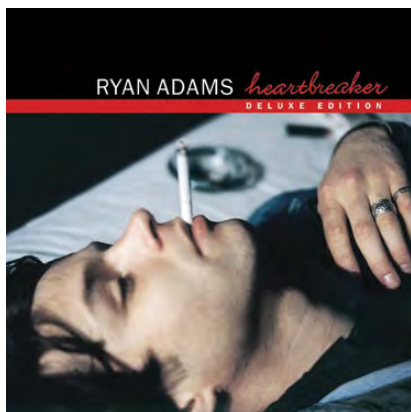




Ryan Adams: *Heartbreaker: Deluxe Edition*. Pax-Am (2 CDs/4 LPs + DVD).

In 2000, the former lead singer of an alt-country band called Whiskeytown released his first solo album, to immediate praise. Of course, it's hard to go wrong when you've got Gillian Welch and David Rawlings contributing, Glyn Johns' son Ethan producing, and the likes of Emmylou Harris dropping in for a duet. *Heartbreaker* starts off with an argument—Adams bickering with Rawlings about which album a Morrissey song appeared on—before the twisted rockabilly twang of “To Be Young (Is to Be Sad, Is to Be High)” peels rubber all down the street. After that, the sound tends toward the acoustic side of things, but the variety in Johns' producing doesn't let it seem like an “unplugged” album. The songs are among Adams' best—neither sappy nor overly introspective. Love, loss, and self are addressed, sometimes obliquely and sometimes simply, but always poetically. *Heartbreaker* became one of Elton John's favorite records, and it has a conciseness and consistency that several later issues would never find, for all their high points. Pax-Am's deluxe reissue includes the original release, a disc of outtakes and demos, and a DVD.

The bonus disc starts with Adams and the *Heartbreaker* cast messing around with Morrissey's “Hairdresser on Fire,” which leads into the argument that starts the album proper; it's nice to hear, after all these years, where that came from. “To Be Young” is a stripped-down ear-

ly take. There's some good ol' profane studio banter, then “Petal in a Rainstorm” complete with a “god-damned” false start; it's a loping country song reminiscent of Whiskeytown, and it was wise to leave it off the original LP. Ryan and Emmylou talk guitars and then run through “Oh My Sweet Carolina”; the tempo feels a hair faster, and it seems a little less melancholy.

Hearing “Come Pick Me Up” with just guitar, vocals, harmonica, and drums, doesn't add anything to the life of the song. “When the Rope Gets Tight” would end up on *Jacksonville*; this take is stark and forbidding, and it's a reminder of how emotionally powerful Adams' singing can be. The pre-album demo for “Bartering Lines” reminds you how bad he can sound when he overdoes things. Except for “War Horse” and “Locked Away” at the very end, the other pre-album demos are barely interesting.

The DVD is of a performance at the Mercury Lounge in New York City from October, 2000, a month after *Heartbreaker* came out. The lighting is unbelievably dim; the sound is generally clear but has a few touches of distortion. It's just Adams and his guitar and harmonica. He's compelling, and the songs mostly work in this stripped-down setting. Eight selections are from *Heartbreaker*. “Gimme Sunshine” would show up a few years later on *Love Is Hell*; “Just Like a Whore” (actually a decent little love song) has come out on some bootleg demos; and there's the Oasis cover “Wonderwall.” The accompaniment on “To Be Young” has overtones of early blues during the verses, and it's a fascinating version. As you'd expect, there's some chaff in the extras, but this reissue is worth getting for moderate-to-rabid fans of the original. **Stephen Estep**

Further Listening: Caitlin Cary: *While You Weren't Looking*; Elton John: *Songs from the West Coast*



Michael Martin Murphey: *High Stakes: Cowboy Songs VII*. Murphey Kinship Recordings.

On the seventh installment of his celebrated Cowboy Songs series, Michael Martin Murphey—long a for-real rancher in addition to being America's foremost advocate for the cowboy in song and in his environmentally beneficial lifestyle—deploys his own tunes and complementary covers to construct a narrative of humans being formed, and transformed, by nature. Witness the latest of six generations of cattlemen bucking the odds of a dwindling market in the Irish-tinged “Three Sons”; the young man engulfed in “sinful living” who hears a divine voice calling him to the straight and narrow when the sky opened up while he was in the midst of rustling cattle, as recounted in a powerful reading of Marty Robbins's classic Western melodrama-in-song, “Master's Call”; the soul-enriching virtues of living in the natural world chronicled in the thoughtful piano-and-fiddle-based ballad “Campfire On the Road,” in which Murph urges, “We must never let them take this life away.” Assaying another high-stakes issue, he addresses a relationship's end in the tender, acoustic-based sayonara “The End of the Road.” Boasting sonics as clear and refreshing as the rivers running through some of these songs, *High Stakes* is a topical gamble offering an inspiring payoff. Take it. **David McGee**

Further Listening: Michael Martin Murphey: *Red River Drifter*; Mad Buffalo: *Wilderness*