



HOMEGROWN



STURGILL SIMPSON METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY MUSIC

HIGHTOP MOUNTAIN

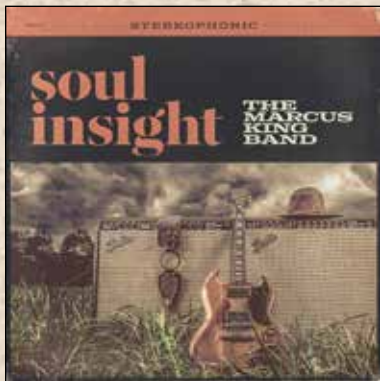
Some become country musicians because they love the style — they grew up on Waylon and Willie, wanted to be cowboys and cowgirls, pick guitars and drive old trucks. **Sturgill Simpson** seems to have the lament of a lonely tune in the marrow of his bones. His voice aches each note out, burdened and bestial. You get the sense that there is nothing about Simpson that is put on -- that he truly feels his songs and writing and performing them is a ritual of catharsis. Hearing **Simpson's** mournful strains harkens back to some of country music's greatest artists, but without actually imitating anyone particular or borrowing too much. *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music* is a wholly spiritual sophomore album with **Simpson** backed by spare and organic arrangements with wildly effected guitars, sparing use of pedal steel and organ, and modern production that is as richly textured as it is soul-bearing.



JASON ISBELL SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE

THIRTY TIGERS

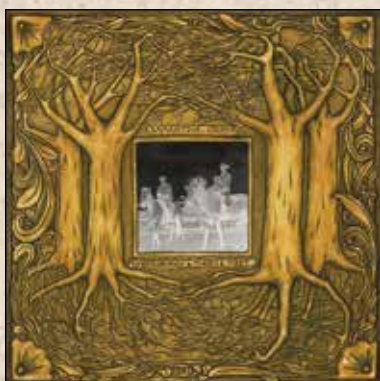
The personal story surrounding **Jason Isbell's** last, breakthrough album, *Southeastern*, is widely known and easily reprised. A troubled young troubadour, newly married, stepped away from the darkness of addiction into a new, uncertain life of clarity and commitment, reflecting ruefully on his hard won victories and the price he paid attaining them. It was an album of aching elegance, marked by the sort of lyrical precision that brought to mind certain literary masters of the melancholy American scene, from Flannery O'Connor to Raymond Carver — an album of memorably infectious empathy. With *Something More Than Free*, he stretches himself further, greatly expanding the boundaries of **Isbell** country, that territory of the heart and mind where people strive against their imperfections, and simultaneously against their circumstances, in a landscape that's often unfriendly to their hopes. The album deepens as it goes along, offering some of the pleasures of a fine novel, including a collection of sharp vignettes that stick in the mind, impossible to shake. This isn't an album of easy certainty, but what makes his songwriting so rich and gripping, besides its observational precision, is the honesty of his inquiries. He doesn't flinch.



THE MARCUS KING BAND SOUL INSIGHT

EVIL TEEN

The Marcus King Band's debut album, *Soul Insight*, displays the young songwriter's stunning command of rock, blues, psychedelia, funk, soul and improvisation — all with a distinctly Southern musical accent. It also brings the 19-year-old a step closer to his musical destiny. *Soul Insight* is the explosive result of that dedication, magnified by another dozen years and more than a thousand nights playing in clubs — initially alongside his father, bluesman Marvin King — since the age of 11, just two years before **Marcus** formed his own group and stepped into the role of leader. **King's** talents and trajectory have already led his band across the country, and he's opening shows for the Foo Fighters, Johnny Winter and both Gov't Mule and its leader, Warren Haynes — who loved *Soul Insight* so much that he's released it on his own label. Haynes' influence is certainly apparent, but *Soul Insight* is very much the work of a true original.



SAMANTHA CRAIN UNDER BRANCH & THORN & TREE

RAMSEUR/THIRTY TIGERS

Samantha Crain's songs are full of expansive melodies that veer off in unpredictable directions, with lyrics that explore conflicting emotions with uncommon insight and compassion. She has a jazz singer's phrasing, often breaking words into rhythmic fragments that land before and after the beat, stretching syllables or adding grace notes to uncover hidden nuances in her lyrics. The intimate vignettes of her new album, *Under Branch & Thorn & Tree*, are marked by **Crain's** careful attention to the tiny details that often escape us, supported by the subtle musical settings she crafted with producer John Vanderslice at his Tiny Telephone Studios, where they honed a unique sound that stands apart from most singer-songwriter types: "We recorded straight to two-inch tape," says **Crain**. "Our effects were done manually through tape looping and manipulation. Most of the arrangements happened in the moment... My guitar and vocals are all first or second takes." The result is stunning.

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