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Peter Cooper is a music journalist in Nashville, and he also turns out to be one hell of a songwriter and singer. He's really a story-teller of the first rank, as he proves in the 10 originals on his album *Mission Door*.

There are so many things to like about this record, starting with the band, which features Lloyd Green's pedal steel prominently. In fact, it has many of the same personnel who show up on Fayssoux's album, plus a couple of top-notch guests.

Cooper shares some of the better attributes of fellow songwriters Slaid Cleaves, Scott Miller and Todd Snider; the latter contributes some vocals and some bluesy harmonica on several tracks, and the album finishes with "Thin Wild Mercury," which Cooper and

Snider co-wrote about a fateful encounter between Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs. A more rocking version appeared on Todd's album *East Nashville Skyline*.

Snider also sings a verse of the title track, "Mission Door," a duty he shares with Cooper, Nanci Griffith and Fayssoux. It's an affecting ballad about the life of homeless winos, played mainly on fingerpicked acoustic and Green's pedal steel.

Several of the songs could be short stories set to music, including "Couple of Lies," about a former athlete who pulls off some kind of shady deal; "Take Care," about a young singer's encounter with Townes Van Zandt; "715," about the difficult life and times of Hank Aaron; and "One By One," a first-person ballad about a barfly who holds a bitter grudge against everyone and everything. In every song, Cooper drops razor-sharp lines that paint vivid word pictures: "Years ago there was a chance he blew / and it marked him wrong like a dumb tattoo," in "Couple of Lies" is one of the best examples.

Some of the songs are more in the slice-of-life vein, setting a scene more than actually telling a story. Such as the opener, "Boy Genius," a mid-tempo folk-rocker about the way we all fake our way through life, thinking "Oh Lord, don't let 'em find me out."; and "Wine," a slow honky-tonker about what wine won't do for you; the rocking "They Hate Me" about nasty in-laws; and "Sheboygan," a humorous ditty about God's will, predestination and being drunk in the title city.

The only two songs Cooper didn't write or co-write are the aforementioned title track and "All the Way to Heaven," both by Texas songwriter Eric Taylor. It's a compliment to Cooper that his own songs stand up quite well next to the veteran Taylor's; in fact, Cooper can stand with anybody else who's writing songs in this vein, from Guy Clark on down.

-Green Man Review