

MUSIC

Can These Artists Get Some Love?

Meet four Black acts making music (country! old-time!) outside the box **BY BRETT JOHNSON**



Darius Rucker

DARIUS RUCKER

After Rucker fronted Hootie & the Blowfish, one of the biggest bands of the 1990's, he wanted to pay homage to Al Green. But when his R&B neosoul CD tanked, Rucker

turned to country music. (His new album, *Charleston, SC 1966*, is out now.) Rucker says he's realistic about his largely White fan base. "Once an African-American kid told me, 'Man, I love country music. I came out of the closet when I heard your record,'" Rucker recalls. "I laughed. If I'm doing that for three kids, that's cool."

CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS

Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons and Justin Robinson have been continuing the African-American old-time string band tradition since 2005. On the trio's latest album, *Genuine Negro Jig*, they play everything from banjo and fiddle to kazoo and bones to get a richly layered vintage sound. But Giddens admits it's been a challenge attracting Black folks to their shows. "But once they're there, they enjoy it," she says. Flemons adds that banjo music has its roots in Africa, so we can feel a kinship to the music.



Carolina Chocolate Drops



"I'm demonstrating skill, refinement, elegance and technique." —ERIC LEWIS

ERIC LEWIS

If there ever was an occasion to describe piano playing as bombastic, a performance by Eric Lewis (stage name ELEW) would certainly fit the bill. He pounds the keys (and sometimes even the strings inside the instrument) in a ferocious, high-octane style to reinterpret a range of indie- and arena-rock anthems. "When I come off the stage, I can tell the Black people didn't necessarily enjoy the music as much as they do some other kind of music," he admits. "But they enjoy that I am demonstrating something that they can be proud of."

STEW

Stew of Stew and The Negro Problem masterminded the Tony Award-winning Broadway rock musical theater piece *Passing Strange*. On October 20 he and his composer/partner,

Heidi Rodewald, premiere *Brooklyn Omnibus*, a full-on rock 'n' roll experience, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. But Stew says the key to having a bigger Black following has nothing to do with the kind of music anybody's playing. "Black people have just as much of an eclectic taste as White people," he explains. "What you don't have is the same eclectic scope of music being marketed to Blacks that is marketed to Whites."



Stew

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: ALESSANDRO ALBERTI; LUCAS JACKSON/CORBIS; SCOTT LEGACY/RETNA LTD (3); JIM WRIGHT