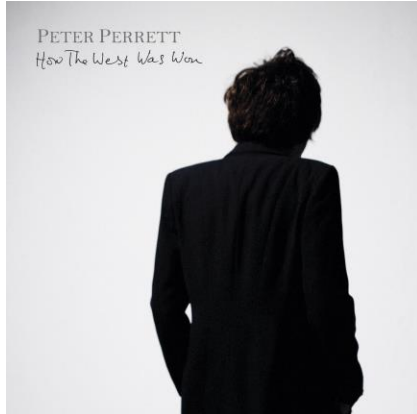




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PETER PERRETT (UK)

*How The West Was Won*

Label: Domino

Release Date: 26.05.2017

Web: <http://peterperrett.com/>

EPK: [irascible.ch/de/releases/peter-perrett/how-the-west-was-won/](http://irascible.ch/de/releases/peter-perrett/how-the-west-was-won/)

In the hands of certain songwriters, a story of resurrection and redemption might ring a little hollow. Worse, it might sound like pseudo-messianic psychobabble. But when the songwriter is Peter Perrett, the usual rules have never applied. Perrett, whose incisive songcraft and sardonic drawl made him one of the most distinctive voices of the Seventies (and briefly, the Nineties), has indeed got a tale of resurrection and redemption to tell. And even if he's telling it with copious doses of his trademark deadpan wit, the miracle is that he's telling it at all.

Perrett made his reputation in *The Only Ones* (1976–1981) by writing about – and living – a life of the utmost decadence without worrying too much about the consequences. “*I always flirt with death,*” began his most famous song (“Another Girl, Another Planet”), “*I look ill but I don’t care about it.*” It was an exotic universe full of strange creatures, but an incredibly dangerous one to inhabit. Not once but twice, Perrett retreated into a hermetic haze and transmitted nothing but radio silence for ten years. The two decades of his life that were surrendered to drug addiction were his own business, of course, but they were music’s loss as well.

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What a fantastic surprise it is, then, to hear an older, wiser Perrett singing of having music back in his bloodstream again. Take a listen to ‘Something In My Brain’, a song towards the end of his debut solo album HOW THE WEST WAS WON: it’s about making good choices, bad choices and ultimately the only choices that will guarantee survival. All too conscious of his mortality in 2017, Perrett no longer views illness as an occupational hazard or death as a source of amusement, like that swaggering young existentialist of 1978. When he gets to the line about being “*just about capable of one last defiant breath,*” he’s not exaggerating. But if his lung power is depleted, his other powers – his intuitive feel for words; his flair for idiosyncratic metaphors; his mordant wit – are still as sharp as razors. The image of the laboratory rat being forced to choose between food and crack is as darkly comical as anything Perrett ever wrote for The Only Ones. By the time he steps aside to allow his son Jamie to play an emotional guitar solo, ‘Something In My Brain’ (“*an allegorical tale*”) has become a double-sided epiphany. Peter Perrett has rediscovered the importance of rock’n’roll, and rock’n’roll has rediscovered the importance of Peter Perrett. It will surely be hailed as one of the standout tracks on HOW THE WEST WAS WON, his new album on Domino, the comeback that nobody saw coming.

The songs on HOW THE WEST WAS WON examine complex emotional terrain and extreme human behaviour, shot through as always with wry self-analysis. In a sense the album is a Perrett family affair: there are love songs (“An Epic Story”, “C Voyeurger”) from Peter to his wife Zena, and their two sons, Jamie and Peter Jr., play lead guitar and bass respectively. But there are also songs where Perrett opens his curtains and stares out into a much-changed world. The title track finds him railing against American imperialism and celebrity culture. “Man Of Extremes” despairs of the “*sick society*” that sends some people into a life of crime. The mean streets of “Sweet Endeavour” are a frightening place to find yourself alone with your demons.



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Perrett makes each song on *HOW THE WEST WAS WON* sound natural and effortless, as though he were continuing a briefly interrupted conversation rather than picking up the threads of a solo career that faltered more than 20 years ago. He claims to have barely touched a guitar in the decade between his 1996 album *Woke Up Sticky* and the 2007 reunion of The Only Ones; with Perrett, a hiatus could so easily turn into a hibernation. Think of the number of prime ministers and presidents that have come and gone since the songs on *Woke Up Sticky* were written in the early Nineties. Yet Perrett's familiar voice sounds like it simply stepped out of the room for a few minutes and popped back in again.

“There's this myth about the Muse,” he says. “I don't think there's a Muse that appears and disappears – it's just a question of wanting to do it. If I play a guitar, I can't help writing songs. Sooner or later I'll play a chord sequence that will put a tune in my head. It's just a case of finding the reason to pick up the guitar in the first place.”

As recently as two years ago, Perrett wasn't planning to record again. Xena Perrett, learning via her Facebook page that music venues were interested in booking Peter for solo gigs, lined him up a small tour in the summer of 2015 – Amsterdam, London, Manchester and Bristol – where he appeared on-stage with Jamie, Peter Jr., violinist Jenny Maxwell, drummer Jake Woodward and keyboard player Lauren Moon. The gigs attracted passionate audiences and glowing reviews. Perrett may sometimes be gone, but he is never forgotten. It was noticed that he was playing one or two new songs, and that they were seriously good.

By the end of 2015 Perrett had management, a record deal lined up with Domino, a respected producer on board (Chris Kimsey) and a sense of renewed purpose that made him feel 25 again. So fired-up was he that, as he waited for contracts to be drawn up and signed, he lost patience and drove to

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Konk recording studio to begin work on the album without Kimsey. One of the songs he recorded that week was the title track. Another was the beautiful closing song, “Take Me Home”. And the third was ‘Living In My Head’, which he and his band had debuted live in the summer. A long and powerful piece, it features a scorching guitar solo from Jamie, who co-wrote the song with his father.

“Normally, when people think of musicians getting their kids into the band, they think of nepotism. But friends have told me that they can’t believe how much feeling my children have for my music”, says Perrett. “It must be something in their genes. I mean, I never played my guitar around the house – for decades I never touched it.”

If Jamie and Peter had an unconventional childhood, imagine their emotions as they back their father on a handful of songs that celebrate their parents’ equally unconventional marriage. “An Epic Story” is an unqualified love song to the girl Peter first met in 1969 and still lives with 48 years later. They have had an extraordinary life together, the runaway teenagers.

Whatever their provenance, the songs for HOW THE WEST WAS WON came thick and fast, whittled down from 40 to 23 and then to ten. Perrett remembers Chris Kimsey urging him at one point not to write any more because there wouldn’t be room for them on the album. But Perrett, with energy in his blood and something in his brain, found it difficult to stop. Has he recaptured the momentum of his halcyon youth? One has to be careful about using words like ‘plans’ and ‘strategies’ where Perrett is concerned, but at this stage in his life – he turns 65 in April – the outlook appears brighter than for many, many years. He has a fire burning inside him again, and a determination not to blow what could be his last chance.



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Peter's story is a cautionary tale. But that doesn't mean it's a cry of woe. And nor does its redemptive arc need to be sentimentalised. "It's too late for repentance of sins," he tells us on 'An Epic Story', suggesting that if he could do it all again, he really would do it all again. And perhaps he would once again arrive at this moment: drug-free, nicotine-free, addiction-free and able to occupy his days with the freedom of music. "Drugs are so boring," he says, as if the realisation has just hit him. "Musicians use their drug use as a badge of honour these days, but to me, music and drugs don't go together at all. It's either one or the other. And from now on, it's this."

Because he has been uncontactable and AWOL for much of his adult life, even seasoned Perrett-watchers will have been caught unawares by HOW THE WEST WAS WON. It's been a stop-start career derailed by hiatuses that turned into hibernations, and then into full-scale vanishings. It all conspired to deny Perrett the momentum to put together the significant body of work that his talent deserved. Maybe, just maybe, it could happen now. It's great to have him back.