

Celebrating The Arrival Of A Better World, (07/13/06)

Having watched television in countless hotel rooms on my recent Boston-to-Austin road trip, I noted that advertisers in the United States are allowed to compare the attributes of their product with that of a competitor and openly suggest that their brand is the best. I thought the approach was an insult to my intelligence. Here in the U.K., the "watchdog" Advertising Standards Authority does not allow such adverts to be broadcast.

John Flynn's *Two Wolves*, his sixth adult recording, was produced by **Ben Wisch** and includes contributions from ace pickers **Larry Campbell** and **Duke Levine**, the extraordinary cello playing of **Stephanie Winters**, and guest vocals from **Kathy Mattea** and **Kris Kristofferson**. A few weeks back we reviewed another Ben Wisch production. Having established a listener's familiarity with each disc, one is fool's gold, the other a shiny chunk of platinum. Rather than foist upon you my opinion of which is which, I'll let you judge. I wouldn't dare insult your intelligence!

Dragon, Flynn's 2003 album, released on the cusp of the coalition's entry into Iraq, found the musician far from silent and unconcerned. I wrote, "John Flynn is not happy with what's happening to his homeland, America. John Flynn's not happy with what's happening to his planet and to mankind. The mature late teen that studied political science at degree level has the intelligence to understand the game that's being played with lives on this ever-spinning blue sphere. Mankind, planet-wide, has been hijacked by fat cats in suits, and Flynn is truly pissed." Three years later the coalition is no longer "waist deep in the big muddy"; hell, we've pretty much been swallowed up by a swamp of our own making. Be very careful: On this occasion Flynn is accompanied by *Two Wolves*.

A Native American-themed exposition, the opening track "Two Wolves" finds a wise grandfather counseling his bullied school-age grandchild that eye-for-eye revenge is not the solution: "*And within each heart these two wolves fight/One is hatred and darkness/And the other is love and light.*" Perceptively, the child chooses to listen. Oh, that some of our leaders possessed such inspired grace. The uptempo "There's No Them There (Nomoreu's Anthem)" alludes to how the shades and hues of mankind could merge into one, just like "*the colours of the rainbow.*" While "There's No Them There" is a prayer for unity and peace, the "Dover" air-force base in Delaware is not currently a warm joyous place where weary travellers are welcomed home. Deathly cold, it's an austere final port of call for a stream of flag-draped aluminium caskets. Later those folded flags will be passed to the deceased's relatives. Don't you want to ask why? Don't you want to change this? "There's No Them There" amounts to a prayer that mankind can find a way to live in peace.

From the cradle to the grave, the cycle of life keeps revolving, and I know no words that adequately capture the breathtaking beauty of "Blink." This is the finest song I've heard in 2006, and if you were reading my fountain-pen-transcribed page, I'd have no embarrassment in revealing that the words are heavily tear-stained. In some people's eyes, the lyric to "Put Your Freedom Where Your Mouth Is" might be interpreted as the

words of a malcontent. Inspired, in part, by the real-life events that gave birth to "Dover," Flynn pins his colours firmly to the mast: "*So we don't dare to protest/Because its oil/Is like black milk/And we suckle at its breast.*" **Ollabelle's Amy Helm** ably supports Flynn's voice on "Freedom" with a Gospel-flavoured backing vocal. "Azizullah" brings the listener face to face with a disturbing vignette that could have occurred after the decision to invade some faraway land. Following in the footsteps of **Guthrie** and **Seeger**, Flynn makes "No More War" a peace anthem that deserves to be sung loud and clear across this wicked world; he's joined vocally by **Jane Kelly Williams** and **Kim and Reggie Williams**.

Phil Ochs' songs still possess the ability to touch listeners deeply, and Flynn performs his nautical fable "Pleasures Of The Harbor," the first of two well-chosen cover songs here. "Hall Of Angels" was penned by Kris Kristofferson two decades ago after **Eddie Rabbit's** 23 month-old-son, Timmy, died following a liver transplant. Rarely performed in public by Kristofferson, Flynn was present on one occasion when he did. Flynn is the first person to record the song, and Kristofferson adds his voice to the cut, as does Jane Kelly Williams. The closing track, "Trust The Rope," neatly wraps up this bag of precious gems with a gentle entreaty to have faith in all you do.

In this instant-gratification 21st-century world we've created, I dream that the anaesthetised masses will open their ears and hear, their eyes and see, their mouths and use their voice. *Two Wolves* deserves to become a touchstone that celebrates the arrival of a better world — one in which life is lived with humility and people don't covet their fellow humans' possessions.

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