

## Dawes' West Coast Americana

**Dawes** is a band from Los Angeles in every sense of the place. They sound like Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young, CCR or some other displaced southern blues-rock band. Their best shows and fan base are found in Minneapolis, Minn. (that is, not in L.A.), and they continually strive for something more than the hot, dry asphalt and smog of their home city. They do not seem like the speedball-burnout musicians of other L.A. bands.

The soft acoustic guitar of "Take Me Out of the City" provides a backdrop as singer Taylor Goldsmith drones on about escaping the confines of an urban environment not conducive to easy breathing or even true love, saying "Take me out of the city / Where God's never been / Where my soul is my sorrow / And it's bound by my skin." On other tracks, Goldsmith's voice dubs a John Fogerty twang over what could easily be seen as Wilco's Americana-inspired guitar riffs. Dawes is revitalizing Laurel Canyon (birthplace of CSN&Y) in a manner unlike your average Southern California band. Their music draws from a pining for the country and the members, who are between the ages of 19 and 24, have obviously been inspired by the place's historically rich music scene. Conor Oberst, The Black Crowes and Wilco all come to mind when listening to Dawes, and that's not too outlandish considering these youngsters have collaborated with all three. Dawes and Jonny Corndawg play at 7 pm Wednesday, Jan. 26, at John Henry's. 21+. \$10 adv., \$13 door. — *Andrew Hitz*



Sean Rowe

CHRISTINA VENDITTI

## All Hail Creepy Country

On Saturday, Sam Bond's Garage calls together its congregation to worship at the altar of country songs about murder, rock and roll that twangs, gothic Americana and gospel music that is more evil than holy.

The sermon will be presided over by **Sean Rowe** and the **Handsome Family**. Rowe's Anti-Records debut *Night* is out Feb. 22. Hailing from Albany, N.Y., Rowe sings creepy tales in a bass/baritone voice that recalls the stillness of American Recordings-era Johnny Cash and the mysterious voodoo of Nick Cave or Tom Waits. His music is so atmospheric there's a country mile from one note to the next.

The Handsome Family are indie-country veterans. Formed in 1993, the husband-and-wife duo draws inspiration from American folk, traditional murder ballads and classic country. Mixing male and female vocals, their songs rise to Waylon Jennings-like levels of honky-tonk but also withdraw into quiet folk balladry. Lyrically, they can at times be morbid and macabre, dealing in subject matter like the life and death of Amelia Earhart and Natalie Wood.

This will not be a night to wear your dancing shoes, or to share a beer with friends while the bands play in the background. This will be a night to listen intently to dark and compelling storytelling and songwriting — to listen to country music that isn't afraid to sound (heaven forbid) like country music, but isn't limited by that sound either. Sean Rowe and the Handsome Family play at 9:30 pm Saturday, Jan. 22, at Sam Bond's Garage. \$10. 21+. — *William Kennedy*



## Hunger and Thirst

How will **Typhoon** fit on stage at Sam Bond's? The Portland band — a group I want to call "orchestral" in large part because little else stands a chance at suggesting their elaborate, impassioned, dynamic sound — filled PDX's Sometown Lounge's stage nearly to overflowing last fall, their stirring late-night set the perfect way to close an evening spent roaming, unsettled, from place to place. There are, according to the band's bio, seven core members of Typhoon, but 19 people are listed on their MySpace page. That's a lot of voices raised behind singer-songwriter Kyle Morton. Morton's voice has an occasionally tremulous, emotionally agonized tone that sits neatly in opposition to the bright horns and goes hand in hand with the elegant, building-and-crashing structure of Typhoon's songs. The band's 2010 album, *Hunger and Thirst*, begins with Morton saying, "I've started a new beginning / Suspiciously like the old one / Only this time I'm ready." Hope and fear mingle with enthusiasm and remorse, and different snippets of lyrics — flashes of story, disconcerting images — stand out with each listen. The nearly seven-minute "CPR - Claws Part 2" sprawls across a wordless singalong, rich harmonies and Morton's nervous, compelling voice: "I am no god-fearing man, but I am afraid / of something I cannot quite explain" he sings before the band takes the song apart and builds it back up again, swift and sure. The pieces are sturdy, the indie rock tropes familiar — the expansive band, the multi-instrumental arrangements, the repeating lines and first-person soul-baring — but the resulting sound crosses strange boundaries, especially live, late at night, where one carefully delivered line can send the hairs on your neck right up, over and over again. Typhoon, Ages and Ages and Brainstormers play at 9:30 pm Friday, Jan. 21, at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+. \$7. — *Molly Templeton*

## Preppy Pop from Ra Ra

Perky, string-flecked, sweet and utterly (and refreshingly) devoid of irony, **Ra Ra Riot's** songs ask for cardigans and neatly pressed pants, beach houses and nicely groomed lawns. The Syracuse, N.Y.-based quintet plays a kind of indie chamber pop that's preppy and safe — not that there's anything wrong with that.

On *The Orchard*, the band's second album for Barsuk Records (y'know, where Death Cab for Cutie once released records), '80s synths shimmer at times, and the contrast between sweeping violin and complicated percussion marks the boundaries within which singer Wes Miles' earnest voice roams. The relatively energetic first single, "Boy," bops along neatly, every player taking his or her turn as layers build for the chorus. "Too Dramatic," harmony-laden and bouncy, is a highlight, but "Massachusetts" stumbles, too drawn-out and directionless. It's easy to like Ra Ra Riot, but *The Orchard* is hard to love. Pop this high-gloss runs the risk of being too precise and too structured to emotionally resonate with listeners. Pristine, tidy and sincere, *The Orchard* is bright and admirable, but missing some of the intensity that powered *The Rhumb Line*, Ra Ra Riot's 2008 release. It isn't a misstep, but a stepping stone, a place between here and there. Still, it's more than worth sticking around to see where *there* winds up being for this young band. Ra Ra Riot, Givers and Pepper Rabbit play at 8 pm Tuesday, Jan. 25, at the WOW Hall. \$12 adv., \$15 door. — *Molly Templeton*

