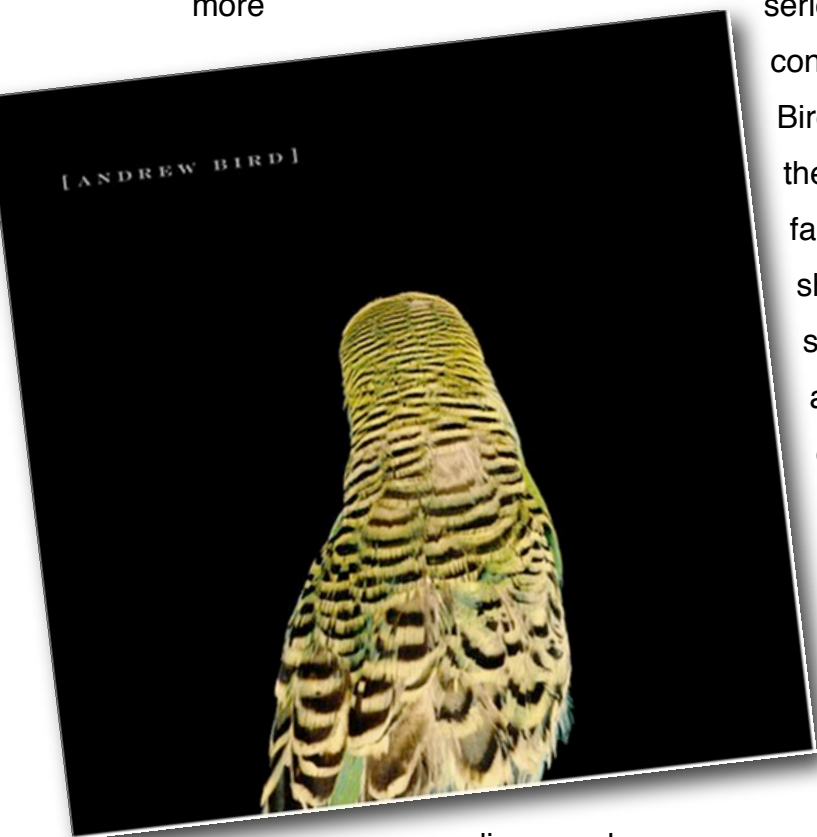


Andrew Bird - Armchair Apocrypha

by: Eric Loose

Imagine if you will, the climax of gruesome plane crash. The plane dives lifelessly through the sky back towards the earth as gravity begins to assert its strength. Now, picture this scene a lovely beat to accompany it, complete with a violin, a piano; perhaps an optimistic tune with whistling, a choir, maybe some horns and lively vocals to compliment. *Armchair Apocrypha* elicits a powerful feeling of contrast and contradiction as Andrew Bird has a knack for making the terrifying into beautiful, or the mundane into captivating. Take the title, for instance- Armchair: a commonplace piece of furniture that, by every means, is nothing out of the ordinary, and Apocrypha: a much more

serious subject, Scripture that is widely considered as false. On *Armchair Apocrypha*, Bird seamlessly blends the “apocryphic” with the “armchair,” the unsettling with the oddly familiar. His insightful and witty lyricism is as sharp as ever, and it complements his swooning, murky voice. While Bird has always been an adept musician, his more electric tendencies spring to life on *Armchair Apocrypha*. While he seemed to rely on his virtuosic violin playing in the past, *Apocrypha* showcases Bird spreading his wings. Vibrant and sad, lively and precise, *Armchair Apocrypha* is the pinnacle of Andrew Bird’s illustrious



discography.

A melodic masterpiece, *Armchair Apocrypha* is a testament to well-structured and executed pop music. It would be not just possible, but reasonable, to rave for years about the excellent engineering of not only each song, but the album as a whole. The organ, the quaint finger plucking, the all-out strumming, the whistling: each sounds perfectly conducted and necessary. At first, it’s hard to pinpoint the exact aspect that makes Bird’s tunes so entrancing. Even after listening to *Apocrypha* time and time

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again, it's difficult to pick up on the subtle elements that separate Bird from his peers. His slurred speech becomes another instrument in his already illustrious repertoire. Sure, Sufjan Stevens and Sam Beam have absolutely lovely voices, but Bird's has a more unique quality. Though it may sound a bit ridiculous, Bird's real claim to fame is his ability to go so far beyond the singing and songwriting of the singer-songwriter/folk genre. *Armchair Apocrypha* is an immense and superb album, the most grand example of Bird's expansion into more electrical and eclectic music than on the acoustic-oriented *The Mysterious Production of Eggs*.

Listening to *Armchair Apocrypha*, many people will notice the lively, beautiful harmonies that inhabit the album like tropical fish inhabit a reef. They're colorful, they glide smoothly from here to there, and while they all share some common characteristics, each is unique and beautiful on its own. Though, like a dip underwater, it's a much more impressive experience when taking the swim as a whole, instead of concentrating on each individual pattern or sound. Violins, eerie whistling, and waves of layered overdubs all enhance the symphonic experience created on Andrew Bird's *Apocrypha*.

The terrifying and beautiful contradiction and composition of beauty can be readily viewed throughout his songs dark subject matter. The aforementioned "Fiery Crash" may be the most obvious, but the album is full of alike counterparts. "Plasticities," superfluously overflowing with a catchy harmony and passionate chorus, is a tirade against a society's culture gone wrong. "*We'll fight, we'll fight, we'll fight for your musicals and dying cities,*" Bird exclaims as a battle-cry in the fight for culture. Also deserving a significant mention is Bird's flair for beginning songs. Take a listen to the introductions to perfect plucking of "Plasticities," or the deliberate, plodding guitar on "Heretics," or the whistling to begin "Darkmatter," and try NOT to be interested. His talent for introducing songs gives a distinct and individual feel to each one, making it much more of a memorable experience. Once again, it's difficult to find songwriting that falls below Bird's incredibly high standards on *Apocrypha*. His take on the Iraq War in "Scythian Empires" is intriguing, as he references the Middle East's history to provide a different perspective. Bird refrains from wailing, and tries to maintain a stoic demeanor

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to his voice. When he loosens up a little, such as on “Spare-Oh’s,” it’s difficult not to feel a wave of emotion pass over through ears along with his soft voice. His juxtaposition of the dark and the fair never quite reach the same heights as on the breathtaking, “Cataracts.” Bird’s outlook on the cruel world and oppression are evident behind his soft, subtle voice and a steady, subdued guitar line as he utters about when, “Our mouths are filled with the uninvited tongues of others.” Instead of clashing and leading to confusion, these two aspects compliment each other and create a listening experience that is reminiscent of the entire album. His sad and harrowing tale is backed by a harmonious tune in an album filled to the brim with equal parts emotion and intellect.

Andrew Bird could have easily coasted along with his virtuosic violin skills, the addition of a more electric sound, and his way with words, and called *Armchair Apocrypha* a success. Instead, there is much more at work here. The atmosphere, the emotion, the feeling is what leaves that lasting imprint, the crater in the ears of the listener that can’t be filled by any other contemporary singer-songwriters. Bird’s juxtaposition of the dark and the beautiful, the harrowing and harmonious, is the recipe *Armchair Apocrypha*. The final product has the ability to be breathtaking at some moments and perfectly content and satisfied at others. *Armchair Apocrypha* doesn’t attempt to do away with the horrifying. Instead, it confronts atrocities head on and makes it possible to see the beauty in the ugly. When the end is near, and your plane is headed down, don’t scream and wail for your life. Instead, hum a pleasant tune and find the beauty that we all overlook in plane crashes.

“The fiery crash, it’s just a formality / Or must I explain, just a nod to mortality.”

Recommended Tracks:

Fiery Crash

Heretics

Plasticities

Scythian Empires

Overall Grade: 93% A

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