Written by Jeff Ignatius
Thursday, 31 January 2013 05:53

The Web-site bio of Dan Hubbard & the Humadors says the band builds its music on “the classic sounds of Tom Petty, Van Morrison, Neil Young, and Jackson Browne.” That’s a pretty common set of influences, and one that has produced plenty of earnest but dull music in the hands of less-skilled singers/songwriters.

But with Hubbard and his band – playing their first headlining gig in the Quad Cities on February 8 at Rozz-Tox – those forebears mostly hint at an unpretentious, straightforward, gimmick-free, and song-based style. And when the hooks are plentiful and the arrangements are thoughtful and performed with vigor – as they usually are – the guys pull it off.

The first song on 2011’s *The Love Show* is a warm slice of lovelorn Americana, a bit on the generic side but sterling in its singing and performance – with an understated but catchy guitar lead, a chugging rhythm section, and harmonica accents. “You’re all I have to lose,” Hubbard sings without emphasizing the desperation of the lyric, thus giving it an odd dimension of confidence.

Vocally, Hubbard’s sturdy if not particularly distinctive voice can recall Chris Isaak’s, and other times it has its own convincing character, particularly when he employs a slight, unshowy vibrato. The album is a mix of ballads and upbeat rockers, and the slower songs sometimes suffer from a heartfelt vagueness in the lyrics. But even those lesser tracks have plenty of bright spots in the details, such as the casually deft guitar solo of “Darkness on the Loose” – loaded with more emotional depth than the words – and the opening verse of “This Is Your Life,” an absurdist counterpoint to the standard-issue piano lead: “Woke up this morning on the wrong side of the bed / My fever on my pillow / My socks were on my head.”

Based in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, Hubbard has released six albums since 2003, and music has been his full-time job since his graduation from Illinois State University in 2007. “It’s kind of a deal I made with my parents,” Hubbard said in a phone interview January 25, “that I would get a degree and get a backup plan before I moved forward with my music career.” When I asked what the backup plan is, he laughed and said, “There isn’t one.”

Hubbard said he’s finishing a solo record for fall release, and while he and the band have done some touring outside of the Midwest, for now they’re focusing on markets within a three-hour drive of their home base. “When we’re doing everything ourselves, it’s kind of unrealistic to build in those markets across the country, because it’s just hard to get back to [them] on a consistent basis,” he said.

One of those target markets is the Quad Cities. While Hubbard and his band have in the past had shorter support gigs in the area – at the Redstone Room and the 2011 River Roots Live festival – the Rozz-Tox show, both because of the set length and the intimacy of the venue, will give audiences a different side of the band.

The concert will likely be skewed in favor of quieter songs, and “in a more personal setting like that, I like to talk about the songs, talk about where they came from, kind of connect with the audience in that way,” Hubbard said.

But don’t expect him to reveal secrets of songwriting, which he said remain a bit mysterious to even him. That’s “one of the reasons I feel I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing,” he said, “because I’ve found something I can’t explain. It’s just there.”

Dan Hubbard & the Humadors will perform on Friday, February 8, at Rozz-Tox (2108 Third Avenue, Rock Island; RozzTox.com). The show starts at 9 p.m. and also features Mo Carter of Busted Chandeliers. Admission is $5.

For more information on Dan Hubbard & the Humadors, visit DanHubbard.net .