself

and there's no time frame to it. The music tells a story of its own around that."

But there's also an element of acidity to the band's image—the song "Banjo Odyssey" details the story of two star-crossed lovers who also happen to be cousins, and the band's new album, *Sugar & Joy*, is anything but sweet and joyful.

"There's one song we wrote about someone who we had bad experiences with," Hilts says. "There's one song about a kid who was teased and bullied, so when he grows up he becomes a murderer."

He says the album is not themed really, just a series of stories told from the band. They've all got their own ways of telling tales through music; Hilts, Kenyon and Pringle all write songs that to some extent bring characters to life. As for Crawford, it's a little different.

"I would say that Colton [Crawford] actually tells a lot of stories," Hilts says, "But more so in his banjo playing. Like, leads and lines than go around it."

Sugar & Joy is garden hose water that you drink deeply from. With an unplugged, high-energy sound, the album is stocked deeply with awful stories well-told that send the listeners down a timeless road of Americana. □

When you think bluegrass, you probably think banjos, twang, soulful voices along with a tasteful mix of rootin' and some tootin'. You might also expect it to come from the Appalachia, but the Saskatchewan-based bluegrass band The Dead South doesn't abide by that part of the definition. The music just speaks to them.

"It grabbed me probably from the part where it mattered in university," says vocalist-guitarist Nate Hilts. "I was about 20, 21 years old and was being introduced to a lot of different kinds of bands."

That the band—which plays at Ace of Spades in Sacramento on Dec. 2—landed on such high-energy bluegrass seems strange. Considering the musical backgrounds of the rest of its members, you're treated to a diverse swath of music. Colton "Crawdaddy" Crawford was a metalhead guitarist before he turned to a life of banjo—translating heavy licks directly to a new instrument. Danny Kenyon is a classically trained cellist with indie rock and pop roots. Scott Pringle's a singer-songwriter in the camp of Frank Turner, and Hilts names the Doors, Pearl Jam, Meat Loaf and classical music as some of his influences.

As Hilts tells it, the band carries all of those sounds when crafting music and melodies.

"When we're writing, we don't really go for a certain sound or feel," Hilts says. "We just play what's inspired by in the moment, build off of it. We kind of get touches of everything."

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Nate Hilts
vocalist-guitarist, The Dead South

Catch The Dead South 7 p.m., Monday, Dec. 2, at Ace of Spades, 1417 R St. Tickets are \$35.

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