

PASTE

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CALEXICO

Carried To Dust
QUARTERSTOCK/TOUCHAGO
A welcome return to the
musical borderlands



Drummer John Convertino inspires a bit of *déjà vu* with the rim clicks that open *Carried to Dust*'s lead track "Victor Jara's Hands." They recall the beginning of "Quattro (World Drifts In)," the second track on Calexico's 2003 masterwork *Feast of Wire*.

Given *Ruin*, the album between *Feast of Wire* and *Carried to Dust*, seemed to shrink the space Calexico occupied. It was intimate, an indoors album. It also downplayed the distinctive Southwestern spice that swirls through the band's best work.

Bandleaders Joey Burns and Convertino never rely solely on brassy horn stabs, percussive acoustic guitar and the lit of the Spanish language, but Calexico's finest moments are panoramic evocations of the American West draped in Latin *sabor* and swing. This flavor makes a welcome return on *Carried to Dust*. It's there in "Victor Jara's Hands" (the title referring to a slain Chilean theater director, musician and political activist) and in the horn-driven "Inspiración," written and sung by trumpeter Jacob Valenzuela.

Carried to Dust is all wide-open spaces. The album is designed as a kind of travelogue about a Los Angeles scribe on a road trip during the recent Writers Guild strike. It's a conceit most apparent in "Writer's Minor Holiday," but journeying infuses most of the album, from "Bend to the Road" to haunting closer "Contention City," named for a ghost town in southeastern Arizona.

It's tempting to think of *Carried to Dust* as a companion piece to *Feast of Wire*. It has the same stylistic diversity, with a hefty dose of pan-Latin zest. And, like that distinguished predecessor, this one is a beauty from start to finish. **DAVE KAWESON**