

# relix

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## Shovels & Rope

**Manticore** DUALTONE



When folk-rock duo **Shovels & Rope** started writing for their fifth album, *Manticore*, the songs were composed in the “before times,” a.k.a. pre-pandemic life. The idea was to make them more focused on the acoustic side of the band’s twangy roots. But when they headed into their home studio to put them down in 2020, they found themselves with way more time than they had anticipated (didn’t we all?)—and the resulting songs are full of the energy, spunk and heart that’s come to characterize their records and live show. *Manticore* certainly has a bunch of different parts to its sum, but above all it’s carrying on the band’s tradition of telling ultra-personal coming-of-age stories, along with wrestling over “bigger society” questions. On the pounding opener “Domino,” they take the POV of James Dean’s ghost wondering why everyone is still fixated on his celebrity. “Collateral Damage” is an impassioned tale of someone feeling trapped in a relationship, dealing with how to break free versus continuing down a path society wants. “Bleed Me” is a gorgeous, yet vague love song that has **Michael Trent** and **Cary Ann Hearst** singing the song’s title in unison over and over, while a simple, yet poignant piano line drives the number into soaring heights. And this is what stands out about *Manticore*, more than anything: Shovels & Rope are becoming masters at emoting over simple narratives that make their words sound even more profound. At one point, Trent described *Manticore* as “not heavy metal but, in our guts, it feels a bit like heavy metal.” Yeah, we can see that—it’s just as intense musically as it is emotionally.

*Mike Ayers*

