



Ryan James **“Back To The Wind”** Hightail Records

Ryan James is a twenty something Texan - born, bred, educated and pretty well everything else that you require in this life. **“Back To The Wind,”** recorded in Nashville and produced by Walt Wilkins and Tim Lorsch, is his debut solo release on his own Hightail record label. James’ debut opens with the up-tempo farewell “Goodbye Carolina.” “Home On The Range” isn’t a reading of the traditional cowboy campfire classic, rather it’s a James and Jared Smith original that subjectively falls back on western history, but then mixes reality with fiction by name-checking Roy Rogers, Matt Dillon, Zorro and John Wayne. Sugarfoot threw me for a minute [this late 1950’s tv series was titled **“Tenderfoot”** in the UK] while Tonto [misspelled Tanto in the liner] and the Cisco Kid arrive to save the day in a later verse. The narrator in the pedestrian “Don’t Go” is having problems with his girl, and the ups and downs of love – mostly the downs - is also pursued in the lyrics of “How Long,” “Take Your Time” co-written with Waylon Pierce, and the James, Wilkins and Wes Nickson collaboration “Barely Holding On.”

Penned by James and producer Wilkins, “Home To Texas” is a desire filled, state-wide travelogue that takes the listener from Dallas and the high plains in the north, through the Hill Country between San Antonio and Austin, as well as to Houston and Padre Island on the Gulf Coast. In the process there’s – the surprisingly unoriginal - mention of getting drunk in a border town under a cornbread moon, and making love on *“the Llano river bank.”* “Stay With Me Awhile” was penned by James for his wife so it’s a love song – the underlying theme being the laudable *“live every day like it could be your last.”* It’s one of the few album cuts with a lyric that stretches beyond the predictable, and in that regard “A Broken Heart,” yet another love song, is also a cut above. The album title appears in the words of the closing cut “I Pray For You My Friend” penned by James and Jarrod Medulla, plus there’s some fine fiddle work by Lorsch on this title. “I Pray For You My Friend” is preceded by two cover songs, Ray Pennington’s Country Top 30 hit from 1967 “[I’m A] Rambling Man,” followed by “Everything That Glitters [Is Not Gold]” a Dan Seals/Bob McDill co-write that gave Seals a # 1 Country Chart single in the early summer of 1986, coincidentally the third # 1 in a consecutive run of nine chart toppers.

As a debut album **“Back To The Wind”** doesn’t break any new ground, musically or lyrically. It’s a solid if predictable set of country tunes. Hopefully albums two and three will see R.J. build on the better parts of this collection, delve lyrically into more mature subject matter and, hopefully, veer away from love songs and travelogues.

Folkwax Score 6 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 09/05.