

SPOTLIGHT



McKenzie Smith, Eric Pulido, Eric Nicholson, Tim Smith, Paul Alexander

MIDLAKE

Slow and steady wins the race for this indie breakout band

AFTER EXPLORING CLASSIC-ROCK influences like Fleetwood Mac and Crosby, Stills & Nash on their breakthrough album, 2006's *The Trials of Van Occupanther*, the members of Midlake wanted a new direction. They found it in the folk-based tradition of vintage British acts such as Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention—then set to the long, arduous task of making that sound work for them.

"It took time to learn how to play together as a band in that way," acknowledges singer, guitarist and keyboardist Tim Smith. "The first year was a learning process for us. Then the second year we got our first song recorded, and it all happened after that."

The result is *The Courage of Others*, a stunning return featuring 11 startlingly vital songs that emphasize the Texas band's careful arrangements and Smith's tuneful, understated voice. Although finding the right direction was a long process, the album came together relatively quickly by Midlake's painstaking standards, starting with the song "Acts of Man."

"That song was written and recorded in five days, which is really quick for us," Smith says. "That never happens—and it was really nice. We listened back and thought, 'Wow,

this is the vibe for the album. If we can make every song as good as this, we'll have made something we're really proud of.' That was the turning point."

Smith wrote all the songs, then fleshed them out with the rest of the band. "I write alone, usually," he says. "I like to be in a comfortable place—my house, preferably. I don't like any turmoil or anything going on in my life. The last thing I want to do is pick up a guitar when things are going badly."

While the songs on *Van Occupanther* were rooted in an observational, third-person point of view, *The Courage of Others* is more direct. "I don't remember setting out with some purpose in mind. I just started writing," says Smith. "I didn't mean for it to be as much in the first-person perspective as it was. Our previous album was about other characters and things, and this one is a bit more personal to me. But it wasn't a conscious thing."

Midlake plans to spend much of 2010 on the road, a relief after having been locked away in the studio for much of the past two years. "We're a better band now, so it was worth it," Smith says. "We wanted to be happy with the album."

—Eric R. Danton

