



ANNIE MUSSELMAN

**Wistful Thinking**

"When you're absolute beginners, it's a panoramic view." **M. Ward** embarks on his fifth studio journey with this line, a seemingly nostalgic ode to his salad days. It's a reminder that the Portland-based singer/songwriter isn't the underground indie-folk scene's best-kept secret anymore. His reluctant, understated star has gradually risen with each album, and most recently he shambled into the limelight with She & Him, his 2008 collaboration with actress/singer Zoëy Deschanel. Maybe he misses the low-key innocence and unmapped musical vistas of his tenderfootin' years. Even his album's title, *Hold Time*, seems to connote his desire to pull back on the reins a bit and head back to the halcyon. But Ward has a knack for looking back, even when he's moving forward, and time has always been more of a suggestion than an absolute in his music. The songs on *Hold Time* are as carefree and unconcerned about what era they should fall into as anything Ward has recorded. There are no hang-ups or baggage – just a wide-open embrace of all the best aspects of Americana music. From the laid-back cover of Buddy Holly's "Rave On" to the down-home, Hank Williams-inspired spirit of "One Hundred Million Years" to the light toe-

tapping shuffle of "Fisher of Men," this record possesses a languid, worn-in charm and early morning intimacy that sounds like the singer/songwriter just sauntered into the studio with the dewy-eyed dawn and recorded all the songs in one take. Dusty, familiar, wistful – call it what you want. More than anything else, Ward's music just sounds timeless. M. Ward plays at 9 pm Friday, May 22, at the McDonald Theatre. \$18 adv., \$20 door. – *Jeremy Ohmes*

**Revival**

Imagine a lost early-'60s Brit band whose lineup boasted Lennon, Jagger and Davies. That's how Texas music fans felt about the recent reunion of **The Flatlanders**, the early-1970s Lubbock group – "more a legend than a band," to quote the title of their reissued first album – whose three leading members went on to forge considerable solo success after scattering from their West Texas hometown in the wake of bad luck and country music establishment resistance. Eventually, 40-year friends Joe Ely (one of rock's great live acts, whose dynamic country rock has recently been enriched by Mexican music influences), Jimmie Dale Gilmore (whose evocative Hank Williams-style croon and offbeat, spiritually



The Flatlanders

searching "country and eastern" sound won critics' hearts in the 1990s) and Butch Hancock (the brilliant Dylanesque folk songwriting legend who scored hits for Emmylou Harris and others) all resettled around Austin. They've often contributed songs and guest appearances on each others' albums and performances over the years, but only recently revived the original band, including joint songwriting, playing and singing on three albums' worth of new material, including their wise and wondrous new CD, *Hills and Valleys*. The new music is fresh and compelling, but I hope this certified supergroup will also mine their considerable respective back catalogs for classics from the last three decades. The Flatlanders perform at 7:30 pm Friday, May 22, at the Shedd's Jaqua Concert Hall. \$26-\$34. – *Brett Campbell*

**Break on Through**

**Break As We Fall** are about to, um, break. Celebrating the release of their second CD and first full-length, *If You're Lonely*, the Portland- and Corvallis-based band's music evokes any number of funky, danceable ancestors: Red Hot Chili Peppers, Stevie Wonder, Rubberneck, even Dave Matthews. And like those groups, there's an underlying independent streak and improvisational sensibility.

"So Long" finds its legs from the first note, with an oversexed urgency that manifests not only in the hip-swerving rhythm but in the first line of lyrics: "I want to kiss you in the places where it really counts / Do the things that I know will make you scream out loud." Singer Evan Churchill matches the rhythm with a smooth voice that turns slightly gritty where appropriate, but at no point does he max out his power. Bassist Tim Karplus gives buoyancy to the whole album, lending character to songs like "Come Down Hard" that in another band's hands would likely be boring alterna-rock. "On Our Way Home," like most of the album's songs, takes its energy from Karplus' throbbing bass lines that slither throughout, maintaining a groove that makes it hard to leave the dance floor to replenish your drink.

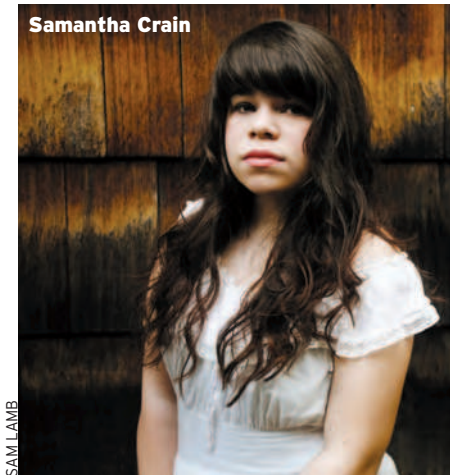
Break As We Fall is deftly able to defy being stuffed into a dance/funk mold, even as their songs beg for funky dancing. It's a style that's deeply rooted but also totally their own. Break As We Fall, Volifonix and Starboard Morning play at 10 pm Saturday, May 23, at Luckey's. 21+. \$5. – *Vanessa Salvia*

**Soul Center**

**Samantha Crain** isn't old enough to sound like this. The 22-year-old Oklahoma singer-songwriter has a wise-beyond-her-years voice, rounded and rich but youthful and spry when she wants it to be. Though the solid grace of her songwriting adds to the

impression that Crain must be a worldlier soul than she appears, it's her voice that takes center stage on the 11 tracks of *Songs in the Night*, Crain's first full-length with her band **The Midnight Shivers** (it follows last year's "musical novella" *The Confiscation*). It's a confident, elegantly unpretentious album that's earned Crain comparisons to everyone from Joanna Newsom to Neil Young.

*Songs* offers nearly as many warily cheerful, nearly upbeat tracks as it does those that set a darker, sadder feel; the title might suggest a lonesome night with only heartbroken ballads for company, but Crain turns the phrase into a promise: "'Cause my baby's gonna be all right / I got songs in the night for you." On "Get the Fever Out," she sings more brightly than usual, an impatient bit of percussion motivating a song that sounds unexpectedly like the now-defunct Wisconsin band Rainer Maria. (As *The Washington Post* put it, "Fever" is a song that "could have been made only in the frenetic wake of '90s girl-punk.") But on the following track, the slinky, dark, Salinger-referencing "Bananafish Revolution," Crain turns surly and throaty, turning up the tremor in her voice as she sings "It's a perfect day for dying / It's a perfect day for them to start crying."



SAMI LAMB

Crain's band is a steady presence behind her throughout, easily shifting gears from the uptempo "Bullfight (Change Your Mind)" to the spare, atmospheric "Calm Down." *Songs* ends with "The Dam Song," which begins with Crain sounding downright fragile; before long, though, she's bleakly wishing the dam would break just so there'd be "a famine, a coffin, a tear / More than I've felt this year." And we're back in the *Night's* darkness, tenderly wrapped up in her voice. Samantha Crain and the Midnight Shivers play with Langhorne Slim and Slim Lowry at 9 pm Thursday, May 28, at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+. \$8. – *Molly Templeton*

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