



# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SONGS

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by



The guys of Truckstop Coffee have One Damn Thing to Redeem.

I was watching "Crossroads" on CMT the other day, and Melissa Etheridge was saying, "Country music, rock 'n' roll, it's a fine line. It's all about the song."

I think that's true, no matter what music genre you are listening to. The standard labels — rock, country, folk, pop, rap — often are not enough anymore; the new style of music avoids easy classification.

Truckstop Coffee, the Delray Beach-based group that was named the Best Country Act of 2005 in CityLink Magazine, has been described as alt-country, Americana with a little bit of blues, gritty, twangy, hillbilly rock... and the list goes on.

"Somebody said something to the effect of, 'We strive to do something original yet familiar,'" Truckstop guitarist Caleb James said. "I liked that. I think it sums up our approach pretty well."

Truckstop Coffee is releasing its first full-length CD, "One Damn Thing to Redeem," this month.

The CD takes a fresh look at some familiar country scenes, namely women, whiskey and life on the road. Most of the songs were penned by frontman Pete Stein with a lot of creative input from the rest of the band.

"I think there is a lot of imagery in the lyrics," Stein said, "but more importantly, the guys I play with are great performers and incredible players. People seem to relate both to the music and to our performance."

## WANTED: BASS PLAYER/BEER DRINKER

The most interesting people have fascinating stories to tell, and often it's the most interesting music that tells these stories. This band has a lot of stories to tell.

"Before I was a member of Truckstop Coffee, I was a fan," bass player Nick Orow said. "I was in another local band that was coming to its end. I saw an ad for a Bass Player/Beer Drinker wanted on the TSC website and decided to try out. ... The thing that appealed to me, and what continues to do so, is the picture that the music paints."

TSC's music often gets its influence from country life. It has to, seeing that Stein wrote much of it about his own roots, growing up on a farm in "the middle of Nowhere, Virginia, a mile down a red, dirt road, 30 minutes



from school or the nearest stoplight."

Life in a small town is a great way to grow up and a great way to raise a family, but by the time he was a teen-ager Stein was

ready to see the world.

"When I moved out to California in the summer of '99," he said, "I listened to the radio the entire three-day drive and knew that I wanted to see the rest of the country one day. I see music as a great excuse to go out and see every little town."

A great deal of road trips and a fair share of introspection led to a compilation of poems that would soon be the 10 tracks on "One Damn Thing to Redeem."

"I think we are all looking for that 'One Damn Thing' that makes it all make sense," Stein said. "Music did that for me."

"Whiskey Shivers" is possibly the defining song for the band. Combining all the elements that make up their sets — drinking, love and that long, winding road — "Whiskey Shivers" has even survived the tempo test.

At one point, the song was a frantic, fast-paced story of someone who needs to get their life in order. With a little bit of input from the band, the pace was taken down a few notches — without losing any of the quality of the original —

and has become more of a mosey through a hangover. Now, it's a staple of their performances with their most avid fans singing it back to them.

"We're constantly tinkering with the old songs," Stein said. "It seems like somebody has some great ideas for parts here and there that add subtle dynamics to the stuff. It's crazy to listen to some older practice demo recordings to hear how the songs have evolved."

## LIVE ON STAGE

One of the most striking things about Truckstop Coffee is that it's easy to see each member is having a blast on stage. Stein, James, Orow and drummer Venny Portalatin are having a great time, playing music they like and feeding off the energy of their growing audiences.

"More often than not, the audience becomes part of the show," James said. "It's great when people are coming to spend their evening with us, not watching us."

James, hailing from a musical family in Clarion, Pa., is becoming known around town not only for his strong vocals and talent on guitar but for his ability to fire up the crowd and bandmates with his energetic stage presence.

"We have a good energy on stage," Orow said, "and our musicianship with each other continues to grow every day. We also have a vast array of material, which allows us to fit nearly any bill."

"One Damn Thing to Redeem" will be available this month at Truckstop Coffee shows. Check out [www.truckstopcoffee.com](http://www.truckstopcoffee.com) or [www.myspace.com/truckstopcoffee](http://www.myspace.com/truckstopcoffee) for more details on where to find them.

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— Pete Stein