



Music Editor Dale Miles reviews Kiff's recently released CD: *You Can't Keep it Down*.

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## Kiff Gallagher's Hometown Homerun

CD Review: *You Can't Keep It Down*

By DALE MILES, MUSIC EDITOR

Stop the presses. Put down the coffee. Run, don't walk, to your nearest CD store. Cole Valley's Kiff Gallagher quietly produced the first great album of 2006 with his pop/funk/soul CD, *You Can't Keep It Down*, which was released at The Independent on Saturday, January 21.

It's hard to believe Kiff has been right here under our noses, crafting a minor masterpiece between visits to Rockin' Java on Haight Street. From the humble surroundings of Stanyan and Parnassus comes a pop confection so mature and fully realized, it could drop into radio formats across the world immediately. If you like Maroon 5, John Mayer or Marc Broussard, get on board now — before radio, MTV and VH1 drive Kiff's catchy blend of pop, funk, rock and soul into the collective national consciousness.

The first thing that jumps out of this album is the surging piano. Think Elton John in the 70s, kicking down doors with forceful piano chords. Think Paul



Fans soak up Kiff's January 21 concert at The Independent. Photo by Tony Deifell

McCartney playing a grand progression into a payoff chorus that makes everyone sing along. Think Michael McDonald and *Takin' It to the Streets* with the Doobie Brothers. Kiff's piano playing is right there in the pocket, pushing and leading a stack of great songs.

And make no mistake, these are real songs, written by a real songwriter.

Melodies, verses, choruses and harmonies in all the right places. In a post-Nirvana, indie rock world where everyone thinks they can bang on a guitar and grunt out a tune, Kiff is an actual pop songwriter, in the tradition of Carole King, Marvin Gaye, Billy Joel and Alicia Keys. And just like those artists, Kiff can really sing.

The album's soulful vocals are tailor-made for the radio and the concert hall. Steamy tunes like "Your Body," a blue-eyed-soul cousin to Gaye's "Sexual Healing," extend Kiff's vocal reach to the intimate confines of the bedroom. He also understands the true craft of songwriting, where lyrics, vocals and playing add up to a cohesive whole in service to the song. The brilliant "Lies," perhaps the album's finest moment, is a prime example: Nothing is superfluous. The things Kiff leaves out are just as important as the things he keeps in.

Kiff's supporting cast is equally impressive. On the urgent opening tune "Now," Mark Calderon plays Kiff's percolating bass line with style and skill, creating an instant hit. Drummers Ramy Antoun and Curt Bisquera provide essential support throughout the album. Mixes by Joe Chiccarelli and Mark Needham help Kiff shine as a producer. But really, when so many people do so well, there can be only one reason. There's a rose blooming from the gritty sidewalks of the Haight--and his name is Kiff Gallagher.