



STARLINE RHYTHM BOYS, *HONKY TONK LIVIN'* (Tin Town Records, CD) — The Starline Rhythm Boys are a Vermont treasure. Crackling out of the speakers like a lost AM broadcast from the heartland, the trio provides a beating country heart for Yankee territory. The music comes at you with passion and warm bourbon breath, like a white-knuckled freight driver on an all-night stretch to see his baby. The Boys can even make some smoky Burlington bar feel like — for a couple of joyriding hours — the front seat of a '53 Caddy in, say, Galveston, with the radio on real loud.

Honky Tonk Livin', Starline's second release, finds the band all fueled up and blasting through 19 tear-jerking and/or shot-pounding songs of loss and redemption. Recorded live at Track Farm Studio in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, the album features vocalist/rhythm guitarist Danny Coane, lead guitarist/vocalist Al Lemery and slap-bass wizard Billy Bratcher, all in top form. Recorded by rockabilly legend Sean Mencher, the album also features cameos by a variety of country cuzzins. Kevin Maul adds pedal steel guitar, Frank Orsini plays fiddle and mandolin, Chuck Setzer hammers the piano keys, Jimmy McGirr plays trumpet, and Mark Cousins adds some sharp

snare work to the disc's tunes. The primary songwriter, Bratcher wrote 13 of *Honky Tonk Livin's* tracks, each one catchy and solid enough to stand with the genre's greatest hits.

Honky Tonk Livin' starts off with the revved-up cheatin' tale "Masquerade For Heartbreak," and Lemery's twanging Telecaster spits out a curling lick. A lonesome fiddle moans through the lazy-gaited title track, as Coane sings a sermon of salvation. "Give Me a Double" is a rockabilly rave that rides high on Coane and Lemery's flawless harmonies. "Big Al" himself brings a strong vocal punch to the teary-eyed ballad, "She Don't Live Hear No More." After only four tracks, it's easy to feel like you've been boozed up, broken down, have glimpsed redemption and fallen yet again.

Honky Tonk Livin' keeps this cycle of tears, alcohol and adultery flowing through the remainder of the record. Not only are there no weak spots, each song is an instant classic. The Starline Rhythm Boys have created a disc of country perfection that reveals itself in layers of passion and pain, as if it were a conduit for all the lovin', fightin', drinkin' and heartache the title implies.

The only downside to the disc is its inability to showcase the

unforgettable experience of the band on stage. Fortunately, that problem is remedied with two local release-party blowouts, this Saturday, May 25, at Red Square in Burlington — with special guests — and Saturday, June 1, at the Capitol Plaza Ballroom in Montpelier.

— Ethan Covey