

# Vetiver to fill Square Room with folk-pop gems

By Steve Wildsmith  
of The Daily Times Staff

It's a torturous thing for a musician, doing a phone interview with a journalist before the first cup of morning coffee.

Because of that, Vetiver front man Andy Cabic finds himself struggling to come up with three words to describe "Tight Knit," his band's new album. Fortunately, The Daily Times reaches post-pre-coffee interview, and he's a little more verbose on the subject.

"It was intentional to have this record be a little more upbeat than the past ones," Cabic said during a phone interview this week, on his way to the airport for the start of the band's spring tour, which brings Vetiver to The Square Room in downtown Knoxville on Monday night.

"I didn't really know how it was going to come together, because I tend to deal with things song-by-song; I knew which songs were going to be on the record, but I didn't now how they were going to be sequenced, and some of them got pushed in different directions than what we had them going in live," he added. "In the overdubbing process, I started hearing these hookier, catchier elements, and to me, that's what I think is somewhat distinctive about this record. I can be pretty good with hooks when I want to be, and I leaned a little more on that with this record.

"I think, in retrospect, I was pushing things in a more pop direction, and I think that's what the songs were geared toward this time around. But really,

everything is a mixture of intent and happenstance, I think. I certainly have full control over songs, and yet half the time I feel like I don't at all, that it's all inspiration and timing. That's the kind of mixture I like when I listen to records — a mixture of chance and intent."

Vetiver is Cabic's brainchild, a product of his northern Virginia upbringing and his musical roots. He spent a few years in the Greensboro, N.C. outfit The Raymond Brake, playing guitar and writing music. He then moved to San Francisco, put together the rock band Tussle and started making connections in the local music scene. As a result, the 2004 self-titled debut album by Vetiver would include an all-star cast — Colm O'Cioisig of My Bloody Valentine, Hope Sandoval of Mazzy Star, folk-rocker Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom, among others.

(As a result, Banhart's name has long been associated with the group, a link that, after all these years, Cabic finds slightly irritating.)

"I understand why it happens, but I think it's more telling about the shortcomings of the media and the limited approach that they take than it is reflective of our music," he said. "Everything is viewed through this lens of a competition — who's up, who's down — and it isn't real. It might be real in one sense of sales of an album, but not in the aesthetics of the short lives that we live.

"People keep talking about it. One review of 'Tight Knit' that I read said, 'With their fourth album, Vetiver has finally stepped out on their own.' I

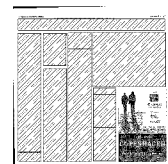
was thinking, what? We did that three albums ago! But I love Dev, and it doesn't really bother me. I'm happy with all of the things we've collaborated on."

The band put out "To Find Me Gone" in 2006 and "Thing of the Past" last year before signing to the legendary Seattle indie label Sub Pop, which released "Tight Knit" in February. There's a certain gravitas that the Sub Pop name lends to any act signed to it, Cabic concedes, but at the same time, he points out that the label partnered with the band because of the talent it saw in him and his bandmates.

Such talent is on display in abundance on "Tight Knit." With horns, tinkling piano and quirky-but-catchy melodies, it's an album that sounds like a less-acerbic evolution of "Daisies of the Galaxy," the 2000 album by Eels, or a shiny, happier version of "Fleet Foxes" (minus the harmony vocals). It's a distinctively more pop effort than the band's previous albums, which have garnered praise from critics for a folk-based sound.

"Writers have always been describing Vetiver's music through the lens of folk, and that's certainly influential in my arrangements and what I listen to, but I'm not working from the folk idiom these days any more than I am from the pop idiom," he said. "It's terrifically satisfying to write something that's catchy and sticks in your mind. Every week, I have one song or another that's doing that to me, and not like in a horrific way.

"There are nights when I can't go to sleep because



some other artist's song is stuck in my head, and I think there's a side to my songwriting where I can push that. That's an insidiously delightful aspect of pop music that I find remarkable — there's a standard form, usually less than 4 minutes, and when it's done well, it might seem like it's easy to do — but really, you're working in a genre where you're trying to find ways to rework old trips into something new."

Lately, he added, "Bachelor Kisses" — off the 1984 album "Spring Hill Fair" by The Go-Betweens — has been on constant rotation in his head. It's a song his girlfriend has found maddening.

"It infuriates her, because I'll wake up and just start humming it," he said. "It's totally up there for me. That's a great example of a pop band — just really nuanced and incorporating a lot of dimensions."

## IF YOU GO

### Vetiver

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**WHERE:** The Square Room, 4 Market Square, downtown Knoxville

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Courtesy of Alissa Anderson

The members of Vetiver — (from left) Brent Dunn, Sanders Trippe; Andy Cacic and Otto Hauser — will bring the sounds of their new album, "Tight Knit," to The Square Room in downtown Knoxville on Monday night.

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