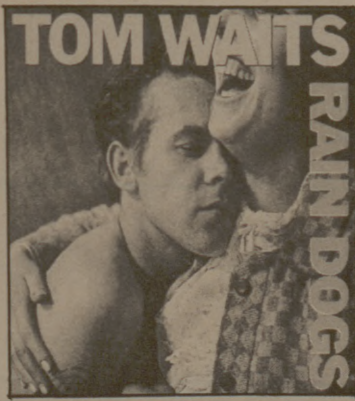


Record Reviews



**"Rain Dogs"
Tom Waits
Island Records**

★★★★★

Imagine Jack Kerouac singing with the Residents and Charles Ives. Tom Waits' new album, "Rain Dogs," sounds a bit like that.

"Rain Dogs," Waits' ninth album, is his best album to date. It combines his trademark beatnik jazz with more of the more experimental music styles he used on his last album, "Swordfishtrombones." Waits uses percussion, organ, accordion, double bass and brass along with his own guitar, piano and gruff voice in a way that is uncharacteristic of most of the popular music today. But the most outstanding thing about Waits' music is his lyrics — neo-Joycean portraits of colorful street characters; that have a much greater depth than the lyrics of most of his contemporaries.

Most of Waits' songs are dark urban street scenes filled with a various sluts, criminals, junkies, bums, scum and the basically good people who are forced to live with them. Sometimes you sympathize with the characters and sometimes you are repulsed. But you are always fascinated by them.

"Clap Hands," "Cemetery Polka," "Tango Till They're Sore," "Diamonds & Gold" and the title track are incredible looks at a range of different characters. "9th and Hennepin" and "Gun Street Girl" are like

some of Raymond Chandler's mystery novels as performed by a coffee house jazz band.

On "Rain Dogs," Waits takes a look at lower-class people from all over the world. "Singapore," with its weird percussion and atonal instrumentation, seems to be an opium-addicted sailor's song of the seas. "Jockey Full of Bourbon" is a look at the everyday life of immigrants in a ghetto, set to a rumba beat.

Waits attempts to fuse jazz with the musical ideas of Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg are most evident on the instrumental tracks "Midtown" and "Bride of Rain Dog." "Midtown" sounds somewhat like an explosion at a jazz club. "Bride of Rain Dog," with its eerie carnival sound, would provide an excellent background for Ray Bradbury's "Something Wicked This Way Comes."

Jazz plays an important role in Waits' music. "Walking Spanish" would be at home at any jazz club in any big city. "Anywhere I Lay My Head," with its brass, parade drum and pump organ, sounds like a New Orleans funeral dirge. Waits obviously understands jazz in all its forms.

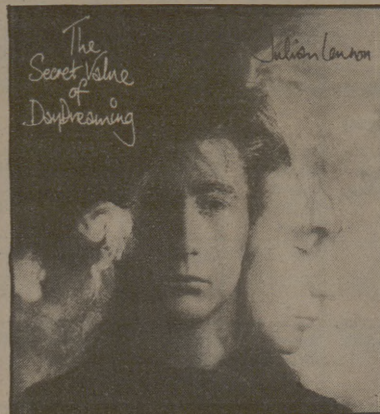
Not all of the songs on "Rain Dogs" are weird. Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards plays on three of the most normal sounding songs on the album. "Big Black Maria" is a rough blues song. "Union Square" is straightforward rock. "Blind Love," with its fiddle and Richards' slide guitar playing, is country.

Playwright Kathleen Brennan, Waits' new wife, co-wrote "Hang Down Your Head" with Waits. Waits dedicates the album to her and they are supposedly working together on a musical play.

There are two fantastic songs that stand out on this fantastic album. "Downtown Train" is a slow rock song similar to his earlier "Jersey Girl." It would be nice to hear Bruce Springsteen cover this one, too. "Time" is

one of the most incredible love songs to come out of the '80s. "Time," Leonard Cohen-ish in flavor, features a beautiful but simple interplay of guitar, acoustic bass, accordion and Waits' voice.

Waits' music is dense. It's not for the MTV crowd because it takes work to understand and appreciate. If you're smart and open-minded, you'll probably enjoy "Rain Dogs" and the rest of Waits' albums.



**"The Secret Value
of Daydreaming"
Julian Lennon
Atlantic Records**

★★★

Like father, like son? Not really.

"The Secret Value of Daydreaming" is Julian Lennon's second album. Most of you know that Julian is John Lennon's son by his first wife. Julian's first album, "Valotte," was a commercial success and wasn't too bad. It showed Julian understands what's happening in current pop music. He did his best to make his music his own, instead relying on his father's achievements and popularity. Julian is obviously influenced by his father but he doesn't stoop to ripping him off.

"The Secret Value of Daydreaming" is much like "Valotte" in style and feel. It sounds like most of today's pop music but there are a few outstanding

tracks. Most artists have that problem of making a second album stand up to their first and the music on "The Secret Value of Daydreaming" does suffer from the sophomore slump.

Most of the songs don't seem out of place alongside the typical MTV fair. "Stick Around," the first single off the album, fits well into top-40 radio format but the lyrics are more cynical than those of most other artists. "You Get What You Want," with Billy Joel on piano, is another typical song that will probably be Julian's next hit.

"I've Seen Your Face," "This is My Day," "You Don't Have to Tell Me" and "Always Think Twice" are more of the same stuff — all planned as possible hits. If it weren't for the synthesizers and drum machines clouding up the mix, I might have been able like these songs.

There is one song that stands out to show that Julian can write and is responsible for two of the three stars I gave the album. "Coward Till the End?" is about a conscientious objector.

He's objecting to war and the oppressiveness of military service. He's objecting to traditional concepts of love and the confinement of certain types of relationships. He's objecting to the concept of fame and the expectations a star is supposed to meet. "Coward Till the End?" is slower and gentler than most of the album and is filled with more emotion than all of Julian's other stuff combined. It's a huge step in the right direction.

Julian's music shows potential. He needs to develop his style more fully and better define where he wants to go with his music. I have faith in him. I think that one day the Lennon family, John and Julian, will be remembered as fondly as the Strauss family among music historians.

**by Karl Pallmeyer
music reviewer**