



BY BRIAN BAKER · APRIL 4TH, 2011 ·

If one is known by the company they keep, **Susan James** can boast an impressive profile by association without having to hear a note of her work. Her résumé is like a who's who of contemporary music — opening slots for Lindsey Buckingham, Ratdog, Rufus Wainwright, Richard Buckner, Richard Thompson, Billy Bragg and Daniel Lanois; guest appearances on her three albums by X's D.J. Bonebrake, The Replacements' Tommy Stinson and Brian Wilson's favorite backing band, the Wondermints. With friends like those, who needs reviews?

That pattern follows on James' fourth album, *Highways, Ghosts, Hearts & Home*, with a stellar backing band including members of The Punch Brothers and Shivaree. But as on all her previous albums, the real stars of the album are James and her intimate and engaging songs filled with inventive characters, wry observations and bittersweet perspectives.

In a lot of ways, James' approach to Americana is similar to Sam Phillips' or Amy Rigby's approach to Pop, which is to absorb its best qualities and transform it into something as personal as a fingerprint. Whether she injects her songs with Country Folk tradition ("Thank You Tomorrow," the gorgeous melancholy of "How to Fix a Broken Girl") or psychedelic colorations ("On Your Side") or Pop passion ("Calling Mr. Zimmerman"), James finds the singular sonic sweet spot of every one of her songs with her clarion voice, songwriting vision and intuitive sense of what makes a great song, regardless of the musical ingredients used to shape it.

http://www.citybeat.com/cincinnati/article-23015-the_twilight_singers.html