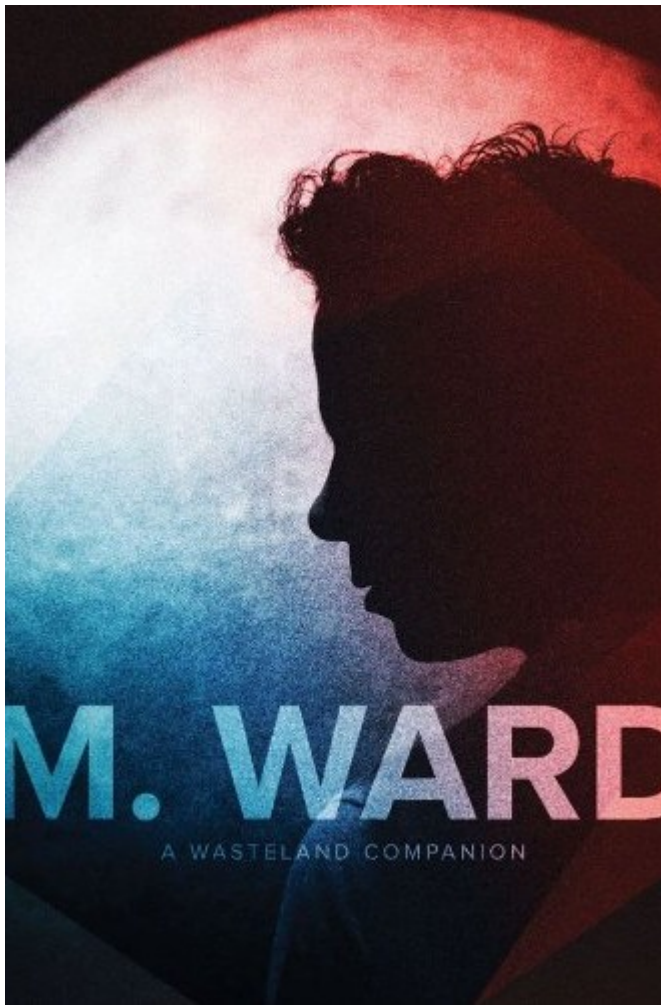


A Wasteland Companion, by M. Ward

reviewed by [Steve Thorngate](#) in the [May 30, 2012](#) issue

In Review



A Wasteland Companion

by M. Ward

Merge

M. Ward's solo albums reveal that he surpasses his more-famous collaborators (Conor Oberst, Zooey Deschanel) on all fronts. His sound has a sepia-toned timelessness; it's both inventive and a whole bunch of kinds of old-fashioned. On his

latest, Ward's folk and old jazz fascinations remain, but his interest in early rock 'n' roll is now just as prominent. In "I Get Ideas," he combines scorching rockabilly with jazz-age innuendo: "When we're dancing and you're dangerously close to me / I get ideas."

Ward's always been interested in themes of spirituality and redemption. "Clean Slate" speaks of the grace that eventually follows pain and despair; elsewhere Ward is similarly upbeat, singing of love and joy. His arrangements explode in dramatic flashes of strings and crystalline piano and vocal oohs, but this never gets overlarge or lasts too long. As always, his songs surprise and delight without losing their essential intimacy. Highly recommended.