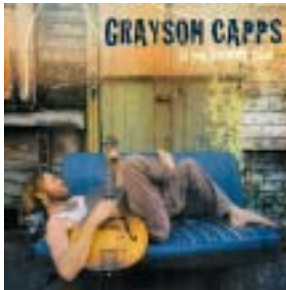


**HYENA**



DECEMBER/JANUARY 2006



**Grayson Capps**  
**If You Knew My Mind**  
**Hyena 9336**

With a name that could only belong to a musician and a coarse, beer-besotted voice straight out of the backstreets of New Orleans, Grayson Capps evokes the swamp folk-soul made popular by Tony Joe White. He looks the part, too: One glance at his solo debut's cover conveys its lazy, creaky, homespun sound. Half relaxed blues-rock, half boozy, folksy introspection, Capps' rustic voice -- it sounds more like a relaxed version of Delbert McClinton's -- is front and center, leaving his words and sturdy but near faceless musicians to convey the soulful atmosphere with chipped, faded-paint backing.

Anyone who's seen the movie *A Love Song For Bobby Long* -- based on a book written by Capps' father, with its alcoholic haze of good people falling on hard times and looking for redemption -- has pretty much heard this album. Capps performed four songs on the soundtrack, but each track from this graphic collection could be its own feature film. Echoes of J.J. Cale, the North Mississippi Allstars, old Ry Cooder, and the great Texas songwriter, Townes Van Zandt permeate these low-key but occasionally spirited blues-rockers. Songs such as "Mercy" and "I Can't Hear You" come alive thanks to gospel-tinged backing vocals, bringing out the God vs. the Devil undercurrent that rumbles like a latent volcano beneath the album's surface.

Capps makes the most of limited resources, bringing genuine warmth and emotion to even the most cliched concepts. Between unplugged folk and tough, Stonesy stompers such as "How's I To Know" there is tension and release that keeps the listener glued for all 12 tracks, even if the melodies start to sound repetitious about halfway through. *If You Knew My Mind* isn't a slam dunk, but Capps' gruff confidence and unpretentious style show he's got the potential for greatness further down the line. He creates poignant characters whose dead-end lives are perfectly reflected in his lived-in voice and grainy, black and white songs.

--Hal Horowitz