

Review: Travis Meadows lays it out there with hard-won grit

By Scott Stroud

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Travis Meadows, "First Cigarette" (Blaster)

On two different cuts from his new release, "First Cigarette," singer-songwriter Travis Meadows acknowledges his voracious appetites.

"I've been hungry like a stray dog in an old abandoned town," he sings on the title cut, an ode to coming to terms with a difficult past.

But it's that yearning, expressed again on "Hungry," that makes this album crackle with electricity.

Working the fault line between country, rock and blues, ranging between bare-bones acoustic numbers and rockers, the Mississippi native lays it out there again and again.

Meadows attracted a small but dedicated following in 2010 with "Killin' Uncle Buzzy," tackling themes of recovery and survival with blunt candor. Still working those themes on "First Cigarette," he breaks down the happiness he's been chasing to its achy essence.

"I have learned to love the comfort when it comes," he sings with hard-won grit, "like a first cigarette in the morning buzz."

But addiction takes many forms, and on "Pray for Jungleland," he recalls the rush of young love.

“Her in those tight jeans, wearin’ out the Dairy Queen, waitin’ on Springsteen, stereo blastin’,” he roars.

That could come off as common until the next line, five words that make the memory fresh: “Too much magic to understand.”

The closest stylistic comparison here might be Chris Stapleton, and while Meadows has a dedicated following among musicians, he hasn’t reached that level of acclaim.

If he keeps putting out music this earthy and evocative, it’ll happen soon enough.