

REVIEWS

STEVE EARLE & THE DUKES (& DUCHESSES)***The Low Highway***

[New West]

Though not exactly a New Orleans record, Steve Earle's latest has a distinct Big Easy flavor. In part, that's because Earle wrote three of the songs for the HBO series *Treme*, on which he played a street musician. There's zydeco-style accordion on "That All You Got?", and jaunty bayou fiddle on "Love's Gonna Blow My Way," and the titular reference of "After Mardi Gras." Even some of the songs not specifically about New Orleans have a humid, river-town feel, as heard in the subtle, jazzy piano of "Pocket Full of Rain" and blustery swamp guitar of "Calico County." If it's not fully a New Orleans album, it's definitely a road album. On the folky acoustic title track, Earle's voice carries the dust of a thousand byways, while "Down the Road Part II" pairs punchy mandolin with the steady thump of an upright bass for a revved-up feel. The original "Down the Road" appeared on *Guitar Town*, Earle's 1986 solo debut, which gives a sense of how many miles the Texas troubadour has traveled. —Eric R. Danton

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