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REVERB: PROFILE



PHOTO BY CLARE FELICE

BORN WITH AN AMERICAN HEART

AA Bondy ditches distortion in favor of quiet, character-driven folk

Thirty-seven-year-old Auguste Arthur Bondy relaxes at home, deep in the woods of Upstate New York, and recollects the four years between the disbanding of his Birmingham, Ala.-based caustic rock outfit, Verbena, and the release of his first solo offering, *American Hearts*. "I didn't keep writing. I was living in the woods, chopping wood, taking pictures of bears, doing country things," he says while presumably gazing out the window at his very own recording studio: a rickety old barn. "[The album] was the result of my very minimal engineering skills. It's almost like a field recording."

The two strategically placed microphones caught a month's worth of stripped-down acoustic folk with very little accompaniment, leaving Bondy's paper-thin yet expressive voice to carry the full impact of each song's message. No longer able to hide behind walls of distortion, songs such as the eerie "How Will You Meet Your End?" or the finger-picked plea "Black Rain, Black Rain" provide stark glimpses into the characters narrating each, culled from experiences gathered while growing up in the South. Born in Louisiana but spending a major portion of his teenage years in Birmingham, Bondy took in a wealth of well-written and vivid folk tales that helped inspire his songwriting. Themes of religion,

spirituality, war and death permeate the music, but he's quick to remind us that he is not a Bible-toting, born again Christian. "I couldn't get away from it there for awhile," he sighs, recalling press pieces past. "It's as if no one believes songs are written by a character anymore."

Since the 2007 release and 2008 re-release of his debut album, Bondy has been touring relentlessly, first with Fionn Regan, then with Bon Iver, making appearances at South by Southwest and even popping up on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. "Tours come in all shapes and sizes," muses Bondy. "It can be the lowest of low times, but if you're with good people, it can be fun." He also touts the benefits of ditching Verbena's big amps and trailer full of equipment in favor of his present low-key touring setup of acoustic guitar, harmonica and an occasional organ accompaniment by his wife, Clare. "It's far easier," he notes, and then adds matter-of-factly, "if you need to do a show [somewhere far], you just fly in for it."

—BOB NANNA

AA BONDY PLAYS ABBEY PUB (3420 W. GRACE, 773-478-4408) SEPT. 20