

Groovie Ghoulies bring cartoon flair to album

By Jason Hardy
Staff writer

When it comes to cartoon bands, a few greats immediately come to mind. Alvin and the Chipmunks, Josie and the Pussycats, KIDS Incorporated — oh wait, they were real. Close enough. The point is that rarely do cartoon bands seriously rock, and they almost never sing about dead bodies. But when it comes to the Groovie Ghoulies, those two characteristics are a must. While technically not a real cartoon band in the animated sense of the word, the Groovie Ghoulies are about as close to being a cartoon as a band can possibly get. Every album jacket has cartoon pictures of the band surrounded by witches, blobs, chubracabras, aliens and scary monsters, and most of their

songs are about the aforementioned creatures.

But on their latest album, "Travels With My Amp," something's different. Sprinkled in with the usual monster cartoons are renderings of some of our nation's most famous landmarks, such as the Statue of Liberty, Graceland, Mount Rushmore and Area 51. But, more than just a new cartoon, "Travels With My Amp" offers fans a pop-punk musical journey across these United States as seen through the eyes of the Groovie Ghoulies.

The group sets the tone early with "Boothill Express," an up-tempo instrumental number with a definite road-trip feel to it. This segues nicely into the coming-of-age number, "Bye Bye Brain," which in turn cruises right into "The Highwayman."

Mixed into these road anthems are a few punchy numbers playing on previous pop hits and American anthems, such as "Hard Night's Day" and a 30-second ditty called "Free Bird."

Still, some of the album's finer moments are found in the songs about girls. Of course, they still have elements that make each song "Ghoulie-esque."

With witty horror kitsch and nods to pop culture, songs such as "(The Girl Is) An Unsolved Mystery" and "Criswell Predicts" retain a Groovie Ghoulie attitude while touching on serious issues of love and respect.

Musically, the 14 songs on this 32-minute album aren't much of a departure from other Ghoulie albums. The band has recruited a girl named Amy to play drums instead of their previous



short-lived drummer, Jaz, and "Travels With My Amp" also marks the second Ghoulie album to include former Queens and Tunnel Rats bassist B-Face.

B-Face, who has been the Ghoulies' touring bass player for years, brings a more raw bass sound to the

REVIEW Groovie Ghoulies

TITLE: Travels with my amp
LABEL: Lookout Records
GRADE: B
FIVE WORDS: Horror kitsch meets pop punk.

album. This, and a lack of background vocals and more live-sounding guitar solos, makes for a stripped-down punk sound that is well suited for the three-chord simple style of the Ghoulies.

"Travels With My Amp" is by no means a musically ground-breaking album, but it is very worthwhile. The songs are lighthearted and catchy without getting monotonous and predictable like so many other three-chord pop-punk bands become.

Dropped

California band American Steels breaks the mold

It seems that many journalists and concert promoters like to pigeonhole bands into certain genres, whether they fit the criteria or not.

It's done mostly because either the person doing the pigeonholing doesn't know what kind of genre a band fits into, or it's just easier to advertise for a band that you can sum up in one catch phrase, like "indie," "rap" or "punk."

The problem is that many bands don't deserve the labels they've been branded with and have more to offer than just one word's worth of style. One such band is Berkeley, Calif.'s American Steel.

Tonight the four piece will take the stage at Knickerbockers, Ninth and O streets, with Nebraska's finest ska-core band, SeaSick Bob, and the

local rock heroics of Rocket F.M.

While definitely not deserving of any specific label, American Steel still is hard to describe. Some call them punk, some ska, and others just don't know. Ultimately it's a blend of everything, especially the "others-just-don't-know" part.

First and foremost, the band's most noticeable element is probably the dueling guitar work of Ruairi and Ryan.

The two rarely play the same chords and incorporate an incredible amount of subtle melodies throughout entire songs, a very noticeable and quality break from the typical verse-chorus-verse-chorus-solo-chorus song structure.

Their songs have a heartfelt urgency and intensity and have the ability to shift moods while they shift tempos. "Rogue's March," the group's second album and first one since signing with Lookout Records in early 1999, is a well-constructed collection of anthems and sing-alongs that carry with them a seri-

ousness and intelligence that really sets the group a cut above most other Lookout bands.

The album itself is a testament to this band's persistence and drive. Just after signing to Lookout, Ryan was diagnosed with leukemia, and everything was put on hold. A year later, the group has put out one incredible album and is currently on its first tour since the diagnosis.

Tonight, Lincoln residents are lucky to have a rare chance to see such a quality and varied musical performance.

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