The Last Town Chorus

Southpaw; Thu 27

Some instruments are gloriously versatile: An electric guitar, for example, can quickly go from roaring chaos to pristine melodiousness. An amplified slide guitar, on the other hand, usually runs a limited range from Hawaiian luau music to radio-ready country. This makes Megan Hickey's accomplishments even more impressive: As half of slow-folk duo the Last Town Chorus, the sounds she coaxes out of her lap steel steer clear of both lei and lariat, using distortion and a delay pedal to convey hollow hopelessness one moment, frantic activity the next.

On the Brooklyn band's self-titled, self-released debut, Hickey's sleepy songs, augmented by Nat Guy's no-frills guitar, tell of people leaving home to chase more enticing things and of the lives they've left behind. A man tells his daughter (or maybe the daughter is recalling the moment), "Daddy's in a rock band now / It's the big one, and I'll be on the road." A bar patron invites a fellow drinker to sample the charms of rural living, but with such cheap come-ons ("Is that your song in the jukebox? Is someone sitting here?") that the appeal is decidedly sullied.

Hickey's languorous voice acquires a bitter, hardened strength in the song "Brooklyn Navy Yard, 1950," as she portrays a woman whose husband has just returned unbidden after a seven-year absence. "Our daughter doesn't know you, doesn't bear your name," she sings, her tone breaking and quavering with fury, "And as for me, I wish I could say the same. Please leave town." As the lap-steel notes ring out hard and dry and streak like meteors, one imagines that this narrator has ways to make her man disappear if he doesn't do so freely.

In concert, Guy strums unobstrusively, almost disappearing onstage as Hickey flings her metal slide bar ferociously and sings in an intimate voice, recalling Tara Jane O'Neil or Rebecca Gates. The band will be augmented at this record-release show by Antony and Maxim of the gender-queer cabaret orchestra Antony and the Johnsons, and aspiring soul diva Reuben Butchart.—*Sara Marcus*