

Matt Armor Still Rocks

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THE ROOT OF THINGS: Former lead singer of Blazing Hayley, Matt Armor has gone solo, and his flowing tones bring back pure country sounds without any of what he calls “the big truck-driving country” tonalities.

Longtime Santa Barbara Musician Goes Solo

The four o'clock sun shone golden in the sky, warming the streets to a serene temperature and casting a glowing hue on Tuesday's bustling State Street farmers' market. Around the corner, the colors of Matt Armor's tattoos seemed to pop off his skin with exceptional brightness as he swiftly moved, cell phone pressed to ear, out the open door of the Press Room, a small pub off Ortega. The former lead singer of the successful psychobilly band Blazing Haley caught my attention, waved me over, and gave a slightly bashful smile indicating the importance of the phone call.

A moment later, Armor rushed back into the pub with wide blue eyes that matched his baseball cap and a grin on his face: “Hey, man, nice to meet you. Can I buy you a beer?” he said as he personally introduced me to the bartender. Armor is just that kind of guy; he seemed to know almost everyone that strolled through the Press Room, and like a true Santa Barbara local, he gave each friend an honest and humble salutation.

Recently, Armor has gone solo in his musical career. He and his band put out a self-titled 12-song album, and he plans to release a mini-LP by this October. Armor's watery and flowing tones bring his audience back to the pure unadulterated lyrics and songwriting style of country and rockabilly without any of what he calls “the big truck-driving country” tonalities. “I like certain [genres of] country, and somebody wasn't hitting where I wanted to hit,” Armor elaborated. “I like the old rootsy stuff; I like Americana and country swing, that old '40s and '50s stuff. I love that stuff. I touched on those styles, and the other stuff is just the sweet, flowing moody stuff.”

Songs such as “Sing Out Loud,” “Don't Change,” and “Shut Down” feature those moody tones that Armor referenced. And his warm voice sets a foundation for the mellow vibes of the Hawaiian lap-steel guitar and the percussive groove

of the upright bass guitar, creating listenable and soulful music. “I wanted to write an honest record,” Armor said. “It took me a couple years, and there was just a lot going on at the time: It’s about relationships, my dog passed away, alcohol and drug use, not heavy, but you know.”

Armor chuckled and leaned back in his chair to take a breath. “You know, it’s all in there. ‘Red Cloud’ is more of an environmental song about planet Earth and all the living creatures. I’m a surfer, and I love the ocean, so I wrote ‘Sacred Ground,’ which is about how I think we need to respect the history of the land more; that one is just a general statement.”

Armor’s band consists of Barney Tower on lead guitar, Jeff Reffredo on upright bass, and Steve Hoke on drums. All area musicians, they are absolutely top-notch, and their styles and skill have been honed by years of hustling in the Santa Barbara music scene. Armor’s music invites a lot of swing dancing, a perfect complement to a moonlit spring night on the town.

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Matt Armor and his band will be playing a free show with the Golden Impalas Sunday, May 24, 4-8 p.m., at Seven Bar (224 Helena Ave.). For information, see www.sevensb.com.

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