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Singing the praises of a troubadour

Alt-country singer Trent Summar and the New Row Mob roll into town Wednesday.

BY JILLIAN COHAN
The Wichita Eagle

Trent Summar wants to buy a beer for the writer who ranked him along with Alan Jackson, the Wreckers and George Strait as one of the best country artists of 2006.

That writer is Peter Cooper, of the (Nashville) Tennessean. In Music City, there's no one better than Cooper to sing your praises, Summar said, so it was an honor when his sophomore CD, "Horseshoes and Hand Grenades," made the Tennessean's list of the year's best country albums.

"It wasn't like we were 'the best of the rest.' We were right there on the front page," Summar said in a brief phone interview from Nashville, where he's gearing up for his winter tour.

The singer and his band, The New Row Mob, roll into Sam's Place Wednesday for a one-night engagement.

Cooper's isn't the only praise for Summar's new disc (it also hit No. 4 on Radio & Records' Americana chart), but it is some of the most effusive.

"Folks along Music Row keep rummaging through demo CDs hoping to find the kind of whiskey-soaked songs that fall naturally from Summar's pen," Cooper wrote. "... On this album, he's the embodiment of everything that all those chin-out, tough-guy country young-uns on CMT would try to become if they borrowed a clue from Hank Jr. or any of the other real dudes."

In fact, Summar's band is almost overstocked with real Nashville dudes. Electric guitarist Ken McMahan formerly played with the Dusters; acoustic guitarist Dan Baird hails from the Georgia Satellites; drummer Dave Kennedy is an alumnus of Walk the West.

And then there's Michael "Supe" Granda, a founding member of the Ozark Mountain Daredevils who earned songwriting credits on both of Summar's albums, plays bass and sings background vocals. Among the Granda-penned numbers is "Pink John Deere," a clever ditty that sings the praises of a farm-lovin' woman.

The CD is full of similarly witty odes to rural life, including "Hayride" and "Girl From Tennessee." Country fans may recognize a few other tracks, too. "She Knows What to Do (With a Saturday Night)" was remade by Billy Currington. "Guys Like Me" showed up on a Gary Allan disc. And "Love You" earned Jack Ingram a No. 1 hit on the Texas Music Chart in 2006.

That Summar's alt-country style is hitting home with the masses gives him hope, the singer said.

"I see the whole Red Dirt movement, if you want to call it that, as reaching out for something. I dislike commercial country as much as anyone who is into roots music. It's pop. It's watered-down."

There's nothing watered-down about Summar's performances, though. On Wednesday, Wichitans can expect firecracker energy to match his signature red pants.

"We're glad to be coming to town," he said, "and we want to thank people in advance for supporting live music. It's the last of the troubadour lifestyle."

Jillian Cohan grew up in a town where nearly everyone owned a John Deere, but she never saw a pink one. Reach her at 316-268-6524 or jcohan@wichitaeagle.com.

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