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Clemente - Teeth Measure the Need

Moodswing

This may be the first recorded example of a new sub-subgenre I'll call emo-alt.country. Jeffrey Siler, frontman of Athens' Clemente, writes miniature narratives that sound like half of an overheard cell-phone conversation; these monologues start quietly, reluctantly, even, until the narrator abruptly summons up his courage and pours his heart out before receding into hushed tones. Siler's vocals are unremittingly solemn, like Jay Farrar's and, when he pushes hard, his voice gets stretched to the breaking point, bringing what visceral drama there is to the album. Its parade of ballads and midtempo tunes, adorned by mournful pedal steel and viola over thumping drums, is unvarying in feel and texture, while Siler's lyrics, which picture everyday life in a tight close-up, typically offer a near-rhyme (or two) early on before eschewing conventional song structure for a kind of free verse. Oddly, on a record in which language is the centerpiece, the mix tends to obscure the vocals, and lacking a lyric sheet I frequently found myself adrift in mid-song. Granted, there's a ton of heartfelt emotion on *Teeth Measure the Need*, but it's delivered so unvaryingly that the end result isn't engagement but enervation.

Shorts

★★

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