



Dar Williams performs at the McDonald on Saturday.

New Directions

Dar picks up the pace.

Dar Williams is a name not easily forgotten, especially after you've made friends with her unique folk songs.

Williams was raised in a liberal, educated home in Chappaqua, New York and began studying guitar at age 9. She wrote her first song at age 11. In high school, an ankle injury pushed her away from athletics and toward drama and more composing. During college she worked in theater, but she also took voice lessons and continued composing. After trials and travails on the coffeehouse circuit, Williams released her debut album in 1993. Her riveting soprano voice and songwriting knack caught the attention of critics, and she has been a major player in the folk scene ever since.

She released her second CD, *Mortal City*, in 1995 and her third, *End of the Summer*, in

On this tour, Williams is promoting a non-profit organization called SELF, which stands for Solar Electric Light Fund. The group encourages the use of solar and renewable energy in rural areas and developing nations. No coffeehouse can hold her now: Williams performs Saturday, May 10 at the McDonald Theatre.

That same night across town at Sam Bond's you'll find the "anti-folkswagger" of Minnesotan **Ben Weaver**. Born right here in lil' old Eugene, Weaver's parents moved a lot as he was growing up and finally settled in St. Paul. Not many singer/songwriters have big-name artists perform on their debut, but veteran performer Greg Brown was impressed enough to perform on Weaver's debut, *El Camino Blues*.

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1997. *Cry Cry Cry* followed in 1998, earning her even more fans and more prestigious gigs at fairs and festivals all over the country. 2000 saw the release of *The Green World*. Now, Williams unveils her latest masterpiece, *The Beauty of the Rain*, which hit stores in February 2003.

This CD finds Williams moving in a different direction, musically as well as physically. She relocated to New York City from New England and documents this transition beautifully in the song *Farewell to the Old Me*. Williams revels in a seeming new-found freedom, filling up the spaces in her previously spare acoustic guitar-based folk with more rock and pop. Obviously, fans find this new Dar appealing: *Beauty* opened with her strongest first-week sales ever.

The CD also features some wonderful guest artists who add to the allure. John Medeski offers keyboards on "Farewell" and "I Saw A Bird Fly Away," and John Popper (Blues Traveler) adds vocals and harmonica heat, as well. Trumpeter Chris Botti enhances the title track and Allison Krauss (Union Station) sings on "The One Who Knows." Bela Fleck kicks in some banjo, along with bass from Stefan Lessard (Dave Matthews Band) and String Cheese Incident's Michael Kang on fiddle.

A second CD, *Living in the Ground*, soon followed.

Weaver is currently touring behind his third release, *Hollerin' at a Woodpecker*. Weaver's songs are stories, and they seem to take on a life of their own. Weaver inhabits his stories and gives the characters and events a fullness that seems real and unexaggerated. Weaver sings about long nights and people with worn-out hands and hearts, driving around the countryside with only some cheap beer and an AM radio for companionship. In Weaver's songs are people whose memories of lost loves fade slowly, the visceral pain of a broken heart never healing.

The songs on this CD aren't cleaned up and pretty. They are raw, gritty and real, whether he's writing about the understanding that one day he'll have lines on his face just like his father does now, or hiding in the back of a friend's closet stealing glances at *Playboy*. Weaver writes books when he's not writing songs, and has a keen ability to project mood and setting into his lyrics and music. At 23, Weaver has a gritty voice, a care-worn heart and a perceptive ability to link past, present and future that you might expect from a man twice or three times his age. He's currently working on a fourth album due out Fall of 2003. **EW**

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