

Talk^{of}the South

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Show Time

With a well-deserved induction into the Grand Ole Opry and an eighth album out this summer, Old Crow Medicine Show has come a long way from busking on street corners

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**GRAND SALUTE**

Old Crow performs at its induction into the Grand Ole Opry, on September 17, 2013. Previous page: Ketch Secor (third from left) and his bandmates in Nashville.

LIKE MANY MUSICIANS, OLD CROW Medicine Show's Ketch Secor grew up dreaming of hearing his music on the radio. Steeped in the sounds of Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger but also acts like Nirvana and Public Enemy, Secor and his childhood friend and future bandmate Critter Fuqua began writing songs when they were twelve. After high school, they busked their way across the country, eventually settling in Boone, North Carolina, where, in the late nineties, they tried to scratch out a living playing on street corners.

Fast-forward fifteen years, and all that work on the dirty pavement turned into a spot in the Grand Ole Opry. It's a fitting recognition for a band that has worked outside the Nashville mainstream, playing the banjo and fiddle while the members of Mumford & Sons were still in private school. "Getting into the Opry was why we came to Nashville," says Secor, one of the band's two fiddle players and its lead songwriter. "We just wanted to get on the radio."

With their eighth effort, *Remedy*, the band might be readying for an even bigger

stage. While retaining the ragged charm of earlier albums, *Remedy* is Old Crow's slickest but most complete album yet. Songs like "8 Dogs 8 Banjos" and "Tennessee Bound" roar with the band's trademark fast and hard sound. "Doc's Day" is a tip of the cap to the late, legendary Doc Watson, who heard them during their street-corner days and invited the band to play at MerleFest, Watson's annual roots-music festival.

"Firewater" is the quintessential pass-the-likker-around-the-campfire sing-along, while the band's socially conscious streak shows up in the touching, vivid highlight "Dearly Departed Friend," written about the funeral of a friend who had served in the military. Over the past several years, Secor has written letters to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. "These are the guys that I went to school with," he says. "And they come to our shows and I want to know about their lives."

Remedy marks the return of Secor writing songs with Fuqua, who left the band in 2004 to enter rehab and then stayed out to attend college. The two generally write

songs by fueling up on coffee and just talking. "We talk about who was cute in sixth grade and which big-box store they're probably working at now," Secor says. "We just shuck and jive, but this time I think we poured a little more into it."

Another highlight of the album is "Sweet Amarillo," a song that began as a scrap of material penned by Secor's hero, Bob Dylan. The song was originally written for Dylan's 1973 album *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*; Dylan

sent it to Secor and Fuqua to finish up. They've never met or spoken with the mercurial icon, but Dylan sent notes back and forth, including a suggestion to play the fiddle, not the harmonica. "It was the coolest thing I ever got passed to me," Secor says. "What a rush."

It also marks the second time Secor finished up a Dylan song: The band's biggest hit to date, "Wagon Wheel," originated as Dylan's sketch "Rock Me Mama." The country star Darius Rucker had a number-one hit with his cover of the song, which has only added to the buzz around *Remedy*. Nevertheless, it's odd to think that a band with fifteen years and eight albums under its belt could be on the verge of a major breakthrough. Old Crow Medicine Show is already a huge concert draw, headlining shows and teaming up with their pals the Avett Brothers to play places like Boston's TD Garden. "How crazy is that?" Secor says of their arena Jumbotron moment. "We slipped through a crack in the door fifteen years ago. And now things are looking a little different." 🎸