

## Cross Canadian Ragweed

By the time his old friend, singer-songwriter Radney Foster, got around to telling Tim DuBois about Cross Canadian Ragweed, DuBois had heard it all before. At least three other times in the previous two weeks, to be exact.

“It was just one of those weird things,” laughs DuBois. “In a really short time, their name kept popping up. It started with one of Pat Green’s managers. He said, ‘You’ve got to see this band.’ A few days later, I was asking Bill Minick, the owner of Billy Bob’s Texas in Ft. Worth, ‘What’s hot?’ because he’s really got his finger on the pulse there in Texas and he said, ‘Cross Canadian Ragweed.’ A week later, Joe Avezzano (special teams coach for the Dallas Cowboys), who’s an old friend, was visiting Nashville and he stopped by the office and said, ‘My kid dragged me out to see a band the other night that was really cool...’ (And then Radney Foster!) I just felt like God was tapping me on the shoulder, saying ‘pay attention!’”

Of course, Cross Canadian Ragweed had no shortage of suitors when Universal South came calling. Both DuBois and his business partner, Tony Brown (whose shortlist of signings includes maverick Texas icons Steve Earle and Joe Ely) knew Ragweed was hot property. (After eight years together, the rag-tag quartet of childhood friends had expanded beyond its Stillwater, OK roots to the forefront of the “Texas music revolution,” a grassroots Americana phenomenon that has seen more than one proud independent artist routinely draw crowds in the thousands and amass CD sales many major label acts only dream of.) After releasing four albums on their own Underground Sound label, the band felt ready to take their music

nationwide and began putting out feelers for interested parties. With their newly recorded fifth (and best) album to date as bait, the majors quickly began circling their wagons.

Cody Canada, frontman and lead guitarist of Cross Canadian Ragweed, remembers the exact moment when Tony Brown won him over. Several weeks after the band met DuBois at their North Carolina show (and later met the rest of the Universal South staff at their offices in Nashville), Brown invited Canada, drummer Randy Ragsdale, rhythm guitarist Grady Cross and bassist Jeremy Plato out to his place. “We just hung out for an afternoon and played acoustic,” recalls Canada. “And Tony clinched his fist, stuck it up in the air and said, ‘We want you guys to be our lead horse.’ That’s the thing that got me.” When DuBois further impressed upon the group his belief in Canada’s songwriting, it was a done deal.

“They said, ‘When we come in, we don’t want to change one thing about you,’” Canada continues, “which tickled the shit out of us, because that’s what we wanted. We told them, ‘That’s good, because we’re not going to change anything.’”

And sure enough, **CROSS CANADIAN RAGWEED**, their major label debut, was the exact same album they wrapped up before even signing their deal. Untouched by any hands other than those of the band and their long-time producer, Mike McClure (from fellow Stillwater outfit The Great Divide); unspoiled, uncut, unadulterated Ragweed, the exact same wicked strain for far too long only available in the most rocking honky-tonks, rowdiest roadhouses and sold-out festivals across the

Red Dirt and Lone Star States and many others along the Southern border of the US. Yes, this was the same CCR that so impressed the Nashville crowd at this summer's Waylon Jennings memorial that Rodney Crowell cornered Canada backstage to tell him their version of "Only Daddy That'll Walk the Line" moved him the same way the original did when he was 25 years old and working in a Houston oilfield.

"We're a little more rock 'n' roll than other people (from the Oklahoma/Texas scene) and that's not a bad thing," laughs Canada, whose Southern-fried lead guitar licks betray his love of heroes like Stevie Ray Vaughan, Pete Anderson (of Dwight Yoakam fame) and Eddie Van Halen – not to mention the fact that he's been playing since he was eight years old."

"Cody's such a good lead player, I don't have a problem playing rhythm," says Grady Cross. "Man, he feels it. He doesn't just sit up there – he's all over the stage, just killing it. He'll take his guitar and slide it across the rail on the front row. And when it's all four of us out there on stage, sometimes it doesn't even feel like the crowd's there because we're all so focused on each other—what the next person's going to do."

No surprise really, given that these guys have known each other pretty much since kindergarten. "We've been friends since we were kids and that's the one thing that keeps us going I think," says Canada. "That's the soul of this band – the friendship between us."

These friendships were born in the band's hometown of Yukon – a blue-collar burg they couldn't escape from fast enough. By the time the guys were all just out of high school (except for Ragsdale, the youngest), they

started jamming at a party and Cross Canadian Ragweed was born. Yukon as a rule wasn't a very musician friendly town, but they had one notable local squarely in their corner: Ragsdale's father Johnny (now deceased).

"My dad was a guitar player – he played with Bob Wills, and a little bit with Reba McEntire when she was first starting out," says Ragsdale. "He really didn't want me to be a drummer but I insisted – I found a set of drums in a neighbor's trash one day and hauled them into the cellar. He kind of figured out after about a year that I was serious and finally got me a new drum set. When he met Cody, he realized his talent and how seriously we wanted to take music, and he really pushed us. He completely drove us up the wall but later down the road we realized he did it for a good reason."

Once the band got its chops, they moved to the all-together more musician friendly town of Stillwater, where acts like McClure's Great Divide and singer-songwriter Jimmy LaFave had established enough of a local scene to earn Stillwater the nickname "North Austin" (or, depending on your perspective, "West Nashville"). Inspired by McClure's self-penned Great Divide songs (and more than a little by early Steve Earle), the band quickly grew out of its Merle Haggard and classic rock covers and began focusing on Canada's uncommonly honest and straight-forward originals. A potent foursome of albums – 1998's **CARNEY**, 1999's **LIVE AT THE WORMY DOG**, 2001's **HIGHWAY 377** and 2002's **LIVE AT BILLY BOB'S TEXAS**, collectively selling over 70,000 copies to date – coupled with an average of 200 gigs a year cinched the band's place at the top of the Texas/Oklahoma music totem pole.

**For more information please contact Universal South at 615.259.5300**

