

# Under The Radar Summer 2009



**David Bazan:**  
*Curse Your Branches*  
(Barsuk)

Flannery O'Connor once suggested that the essence of her characters was only revealed when they were faced with extremes, often via jarringly violent moment-of-death situations. David Bazan excelled at extrapolating from O'Connor's methods with his former band Pedro the Lion, metamorphosing from his nascent days as a Christian heart-on-sleeve songwriter into a seemingly agnostic, deeply acerbic, sociopolitical critic, crafting expository sketches of characters rife with hypocrisies. Be it the priest who renounced his religion while delivering a eulogy on *Control's* "Priests and Paramedics," or the hiker who couldn't bear to sever his own leg on *Achilles Heel* standout "Transcontinental," he sent up flawed men faced with their own mortalities in a decidedly compassionate and non-judgmental manner. On his debut solo LP *Curse Your Branches*, his storytelling eye is no less keen, but it's been molded into something deeply personal and jaded, as black-hearted and resigned as American Music Club circa *Everclear*.

Musically, *Branches* is pitched roughly between the fireside balladry of mid-period R.E.M. and the languid melodic radiance of Red House Painters. The instrumental grace is belied by grave subject matters—the specter of alcoholism pervades the tender "Please Baby Please," offering a quietly devastating take on the rock bottom point of an addict, as Bazan desperately wheezes, "What makes a man realize when he's about to lose it all?" over soaring Lennon-esque harmonies and a gentle metronomic drum machine pulse.

On title-track "Curse Your Branches," the record's forlorn emotional centerpiece, Bazan croons dejectedly that, "Fallen leaves should curse their branches," an elliptical admittance of wronged ex-bandmates, sounding as fraught with regret as Neil Young did throughout *Time Fades Away*. And when he wonders, "Why are some hell bent on there being an answer, while some are quite content to answer 'I don't know?'" he articulates the glorious conundrum at the heart of this record, that of raising the unanswerable questions, and justifying them as the only ones worth asking. ([www.davidbazan.com](http://www.davidbazan.com))

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By John Everhart