

The National - Sleep Well Beast (2017)

Written by bluesever

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1 Nobody Else Will Be There 2 Day I Die 3 Walk It Back 4 The System Only Dreams In Total Darkness 5 Born To Beg 6 Turtleneck 7 Empire Line 8 I'll Still Destroy You 9 Guilty Party 10 Carin At The Liquor Store 11 Dark Side Of The Gym 12 Sleep Well Beast
Backing Vocals – Arone Dyer, Lisa Hannigan Bass Flute, Flute – Maaike van der Linde Drums – Eric Cha-Beach Drums, Percussion – Jason Treuting Electronics – Alexander Ridha Guitar – Josh Kaufman Keyboards – Thomas Bartlett Keyboards, Electronics – Erwan Castex Keyboards, Programmed By – Andi Toma, Jan St. Werner Organ – Nick Lloyd, Walter Martin Piano – Katia Labeque Synth, Backing Vocals – Justin Vernon Trombone, Synth – Benjamin Lanz Trumpet, Flugelhorn, Backing Vocals – Kyle Resnick

Since The National released sixth album 'Trouble Will Find Me' in 2013, it's fair to say the world has found nothing but trouble. Follow-up 'Sleep Well Beast' continues the theme, asking on the rollocking 'Day I Die', "the day I die – where will we be?". In a bunker, sheltering from a Trumpian nuclear war at this rate.

It's all very 2017. And it's an album on which Matt Berninger, Aaron and Bryce Dessner, and Bryan and Scott Devendorf stray outside the previously clearly defined lines of what The National sound is. It's more experimental lyrically. For example, on 'Walk It Back', a skittering exploration of anxiety, we hear an excerpt of former deputy chief of staff to George W Bush, Karl Rove, quoting an aide.

And it's more experimental sonically, too. 'I'll Still Destroy You' starts with synths Jamie xx would dig. 'Turtleneck', one for fans of Steve Jobs' sartorial decisions, is a revelation. A strong Pixies vibe and raucous licks that duel together happily see The National at their hardest, with Matt railing against "another man in s**tty suits".

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They've been added to the steadfast elements that make The National so good: clever turns of phrase, genius storytelling, Bryan Devendorf's marching-band drums, delightful arrangements and piano and brass that work well together. All these are put to expert effect here on the sublime 'Dark Side Of The Gym', which is a perfect blend of old and new.

Not everything works, and 'Guilty Party' is the unfortunate victim of this band's habit of chucking a monotonous dud or two on every record. But hey, this is The National at a time when a nationalist heads the most powerful country in the world. They've adjusted accordingly. Play it on repeat in the bunker. --- Hannah Jane Parkinson, nme.com

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