

Blues



MALCOLM HOLCOMBE To Drink The Rain (Music Road) Rating: **NNNN**

North Carolina country-blues songwriter Malcolm Holcombe's gritty voice carries hard-earned wisdom on his eighth album, produced by long-time collaborator Jared Tyler. His sometimes slurred delivery is an acquired taste, but all his songs bear repeated listens. The arrangements, which feature upright bass, dobro and fiddle, are inspired, organic and unfussy.

Holcombe sings of both earthly and spiritual matters, and channels his faith without getting preachy. Like Tom Waits, he'll surprise you with a sudden evocative, hummable melody (The Mighty City), and like late Dylan, he can sing-talk or wail over intense violin (Behind The Number One, Where I Don't Belong).

Stripped-down closer One Man Singin' offers a moving description of what it's like to connect with live music despite being in a loud crowd.

Top track: The Mighty City

Malcolm Holcombe plays the Rivoli Wednesday (November 2).

SARAH GREENE