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Cameron McGill

This folksy weeping willow's got whip.

Monday Jan 16, 2006. By [Gavin Paul](#)

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Cameron McGill is quite the tricky shoe gazer. With just a guitar, a harp and mic he drifts about his audience like a weeping willow on the verge of a thunderstorm. And right when he's tugging heads with lullaby lows and delicate finger-plucks, he'll kick you back on your heels with a wailed refrain.

The self-dubbed "traveling salesman of songs" delivers a lighthearted sadness, singing of the lost and lonely with a cathartic optimism. But he didn't used to be such a folk purist. His entrance into the solo world began after a stint as the front man for Chicago's pop-rock trio Morris Minors. The band split

in the first quarter of 2003 due to Cameron's growing infatuation with chamber pop, giving way to the lush orchestration of his debut, "Stories of the Knife in the Back."

Now back with a second batch of songs, we find McGill fully embracing a minimalist approach. "Street Ballads and Murderesques" comes stripped bare of overdubs, emphasizing the narrative poetry within. Whereas the characters in "Stories" were a little closer to home, "Street Ballads" offers more multi-interpretive vignettes. Drawing the title from an arabesque, a classically ornate pub song sold to the masses in Old England, Cameron slaps a little irony with lines like, "Love's worst day is always better than hate" and "We've got hope like the veins in the left arm of a right handed guitar player."

But pigeonholing him as a minimalist wouldn't give his full band, Cameron McGill and What Army, justice. Catch him on one of these nights and you'll see the swaying willow tree launch an amplified assault with keyboards, guitars and thumping percussions possessed with the body spasms of the rock and roll Gods.

Tell me who you are: I'm not an engineer, truck driver, murderer, optimist or chemist for sure. I might be insane, a poet someday, a friend to a few folks. Maybe I made my mother proud. In general, I'm afraid the signal is distant.

What was your Chicago start: Hard to recall, but I believe it was a place on Fullerton, not sure if it's even still there...was called Hog Head Mcsomethings. That was back in 1995 or '96 I think?

Here I am-rock you like a: Category 4 that didn't hurt anybody.

Up next at: Dive or no dive, our next show in Chicago will be at the [Hideout](#) on Saturday, Jan. 21.

Up next for Cameron: Looking like one full-length and two EPs in 2006. Will be releasing "Street Ballads & Murderesques" in January. The full band, Cameron McGill and What Army, went into the studio in November to record an EP for release early to mid-year.

What's cool in your neck of the woods: I like going to the [Charleston Bar](#) and the [Map Room](#) mostly. The people are nice and not pretentious as hell like so many places in the now Disneyland version of Wicker Park. There, I said it.

This band blew my hair back: Years ago I used to go see Joe Cassidy and Merritt Lear on acoustic guitar and violin. Haven't seen anything better than that in Chicago, honestly.

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