

SPOTLIGHT



Nathan Preasley

Jesse Ebaugh, Dave Colvin,
Erika Wennerstrom, Mark Nathan

HEARTLESS BASTARDS

Erika Wennerstrom aims her latest songs directly at the pain of heartbreak

AFTER THE END OF A NINE-YEAR relationship, Heartless Bastards frontwoman Erika Wennerstrom went for a drive. As she made her way across the nation from West Texas to Ohio, she thought hard about what she wanted to express about her experience through music. Once she figured it out, she booked some studio time and got ready to spill her guts. "Then there was no turning back," she says. "I couldn't put off the album. In a sense, when you create something, you can always tell yourself something could be better. But at some point you have to let go."

Not that Wennerstrom requires either a monumental breakup or a thought-provoking road trip to write new songs for her band, which also includes guitarist Mark Nathan, bassist Jesse Ebaugh and drummer Dave Colvin. "I have music in my head all the time," says Wennerstrom, who helped found the group eight years ago in Ohio. "Sometimes I have songs in my head for a decade. I never get anything done if I try to work on a bunch. I have to pick ideas, one at a time—and start to focus, let the songs tell me when and where they want to go." That's how the 10 tracks on *Arrow*, the Bastards' fourth and

latest album, came to fruition. "I always get the melodies first," she says. "Then I think about the lyrics. I had a lot of writer's block writing this album, thinking, 'Maybe that's not the right word.' I was really trying to say what was within me."

Spoon drummer and *Arrow* producer Jim Eno also had a big influence on the new album's sound. "We ended up going with most of his suggestions," Wennerstrom says. "Jim also had the idea of our doing a tour with the new songs so that when we went into the studio we wouldn't be second-guessing ourselves." After spending a few months playing all the new tunes live, the band took two days off and promptly began recording. "We went right in and everything felt real natural," she says.

Heavy touring also allowed the current lineup of the group—of which Wennerstrom has been the only constant member—to settle in. "I feel like we have a chemistry going," she says. "We are all so comfortable with each other, I feel like things are coming together naturally and easily. Everything's meshing and it doesn't take a lot of effort."

—Nancy Dunham

DECEMBER 2011 M
MUSIC & MUSICIANS
MAGAZINE

