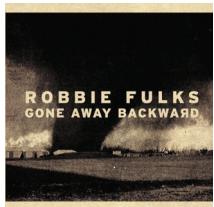


REVIEWS

ROBBIE FULKS

*Gone Away Backward*

[Bloodshot]

Smartass singer-songwriter Robbie Fulks has been a fixture in the alt-country scene for nearly two decades, penning clever and catchy songs about everything from patricide to Susanna Hoffs, lead singer of the Bangles. On *Gone Away Backward*, his first album since *Happy*, his 2011 tribute to Michael Jackson, Fulks trades twangy Telecaster and pedal steel for the acoustic sounds of folk and bluegrass. Backed by a stellar band that includes Mike Bub, Ron Spears, Jenny Scheinman and Robbie Gjersoe, this natural-born storyteller effortlessly depicts nuanced characters like the downwardly mobile protagonist of "I'll Trade You Money for Wine," and a failed singer who, after embracing Music City sheen in a bid for stardom, realizes "Sometimes the Grass Is Really Greener" and returns to his mountain roots. Fulks and his band show off their picking prowess on a pair of traditional instrumentals, and while *Gone Away Backward* is planted in the rich soil of acoustic roots music, Fulks tackles many modern issues. "Where I Fell," about the decline of small-town America, isn't the most uplifting song of the summer, but it's certainly the most captivating. —Juli Thanki

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