

Two Dollar Pistols



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To get a handle on Two Dollar Pistols, this quote from lead Pistol John Howie, Jr., might be the best place to start: "We would like folks to think of the Two Dollar Pistols as a country band that likes R&B, that likes rock 'n' roll, that likes rockabilly, that likes The Beatles, but not a rock 'n' roll band that likes country music."

The Pistols new album *Here Tomorrow Gone Today* is certainly more pure country than anything you'll hear in the underground circuit these days. Produced by Southern Culture on the Skids ringleader Rick Miller, its twelve tracks come replete with twang, deep, longing vocals, and whiskey-soaked heartbreak. You'd never guess that John is actually pretty happy; he is not only a proud new father, but John and fellow NC musician Michael Rank recently started 8th House Records, a move that brings them great relief after years of dealing with labelheads and industry demands. *Here Tomorrow Gone Today* will be one of the first albums 8th House will release.

The release marks a new era for the band, coming on the heels of their three other full-length studio albums, a live CD, and an EP of duets with Grammy nominee Tift Merritt. It is the band's first album since 2004's critically acclaimed *Hands Up (Yep Roc)*. A new era, but thankfully not a completely new sound: the Pistols remain faithful to their roots, and with *Here Tomorrow Gone Today* have cemented their reputation as country stalwarts amidst ever-changing musical trendiness.

When John started Two Dollar Pistols in 1996, North Carolina's Triangle area was a hotbed for rock 'n' roll bands that liked country music, with the Backsliders, Whiskeytown, and 6 String Drag among the bands packing clubs and earning the region a spot on the short list of alt-country ground zeroes. John's aim was to make music that didn't need the "alt" at the front of that tag, a goal made far easier with the arrival of lead guitarist/multi-instrumentalist Scott McCall in 1999. McCall's guitar has been an integral part of the Pistols sound since 2002's *You Ruined Everything*, but *Here Tomorrow Gone Today* contains some of McCall's finest moments yet, seamlessly going from a classic telecaster shuffle like "Were You Pushed (Or Did You Fall)" to the country-soul/country-politan groove of "Anyone Else But Me."

In true old country fashion, each player in the Pistols adds his or her own flair to *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, creating an ensemble of superb sounds. The Waylon-esque stomp of opener "When It Was Over," souped up by the band's powerful rhythm section of four years – Mark O'Brien (Bass) and Matt Brown (Drums) – gives way to ringing shades of Dwight Yoakam in "Stranger Things Have Happened," a track that features Southern Culture on the Skids chanteuse/bassist Mary Huff on harmony vocals. Two-thirds of Tres Chicas make an appearance on two tracks, the aforementioned, "Anyone..." and the song that may just be John's best country ballad so far, "Nothing Left Of Me." And check out the Farfisa organ on "I Don't Know You (But I Don't Like You)" or the sixties pop intro on "She Lies All the Time". As suggested by John's opening comment and as demonstrated whenever the band hits the studio or stage, Two Dollar Pistols are more than a one-note, one-mood band.

Turning their myriad influences into one unyieldingly soulful country album is the genius of Two Dollar Pistols: it is what has enabled them to share the stage with legends like Merle Haggard and Billy Joe Shaver, as well as contemporaries like Big Sandy, Wayne Hancock, Dale Watson and the Derailers. When you put on *Here Tomorrow Gone Today*, make sure to listen to the title track; it's quite possibly the best catchy rock song that you'll hear all year. It just happened to be made by North Carolina's premier country band.