

Brainwashed - Bill Fay Group, "Tomorrow, Tomorrow and Tomorrow"

Written by Jonathan Dean

Saturday, 26 February 2005 19:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 31 July 2005 10:50

More than 35 years after Bill Fay's work first surfaced on Decca Records, the unique singer-songwriter is finally getting his due. I suppose it's inevitable that an artist who recorded two such singularly idiosyncratic and intensely rendered albums—1970's *Bill Fay* and 1971's *Time of the Last Persecution*—and then permanently disappeared off the radar screen would be the subject of much speculation.

[Durtro/Jnana](#)

In Bill Fay's case, this speculation has often taken an unfortunately hyperbolic form, with many critics painting a portrait of a psychotic loner whose music was clearly the result of drug burnout and paranoia, a "mad bearded Rasputin" with a resemblance to Charles Manson (a reference to the photograph of Fay on the cover of his second LP). This finally prompted Bill Fay to write an angry letter to *The Wire* last year, setting the record straight: that he was simply a songwriter who had long hair and a beard "as a lot of people did then," and that he had never been heard from again only because he lost his contract with Decca after the poor sales of his two albums, and "couldn't get signed anywhere else." "I still continued to write and record but not with a label," Fay continued, and *Tomorrow, Tomorrow and Tomorrow*

is the first evidence of that work. This album, recently released as a digipack CD by Durtro/Jnana (David Tibet has long been a champion of Fay's music), contains Bill Fay's third album, the follow-up to

Persecution

, recorded 1977-1981 but never released until now, 25 years later. Bill Fay Group is the name given to Fay's teaming on this record with The Acme Quartet, a misleadingly named improvising trio of guitar, bass and drums. These smaller arrangements create a more intimate backing for Fay's intensely personal, soul-searching songs that provides an interesting counterpoint to the huge, Scott Walker-style MOR strings (along with searing fuzz guitar and climactic passages of free jazz) that characterized the first two LPs. This is not to suggest that the music on

Tomorrow

is simple, however. It is far from simple. The group utilizes a complex interplay of competently played jazz and psych-rock elements with sudden left turns into areas of psychedelic abstraction, as well as vocal doubling, stereo panning and a multitracked backing chorus. At times the effect is very reminiscent of the mid-70s work of Pink Floyd, at others Soft Machine. Roger Waters and Robert Wyatt at their best, however, cannot equal the haunting, apocalyptic lyrics and intuitive chamber-pop songwriting that seems to flow so easily from Bill Fay. Over the course of 20 tracks, the artist never misses a hook, creating haunting pop songs that recall the instantly memorable melodies of a Paul McCartney with the chilling doomsday prophesizing of a Current 93. If

Time of the Last Persecution

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represented the songwriter's emotionally wrenching exegesis of Armageddon, then *Tomorrow*

points to a doorway out of tribulation and purgatory. After climbing a "Strange Stairway" to "Spiritual Mansions," and confronting unflinchingly the hypocrisies of life and man, Fay sings triumphantly: "We are raised/We sit beside Him now/We are raised." Bill Fay navigates a symbolic world informed by Christian prophecy, but illuminated from within by personal revelation. His weathered voice and unique musical genius are able to mediate these impossibly vast concepts straight into the realm of the individual. It's outrageous to think that this album might never have seen the light of day had it not been for the efforts of Durtro/Jnana and the Bill Fay Group, as it represents the inevitable and necessary third chapter to the trilogy and a sublime masterpiece of modern pop music.

samples:

- [Strange Stairway](#)
- [Goodnight Stan](#)
- [Love is the Tune](#)