

Taking aim with American Gun

By OTIS R. TAYLOR JR.
otaylor@thestate.com

IF YOU WANT, DONALD MERCKLE and Todd Mathis will let their dark Southern hearts bleed for you. The songwriters for American Gun — which will release its debut CD, the aptly titled “Dark Southern Hearts,” on Saturday — want their hearts in your hand. (More likely, in your CD player or iPod.)

Mathis and Merckle are not quite Lennon/McCartney (or is that McCartney/Lennon now?). For one, the Beatles didn’t write progressive Southern rock. And two, Mathis and Merckle don’t bicker about songs. Or do they?

“We’re not friends, we (just) work together,” Merckle says with a hint of sarcasm.

Mathis hits right back: “I was like, ‘Donald, you’ve been doing this Loch Ness Johnny thing and it’s not working. I really need to hook you up and get you some stardom.’”

Mathis and Merckle have worked well together since they started American Gun as a side project for their other bands, Boxing Day and Loch Ness Johnny, respectively. The transition was easy.

“We each had songs that we each wanted to play that weren’t necessarily right for what we were doing with our previous bands,” Merckle says. “We both had very similar influences and similar styles.”

American Gun was an outlet. Now it’s the primary focus for both.

“It’s really kind of taken off in a way LNJ never did and I feel like I’m in a different area as far as songwriting goes,” Merckle

IF YOU GO

*American Gun, The Defilers
 and An Epic at Best*

WHEN: 10 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Art Bar, 1211 Park St.

TICKETS: \$3

INFORMATION: (803) 929-0198;
www.artbarsc.com

says. “We’re really working hard to make this album successful and make this band successful.”

Mathis says the fun he has writing with American Gun allowed him to move forward.

“It was a whole lot easier to make that decision knowing that I had American Gun to fall back on,” he says. “We had taken Boxing Day pretty far. We were going to have to reinvent it. That was a burden.”

The songwriters work with a “that sounds good, but maybe we should do this” attitude. The results on “Dark Southern Hearts” is edgy, distinct and, with the addition of horns and pedal steel in some songs, endearing. American Gun pulls from several genres, including country, but just don’t label this al-

bum as country.

“I don’t think this is a Nashville kind of record or even a Nashville kind of band,” Merckle says.

“I think it’s more of an Austin style,” Mathis adds. “Somebody in Nashville wants to record our song, go right ahead. Send us the publishing money.”

American Gun is Southern rock with indie tendencies. More Wilco than, say, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the band wouldn’t have its bombastic sound without the players backing Mathis and Merckle. Drummer Andrew Hoose, guitarist and pianist Jeff Crews and bassist Kevin Kimbrell provide an outstanding backdrop for the songwriters up front.

“Dark Southern Hearts” is ready for you to listen to until your heart is content. Merckle is content with the outcome.

“I’m very satisfied,” he says. And that’s something you rarely hear from songwriters.

Reach Taylor at (803) 771-8362.



To listen to tracks, visit
www.columbiatunes.com

