

The Menders' "Nina"
review by: Becky Huskins

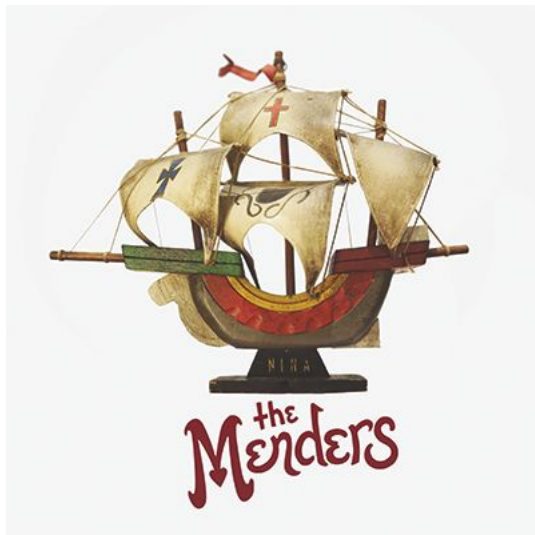


I love music. But what I love even more is music with passion. The first time I saw The Menders, I saw it. Lead singer and guitarist Jesse Watson closes his eyes and sings sweetly. Guitarist and vocalist Wes Forbus tilts his head back and cries out. Phillip Anderson bangs his drums and also belts words out to the sky. And then Jonny Boswell seems to nearly squat at his keyboard all the while growling out his part of the lyrics. It's loud, it's emotional, it's exciting and it's passionate. I thought I could only really catch that passion from a live performance until I got my early download of their new record, Nina.

From the hard-driving kick-off song, "Carolina Highway", I am immediately pulled in. Jesse's beautifully pure vocals create a kind of cataclysmic moment with the guys chiming in behind him with their powerful sound. Jonny's voice has a very different style which is easily recognized on a song like "Where Are You Now" with its classic bluesy style and gut-wrenching vocals. I also really like the even more up-tempo and slightly jazzy "Delores" which also features Jonny's raspy voice. I was repeating "uh-huh, uh-huh" for days after I heard that one.

It's no wonder to me how much I dig The Menders. They cite some of my favorite bands as their biggest influences: The Beatles, The Doors, Jack White, and The Black Crowes. These guys describe their sound as "raw garage folk", and I really can't think of better words for it. Together since 2011, The Menders originate from Gastonia, and bring their certain small town grittiness and rural vibe to their music. I can't really describe it, but if you grew up in a big town/small city you'll know just the kind of aura I mean. It's the sound of driving down country roads with good-looking people in pick-up trucks. It's the sound of freedom and of home. I wouldn't really call it dirty, but it's not altogether clean either.

The band members use words like "dark" and "morbid" to describe a lot of their songs, and it's apparent on a tune like "Room for Two" which isn't on Nina but was featured on their recent visit to Independent Artist Spotlight on WSGE 91.7. But while a song like "End of the World" may have a dark title and dark subject matter, it's just too rocking and sexy to make you feel bad. And speaking of sexy, "Like Me Too" is the kind of song your mother warned you about. It makes you, uh, feel things.



It's a tough call, but I think my favorite song on the record is "Out of the Light" because it combines every element that makes The Menders a true phenomenon: the tender vocal stylings, the powerful driving sound, the garage-style guitars, and story-telling lyrics that paint a dark but beautiful picture. I can also hear some of their local influences in their style like David Childers and The Serpents, Sinners & Saints and Bless These Sounds Under the City.

With everyone kicking in on the creative process, these guys are all practically always writing and coming up with new tunes. When I saw them just before the release of Nina, they had already moved on to performing new songs created after the record was

cut last fall (Old House Studio). That gives me hope that we'll hear a lot from these guys for years to come. At least I hope we do.

Photography credit

Album Cover: Emily Quezada

Tintype: Jeff Howlett (Howlermano Photography)

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