



## American Gothic

John Mellencamp teams up with T Bone Burnett  
For a dark political album that fits the national mood



### John Mellencamp

#### Life Death Love and Freedom

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RS: 4 of 5 Stars

Earlier this year, John McCain used John Mellencamp's hits "Our Country" and "Pink Houses" during stump speeches, until the Democratic singer asked him to stop. It's unlikely that the Republican candidate would find anything useful for his campaign on *Life, Death, Love and Freedom*. Mellencamp teamed up with producer T Bone Burnett to create a whole new sound — a set of textured, atmospheric folk and country blues that adds up to one of the most compelling albums of Mellencamp's career. There's not a bright, catchy riff or fist-pumping populist anthem to be found among these brooding, low-key songs about growing old, sick, lonely and pessimistic.

Burnett brings a fuzzy moodiness to the gospel hymn "If I Die Sudden" and the Springsteen-like "Don't Need This Body," both underpinned by distorted guitars and reverb-heavy leads. Politically motivated songs like "Jena," about the racially charged Jena 6 trial in Louisiana, and "Young Without Lovers," a more general plea for tolerance, sometimes strain to deliver a Big Message, with lines like "Let the people have the right to be different." But Mellencamp excels at the simple tunes: the twangy "My Sweet Love," kick-started by a big Bo Diddley beat and sweetened

with female harmonies, and "A Ride Back Home," his desperate plea to Jesus over spare, ragged guitars. Life's dark undertones may not make for easy listening, but Mellencamp's raspy drawl has only gotten more soulful with age.

MARK KEMP

(Photo of Mellencamp captioned as follows)

### **COUNTRY BOY**

Mellencamp's latest set of atmospheric folk blues includes a song about the Jena 6.

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**John**

**Mellencamp**

**"My Sweet Love"**

A Bo Diddley

rhythm and bright

backup vocals

bolster this ode to a

love that's as classic

as country rock