

## **ACL review: Alejandro Escovedo**

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*Austin-American Statesman*, September 26, 2008

For as long as I have watched Alejandro Escovedo perform (and it's been long enough for a Savings Bond to mature), I am always put in mind of that Robert Frost poem where he talks about how "work is play for mortal stakes."

That is always how Escovedo's work has come across to me. It's music for grownups, infused with loss, but never quite bereft of hope, informed at every moment that it (and he) are playing for keeps. That sense of gravitas—and accompanying sentiments of fun and joy—was present from the moment that Escovedo stepped on stage for his inaugural ACL performance.

ACL visitors from out of town don't necessarily have to know that Escovedo's life has been shaped by cathartic and life-altering circumstances. But surely, listening to him launch headfirst into the joyous choruses of "Always A Friend," they must have gleaned some sense that here is a man who has been there and back. There is a wonderful sense of abandon and unfettered celebration in singing "Every once in a while, honey, let your love show/Every once in a while, honey, let your love go." There is a liberation in those lines that has to be merited, and Escovedo has earned every syllable.

The set, per se, was a sampler of his new album, "Real Animal," as well as a hopscotch survey of his life and times and influences (heads up, Iggy Pop). "Chelsea Hotel '78," with its nihilistic echoes, butted up against the sunny "People We're Only Gonna Live So Long" (Escovedo was still walking on air from having performed the latter at the Democratic National Convention), which had a shotgun wedding with the churning, paranoid "Everybody Loves Me," which eventually yielded to the top-down unfettered rock of "Castanets."

Escovedo, characteristically, seemed enamored of every note he played, of every musician who shared the stage, of (as that movie queen memorably phrased it) "all those wonderful people out there in the dark." The feeling was contagious. Listening to his set was, as always, like diving into a renewing well capable of quenching every weary thirst.

*Photo: Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN*