

Andrew Bird Bio - 2007

Chicago-based multi-instrumentalist and lyricist Andrew Bird picked up his first violin at the age of 4. Actually, it was a Cracker Jack box with a ruler taped to it, and the first of his many Suzuki music lessons involved simply bowing to the teacher and going home. He spent his formative years soaking up classical repertoire completely by ear so when it came time for a restless teen-ager to make the jump to Hungarian Gypsy music, early jazz, country blues, south Indian etc., it wasn't such a giant leap. It's fitting that now, though classically trained, he has instead opted to play his violin in a most unconventional manner, accompanying himself on glockenspiel and guitar, adding singing and whistling to the equation, and becoming a pop songwriter in the process.

Since beginning his recording career, Andrew has released nine albums: six studio albums, both solo and with his former group the Bowl of Fire, and three live albums. The soon to be released *Armchair Apocrypha* will bring the tally to ten. *Armchair Apocrypha*, to be released March 20 on Fat Possum, was recorded mainly in Minneapolis at Crazy Beast Studios (Ben Durrant) and Third Ear Studios (Tom Herbers).

A cast of collaborators was drawn from the surrounding music scene: Drummer and keyboard player Martin Dosh, singer Haley Bonar, bassist Chris Morrissey, and multi-instrumentalist Jeremy Ylvisaker (who, along with Dosh, now features in Andrew's live lineup) added their talents to the album, which was mixed at the famed, haunted Pachyderm Studios in Cannon Falls, Minnesota. It is an album that sums up where Andrew's career has taken him, yet is completely very much of his artistic present.

The album opens with "Fiery Crash," which Bird describes as a superstitious incantation to protect him from plane crashes ("just a nod to mortality before you get on the plane"). As the album progresses, songs of "Dark Matter" ("do you wonder where the self resides, is it in your head or between your sides, and who will be that one who will decide its true location?"), "Heretics" and "Plasticities" are sung with humor and lightness the belies their lyrical depth. "Scythian Empire," amid lush pizzicato violin, considers an obscure corner of history and its lost civilizations, and apocalyptic horsemen. And so it goes through to the final notes of "Yawny at the Apocalypse," varied and stunning musical tapestries embellished with lyrical vignettes and musings that veer fluidly from almost childlike innocence to seasoned, darkly comic wit, with brilliant and unexpected twists at every turn.

Andrew's 2005 studio album, *The Mysterious Production of Eggs*, was a breakthrough for him both commercially and artistically, with exuberant praise

from a wide variety of sources, and a dramatic increase in attendance at his unique live performances, moving up from clubs to packing the likes of Los Angeles' Henry Fonda, San Francisco's Great American Music Hall and concluding with a sold-out two-night homecoming at Chicago's Logan Square Auditorium. Similar word of mouth built to a steady simmer amongst fans from NPR, bloggers, high school students, and Parisian aficionados to an avid and expanding set of live-tape traders worldwide, as Andrew made good on the London Independent's prediction: "Bird could do for independent American music what Tarantino did for American cinema."

Since then, Mr. Bird has also impressed huge festival audiences at Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, the Montreal Jazz Festival, Radio France, made appearances on the BBC, KCRW's "Morning Becomes Eclectic," and NPR's "World Cafe_." Positive reviews and Best of 2005 lists followed including Magnet, Paste, The Onion, the Boston Globe, CMJ, and popmatters, as well as a nomination for the 2006 New Pantheon award, and the following rave from Pitchfork: "I looked at my notes and next to 'Skin Is, My,' the only comment I had scrawled was 'Wow!' The same dumbfounded comment was chicken-scratched next to three other song titles. Fitting, as there's no better word to describe Andrew Bird live."

Though Andrew's voice has been compared to such eminent company as Jeff Buckley, Thom Yorke, and Rufus Wainwright, like those performers, it has a quality all its own. He also adds to the mix his unnatural whistling ability, rendering him capable of adding organically generated yet otherworldly, Theremin-like sounds to the mix.

The live setting is where Andrew becomes one with his songs. At first, it is a curious attraction - one man, generating the wealth of sound normally produced by an orchestra. Each night, song parts are constructed on violin, guitar, and glockenspiel, layered, then looped over themselves in a tangled and textured layer cake of sonics. Each night, songs shape shift within their loops - Andrew rarely replicates a song's perfect structure as it lives on the album, but rather yields an improvisatory aspect to the performance. More recently, the scope and range of the live show has been expanded to incorporate songs from Armchair Apocrypha, with Andrew's main live collaborator Dosh also joined by the aforementioned Jeremy Ylvisaker.

Armchair Apocrypha is released on March 20, 2007.

www.andrewbird.net