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Those who've witnessed the harrowing train wreck a Todd Snider concert can be will know that the longtime folkie and roots rocker has also been involved in a continuous wrestling match with personal demons, coming up on the losing end more than once. Fresh out of rehab (again) and returning with his sixth studio album, Snider shows on East Nashville Skyline that he is still one of the finest songwriters and best-kept secrets in the musical world.

Musically, there's nothing particularly new about the material on East Nashville Skyline, although there's enough variety in the old—'50s rockabilly, '60s-influenced topical and protest folk songs, '70s country rock—to make the listening experience worthwhile. But the real reason to care, as always, is Snider's quirky take on modern-day life. He may have cribbed his album title from The Voice of a Generation, but Snider has clearly developed his own voice, and it remains bitter, acerbic, pointed, poignant and devastatingly funny, often within the space of a single verse.

On the brilliant "The Ballad of the Kingsmen" Snider recalls the parental/establishment hysteria that surrounded the 1963 release of "Louie Louie" (occasioned, chiefly, because nobody could understand the lyrics), connecting the dots to similar contemporary backlashes against Marilyn Manson and Eminem. It's an epic tour-de-force that showcases both Snider's barbed political commentary and wicked sense of humor. On "Conservative Christian Right Wing Republican Straight White American Males" he marries a stoner cowboy anthem that would have fit seamlessly on a 1970 Country Joe and the Fish album to lyrics that skewer the pious moralism of the Bush administration, contrasting the current uptight moral climate with "tree huggin' gay weddin' pot smokin' porn watchin' lazy-ass hippies like me." They're big, outrageously provocative statements, to be sure, guaranteed to alienate as many people as they delight, but one suspects that Snider doesn't particularly care.

He doesn't venture far from the musical template he's followed for a decade now, but the quality of the songwriting makes all the difference. This is his best, sharpest batch of tunes since his 1994 debut Songs for the Daily Planet, and he places his own idiosyncratic, crotchety stamp on every track, whether he's doing his best John Prine gravel-voiced folkie impression ("Iron Mike's Main Man's Last Request" and "Age Like Wine") or piledriving through piano-driven roadhouse rave-ups like a young Jerry Lee Lewis ("Incarcerated" and "Nashville"). Killer stuff indeed. Just don't take it too literally. Todd, be well. Your country needs you.