

*From Arnhem Owen's "News From The Underground",
Arlington Heat, August 2022*

Sometimes on my travels I'll get lucky and find something special, a hidden gem that I want to share. Not that there isn't a wealth of talent right here, but there's a charm in finding music on the road that I really like.

I was visiting family in Michigan and happened on a festival in the small town of Saline. It was free, the beer was cold and the sun was hot, so I thought I'd stay for a while and watch the various groups. There were several undistinguished cover bands that didn't really hurt to listen to, but left me underwhelmed. Then The Gravel Shakers came on. A quartet of older guys, I'd guess in their late 50s, plugged in and started the first of two hour-long shows they'd do that afternoon. I was immediately impressed with the balance and focus of their sound, and by a repertoire of what were obviously well-crafted original tunes in a variety of rootsy genres. I was also struck by their personal charm, and their often hilarious interactions with each other and their audience. I left at the end of the afternoon with a copy of their new CD, "Forward In All Directions", in my car stereo.

The album, like their stage show, has a good deal of charm and a lot of very solid songwriting. I was surprised to find that there were three songwriters in the band, as the feel of the collection

is quite cohesive...there are of course other groups with multiple songwriters (Sebadoah, Sloan and Golden Smog come to mind), but it's a relative rarity to find them. Although there are many differences between the songs (And again, quite a few rootsy styles appear), it seems that these guys have been drinking from the same well. It's a great listen from start to finish...a sparkling collection of songs ranging in style from Eclectic Americana, Rock, Blues, Country, Swamp Pop and Swing from these impressive, insightful and funny musicians. I'd hit that next show if I were you!

- Arnhem Owen