



MUSIC

American Craftsman

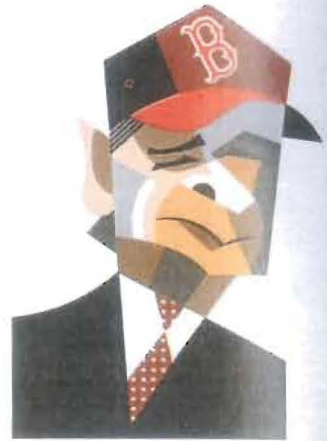
Justin Townes Earle is all soul, rhythm, and country.

» **DON'T CALL JUSTIN** Townes Earle a country singer. The Nashville-raised, NYC-based singer-songwriter has released four full-length albums and one EP entrenched in Memphis music (gospel, honky tonk, and soul), but the label he uses is simply *American*. Of course country is in his blood: He's a scion of the legendary Steve Earle. "I've spent the last five years very seriously trying to make an impression on people," Earle the younger says, "and it's finally kind of starting to pay off." No kidding. His latest Memphis-inspired record, *Nothing's Gonna Change the Way You Feel About Me Now*, earned him another appearance on *Letterman* and a headlining fall tour with his own backing band. An assiduous musician, Earle is already writing his next LP, which he describes as "Ike Turner-style R&B;" has produced rockabilly legend Wanda Jackson's new album, *Unfinished Business*; and in October curated *In the Spirit of Woody Guthrie*, a two-night event at New York's Pace University in honor of a man he describes as "the master." Like his father, Earle has grappled with his own demons, but now the 30-year-old has his eyes on the prize. "I went through all the pitfalls early so now I'm kind of just laying back and making sure that I keep focused on what's really important," he says, "and that's the craft." —GARIN PIRNIA

» **NOVEMBER 1, Taft Theatre, 317 E. Fifth St., downtown, (513) 232-6220, tafttheatre.org. Tickets: \$19 advance, \$25 day of show.**

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Q+A

Tim O'Brien Fights War With Words

» *When you think Dayton, you probably think "aviation." But ever since then—Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke chose the city to host the Bosnian peace negotiations in 1995, Dayton has been known for a commitment to social justice, particularly through its annual Dayton Literary Peace Prizes. This year, the Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award (one of the prizes) will go to novelist Tim O'Brien, who grew up in Minnesota, was drafted in 1968, and served in Vietnam until 1970. But it's what O'Brien did after Vietnam—write powerful novels about the war, including Going After Cacciato and The Things They Carried—that earned him this award.*

You've won awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. Yet you've said this one means more than all the others. Why? The easy answer is that I've been working as a writer now for almost 40 years, and I've always looked at my writing as about war *per se*. It's not full of bombs and bullets and macho stuff. The object is to try to display in fiction what I felt as a soldier all those years ago—how futile it was, and how destructive. To get an award like this is really the capstone of what I've tried to do in my life. I'm always talked about as a war writer. But I've always felt in my heart that I'm a peace writer.

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