

At the Aggie Theatre Thursday, local ska band The Swashbuckling Doctors treated a late-night crowd to a long, daring, energetic set.

Rhythm guitarist John Bloemker and lead guitarist Ryan Thompson produced raucous, distorted grooves supplemented by charging bass lines from Drew Miller. Trombonist Kalen Rooney, who graduated college this week and will be leaving the band in the near future; trumpeter Mackenzie Sutphin, who finished the last final of her college career minutes before the show started; and alto saxophonist Callie Dodd anchored a horn section that blew sassy but richly toned—that is, patently ska—phrases. Scot Slusher took most of the vocal duties.

The obvious comparisons are to bands like The Mighty Mighty Bosstones and Streetlight Manifesto. The Doctors did cover Streetlight's "Somewhere in the Between." The breakdown featured stellar interplay between Sutphin's trumpet and Miller's bass.

But the dual guitars, which spent plenty of time in atonal spaces and kept the distortion knobs on 11, lent the music a jarring urgency.

Several pieces carried a punk influence that harkened back to bands like The Dead Boys and The Clash. The crowd embraced such numbers with manic fervor, running around in dervish-like circles on the dance floor.

Starts and stops abounded throughout the show, evincing the band's tightness.

The Doctors brought their breakneck ska sensibilities to Death Cab For Cutie's "I Will Follow You into the Dark" and Of Monsters and Men's "Little Talks."

A Motown influence also crept in at points. Sutphin's vocals brought a punk sultriness to a cover of James Brown's "Feelin' Good." Another piece included quotes of Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" and Vince Gill's "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing."

Topical political and social themes ran throughout the show. The Doctors dedicated one tune to the FCC after pointing out that "nobody got to vote" on net neutrality. A catchy horn motif laid the groundwork for a tune called "Make America Punk Again." A third song lampooned today's social media culture with lines such as "You lost yourself in your Twitter feed/a side of you I wish I didn't read."

Other songs treated less controversial themes. One "drinking song" (Slusher's description) developed around an appropriately Celtic bass line.

On certain numbers, Sutphin played a keytar with a mouthpiece that bore a tone somewhere between that of a fiddle and that of a punked-out harmonica.

The show was at once heavy and light-hearted. At times, it felt like there was a joke hanging between the band and the audience. Still, The Swashbuckling Doctors demonstrated impressive chops and a ska-infused versatility.