

August 25th, 2005
The Thieves

Steal of the night

Dylan Young

The Thieves get almost took

I kind of hated *Almost Famous*. Everyone else seemed to think that Cameron Crowe's Pollyanna rock fable was the bomb, you know, just a nice little slice of pop arcana. But I couldn't look past how pleasant he'd made it all seem, how aw-shucks glorious the road life was portrayed. It conflicted with almost everything I'd known or been privy to, Crowe's happy-go-lucky rockers standing in stark contrast to the windshield-weary, frequently bored, oft-disappointed, terminally jaded souls of my world.

Yeah, sure, it was just a film and Crowe was mythologizing an era, not documenting it. It still got right up my nose.

But talking to Hal Stokes, guitarist of the Oxford-bred Cali-based Thieves, I'm starting to feel some of the balmy sunny side of rock that Crowe was getting at. Stokes's band, started with his brother Sam on bass and drummer Jamie Dawson, is a self-described "hard and fast," "through and through" rock band, "plain and simple."

It's a fair assessment. The Thieves have a ballsy straight-ahead sound, unadorned by the conventions of stylistic trend or strategic quirkiness. It is, as they say, classic rock. For a Brit, Stokes is about as good ol' boy about the music as it gets. And he seems pretty nonchalant about the whole dizzying business of it.

When asked why the group moved from Oxford (home of Radiohead and Supergrass) to the mellow climes of La-La Land, Stokes lays it on the line.

"Well, I don't know if you've ever been to England... but it rains all the time," he says.

"Actually, it wasn't just the sun. England is very fickle and trend driven. And if you don't fit into the labels' particular sense of what's popular at that time, it's very hard to get a deal."

"So, even though we were selling out shows, no one was interested," he continues. "Lenny Kravitz's manager saw us play and encouraged us to move over here to work with him. So that's what we did. Ironically, just after we left, the whole hard-rock thing became very trendy in England again."

The Thieves didn't let it get them down, though. They ground out an EP and hit the American interstates. The rest is pure Cameron Crowe.

Now on their third North American tour and with a brand new album to hawk, the band still seem to find the kind, wide-eyed appreciation for the road that Crowe's fictional Stillwater had. If there were any doubt, the album title, *Tales From the White Line*, would put it to rest. And Stokes has even more to tell.

"We were in Boise, Idaho, and we went to this party with these girls we met at the club," he begins. "They insisted we come back with them and we did. One of the girls had just had one of her molar teeth out. She had these very strong painkillers. And I had a broken leg at the time so I could kind of sympathize. I had a bunch of pain killers back in the RV."

Around 5 o'clock the band realized that nothing much was going to happen at the party, so they left. Stokes doesn't know what happened after that, but a few hours later the girls were thumping on the door of their RV, accusing them of having stolen their painkillers.

"It was really odd," Stokes says. "I had a whole bag full of painkillers of my own and these girls were calling the police for stealing theirs. When the police got there they seemed pretty sympathetic - right up until they asked what our band was called."

He laughs.

Well, it's not quite an Elton John sing-a-long but it's getting there.

The Thieves

At Le Swimming, Aug. 29 at 9 p.m.



The Thieves tell tales from the white line (and not that white line)

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