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Dan Reeder Biography

Dan Reeder's new second album *Sweetheart* consists of 15 original songs, plus a cover of Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale," that sounds like the demo version Gary Brooker probably dreamed of singing 39 years ago before all that baroque production-work got in the way. It isn't so much a sequel to his wonderful out-of-nowhere, out-of-time 2003 debut, *Dan Reeder*, as it is an extension of--a more freewheeling elaboration on--his first musical offering. Certain themes recur on *Sweetheart*: Dan likes to be alone ("I Don't Really Want To Talk To You"; "Just Leave Me Alone Today"); Dan likes to think about, and have, sex ("Pussy Titty"; "Pussy Heaven"--for the son of a minister, he's got quite a mouth on him). But most of the time, *Sweetheart* is about the sound of Dan Reeder's cracked, dry, confiding voice and the pleasant noises he gets out his homemade guitars, his multi-tracked harmonies with himself and his occasional puff on a harmonica.

There's a certain stubbornness here, and I'm not just talking about the 37 years Dan says it's taking for his cappuccino to arrive in *Sweetheart's* lead-off cut, "I'm Waiting For My Cappuccino." Reeder has the stubbornness--the creative persistence--of an artist: You get the definite feeling he'll do or make whatever he wants and the hell if anyone else likes or wants it. In a world where most pop culture is about finding out what the maximum number of people desire and then manufacturing something that will max-out that desire till you puke, Reeder's quiet, sharp-witted, literally home-made music reminds you why some people create: to satisfy themselves, and then, if possible, make some money in the bargain.

Reeder accompanies himself on those guitars, plucking a few simple chords, while his melodies connect to the blues, country, folk and early rock & roll. Every person I play a Dan Reeder song for has roughly the same two reactions: Hey, I've thought about stuff like that, and, how great it is to hear someone sing about the important things in life without sounding all self-important.

A lot of this has to do with Reeder's other artistic endeavor, which he'd been doing way before he sent his first album, unbidden, to John Prine and Oh Boy Records in 2003: painting. A Louisiana-born Californian (studied art at cal State Fullerton), transplanted to Germany, married with three children, an artist who keeps both his paint buckets and his instruments in the same comfortably small, semi-tidy studio, Reeder is clearly not a conventionally striving middle-class American, but he doesn't have a whit of condescension toward anyone who is: As he sings here on "Beautiful," "I am not you and you are not me," and Reeder really gets off--becomes inspired by--all of our differences. Reeder makes paintings that are, like his compositions, deceptively simple: canvases marked by a realism mixed with cartoon exaggeration, plus the occasional helpful caption, such as a throbbing lump of tan brain-matter against a dark background with the words, "Brain which has been thinking the same shit over and over begins to generate unpleasant radiation." My favorite one on his website, danreeder.com, may be the simplest, yet most self-referential, of all: a painting of a paintbrush against a sky-blue background. An art critic could find comparisons to others in Reeder's work--hell, even I can see glimmers of the faux-naif Henri Rousseau; Reeder's fellow California transplant Ed Ruscha; and another multi-media ornery talent, the painter/film-critic Manny Farber. But, the work is also distinctly Dan Reeder.

Reeder is someone who is squarely in the American tradition of independence and self-imposed isolation, yet who wants to share these qualities with others, because he wants to connect with his fellow isolates, to let us know we're not alone. I don't see how anyone could fail to be moved by the somber beauty of the one-man doo-wop harmonies on "You Should Have Wrote a Book." And when he sings, on the new album, "I don't wanna be on no TV if you know what I mean" (from "Just Leave Me Alone Today"), we *do* know what he means. Dan Reeder is, in the art and music worlds, a plucky survivor, but he sure as hell doesn't want to go on that damn TV show *Survivor*, or join the band *Survivor*, for that matter. No "Eye of the Tiger" for him: more like the eye and ear of the beholder--that's who he's aiming his music, his art, at. So, to get more portentous than this man ever will: Behold, Dan Reeder. Now watch him draw himself a beer and listen to him make himself some music.

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