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"...passionately sung, and loaded with inventive instrumental arrangements, surprising melodic twists, and multiple layers of wonderful, shimmery guitar work. And it rocks out, too. A joy to listen to."

—Dave Mandl, WFMU-FM DJ; Music Editor, *The Brooklyn Rail*

Dare Dukes

Prettiest Transmitter of All

Starland Records

Release Date: November 18, 2008

The songs that make up Dare Dukes' new album, *Prettiest Transmitter of All*, are a striking combination of incisive intelligence and sweet, doleful hooks. Looking past the shiny surfaces of American life, the Savannah, GA-based singer-songwriter chronicles the everyday world, mining the margins for the eccentric characters and bizarre events that are the heart of his music.

Born and raised in the exurb of San Jose, California, Dare grew up as the state blossomed into what he calls, "exit-ramp culture"—a maze of smoked-glass franchises and cookie-cutter subdivisions that took root along the vast network of interstate freeways. "Everyone knows the clichés about suburbia: It's a stark, sanitized landscape, pretty much soulless," Dare explains. "No one needs to remind us of that. I'm more interested in the poetry I see there--the weirdness, the anomalies, the resistance. Even in this unlikely grid you can find courageous people and precious things."

Moving to Minneapolis in his twenties, Dare began playing music as bands like Soul Asylum, Babes in Toyland, and the Jayhawks were emerging to define that city's post-Replacements sound. Influenced by seminal post-punk groups like the Pixies and Fugazi, and musical raconteurs like Tom Waits and Kurt Weill, Dare fronted the Penelopes, a frenetic quartet that was a fixture in the city's rock clubs. After moving to New York City, Dare took a hiatus from music to focus on writing and theater, but began playing out again, backed by friends and expert musicians Mark Boquist and Paul Garisto. This collaboration led to the bulk of the arrangements for the songs Dare produced for *Prettiest Transmitter of All*.

"America is a crazy, scary, and fascinating landscape," Dare says. "The reality is a lot more interesting to me than what the nightly news depicts. The way I see it, it's a place filled with eccentric characters, all on their own strange mission--some nuts, some saner than the rest of us. These missions, these people, they are what my music is about."

"The Ballad Of Darius McCollum," a burning uptempo number inspired by actual events, makes clear Dare's skills as both songwriter and producer. The song captures the insouciant compulsion of a Lower East Side man with Asperger Syndrome who, obsessed with the subway system, impersonates a conductor and commandeers a train, driving it several stops before being caught. With his high, lilting and plaintive voice, Dare wistfully inhabits McCollum, while the grind of the rhythm section, the crunch of guitars, and an ethereal keyboard line join together to push the song to near perfection.

"Bakersfield," which Dare describes as "the closest thing I have to a traditional song," is heartbreaking in its spare depiction of lonely desperation. Minimally arranged, the song builds measure by measure, as visually



photo by Imke Lass

arresting lyrics describe a man's search for his lost lover. By the time trumpet and trombone blow in to announce the protagonist's arrival in Bakersfield, the song has enveloped the listener.

With the album due in early November and a regional tour of the Southeast in the works, Dare is eager to have the album heard. With a head full of ideas, he's already begun work on a new batch of songs, and plans to go back into the studio early next year after finishing support for *Prettiest Transmitter of All*. His goal for the next project is to push the boundaries of his instrumentation as far as the limits of his lyrical imagination. But for now, *Prettiest Transmitter of All*, with its intelligence, eclectic soul and richly layered melodies, is an album to savor.

What people are saying about *Prettiest Transmitter of All* and Dare Dukes:

"4 Stars"

—Al Kaufman, *Atlanta Music Guide*, 12/10/08

"Best of 2008."

—Insomnia Radio
—Lithium Radio
—Wildy's World
—Snob's Music Blog

"...an intimate-feeling guitar-led record with well-placed accessories, lyrical heft and finely-balanced melodies. Full of well-produced and air-worthy songs, it deserves wide attention."

—Orlando Montoya, *Georgia Public Broadcasting*, 02/01/09

"...passionately sung, and loaded with inventive instrumental arrangements, surprising melodic twists, and multiple layers of wonderful, shimmering guitar work. And it rocks out, too. A joy to listen to."

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"...a wonderful new alt-rock CD....crunchy, earthy, sour-pop...a welcome blast of well-constructed, invigorating alt-rock. The record, which instantly evokes comparisons to Dukes' acknowledged influences Sparklehorse and Will Oldham's alter-ego Bonnie 'Prince' Billy (as well as contemporaries *The Rosebuds* and *Deathray Davies*), is a triumph of sparseness. Its blend of softly-strummed rhythm guitar, minimalist keyboards, chiming electric guitar leads, driving—but understated—drums and the occasional brass instrument cameo, also recalls the output of a handful of seminal 'college' artists of the '80s and '90s, like *Barbara Manning* and—at times—the softer and more wistful side of *They Might Be Giants*. It's a real sleeper."

—Jim Reed, "Seeing Liabilities as Opportunities," *Connect Savannah* (Savannah, GA), 10/29/08

"Dukes, performing solo, charmed the listeners gathered around the stage. His songs made me want to just sit back in the comfy sofas and drift into a sleepy bliss. His Savannah roots show in his attention to detail and dreamlike melodies. Mr. Dukes, I might add, had a very awesome hat."

—Jordan Stepp, *Flagpole* (Athens, GA), 10/20/08

"...no less than stunning. The melodies are gorgeous, inventive, and emotionally resonant. The lyrics capture the surprising beauty in the most mundane—mostly suburban—environments. Dare has wisely kept the arrangements sparse and simple, nevertheless they sparkle. You'll find yourself smiling but you won't be sure just why. This is a play list you will listen to over and over again, finding fresh nuance with every listen."

—Lauren McLaughlin, *Lauren McLaughlin Blog* (New York, NY), 11/10/08

"...showcases Dare Dukes' ability to craft multi-faceted, emotional pop songs. Think *Sparklehorse*, with great pop hooks that blossom and expand with repeated listenings. The tone is alternately upbeat, ironic, and quirky. The production is understated and reveals itself slowly. I found at least three of these songs rattling around in my head days after my initial introduction. I love this cd, and consider it to be a thirty-minute pop masterpiece."

—Shannon Burke, author of *Black Flies*