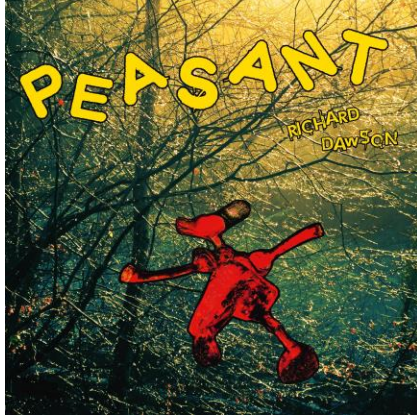




**IRASCIBLE  
MUSIC**



**RICHARD DAWSON (UK)**

*Peasant*

Label: Weird World

Release Date: 12.05.2017

Web: <http://richarddawson.net/>

EPK: <http://irascible.ch/de/releases/richard-dawson/peasant/>

“I feel like shouting”, says Richard Dawson, quietly ‘I really believe in this album. It feels somehow different than before.....that this can be something important, something of use.”

No listener to Dawson’s earlier music has ever discerned a lack of artistic ambition. Whether they got on at the last stop - the 4 track Tyneside-*Trout-Mask-through a-Vic and Bob-filter of Nothing Important* - or earlier in the journey, with *The Glass Trunk’s* visceral song cycle or *The Magic Bridge’s* sombre revels, devotees of his earlier recordings will be at once intrigued by and slightly fearful of the prospect of a record that could make those three landmark releases look like formative work.

*Peasant* is that album. From its first beguilingly muted fanfare to its spectacular climax exploring a Dark Ages masseuse’s dangerous fascination with a mysterious artefact called the Pin of Quib, it will grab newcomers to Dawson’s work by the scruff of the neck and refuse to let them go until they have signed a pledge of life-long allegiance. What other response could there be to a record that can somehow make you (or, at least, me) think of Metallica at their long-lost most formidable best, the late-lamented Qawwali giant Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Hull’s first family of folk The Watsons, and tireless Dutch anarcho-troubadours The Ex in the space of a single song, without ever sounding like anything other than itself?

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Where *Peasant's* precursors sometimes feel (however erroneously, given the involvement of several long-term collaborators) like the work of a lone, Guinness-fuelled visionary howling into the abyss, this is an explicitly collective endeavor, featuring a supremely disheveled ensemble of master musicians. It moulds those collaborators - engineer and co-producer Sam Grant, harpist Rhodri Davies, violinist Angharad Davies, brass virtuoso John Davies - into the musical family the last three of them already are (Rhodri and Angharad being brother and sister and John their dad). Emerging from this tumbling, fumbling orchestra a formidable chorus of young voices projects the embattled mutuality of the Durham Miners' Gala back through time to a mythic distant past as pungent and funny and horrifying as any Monty Python ever created on film. Or should that be a very peculiar north-eastern take on Andrei Rublev?

Driven forward by exhilarating guitar flurries, Qawwali handclaps and bursts of choral ferocity, *Peasant's* eleven tracks sustain a momentum worthy of the lyrics' urgent subject matter. Dawson describes the themes of these songs as "Families struggling, families being broken up by circumstance, and - how do you keep it together? In the face of all of these horrors that life, or some system of life, is throwing at you?" The fact that these meticulously wrought narratives all unfold in the pre-mediaeval North Eastern kingdom of Bryneich - "any time from about 450AD to 780AD, after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire"- only makes their contemporary relevance more enduring and vital.

Dawson's objective was to create "A panorama of a society which is at odds with itself and has great sickness in it, and perhaps doesn't take responsibility - blame going in all the wrong directions". But encountering *Peasant's* captivating sequence of occupational archetypes ('Herald', 'Ogre', 'Weaver', 'Scientist'), listeners might find themselves wondering if these multitudes could somehow be contained with one person - surely we all have a 'Shapeshifter' and a 'Prostitute' within us?

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“I did wonder if that might be a possibility”, he admits, “but it certainly wasn’t set in my mind. I suppose what was more to the fore was the idea of painting a panorama of a society, a bird’s eye view, swooping and darting here and there, and to speak of the collective consciousness, the extent to which we’re all linked...but of separation also.”

The idea of Richard Dawson imagining an origin myth for the folk tradition will make sense to people right from the off, but there’s another musical root-system beneath what he calls *Peasant’s* “Mind-set of gentle opposition” which may take some by surprise. “There are a lot of punk bands I have great respect for”, he explains, “but the kind of protest this album is making is absolutely not a punk thing. On the other hand it absolutely is a prog and a metal thing... I was thinking about heavy metal a lot when I was making this record - there’s a lot of Iron Maiden in here...”.

After a suitably respectful pause to allow the shockwaves from that bombshell to dissipate, Dawson continues, “my thinking with any form of protest, is that it has to be something of beauty first, for it to have any staying power. Also, I’m obsessed with the idea of contradiction, so I wanted to make something which was at once much more accessible and direct than previous works, maybe even something like pop music, whilst also being more dense, pungent and difficult to chew on, lots of improvisation amidst the scaffold, and more freedom, more chaos. I wanted to see if that’s possible – to do both. Like a great pulling apart...”

The tension that holds the molecules together is exactly what makes it such a big deal when the atom splits. And acts of creative fission don’t come much more explosive than *Peasant*.