

# SOUTHERN CULTURE ON THE SKIDS

"Countrypolitan transcends music. It's a lifestyle, not a category of music," says Southern Culture on the Skids front man, Rick Miller. "It's where rural and urban sensibilities meet. I mean, it's when you see trucker hats being sold in Beverly Hills boutiques or notice folks eating pork in Mebane, where I live, drinking a glass of merlot. Or best yet, when you see a motor sport invented by backwoods moonshine runners and bootleggers broadcast on Sunday afternoon into potentially every living room in America, there ain't no doubt it's a countrypolitan world and SCOTS' new album, *Countrypolitan Favorites*, is the soundtrack for it."



Long the bards of downward mobility, Southern Culture on the Skids have always embodied countrypolitan. Recently described by Dwight Yoakam (in *Filter*) as "really on the outside, like Dick Dale meets Hank Thompson," SCOTS have mixed high and low culture for decades, endlessly touring, serving up moonshine martinis and poultry picking for fans everywhere. Now, with their new fifteen song covers collection, *Countrypolitan Favorites*, they've given the Go-Go country treatment to some of their favorite songs, creating a tasty buffet of tunes from Don Gibson to T-Rex.

"It's a party record," Miller says. As if anything Southern Culture on the Skids might put on tape wouldn't be a party record. Since 1983, when they formed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, SCOTS have played their unique hybrid of Americana, surf, R&B, rockabilly, and swamp pop (the band describes their sound as "toe sucking geek rock – kinda weird, but it feels good when you're doing it"), all the while driving fans into ecstatic, sweat drenched paroxysms of joy. Assisted by his cohorts in white trash renaissance – drummer Dave Hartman and bassist/singer/heartbreaker Mary Huff – Miller and crew have been prolific and ubiquitous for over twenty years. From their 1985 debut *Voodoo Beach Party*, to the international smash, 1998's *Dirt Track Date* (featuring the hit single "Camel Walk"), and up to their last studio album, 2004's barnstormer *Mojo Box*, Southern Culture on the Skids have continued to throw what *Rolling Stone* dubbed "a hell raising rock and roll party." Their 2005 live outing, *Doublewide and Live!*, captured all of this on tape, dirty and rough and wild.

"The live album was so raunchy," Miller said, "the production on this one we wanted to be slick."

Recorded at Miller's own studio (The Kudzu Ranch), *Countrypolitan Favorites* might be slick in spots, but there's no mistaking that this is the same Southern Culture on the Skids who wrote "Eight Piece Box."

"Countrypolitan was an outgrowth of the Nashville sound of the 60's. It was an attempt to go more mainstream and put dents in the pop charts and create more sophisticated tunes – for country jetsetters," Miller says. "It was a deliberate blend of country and pop. I always think it's cool to blur the lines between genres," Miller adds, "But we took the countrypolitan concept a bit further [on *Countrypolitan Favorites*], adding and subtracting, updating – getting respectfully irreverent, you know, close to the cuff but all mixed up."

And mix it up they did, giving traditional country songs the rock treatment, and vice versa. T-Rex's "Life's a Gas" appears here with country harmonies atop heavy synthesizer; "O Lonesome Me" has an upbeat twist, again with the harmony vocals; "Tobacco Road" sounds like CCR, while CCR's "Tombstone Shadow" gets stacked with three part bluegrass harmonies, and "No Longer a Sweetheart of Mine," originally a bluegrass tune by Reno and Smiley, gets rocked up with surf guitar and honky tonk piano and more harmony vocals. "Funnel of Love" (made famous by Wanda Jackson) is a standout track, featuring Mary Huff's sultry lead vocal, and her duet with Rick on the swingers-on-the-rocks classic, "Let's Invite Them Over" (an Onie Wheeler original), explores the relationship of a couple who don't love each other, but do love their best friends.

"'Let's Invite Them Over' is the most thematically correct song on the album, as far as countrypolitan goes," Dr. Miller says. "It's suburban roulette!"

When asked why the "countrypolitan" social phenomenon works so well when put into a musical context, Miller expounded, "It's an overlap of high and low culture. Homogenization, though probably not a good thing, makes for some interesting observations." Sounds like a true academic. But then Dr. Miller added, "But we're not sociologists or anything. I mean, we just want to party."

And so, let us party, with Southern Culture on the Skids' *Countrypolitan Favorites*.

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