

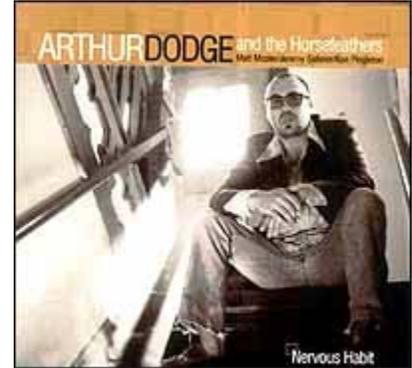
CD REVIEWS - Arthur Dodge, Billy Ebeling

By Jon Niccum, Entertainment Editor

Thursday, February 15, 2001

Arthur Dodge and the Horsefeathers

'Nervous Habit'

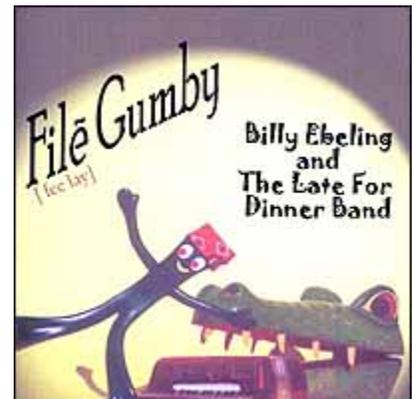


When Arthur Dodge sings, you believe it. You don't question that he's endured a whiskey-soaked lifestyle, grew up in a working-class environment or spent his youth listening to both Hank Williams and The Sex Pistols. Whether any of this is reality or fabrication is irrelevant ("Arthur Dodge" itself is a stage name), but the music this singer-songwriter prolifically churns out is undeniably authentic. It's the definition of Americana and it proudly hails from Kansas. "Nervous Habit," Dodge and the Horsefeathers' third album, stylistically conjures The Band's "Big Pink" era, or at the very least the Son Volt and Wilco crop which followed in that act's footsteps. Mixing the haunting, minor-key stutter of "Absolution" with the breezy shuffle of "Anything to do with the Moonlight," Dodge manages to fit into a roots-rock format without any of the songs sounding alike. The album's highlight, "Outta My Car," recalls the earnest liberation of Truck Stop Love's classic "Townie" more so in mood than in the actual composition. Maybe it's because TSL's Matt Mozier is now the Horsefeathers' guitarist, and his distinctive harmonies seep through many of the disc's tunes. Dodge himself maintains an almost Tom Waits gruffness to his delivery, particularly on the album's piano-backed closer "Stripper in a Cab." His ever-straining voice is an acquired taste, though it's hard to envision this material sung any other way. Recently, the Lawrence musician packed up his act and moved to Nashville. It's uncertain if the soft drinks and silicon Nashville of today will embrace the earthy Dodge, but they'll never accuse him of selling out.

Billy Ebeling and the Late For Dinner Band

'File Gumby'

Like the titular cartoon figure shown on the cover of "File Gumby," Billy Ebeling sports a talent that is very flexible. The Lawrence-based musician is comfortable with an arsenal of traditional instruments, including accordion, slide guitar and harmonica. And he can vocally front a band, as he has proven during several decades of touring. Ebeling's voice is quite distinctive,



revealing itself to be both hoarse and reedy — a fairly unlikely combination. The singer envisions his latest tribute disc as the first in a trilogy, with the upcoming two leaning toward all-original material. The 11-song "Gumby" runs the gamut of influences, from bluesman Willie Dixon to zydeco pioneer Clifton Chenier. Some of the covers stand out nicely, particularly a version of Chenier's "Bon Ton Roulie" that displays Ebeling's knack with the slide guitar. Others aren't so thrilling, like a trifling version of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love." Though Jimmy Page's guitar hook is humorously replaced by a pulsing accordion, it's still a tune so cloyingly familiar that it comes off as no more inspired than Britney Spears' version of the Stones' "Satisfaction." Ebeling's bandmates may be late for dinner, but they're musically right on time. Veteran Lawrence drummer Paul Matthews adds the right bit of pep to the straightforward tunes (and also produces the record), while bassist Ben Shult sticks in the pocket without getting redundant. "File Gumby" feels more like a warm-up for the original discs that are planned to follow, yet it offers a taste of the eccentric skills that Ebeling and company possess.