

## SPOTLIGHT



Autumn Dewilde

## M. WARD

## The “Him” of She &amp; Him takes a confident step back to center stage

AFTER RELEASING 2009'S *HOLD TIME*, Portland-based singer and songwriter M. Ward largely put his solo career on hold. He toured and made albums with Monsters of Folk—an indie-rock supergroup also featuring My Morning Jacket's Jim James and Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst and Mike Mogis—and She & Him, the duo Ward founded with actress and singer Zooey Deschanel. “I'm one of those strange people who's just as happy in the driver's seat as I am in the passenger's seat,” Ward says.

Still, Ward slowly and surely made his way back to the steering wheel. Over the last three years, whenever he found himself with moments of free time, he whiled away at *A Wasteland Companion*, his seventh solo album. “I wanted to make a new kind of record,” he says. “One that combined live records with studio records.” So Ward (first name: Matthew) hit the road to record in Los Angeles, Austin, Omaha and New York, among other U.S. cities, teaming with regular collaborators like Deschanel and Mogis as well as new partners like Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley. When his travels took him to England, Ward recorded the '60s-style piano-pop tune “Primitive Girl” with John Parish, best known for his work with PJ Harvey.

“One of the nice things about listening to a live record is that you're going to these different places in the world, and you're getting a chance to listen to a musician think on his feet in a new situation, in a new room,” explains Ward, 38. “I wanted that element, but also wanted to have the advantages you get when you record in a studio—like making guitars and vocals sound how you want them to sound.” *Wasteland* benefits from the spontaneous instincts of Ward and his cohorts. “I'm lucky to have talented friends who enjoy thinking on their feet and meeting me in strange rooms around the world and recording songs that they've never heard before—but that I'd been thinking about for months or years,” says Ward.

Despite the circuitous manner of its creation, *Wasteland* was never intended as a travel diary. With its wide range of styles—everything from sunny malt-shop pop and fuzzy rockabilly to somber acoustic ballads—the album remains representative of Ward in full. “I'm not someone who feels like a record has to be a picture of two weeks of songwriting,” he says. “I feel like a record should be a picture of a whole lifetime, if possible.”

—Kenneth Partridge

