

BLITZEN TRAPPER'S AMERICAN PASTORAL

The Oregon band is shaping a new Pacific Northwest rock scene with hippie anthems for troubled times





NATURE CALLS
Eric Menteer, Drew Laughery, Brian Adrian Koch, Earley, Marty Marquis and Michael VanPelt (from left) in Portland

IN HIS 31 YEARS, ERIC EARLEY, the brainy leader of the Portland, Oregon, band Blitzen Trapper, has had many obsessions: bluegrass, quantum physics, science fiction, God, fishing, camping, Neil Young. And on Blitzen Trapper's fourth record, *Furr*, he somehow weaves all of them into one of the most gorgeous rock albums of the year.

Earley records Blitzen Trapper's music almost entirely on his own in their rehearsal space—crashing there and often working through the night. He wanted *Furr* to capture the sonic vibe of Young's 1970 classic *After the Gold Rush*—and the result is a breakthrough that, along with the Fleet Foxes' debut, is shaping a new Pacific Northwest rock sound.

Furr's plaintive acoustic title track, an allegory about a man turning into a wolf, is already an anthem for indie rock's new wave of bearded, plaid-wearing, back-to-the-garden hippies. Many of the group's songs carry that naturalist vibe: "We're out in nowhere, in the wilderness and going horseback riding and doing all these things that you just do because you live in Oregon—so it's just a matter of what I relate to," says Earley, who

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looks like a young, cleanshaven Lindsey Buckingham. "This is a testament to modern man's desire to get back all this shit we've destroyed. It's, like, sentimental."

Earley grew up in rural Salem, Oregon, but his parents met in Los Angeles, where they worked for a while as a folk duo in the late Sixties. Earley's dad taught him how to play guitar and banjo, grounding him in American roots music, from Bob Dylan to Crosby, Stills and Nash. The band, made up of a group of Earley's high school and college friends, started out playing wilder Frank Zappa-influenced prog-rock. But when his dad died six years ago, Earley abruptly changed course, creating a new sound he sees as a tribute to his father. "At the core of what we do is acoustic guitar and harmonies," Earley says. "I had this realization: 'What am I doing with all these things he taught me and gave me?'"

BRIAN HIATT

Photograph by JAMES MINCHIN III