

MELODY MAKER

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JACQUES TO STARS (SETANTA)

OUT JUNE 5 ★★★★★

THE second off-shoot album from swoonsome dramatists Jack, "To Stars" is a mesmerising, touching, at times heart-shatteringly beautiful affair, a sumptuous collection of snap-shots and ruminations from the sorry soul of singer Anthony Reynolds.

Though his music inhabits similar vistas to Suede's world of vertiginously emotional, sky-scraper romance, Reynolds twists the familiar lexicon – raindrops skittering off lonely tenement windows, tearful farewells in dusky side streets – into lavishly touching shapes all of his own. A judiciously gifted, curiously underrated songwriter, Reynolds eschews the camp irony and somnolent pretensions of Neil Hannon and Nick Cave (both of whom operate in superficially similar areas), to create refreshingly uncluttered, ugly beautiful songs dealing in – now get a load of this – *real* emotions.

So even if a faint flicker of a smile is detectable behind the cover of Abba's dread-filled "The Day Before You Came", songs like "London Loves You" are genuinely moving, lushly melodic affairs. "I Won't Let You Down" and "It'll Never Happen Again" in particular display a keen understanding of the effortless, bittersweet genius of Sixties songsmiths Jimmy Webb and Burt Bacharach. "To Stars" is a record of rare, surprising beauty. Buy buy.

A BIT LIKE? Fingershicks and Elvis Presley dancing naked in a fountain in Venice

PAUL WHITELAW

