

## Iron and Wine Biography

The last that we heard from Iron and Wine was the six songs comprising *Woman King* released in 2005. (This doesn't include the collaborative *In the Reins* EP which featured songs by Iron and Wine's Sam Beam and performances by both Iron and Wine and Calexico together.) What distinguished *Woman King* from its predecessors was the deepening integration of spiraling, dense opuses ("Gray Stables," "Evening on the Ground (Lilith's Song)") with intimate confessionals ("Jezebel," "My Lady's House").

On *The Shepherd's Dog* this integration is complete. Compositionally, it is Iron and Wine's most ambitious and accomplished recording to date. It's also the most satisfying.

While many of us learned of Iron and Wine by way of Sam Beam's tender and spare rendering of The Postal Service's "Such Great Heights" on the *Garden State* soundtrack, those who dug deeper discovered a classic American tunesmith with a precocious musical signature. Songs like "Lion's Mane," "Jesus the Mexican Boy" and "Naked as We Came" are remarkable demonstrations of craft; musically memorable, lyrically evocative and casually atmospheric.

In conversations with Sam while mixing *The Shepherd's Dog*, he confessed to finding spiritual inspiration in Tom Waits' pièce de résistance, *Swordfishtrombones*, an album where said artist upended his previous strategies and forged a new musical language for himself.

While sounding nothing like Waits' 1983 release, *The Shepherd's Dog* succeeds in accomplishing a similar cathartic recasting of the artist's intentions. The arrangements are kaleidoscopic and rich. "White Tooth Man" rocks with a desperate, menacing intensity while "Boy with a Coin," the album's first single, is darkly playful with a handclap hook tumbling under its cascading melody.

The whole album breathes. Its seductive rhythms percolate and undulate, from the Psych-Bhangra-redux of "Pagan Angel and a Borrowed Car" to the album's last dance—a waltz—"Flightless Bird, American Mouth." And there's nary a trapkit on the whole album!

"Resurrection Fern," a staple of Iron and Wine's live performances, is given a somber, elegant treatment here while my two personal favorites, "Wolves (Song of the Shepherd's Dog)" and "Carousel," summon, in their respective ways, a vivid otherworldliness. Taken as a whole, *The Shepherd's Dog* is informed by a sensuality that brings a dreamscape to life.

—Jonathan Poneman, May 2007

*The Shepherd's Dog* was recorded by Sam with the assistance of longtime producer Brian Deck and engineer Colin Studebaker. The album was conceived in various phases, mostly in Sam's home studio outside of Austin, Texas. It was mixed and completed at Engine Studios, Chicago, Illinois.