

SOUNDS OF RURAL AMERICA

National Park Radio is flying its freak flag

“OUR SONGS ARE BIG, folk free-for-alls,” says Stefan Szabo, National Park Radio’s ringmaster and songwriter. The romping, stomping tunes on *The Great Divide*, the band’s debut, live up to Szabo’s description. Although there’s a hint of bluegrass in the arrangements, the band eschews the solo instrumental flights of the genre, going for a lively sound marked by the rhythmic interplay between banjo, acoustic guitar and galloping stand-up bass.

“It’s a singer/songwriter with a band,” says Szabo, “but I don’t like to describe it. If you listen, you’ll understand what it is.”

Szabo played guitar in a Christian rock band in high school, but didn’t get serious about music until he turned 27. “I’ve always wanted to sing, but never gave it a try. In my late 20s, I realized I was running out of time.”

He made an album of original songs in his garage and, after he started playing them live, added other musicians to flesh out his vision. “I’m not an amazing singer or player,” he says. “It’s taken a lot of hard work to not embarrass myself when I perform. I’m just an ordinary person who decided to try and do something extraordinary. I’m just as real and honest as I

can be in my songwriting. A lot of people seem to connect with that.”

When the band isn’t on the road, its members live in the rural Arkansas town they grew up in. “We’re isolated from the rest of the world in a lot of ways,” says Szabo. “That’s why my songs reflect real life in Arkansas, which I imagine is similar to life in a lot of rural areas and small towns across the South and Midwest. The whole idea of ‘hillbilly’ backwoods mountain music is fun to play with, which is probably why banjo has such big role in our sound.” —*j. poet*



UNDER THE INFLUENCE
with **STEFAN SZABO**

01 FAMILY

“My wife and two girls are the biggest influence in everything I do. They’re the reason I put up with the struggles of playing music for a living. I want to show them that living life the way we want to live is possible.”

02 PERFORMING

“Sharing my songs with people, affecting them in ways I never would’ve imagined, is an amazing feeling. Being met with tears, hugs and joy after a performance, and knowing that what I’m doing inspires others, keeps me inspired.”

03 NATURE

“The natural world plays a big role in my life. Exploring the mountains, hills, lakes, rivers and streams inspires me to keep on going, to see what’s around the next corner.”