

Close the Gap: Dawes, at Daytrotter's Barn on the Fourth of July

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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The California-based band Dawes has parlayed its debut album, last fall's *North Hills*, into slots at this year's Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza festivals, and if you've heard the sensitive and often lovely record, you know that's probably not an easy transition.

The group's warm, nakedly emotional songs recall the 1960s and '70s -- aggressively, one could say, if aggression weren't so antithetical to them; they seem built for intimate venues. AbsolutePunk.net [wrote](#) that the album is "a collection of 11 near-flawless roots-rock offerings that drip with such a defined sense of soul, grit, and harmony [that] it feels nearly criminal to label this album contemporary." *Rolling Stone* named the album's "That Western Skyline" one of the 25 best songs of 2009.

Guitarist, lead vocalist, and songwriter Taylor Goldsmith is only in his mid-20s, but *North Hills* is full of musical maturity, patience, and confidence -- a willingness to let the work overshadow the performers.

"We went out of our way to make the record focus on the songs, and presenting the songs in

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the most clear way, and not hiding behind any loud guitars or effects or anything like that," he said in a phone interview this week.

He added that he's fond of the disconnect between the softness of the recording and what's required for a concert audience. "Live, the priority ceases to be the songs and it becomes the energy ... ," he said. "We like to think the songs can do both. We've always really liked that gap."

It won't be a major festival, but Dawes on Independence Day will be part of the Daytrotter.com Barn on the Fourth of July concert in a Maquoketa barn with five other bands. Goldsmith said he loves the barn-show atmosphere, with unconventional venues and audiences that travel significant distances, bringing their dogs and kids. "It's a real experience that you can't get" anywhere else, he said. (Daytrotter championed Dawes months before *North Hills* was released, and the group performed as part of the Web site's Barnstormer tour in October.)

Goldsmith admits that it's been a challenge to adapt to larger audiences. "In order to feel like you're connecting with all those people [at a festival or in a large venue], I found myself trying to make my singing and playing as big as the audience was," he said. "I feel like it's the band's job to rope an audience in every night. And the bigger the audience, the harder that can be."

Goldsmith attributed some of his band's touring success to the difference between the album and concerts: "I feel like if our record was as heavy as our live show ... there wouldn't be a lot of people who are coming to the shows," he said.

Dawes has been road-testing material for its next album -- which the band will begin recording in September -- and Goldsmith said there won't be any radical departures. He said the band doesn't want to throw its fans any curveballs; Dawes wants to "earn a lot of people's trust." So it's employing the same producer and will again be recording to analog tape.

But he said one aim is to "close the gap from our live show and recording, ... I think bringing them a little closer together."

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He also said he's being more deliberate in his songwriting. "Being clear has become a lot more important to me," he said. When a fan asks what a song means, "sometimes I feel silly that I have to explain it. Why did I write the song if I'm now having to explain what it's about?"

Dawes will perform as part of Daytrotter's Barn on the Fourth of July event at Codfish Hollow Barn (3437 288th Avenue in Maquoketa). The event starts at 7 p.m. and also includes [Justin Townes Earle](#)

, [Jonny Corndawg](#), [Young Man](#),

[These United States](#)

, and a surprise headliner. For tickets (\$20) and more information, click [here](#)

For more information on Dawes, visit DawesTheBand.blogspot.com or MySpace.com/dawestheband

Dawes Daytrotter recordings can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).