

PETER COOPER "Mission Door" Red Beet Records

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PETER COOPER HAS a voice that makes me think of furniture in a roadside motel: a little worn, nothing fancy, but sturdy enough to get the job done. The job in question is delivering moody songs with evocative lyrics.

Standouts include "Boy Genius," which has one character looking in the mirror and musing, "The genius thing is somewhat in question/And now I'm not looking like a boy at all." Another is inspired by the former head of [FEMA](#): "Michael knew he could jive his way through/If the Good Lord was willing and the creeks didn't rise." Each verse's story leads into the chorus "Oh Lord, don't let 'em find me/Oh Lord, don't let 'em find me out." Another gem is "All the Way to Heaven," a tune about the late, great Charlie Rich playing at the Continental Ballroom when a man is shot by the bartender. Jen Gunderman's piano and Cooper's easy delivery transport you there and convince you that "on a night like that you make it all the way to heaven/Pearly gates open when the doorbell rings/Just like that, all can be forgiven."

Other tracks worth a special note are "715 for [Hank Aaron](#)," "Take Care" about Townes Van Zandt and "Sheboygan," one of the few songs around that addresses predestination and getting drunk.

-- Curt Fields

Appearing with Nanci Griffith Monday through Wednesday at the Birchmere (703-549-7500, <http://www.birchmere.com>). Show starts at 7:30.