

WestWord

The Stand Ins stands out in indie genre

by **Hillary Lindwall**
News/Wire Editor

Those unfamiliar with independent (indie) rock but interested in exploring the genre should check out Okkervil River.

On its five albums and numerous EPs, the band provides as good an indie primer as any band currently plying its trade in the genre. By mixing heavy drum beats with exaggerated vocals, this group from Austin, TX, makes it easy to dive right into Indie and Folk rock.

The group's latest album, *The Stand Ins*, is successful in connecting with listeners and making them want to hear the music that they created. The album, which dropped Sept. 9, creates a calming atmosphere. The vocals, rather than the guitar, are the main focus.

The band counters this, however, by consistently adding three, roughly 30-second interludes in each song, instrumental breaks that do not feature any vocals at all. Although somewhat formulaic, featuring the instruments in this way is a nice break for the listener, providing a chance to take in everything that they hear.

Although the interludes sound very strange for the most part, they blend into the next song which is a cool effect. The instrumentation of the band is not very original, featuring the typical drum set and guitars, but occasionally throughout the album, the listener can hear stringed instruments, which are not typically

expected of an Indie rock band. This gives the album a unique timbre and makes the listener hear levels of sound rather than falling flat.

The first track, "Stand Ins, One" is the first musical interlude on the album. The strange chords and synthesizers give an odd vibe and make the listener wonder what sound they will hear on the next track, "Lost Coastlines." This song begins with a simple guitar strum and banjo. The vocals come in next with a smooth, catchy melody. As the song builds, heavier drum beats and tambourine can be heard, but the instrumentation is almost like an echo. The vocals are obviously meant to be the focus.

A theme of sadness is expressed throughout the album, but is heard especially on the track "Blue Tulip." Band member Will Sheff uses lines such as "With every single cell of me, I'm going to make you mean the words you sigh/You lie" to express his anguish. Lines such as these make the listener sympathetic toward Sheff.

If the band has a flaw, it is the fact that many of the songs seem never-ending. With song lengths of up to six minutes and 18 seconds, the listener is left in a vast sea of sound that doesn't seem to have a clear ending in sight. At first listen, the songs seem catchy but after the fact, this reviewer had a hard time remembering any of the melodies from the CD.

The majority of the songs on *The Stand Ins* have a sound that is reminiscent of the 1950s or 1960s because of their heavy background drum beats and simple, occasional guitar strums. This gives the album a soothing, feel-good quality that makes the listener want to hear the rest of



the songs on the CD.

To promote *The Stand Ins*, Okkervil River has released a series of cover songs on YouTube from the album. This is a unique way to gain a larger fan base and to get more people interested in their music.



Silent book screams to readers

by **Naomi Prale**
Around Town Editor

The Story of Edgar Sawtelle describes the story of a boy who cannot speak, but can use sign language, and though his unspoken communications with dogs, lives a life full of friendship and mystery. Edgar Sawtelle was born mute, but could hear. His parents created their own kennel, a business Gar Sawtelle took over from his father. Edgar learns almost everything he needs to know about breeding dogs from his father and enjoys nothing else than his dogs and his lifelong friend and ally, Almondine.

Edgar lives quietly with his family in northern Wisconsin, until one day, Gar's brother Claude unexpectedly comes home, bringing Edgar's quiet life into a state of confusion and noise. When Edgar's father suddenly dies, Claude steps in to help run the kennel and into Edgar's mother's affections. Angered by the new position Claude takes in Edgar's life, Edgar tries to prove that Claude is Gar's murderer, but his plan backfires. Forced to leave his home, Edgar is followed by three yearling dogs as he moves north into the wild, but Edgar's devotion to his home and the Sawtelle dogs turn Edgar homeward.

Author David Wroblewski uses his technique of master storytelling to create awe-inspiring scenes, the northern woods, the change of seasons, a traditional American barn and a ghostly vision in the falling rain, all breathtaking views seen in *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*. The lack of dialogue in this book is replaced by vivid descriptions by Wroblewski, creating beautiful scenes that allow readers to visualize the book to a complete detailed image. These descriptions add to the complexity of the book, creating a sophisticated look and a simple situation.

This brilliant novel uses the themes of

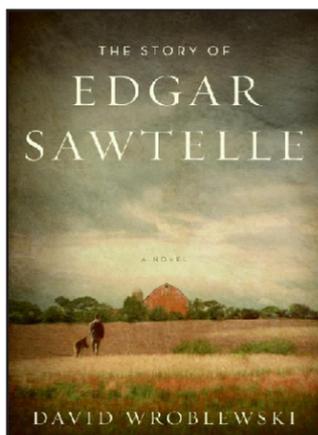
friendship and unspoken language to create a mystery that is a brilliant, extremely beautifully written story. The novel is long and satisfying, divided into five parts, each part reflecting another important period of time in Edgar's life.

An important aspect of the book is the fact that it uses little dialogue, because Edgar cannot speak. His use of sign allows him to communicate with his dogs on an extraordinary level, where he can relate to their emotions, and understand his dog's feelings. The bond between Edgar and his dogs is like no other animal bond seen before.

The book contains a similarity to the Shakespeare play Hamlet. Edgar sees a ghostly image of his father, who helps Edgar continue through his life and avenge his father's death. Edgar's uncle Claude is similar to Hamlet's brother Claudius, with a similar name, and both also killing the hero's father. Ophelia is represented through Almondine, Edgar's true friend and ally.

Last week, *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* was placed on Oprah's book list, another reason some people might be inclined to buy this book.

Through Wroblewski's master skill of story telling and the unforgettable journey of Edgar Sawtelle, readers will slowly see a ghostly tale and story of love that is incorporated in a modern classic. Themes of love, loss, and revenge use master storytelling to create a literary treasure.



The Story of Edgar Sawtelle
★★★★
By David Wroblewski

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