

Bakersfield, Blues and Bluegrass

I Told You reinforces and even expands Saints Eleven's edge.

By Tom Geddie

WHEN JEFF GROSSMAN TALKS ABOUT "old school" country, he means Dwight Yoakam and Buck Owens and that whole Bakersfield sound.

Those are good influences; because he's a relatively young 42, he can be forgiven for not going even further back. And congratulated for mixing some blues and some basically early rock into the old-school sound.

Oh, wait. And bluegrass. That's one of Grossman's major influences, too, a kind of music that basically grew out of the long-ago Appalachian sounds which mostly came to this country from the British Isles.

There's even a somewhat coincidental hint of The Soggy Bottom Boys from the movie "O Brother Where Art Thou?"

While the movie played the sound as much for laughs as anything else, the sound itself, in a handful of the songs he and his Saints Eleven bandmates play and record, is serious. (Ray Wylie Hubbard once remarked that the bluegrass body count is higher than hip-hop's.)

The point here, before it gets lost, is that in the broader Texas music scene that's sometimes too derivative, Jeff Grossman has no genuine modern influences and Saints Eleven ought to be one of the busiest bands around.

The new album, *I Told You*, is from Winding Road Music. Grossman wrote nine of the 10 songs and the band does a fine cover of the country standard "Delta Dawn."

Favorite songs

ONE OF MY FAVORITE SONGS here is the Bakersfield-influenced "Turns to Rust," which also happens to be the band's current single and has a reference to another classic, "Faded Love." Grossman sings "we were so in love when we were young, we thought we'd make it till the end . . . but you stepped out and you crossed that line, you thought of no one but yourself . . . I wish the best for you and your new love, I hope you both burn in hell."

Then there's the pleading piano and fiddle-laced "Just for Tonight: "let me know I'm your man, wait until tomorrow before you leave me."

And the closing "Stone Free," which moves from gospel to rocking blues. Grossman describes it this way: "It's kinda a spiritual song about an ex drug addict— not me — it's not biographical — who cleans himself



They are scheduled to perform at Love and War in Texas Plano on March 27: Saints Eleven

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—JEFF GROSSMAN

up and straightens his life out."

I Told You is a step up from Saints Eleven's first album, *I'll Be Fine*, because it's more distinctive.

That one sounded, on a casual listen, a lot like many of the Texas/Red Dirt country-rock bands proliferating the scene. A better listen, though, exposed the clear fact the band has a more interesting edge to what it does. That edge comes from straying outside the sub-genre's lines.

Grossman said he learned a valuable lesson on the first album.

"I learned how to be patient (during production). On the first record, I wanted it done and then when it was done I wanted

it pressed. I learned to let things happen organically, to not rush it, to take your time on stuff and to expect to wait."

The new album reinforces and even expands Saints Eleven's edge.

"I am a big fan of the Delta blues and a big fan of bluegrass. The rest of the album is in between those styles, a little bluesy, Southern rock, with some good country fiddle in it," Grossman said.

"What's cool about Texas music is that it's a melting pot of all different kinds of music. Some bands put a little more folk in their pot, some put a little more rockabilly in their pot. For the most part it all has some country

in it. We have a good variety of music in Texas. That's for sure."

The older music, though, is what "grabs my soul," Grossman said.

"You hear so much out of (national) country radio nowadays that's ridiculous. There's no story to it. So good lyrics are most important when I'm doing a song."

What's not important is what other people might think of the song, although Grossman tempers that thought because he appreciates the audience.

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Three of the four band members are in their early 40s; the youngster, fiddler Michael Poole, is in his early 20s.

Jeff Mosley plays bass guitar and upright bass, Chris Bradley plays drums, and, in addition to his vocals, Grossman adds lead and rhythm guitar, Dobro, lap steel, and banjo.

The band formed in 2011.

"It was just the desire to put out our own music," Grossman said. "I'd been playing lead guitar for other people for the last 25 years and it was time to get out on my own, and write the kind of music I want. I found this group of guys who want to do the same kind of music."

Band name

THE BAND'S NAME came from a movie, "The Boondock Saints," which Bradley and Mosley talked about.

Grossman hadn't seen the movie, but thought it would be "a cool name" for the band.

"The other guys didn't really want to use the name of the movie. That night was our very first rehearsal. It was on 11-11-11, so then I came up Saints Eleven."

The band's two albums have done well on radio and the band has toured across Texas, including Shinerfest and other festivals and is coming up to its third time at South by Southwest.

Most of the dozen shows a month—either with the full band or with Grossman and one other member, often Poole on fiddle—are, perhaps oddly, *not* in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Grossman lives in Joshua, the other members live in Arlington, Dallas, and Denton.

While the music remains original, the root influences for Saints Eleven all seem to be B: Bakersfield, blues, and bluegrass. ■