

Elmore

SAVING AMERICAN MUSIC

ON THE RECORD

THE NIGHTOWLS

Good As Gold (SELF-RELEASED)



A band of nine has to play out a lot to make the hard work worthwhile.

Two years ago, the Nightowls started playing covers of Al Green and Stevie Wonder tunes in the bars of Austin, Texas. Their own tunes gradually won fans at Stubb's BBQ and One-2-One Bar. This debut album offers nine original tunes steeped in classic R&B and Motown sounds.

Frontman Ryan Harkrider acts as the songwriter for this ensemble that includes horns, sax, two female backup singers, drums, bass, keys and guitar. Harkrider's flexible tenor has a pleasant edge and bright, high overtones. Inspired by smooth Detroit stylishness, this tasty southern soul is soft-edged, more discreet than one would expect. In the studio, everyone played and sang live; the best takes were mixed on an analog console directly to two-track tape, capturing the live energy, skill and vitality. The Nightowls may sound a touch too polite, but they will hit their stride before long. Austin, keep an eye on the Nightowls.

Recommended downloads include the danceable "I Don't Mess With That," with its James Brown influence, and "I'm Sorry Baby," a slow 6/8 number recalling the intimacy of Smokey Robinson's ballads.

ANNIE DINERMAN