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## Feeling alive

### Gourds soundtrack captures blue-collar appeal

by Erika Fredrickson

There's a great live version of "Goodnight Irene" by Levon Helm & the RCO All-Stars where they play to a murmuring New Year's Eve crowd in New York City, 1977. The recording is sharp and the audience's exhilaration palpable. It feels like everybody's happy and in love and maybe drunk and probably a little delirious. This is exactly the kind of spirit and depth that makes the live songs on The Gourds' *All the Labor* so magnetic. As the Austin, Texas, band kicks out Southern alt-folk and rock tunes, unbridled whoops and whistles from fans fill the lulls, sparse though they are. You feel like you're there. And, actually, you might have been. The official soundtrack to Missoula filmmaker Doug Hawes-Davis' rockumentary about The Gourds includes three live songs from 2011 and 2012 shows at the Wilma Theatre.

The feature documentary, also called *All the Labor*, came out last March and follows the quirky yet down-to-earth band through live shows and interviews. It tells a story about a group that is distinct and genre-defying. They're not a jam band, but they do jam. They're often goofy but also weirdly profound. They're a cult band that has created a relationship with Missoula ever since they first played here in 1998.

The newly released soundtrack isn't just for the fans, though. I think it's a pretty good introduction to The Gourds, and it stands on its own. Hawes-Davis produced the album. Brendan Canty, jack-of-all-trades and former Fugazi drummer, engineered it. With the exception of "Gangsta Lean" and "Pint Tar Ramparts/Stadium Blitzzer," which came from archive material, the songs were recorded for the film during rehearsals and shows spanning Oregon, Montana, Texas and California.

I am not a Gourd-head, but I am a sucker for vivid lyrics, even silly ones, and The Gourds have that in spades (i.e. "Chicken sneezed eatin' my cracklins.") Any album from the band will showcase that fact. But this soundtrack does something more. It allows you to experience how damn hard the band works on stage. You can just tell they don't do it for anything else but sincere love of playing music to an audience that loves them right back. And I think that's rarer than we all might think.