

Cameron McGill takes the solo road home

One listen to singer-songwriter Cameron McGill's amazing solo debut, "Stories of The Knife and The Back" (Post-Important Records), and it is immediately evident he could contend for the title of "the singer-songwriters' singer-songwriter."

The only problem is the thought makes the Champaign native cringe.

"To be honest, it made me kind of nauseous to think about it," the former front man for the Chicago rock trio the Morris Minors says of his decision to perform and record under his own name. "I guess since I haven't really been able to put together a consistent group of musicians to go out and play with, it makes the most sense."

"And besides, when you play under your own name, it makes it kind of hard to walk away if things aren't going so well," he adds with a laugh. "It is kind of hard to quit yourself."

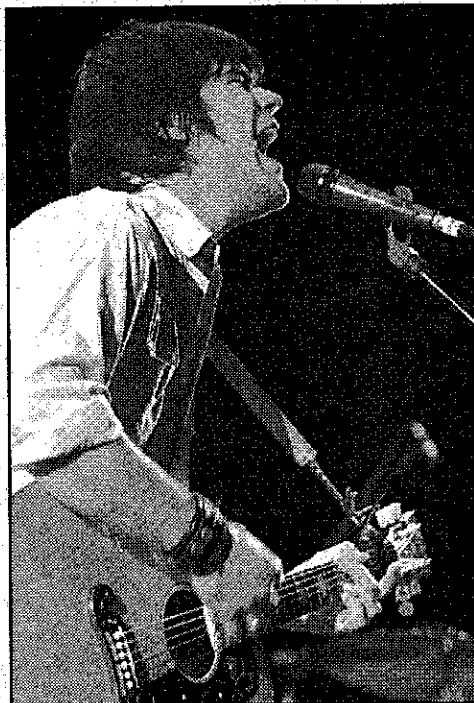
McGill performs solo at 10 p.m. Dec. 19 at Mike 'N' Molly's, 105 N. Market St., downtown Champaign.

"Stories ..." is definitely a collection of songs befitting the title. Having seen McGill spin his passionate tales with only six steel strings and his worn-yet-warm voice, I assure you he has the goods to be mentioned in the same breath as Jeff Tweedy (Wilco), Thom Yorke (Radiohead), Mark Eitzel (American Music Club), Jason Falkner (Jellyfish), Jeff Buckley or Ryan Adams (Whiskeytown).

The disc's lead track, "Long Way Back to California," opens with simple acoustic and pedal steel guitar and McGill's voice. However, by the first chorus the song swells with electric guitars, keyboards, strings, percussion and a chorus of harmony vocals. "What The Hell (I Love This Girl Danielle)" dances somewhere between "California"-era American Music Club and the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper" without ever sounding bombastic or overblown.

The trend continues throughout the record, yet each song sounds as enticing — if not more so — as the previous one. "No Sometimes" showcases the 26-year-old's incredible vocal range. Highlights include the poppy-Beatle-esque "The Summer Dress Step," the driving, uptempo rocker "The Ballad of George Dobbins," the piano ballad "Coal Miner's Son" and the quiet lullaby "Overboard." Yet McGill's material and delivery are so strong throughout, it seems unfair to even single out any songs.

McGill employs the "throw in the



Champaign native Cameron McGill returns for a solo performance at 10 p.m. Dec. 19 at Mike 'N' Molly's in downtown Champaign.

kitchen sink"-style of recording, yet manages to deftly allow the songs' poetic lyrics and melodies to remain a strength.

"I've always liked the distinct charac-

teristic about bands like Wilco and Radiohead in that you can put Jeff Tweedy or Thom Yorke into a room alone with a piano or guitar and they could play every song by their band alone and they would still sound great," McGill says. Although the disc is technically a self-produced and self-released project, McGill employed the talents and equipment of friend Brian McDonald and Chicago's RaxTrax Studios owner, Rick Barnes.

"I basically recorded some demos with Brian in his apartment and I wound up getting a spec deal with the studio to record the record," McGill says. "It took awhile to do the whole thing because we had to record around the time when the studio was booked, but it was worth it."

McGill also, in what seems to be his typical "cart-before-the-horse" style of doing things, despite remaining unsigned, is being managed by the immensely powerful Jeff McClusky and Associates, a promotion, publicity and consulting firm.

"Yeah, they've been really helpful so far, even though I don't really know what we're doing," McGill says of the firm which has had a hand in launching and/or supporting the careers of such acts as Jewel, Avril Lavigne, the Goo Goo Dolls, the Rolling Stones, Kenny G and Moby, to name but a few.

"Right now," he adds, "I'm trying to look at distributors and focusing on getting out and playing as much as possible."

On the web: www.cameronmcgill.com/ ■



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