

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM: The Story of Scott Walker and the Walker Brothers by Anthony Reynolds (Jawbone, UK; 2009; 352 pages)

There's an alluring, indefinable magic to the Walker Brothers. In his liner notes to their 1966 EP, *I Need You*, Brian Sommerville dubbed it "neurotic romanticism." He goes on to portray them as reluctant stars whose "assumption of the world's hostility ... finds expression in the yearning, pained quality of the songs they sing." On records like "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore," writes Anthony Reynolds, the Walkers could make "the prospect of eternal night sound uplifting." It's the kind of magic few others have ever been able to master.

While previous Walkers biographers have usually chosen to focus almost exclusively on Scott—admittedly the most gifted of the pretend siblings—Reynolds' book also gives due attention to the other 'brothers,' John Maus and Gary Leeds. Maus' contributions in particular have been grievously overlooked in the past, so it's refreshing to see him receive due credit at last, not only for his vocal talents, but also for his abilities as a songwriter.

While Reynolds was not able to interview any of the Walkers for *The Impossible Dream*, he makes generous use of existing interview material, some of it previously unpublished. Perception changes over time, and memory, as we all know, can be selective, so there's some discord from time to time when a quote from 1967 bumps up against another from 20 or 30 years later, but as a whole the author integrates the material effectively (although the sources for all the quotes should have been documented in more detail). The words of the three Walkers are supplemented by new interview material with producers, engineers, backing musicians and a variety of friends and associates.

But it's Reynolds' passionate and perceptive writing style that elevates the book above the kind of dry rock bio hackery that's become an industry standard. He's not only well-versed in all of the music, he's also emotionally invested in it, and as a musician and vocalist himself, he's able to provide clear, intelligent analysis of just about every track the Walkers ever recorded, as a group or as solo artists. His beautiful, if occasionally florid, descriptions are a treat, too: "Blinded by their rain-sodden fringes, the narrators trail listlessly along deserted boulevards and dead-ended avenues" ("The Girl I Lost In the Rain"); "The voices are flawless, falling skyward like cranes out of a cedarwood forest..." ("Summertime"); "If this were a film it would be Godard in Carnaby Street" ("Saddest Night in the World"); "John joins faithfully on the chorus, their voices fitting each other so perfectly you imagine orchards of roses simultaneously blooming in sympathy the world over" ("It Makes No Difference Now")—and so on.

But it's not all wet bangs and blooming roses. The book's opening chapter paints a grim yet comical picture of one of the group's final shows together, a dying gasp at a down-at-heel Birmingham nightclub in 1978 ("You got a complimentary portion of chicken and chips with your ticket to the show"). The rest of the book traces the Walkers' musical career to that moment, beginning with the group's formation in California in the early '60s. The California period is rushed through perhaps a little too briskly for my tastes, but admittedly has already been covered in minute detail in Stephen McParland's fine *All-American Boys: The Walker Brothers' Genesis* (reviewed in

UT#21). It was only when the group reached England that their career really took off and they began to make the kind of records that would define their sound, and it's at this point that Reynolds really sinks his teeth into the material. The group's story—together and apart—is told in absorbing detail, but with a sense of style, humor and pacing that will keep you turning pages long into the night.

The book also includes an excellent photo section, with many previously unpublished shots, and numerous appendices, including discographies, a list of live, TV and radio appearances, and more. Everything a neurotic romantic could ever ask for, in other words. (MS)

An Interview with Anthony Reynolds

UT: When did you first get into the Walker Brothers, and what was it that attracted you about their music?

AR: My mother (who is quoted in the book) was a teenager during the sixties and was your classic Beatles, Motown, and Walker brothers fan. So I grew up listening to them and she would actually foist them onto me when I became a teenager. Of course, you reject anything your folks like at that age so it wasn't until the *After The Lights Go Out* and *Boy Child* compilations in 1990 that I discovered them for myself, if you like. I remember vividly listening to the title track of the latter on a Walkman as me and my friends drove into Paris that same year. I was 18 and it was the perfect soundtrack to a perfect moment.

Their music is very seductive and authentic sonically. I love the production, the drumming ... and the songs are almost all classics. But most of all there's something weird going on under those lush strings and perfect voices...something odd that I still can't put my finger on. They looked too cool too, especially compared to most of their UK peers.

UT: How did you go about researching the book and how long did it take?

AR: It was my first book so I found out how it's done as I went along. The Internet helped, almost everyone alive in the music business has or is mentioned on a website. More so today with MySpace, etc. I also found people the old fashioned way via word of mouth, one subject leading me to another. A few cold calls. Some people got in touch with me when they found out I was writing it. I spent some blissful weeks in the London magazine archive, a wing of the British Library, scrolling through microfilm all summer long. A lot of fun for a nerd.

I started the book in late 2004 and finished it in early 2006. It was delayed since then for reasons beyond anyone's control.

UT: Why were you unable to interview Scott, John or Gary for the book, and was this an impediment to your progress?

AR: I don't think it's particularly important to have to interview the subject of a biography. Plus, all three Walkers have spoken so much over the years about their relatively brief time in the group that if you were able to put all that together as text there wouldn't be much left unsaid. You can be more objective this way too. I did write to John and Gary at the outset. I only got a reply from John, saying he was saving himself for his own book—which has turned out true, so good for him. I didn't even want to approach Scott. I think he's happy enough discussing the Walkers in conjunction with promotion for his new work, but he's not gonna sit down and wax lyrical about the past for the sake of it or for the sake of another biography. In fact I'm sure he'd rather there was no biography, but is also realistic enough to realise that things will be written. Unlike his 'siblings' Scott is today a very vital, legitimate and active artist in my opinion. I respect that fact that he doesn't want to waste time looking back on an uncomfortable period



of his life. He was pretty lost then for a long time, I think. It just happened that the public fell in love with the work from that period. I don't think he owes the public anything—the opposite in fact—so I didn't bug him.

UT: You skipped over the pre-UK recordings of Scott and John pretty quickly. Any particular reason?

AR: The book was meant to cover in depth the history of the Walkers—as a group and solo—during the lifespan of the group. So I wasn't too interested in their pre-Walkers catalogue. As Walker brothers they only had two brief sessions on US soil, four songs with Nick Venet, and I covered these best I could.

UT: I think you treated John's contributions with a great deal of respect, which was refreshing. Why do you feel that John's contributions have been so overlooked over the years?

AR: His work is overlooked simply because the public have a problem with distinguishing him from the Walkers and from Scott. If he had made those same solo records completely independently of Scott Engel—if they had never met—then he'd be much more regarded than he is. Of course, had he not met Scott, both may have never made the records that they did. The record buying public (as they were once known) seems to have a problem with taking work on its own merit. I think many are not sure of their own taste. It's like Sammy Davis Jr (whom I'm also a massive fan of) is not often taken seriously in his own right. He's always compared to Sinatra and Martin. And he suffers because of it, particularly because of the Sinatra comparison. But who can compare to Sinatra? Anyone is gonna come up short next to that guy. For whatever reason I don't suffer from this, I'm able to listen to music as music most of the time. And you listen to some of John's stuff and it's just utterly delicious, truly lovely. But if you're a Walker fan and you're putting him in a sonic egg and spoon race with Scott, then he's gonna come last, as most would. His work is overlooked for this reason; people aren't able to listen beyond prejudices they are not even aware of.

UT: Gary is an interesting character. As you point out in the book, he didn't play on any of the records and barely played even at their live shows. Why was his role in the band so important, even to the extent that he was brought on board for the '70s reunion?

AR: Gary was the most ambitious, driven and the most together when they got to England. Scott and John were never hard-hearted, diamond-minded professionals. Compared to the Beatles, Tom Jones, Rod Stewart, Engelbert Humperdinck, John and Scott were unambitious stoners. They might never had made it to the UK without Gary. When they did

make it, they weren't gonna boot Gary out because he wasn't Keith Moon. They were mates, American's abroad under hyper-real circumstances (i.e. hugely famous).

They found a lot of comfort in one another and Gary was funny and charismatic. He took pressure off Scott in particular. It was a dynamic not based on musicianship. By the time they reformed in '75, all were feeling battered by their years in the wilderness, all were struggling financially. By then they were a family that should have outgrown each other but these circumstances brought them back together. By now Scott used Gary as a kind of crutch. He was putting off his real destiny. But by *Nite Flights* Scott had come round. Gary and he haven't spoken since the '80s, but for a while they were just young dudes having an amazing time—buddies.

UT: Why did you choose the title *The Impossible Dream*?

AR: That's the name of a Jacques Brel song, from *The Man From La Mancha*, a musical Brel co-wrote about Don Quixote. At his peak, Scott was a bit of a Quixote character, tilting at windmills, etc. He covered the song, too. But in the deepest sense, the title really refers to the idea of youth that the Walker brothers in part represented for me and many, many others. Something too wonderful, too perfect and too beautiful to ever endure. •

CLASSIC BLUES ARTWORK FROM THE 1920's, VOL. 7: 2010 Calendar (Blues Images, Tefteller.com; 32 pages) Calendar + CD

Blues Images, a division of John Tefteller's World's Rarest Records, has been publishing these distinctive LP-sized calendars since 2004, and if you're a blues fan—especially a pre-war blues fan—they're exactly what you want hanging on your kitchen wall all year.

Each month reproduces advertising artwork for a blues release from the 1920s or '30s, along with a capsule bio of the artist in question. January 2010, for example, features Robert Wilkins' "That's No Way To Get Along" (a song that will be familiar to Rolling Stones fans as "Prodigal Son" on *Beggars' Banquet*); February displays "High Water Everywhere" by Charley Patton; March, "Hard Luck Child" by Skip James—and so on. The evocative illustrations, often accompanied by a shot of the artist, are rendered in a wonderful hand-inked style rarely seen anymore in this digital age. Each month also includes the birth and death dates of various blues artists and other important African-American figures.

What's more, a CD is included with all of the recordings represented in the calendar, including tracks by Blind Lemon Jefferson, Ida Cox and Ma Rainey, along with six additional cuts, all expertly remastered from rare 78s. In the case of two tracks by Henry Townsend they're transferred from the only



known copy of the 78, and there's also previously unreleased tracks by Blind Blake and Frank Palmes.

In an introductory essay, Tefteller notes that due to the state of the economy and the closing of so many record stores this may be the last of the Blues Images calendars. So buy one for yourself and a half-dozen more as Christmas presents, and help keep this great institution alive, because, as Robert Crumb puts it, "It's worse now than in the '30s 'cause we don't have music and graphics like this anymore to get us through it!" Order at: www.bluesimages.com (MS)

LOVE, SEX, FEAR, DEATH: The Inside Story of the Process Church of the Final Judgment by Timothy Wyllie. Edited by Adam Parfrey. (Feral House, US; 2009; 304 pages)

Forget about plants, the secret life we've all been waiting to find out about is the one led by those pseudo-swastika-sportin' doomsdayers of the Process Church of the Final Judgment. During the Aquarian Age, its shaggy acolytes and their German Shepherd packs spread their subversive belief in the democratic worship of four gods: Satan, Lucifer, Jehovah, and good 'ol Jesus. Then in the late-'70s they disappeared, leaving behind little but hazy memories and a handful of publications filled with apocalyptic essays and photos of their adherents clad in devilish black uniforms. Now, thirty years after the fall, Feral House spills all the beans.



Author Timothy Wyllie (aka Father Micah) was a long-time member of the Process and saw it though all its incarnations—from its Scientology-inspired beginnings in London to self-flagellation sessions on remote Mexican beaches, and finally into big, people-pleasin' non-profits in Toronto and New York. With an astute eye he explains the internal power plays, the rituals, and the surprisingly less-than-sinister motivations. If Wyllie's matter-of-fact recollections slightly deflate the Process's mythology, the ample sections of (color!) photographs will cheer up even those crushed by the loss of another great mystery.

But, you might ask, what in the gods' names is a review of a book about a poly-religious, psychotherapy cult doing in a music magazine? Good question! Like

most cults, the Process had a cash flow problem. When the organic omelets and empathy sessions in the coffeehouses weren't quite bringing in enough new recruits, the group resorted to that age-old come-on—rock music. They interviewed Mick Jagger and put him on the cover of their magazine. They convinced George Clinton to print their missives on the jackets to *Maggot Brain* and *America Eats Its Young*. They preached to the freaks and bade them to further their cause. One such group of volunteer pied pipers was the Velvet Frogs, a *SF Sorrow*-era Pretty Things opening act who described themselves as "delinquency set to music." In 1968 they chanced upon some Process literature at the bottom of their soup bowl and took it upon themselves to help spread the message. Their spooky "Jehovah" can be heard on Tenth Planet's *Oak Records Story*.

In Toronto in the early '70s, Wyllie himself participated in an in-church rock ensemble called The Process Version that nailed down a 60-song set of mystically-themed originals and "a few classics." In the US, the Process chapter out in California had their own house band called Black Swan, briefly boosted by Jefferson Airplane/*It's A Beautiful Day*/Moby Grape-manager Matthew Katz. Katz included their fey "Lady Blond" and slightly churchier "She Encircles Me" on his San Francisco Sound collection *Fifth Pipe Dream* in 1968.

Though Wyllie doesn't mention the group in his book, he does go into depth about the West Coast junkie he and some of his cronies took in 1967 in a Ford Galaxie full of Alsatians. Upon arriving in San Francisco, the group hit the park to let the dogs do their duty.

"So there we were," remembers Wyllie. "Hair down to our waists, black robes wafting in the breeze, massive beasts straining on leashes, topping a sloping hill with wintry sun behind us to see, stretching out before us in a gentle valley, thousands of people in colorful hippie garb, all sitting and standing as if waiting for something. And they were all looking up at us!"

The Processeans had unwittingly stumbled upon the Human Be-In and the crowds, waiting for the arrival of their heroes Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg, were shocked to see these darkly-clad minstrels and their sinister kennel.

The Process's story is way too complex and convoluted to sum up here, but trust me, it's a good one. And regardless that it's a bit of a letdown not to have anything left to wonder about anymore, *Process* will undoubtedly be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of those of youze whose taste runs towards the more, umm... *esoteric*. (Erik Bluhm)

PRETTY THINGS:

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