

PINMONKEY

BIG SHINY CARS

Pinmonkey has proven to be many things. They proved themselves to be tenacious self-starters when they planted themselves squarely on the music scene with their first, independently-released CD. "We didn't really intend to record an album," says frontman Michael Reynolds. "We just started putting our music down on tape just to see how it came off." The result was *SPEAK NO EVIL*, a notable first endeavor which featured tracks penned by Gillian Welch, the Carter Family, and Joy Lynn White, as well as a bevy of originals by Reynolds. Bassist Michael Jeffers says, "When we saw the reaction we were getting from the recording we knew we had something...and we couldn't let that opportunity slip through our hands." And they didn't.

The momentum behind that first album propelled Pinmonkey directly to their second, self-titled CD (and a major label contract with BNA) which proved to be one of the most critically-acclaimed country albums of 2002. With its feel-good blend of bluegrass, California rock and down-to-earth country, it established the band as the very definition of American-born music. The album spawned the hit *Barbed Wire & Roses*, which hit the airwaves and climbed the *Billboard*, *R&R*, *Americana*, and *Texas Music* Charts at a whirlwind pace, as well as reaping time on *CMT* and *GAC* with the video. "It was all pretty heady stuff," says Reynolds. "And it all happened so fast. Not every day was paradise, but we were making good music and we were staying true to who we were....It was a good place to be."

The next few years saw the band torpedoing through an exhausting tour schedule which took them on the road with a virtual who's-who of country music, from Alan Jackson and Brad Paisley, to Willie Nelson and Lee Ann Womack. Proving their unstoppable work-horse ethic, they quickly earned the respect of music industry elite as well as an ever-growing population of hard core fans ("Pinmonkey Junkies" — a moniker coined for them by Country Music historian and journalist Robert Oermann). A nod from the Academy of Country Music followed with a nomination for Best New Group in 2003.

With their new album *BIG SHINY CARS*, Pinmonkey proves itself yet again...this time as survivors. "A band is probably the hardest thing to hold together," says Reynolds, "Differing personalities and personal agendas, unfortunately, sometimes get in the way of the music." After their label pulled the plug (right in the middle of recording their next album), two of their members left the band for greener pastures. Staggering from such blows, many bands would have been waylaid and well on the road to obscurity. But Pinmonkey's latest release, *BIG SHINY CARS*, shows that this band will not be so easily undone. "You can let things like this be water on the fire or you can let it be gasoline," says drummer Mike Crouch. "We determined that it would be gasoline!" So together Reynolds, Jeffers, and Crouch set about getting the band back on track. They started by enlisting veteran guitar player Mike McAdam (an original Duke for Steve Earle) to help them round out their sound. Jeffers states, "McAdam brings such a natural energy to the table that it stepped the whole thing up a notch for all of us. He's an incredibly talented musician."

Their next step was to find a new label for *BIG SHINY CARS*, which turned out to be the hardest part of the process. Not geared toward the Music Row mindset, Reynolds calls *BIG SHINY CARS* a "reactionary record." "We had felt hemmed in for so long and had lost sight of why we were doing music in the first place. We went into the studio and started recording songs we loved...making music the way it ought to be made!" And it resounds in every note of this CD. From the self-evident *That Train Don't Run* written by Nashville venerables Matraca Berg and Gary Nicholson, to the country rock hammer of *Down* penned by none other than Dolly Parton, (a song that could easily be a testament to the troubles Pinmonkey has weathered the last year), to the rollicking gospel-infused redemption of the original *Can't Have A Hand On Me*, this album embodies a wide range of Pinmonkey's well-loved musical influences. This is something that has defined their style from the very beginning. "We all bring a lot to the table," says Jeffers, "and we let it all creep into the music. That's what makes this music ours. There is no pretense here. This is who we really are."

Another defining element of Pinmonkey's music has always been the selection of songs with strong lyrical content; songs that are not just stories told, but stories captured and relived, moment by moment. *BIG SHINY CARS* bears this out with the title track — the heart rending witness of a man who lays open his soul, comes clean about his demons, and recounts a few threadbare moments of his life with a tenderness and hope that dangles on the line between naïve and unshakably certain. *Someday we'll be able to get a good table/ and ride around town in them big shiny cars* "It's just an incredibly soulful song," says Jeffers of the song written by Davis Raines, a friend and undeniably one of Nashville's undiscovered jewels. Reynolds adds, "This song became the crux of the whole project. It set up the emotional thru-line for the album — 'Hope in the face of all adversity' — something we could definitely relate to. I think that's why I like this album so much. There's more true passion in *BIG SHINY CARS* than any album we've ever done."

When Back Porch Records first heard *BIG SHINY CARS*, they immediately made an offer and Pinmonkey responded without much hesitation. Reynolds states, "It's just one of those things. You feel it in your gut and you know it's right. And I don't think we could have asked for a better place to land. Everyone at Back Porch has a great passion for music, but they are outside the Nashville box, so we get a lot more artistic freedom to let our music develop the way it should."

With a new CD, a new label on board, and the tour book quickly filling up, the boys in Pinmonkey know that they are on their way back to a better road. "It's been rough," Reynolds says. "I won't kid you. This last year has been a tough one. There was a lot of hurt and disappointment but everything happens for a reason. Maybe it's not the reason we'd like, but it's always for the right reason. We toughed out the hard times and we're in a great place now with our career, with our music, with our lives." And it's that kind of indomitable, never-say-die spirit that drives Pinmonkey, "If you do what you truly love, there's nothing that can really keep you down," Jeffers sums up., "And as long as we keep the music first, we'll always find a way to make it."



www.backporchrecords.com

4650 N Port Washington Rd. Milwaukee Wi 53212 414-961-8350