

# Texas Music

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## THE RAGPICKER STRING BAND

*The Ragpicker String Band*

YELLOW DOG



This eponymous debut was born when three individually accomplished acoustic musicians — one based in Houston, the others in the Pacific Northwest and

New England — gathered in Austin for a first-time studio collaboration as a three-way ensemble. Working with veteran producer Mark “Kaz” Kazanoff (on a project that, atypically for him, features no horns), they christened themselves the Ragpicker String Band and, relying only on their own voices and stringed instruments, crafted a subtle masterpiece. The self-sufficient trio comprises blues mandolin virtuoso Rich DelGrosso, fingerpicking guitarist Mary Flower and multi-instrumentalist Martin Grosswendt (who shines brightly throughout but particularly

on bottleneck slide guitar). They coalesce as an artistic democracy, with members trading turns on lead vocals or string solos while the others harmonize divinely in support. While grounded in 1920s and '30s blues or Tin Pan Alley-style songs, their repertoire is eclectic. Included are four originals as well as vintage material ranging from the likes of the Mississippi Sheiks, Lil Johnson and even jazz icon Thelonius Monk (on the impeccable instrumental “Blue Monk”) to contemporary compositions such as two stand-outs, the witty “Google Blues” and the mournful and metaphorical “Motel Towel.” For 14 consecutive tracks they find the elusive sweet spot in each song. As pickers and string benders, these guys are first class, and their three-part singing is well bonded and moving. The album offers a fresh evocation of an old-timey musical style delivered with a high level of acumen and charm.

— ROGER WOOD