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Adam Zwig Cast Iron Letters (Conscious)

The fact that former Shapeshifter guitarist Adam Zwig works by day as a Seattle psychotherapist doesn't mean he's not a tough cookie to crack. Since leaving the late-'90s hitmaker Shapeshifter in 2002, Zwig's released four rootsy, bluesy solo albums—the excellent *Cast Iron Letters* the most recent among them. Throughout the 13 tracks, Adam Zwig's sleepy, stoner voice is deceptively flippant, disguising his unease over love and war, which culminates in the plaintive irony of "Who Killed Michael Vaughn?"—a modern take on Bob Dylan's "Who Killed Davey Moore?" Questioning the blameless death of a soldier slain in Iraq, Zwig pays tribute with a mournful pedal steel guitar that kicks in after this zinger: "*Not I, says the shooter, you can't blame me/ I'm defending my dear country so you can't blame me.*" Zwig, though, has less in common with Dylan than with Lou Reed and Stephen Malkmus—Zwig's obvious influences, especially on the plain-spoken folk song "Darken Days," which veers toward the tight lyricism of hip-hop. The only obvious allusion to Zwig's day job is the atmospheric "I Don't Think About You," its lulling background vocals sounding like more of a meditation than, well, a song. Coaching himself out of a dead-end relationship, Zwig says, "*I don't think about you/ Or how sometimes I break down and wonder how it is with you.*" But underneath Zwig's detached vocals, there's a biting, bitter lament.


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