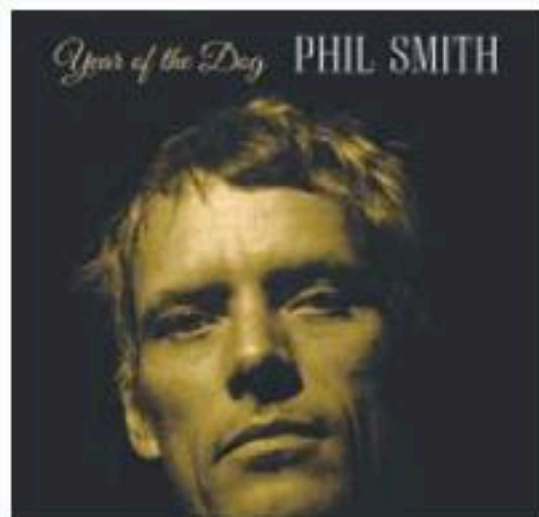


ROOTS PHIL SMITH

YEAR OF THE DOG (INDEPENDENT)

★★★★☆

"YOUR dreams turn to dust so fast/Rust like an old car that's out in the field," Brisbane songwriter Phil Smith observes on *Memories*, one of the key tracks on his third album, where the music is stripped lean and emotions run at high intensity. The song, with its waltz time and country fiddle, sits somewhere between Neil Young and more recent keepers of the flame like Gillian Welch and Will Oldham. Wisps of pedal steel and bluesy guitar wind through opener *Calling Home*, a song that feels as lonesome as the wind through the wheat. *Broken Rivers*, with its haunted female backing vocal and rustic banjo, finds solace in melancholy. *Avenue Girl*, *El Corazon* and *The Ballad of Joseph Henry* are superb folk



songs, the kind that might have once appeared on a Nick Drake album, with acoustic guitar, piano and cello. And *The Train*, the story of attending a funeral, somehow cuts deep and lifts us up at the same time. The message here is the one we get from all the art that speaks personally to us. Sure life can be tough — the album is called *Year of the Dog* after all — but not so tough that songs as good as these won't help us through.

Noel Mengel