



How can you have a reunion when only one guy shows up? Well, if that guy brings his best songwriting, singing and guitar playing in years to the project, nobody's going to ask any questions. The new Son Volt album is all that and more. A rejuvenated Jay Farrar has put out his best album in "Okemah & the Melody of Riot" and has dressed it up as a Son Volt record. Three new backing musicians accompany Farrar on material that rocks with the dense guitars and muffled, heartbreaking vocals just like the old band.

It's political, historical and topical with songs about Woody Guthrie in "Bandages & Scars" (Okemah, Oklahoma is Guthrie's hometown), George Bush in "Jet Pilot", Highway 61 in "Afterglow 61" and just plain music in "Gramophone" And "6 String Belief." Farrar's songwriting never lets you zero in on exactly what he's trying to say, but it's pretty obvious how he has been affected by the war in Iraq. His unique voice and distorted guitar work are what has always defined this band and there's plenty of that to go around.

How good this album is really says more about how unfocused his previous solo albums have been. Farrar has always been the one from the Uncle Tupelo breakup predicted to do big things, not Wilco. But now, with perhaps the new band acting as his muse, he has made a return to form. To be fair it's said he tried to reunite the original members (check out their song on the tribute album to Alejandro Escoveda called "Por Vida") but "it just didn't work out." Maybe it's for the best.