



**The Flatlanders:**  
*Hills and Valleys*  
[New West]

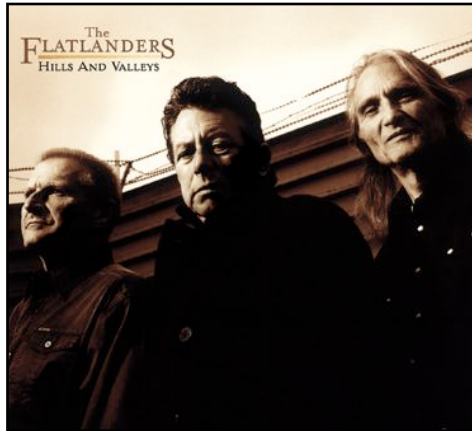
By Steven Rosen

*Americana role models create strongest post-reunion album to date*

The Flatlanders are now more a band than a legend, to inversely paraphrase the title of their first CD. By the time *More a Legend*

*Than a Band* came out in 1990, it was primarily a historic document, drawn from the 1972 sessions of one of Texas' earliest and short-lived alternative-country bands. But as the band members—Joe Ely, Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore—began to have successful solo careers as singer-songwriters, interest grew in their long-forgotten Flatlanders roots.

The primarily acoustic *Hills and Valleys*, produced by Lloyd Maines, is the Flatlanders' third and strongest album since reuniting in 1998 for *The*



*Horse Whisperer* soundtrack. The three share writing credits on eight songs, and create vividly rendered tales about restless hearts, wide-open spaces and troubled times. They also have carefully crafted melodies, especially the

mid-tempo compositions replete with folk-rock hooks. "Homeland Refugee," sung by Ely, updates Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie with hauntingly vivid detail; "Borderless Love" is both romantic and political. Hancock's "Thank God for the Road" showcases his characteristic inventive wordplay, always careful to be sincere and not merely clever. Although there are a couple filler songs sprinkled throughout, the Flatlanders are clearly no longer a mere legend. They're elders of Americana music. Role models, even.