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## FASCINATING FOLK

HARD WORKING AMERICANS HAVE A BIG HEART BEHIND ITS MUSIC—AND WE CAN'T GET ENOUGH

by SIMON WEEDN

**S**ongs about the plight of blue-collar workers and families has long been a reoccurring theme in American songwriting. So it should come as no surprise that a group of musicians would come together around that theme and attempt to explore it in full and draw attention to those struggles as few have done before. Hard Working Americans represents a super group of sorts featuring a lineup of some of the most talented artists of the Americana, Jam Band and Roots Rock communities. The band's self-titled debut brought together singer songwriter Jesse Aycocock, songwriter Todd Snider, veteran guitarist Neal Casal, bassist Dave Schools of Widespread Panic, keyboardist Chad Staehly and Duane Trucks on drums. Diving deep into working class themes and ideas, Hard Working Americans chose to start its journey by taking works by other songwriters, mainly from the Americana and Alternative Country scenes, and work them into its own. Since its debut, the group has toured a great deal and recently released a live DVD/album documenting the band's recording sessions for the debut record and first live performance entitled, *The First Waltz*. The band has also debuted a new 12" single and music video for its re-working of Frankie Miller's classic, "Blackland Farmer." The video explores the hardships of the American farmer and shows cannabis as a possible source of extra income and economic boost for those in the agriculture industry in desperate need of money. Recently, *CULTURE* was able to catch up with both Todd Snider and Jesse Aycocock, and hear all about the adventures and endeavors of this great group.

Your band's new record/documentary, *The First Waltz*, chronicles some of the very beginnings of the band, how did the idea to invite a documentarian into the studio with you all come about?

**Todd Snider:** When we got TRI Studios, which is Bob Weir's place, we rented it to record, and then someone let us know that if we wanted to film, that it was all set up for that as well. So we thought, "Sure! Let's do that too!" Once we did it, we just kept going with it and brought Justin Kreuzmann on the road.

Do you think you'll try to do more filming of the band's creative process in the future?

**Snider:** Yeah! Definitely! We want to try and film a lot; we want to make a lot of different kinds of art. We're even talking about trying to make a TV type station, I mean we all have other interests we can incorporate, Neal's a photographer, and David is into film, so I'm hoping we'll be able to do a lot of interesting things. I just think its fun to be creative with those cats, so I'm hoping

we'll get to do a lot of fun stuff like that.

**Jesse Aycocock:** I'm sure there will be more film stuff! Everybody in this band is so full of ideas all of the time so there's bound to be more of those endeavors and creative ventures ahead.

As somebody that's from Oklahoma, Jesse, is medical cannabis something you feel could help out those farmers over there?

**Aycocock:** God, man, you know, over in Oklahoma farming and ranching are big, but oil has just taken over. Where I'm from, over in Tulsa, we've got great soil, and I think if cannabis was allowed to be grown for medicinal or industrial purposes it could be really beneficial to the farmers while bringing in a lot of money to the state. On a personal level, I know people and have friends who are legitimately struggling with cancer and have benefited from medical marijuana. I think it's ridiculous that in Oklahoma they can't legally have access to something that is only helping them. ☺