

Sweet Baboo - HELLO WAVE (Businessman BMR. 005)

This obscurity will divide the folk purists as well as those with more open minds, that's for sure - and by all accounts it's already divided the critics. But so what?

Sweet Baboo is the alias for the elusive Cardiff-based Stephen Black, who here on his second album release comes across as a slightly embarrassed chronicler of life (at any rate a proudly skewed maverick kind of life) who views it all through a distorted and refracted Americana lens and comes out the other side with shades of Jonathan Richman, Alasdair Roberts, Tunng, Frank Zappa, early ISB and James Yorkston extruding from his musical personality.

Stephen's lyrics are as charming as the determinedly home-made nature of this CD (on which he gathers round friends and extended family to help realise his peculiar yet compelling musical vision). They veer from playful surrealism to sideways paradox and near-parody to decidedly odd dark reflections (at times I'm reminded of a less literary version of Ivor Cutler or Handsome Family), but equally are sometimes pretty cleverly referenced and the wordplay is rather enticing.

The opening track, *If I'm Still In Love When I Get Back From Travelling*, at first sounds like one of those seemingly silly, jaunty throwaways that are destined to go nowhere, but its intriguing imagery reveals more. In fact, after the shock of that curious, can-I-be-bothered first play has worn off a bit, you'll find many of the songs start to really take a grip: first of all check out *The Bumblebee Song*, whose alternate title *How I'd Live My Life* gives a clue to its altogether deeper concerns. *Let's Go To Town* is a desperate croak for attention that can't go ignored - and it isn't (soon getting swamped by a carousel-cacophony), while *Weak As In Good* takes a slice through the philosophy of well-being and *Little Bernadette* carves itself a nice line in double-edged deliberate melancholy.

And I love the twisted-gospel of *In The Night Sky* and the limpid depths of the ostensibly simple address-to-a-loved-one that is *Darlin' If You Think My Songs Are Fun Then Darlin' You Are Wrong!*

The songs are cradled in suitably quirky instrumental colours, with liberal use of strange guitars, pedal steel, mandolin, organs, toy-synths, musical saw and assorted percussion knick-knacks.

Yes, there's an appealing devil-may-care innocence, even naivety, about this eccentric Baboo universe, and it's a place I could happily spend many fruitful, pleasant and quietly stimulating hours. I'd advise you to give this disc time for the chance to worm its way into your consciousness - I feel sure you'll find it worth your while.

<http://www.myspace.com/sweetbabotheband>