

CD REVIEW

Alternate Routes' Best Yet

With 'Lively,' Bridgeport Band Attains Distinctive New Level

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It's been a busy 18 months for the Alternate Routes. Let's recap. The Bridgeport group spent time touring behind its 2009 release, "The Sucker's Dream." Bassist Chip Johnson left the band. The rootsy rock band left its label, Vanguard, returning to independent status just in time to self-release "Lately."

It's the Alternate Routes' third and very much best album, the one that previous efforts hinted at and never quite achieved. Recorded in Nashville with producer Teddy Morgan, "Lately" strips away the high-gloss sheen of "A Sucker's Dream" on a set of songs that are warm, engaging and charmingly rough around the edges.

The band sounds energized and often exhilarated, letting singer Tim Warren's voice ring over layers of brawny guitars piled atop sturdy rhythms. Warren's vocal melody floats over a wash of snarling guitar licks from Eric Donnelly and Mike Sembos on "Rocking Chair," and the singer injects a note of impassioned urgency into "Kiss Me," backed by a stuttering guitar riff, fiery lead lines and the buoyant slap of Mike Stavitz's busy drum part.

"Lately" is a great sounding record, which is, well, great. Even better than good sound,



though, are good songs, and these tunes are. Warren digs deeper than ever before in his lyrics, and wouldn't you know it, he turns up a winsome sincerity. It takes the shape of moony yearning on the wistful, soaring love song "Carry Me Home" and a heart-weary sigh on "Shame," steel guitar glimmering as the singer wonders about a dissipating love. There's even a playful, flirty swagger mixed with a measure of self-reflection on "Stay," a song that perfectly captures the feeling of early infatuation, when the end of the evening always seems to come too soon.

It would be convenient to say that "Lately" also feels like it ends too soon. Actually, at slightly less than an hour, the album lasts just long enough to demonstrate how successfully the Alternate Routes have developed from another roots-rock band into one with a sound of its own.

ERIC DONNELLY, left, and Tim Warren help Alternate Routes' album "Lively" live up to its title, and then some.

TRISH BADGER

