Wilco – Wilco (2009)



01 Wilco the Song
02 Deeper Down play
03 One Wing
04 Bull Black Nova
05 You and I
06 You Never Know
07 Country Disappeared
08 Solitaire play
09 I'll Fight
10 Sunny Feeling
11 Everlasting

Personnel
* Jeff Tweedy - vocals, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, 12-string acoustic guitar, 12-string electric guitar
* John Stirratt - bass, electric guitar, background vocals
* Nels Cline - electric guitar, lap steel, electric "shorty" 12-string, loops, electric 12-string guitar, slide guitar
* Pat Sansone - Wurlitzer electric piano, harpsichord, Fender Rhodes, Mellotron, dulcimer, celeste, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, piano, field organ, Hammond organ, tambourine, pump organ, Optigan organ, background vocals
* Mikael Jorgensen - piano, bowed piano, synthesizer, Hammond organ, background vocals
* Glenn Kotche - drums, percussion, chimes, cimbalom, gunpowder
* Jason Tobias - slide cimbalom
* Leslie Feist - vocals
* Neil Finn - background vocals
* Dave Max Crawford – trumpet

For a band that could easily lay claim to the title 'the best live act in the world', Wilco's eighth album is a remarkably studio-bound confection. But fear not, this is by no means an overwrought, over-involved piece of sonic navel-gazing. After years bouncing between country rock, experimental noise and visceral rock pyrotechnics Wilco (The Album) sees the band balance Jeff Tweedy's writer-at-his-peak poise with some of their most charming pop rock ensemble playing.

By Tweedy's own admission, the album saw the six-piece using their collective (and not inconsiderable) chops to achieve something a little more 'crafted'. Partly recorded in Neil Finn's Auckland studio, it also seems that an element of the Kiwi star's Beatle-aping tendencies have rubbed off.

Second track Deep Down, with its ocean floor metaphors and sound effects could almost be their Yellow Submarine; while the most poptastic song on offer, You Never Know, not only features some of their sweetest close harmonies but also cheekily references George Harrison's My Sweet Lord.

But this is still unmistakably a Wilco album. Tweedy's voice beautifully covers all bases from intimate despair (especially when paired with Feist on the aching You And I) to breast-beating intensity. And for fans of the wilder, avant garde Wilco there's still Nels Cline's paint-stripping attack on the ascending maelstrom of Black Bull Nova; supposedly told from the point of view of a murderer.

It's a paradoxical mixture of warm and dour. Two songs seem to chronicle fraying relationships (You And I and One Wing). But the country drift of Solitaire details a return from the existential wilderness, possibly due to Tweedy's victory over addiction. He wants us to know how much he cares. And as with Sky Blue Sky's On And On And On, everything is sealed with a life-affirming ode to the transience of life, Everlasting.

So while Jeff may sing "I don't care anymore" the truth is obviously otherwise. As Wilco (The Album) flutters away on the birdcall beauty of Cline's loops, you feel like you've shared a special moment: one that you can always return to. As they say on the opening Wilco The Song, "Wilco will love you." Best live band? How about plain old best band in the world right now? ---Chris Jones

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