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THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

TOM WAITS

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"I'M A BIG LIAR..."

Welcome to Uncut's Ultimate Music Guide: Tom Waits

TOM WAITS, AS you probably know, is right about most things and amusingly duplicitous about most others. He is not, though, infallible. In October 1985, *NME*'s Gavin Martin met Waits at a diner on New York's Lower West Side, for an interview squeezed in between Sunday babysitting duties and a visit from the in-laws.

Among the tall tales, Waits attempted to put journalistic pretensions in perspective. "Music paper interviews," he told Martin, "I hate to tell ya but two days after they're printed they're lining the trashcan. They're not binding, they're not locked away in a vault somewhere tying you to your word."

Those old interviews with *NME*, *Melody Maker*, *Vox* and *Uncut* might not constitute a legal contract: Tom Waits remains, to this day, free to contradict himself whenever he wants. They have, though, been locked away in a vault, waiting to be exhumed for this latest in *Uncut*'s series of *Ultimate Music Guides*.

Tom Waits is regularly fêted as one of the most inventive musicians of the past 40 years, but in these pages he's also revealed as one of the most compelling raconteurs. Here, rescued from oblivion, we've republished a tranche of interviews that are full of beatnik strangeness, arcane wisdom and the most phantasmagorical shaggy dog stories. There is a trip to Bedlam, talk of "demented kabuki burlesque" and a career in golf, interviews sold for $29.95, and a great yarn about how Waits met Keith Richards while their wives shopped for bras. "The truth of things is not something I particularly like," he admitted to Pete Silverton in 1992." I go more for a good story than what really happened. That's just the way I am. I'm a big liar."

More reliable – and hopefully just as entertaining – are the comprehensive new reviews of every Tom Waits album, provided by *Uncut*'s crew of nighthawks and junkyard scholars. The antic spirit and evolving brilliance of Waits' music is a given here, but it's the remarkable consistency that becomes most striking as we chart a path between *Closing Time* and *Bad As Me*; a discography full of unexpected turns, but startlingly free of wrong ones.

Welcome, then, but proceed with care: don't go into that barn!

EAMONN McCABE/GETTY IMAGES

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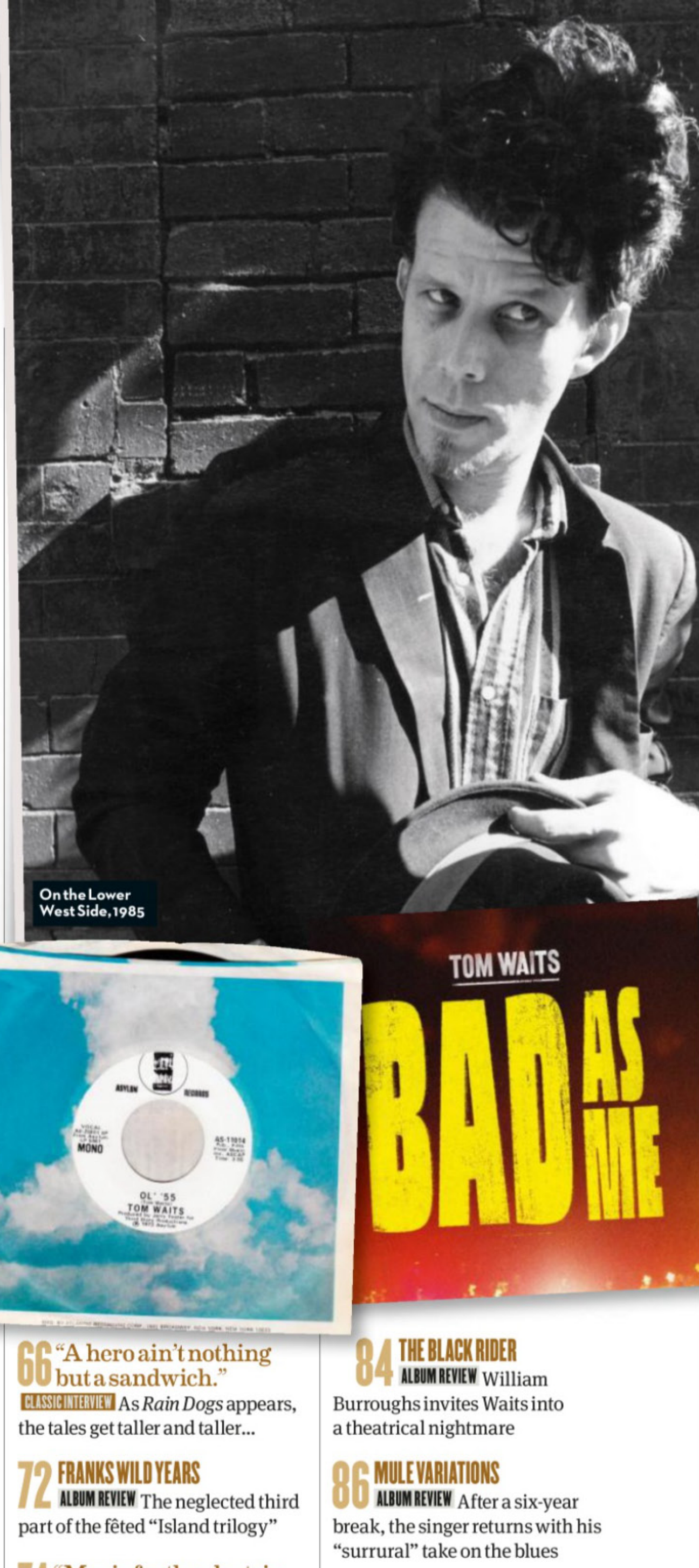

On the Lower West Side, 1985

REX FEATURES/LIVE PRESS, BLEDDYN BUTCHER

Clearly plastered: Waits in 1987

We're all mad here: a still from the Jesse Dylan-directed video for "Satisfied", 2011

UNCUT

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JESSE DYLAN, BLEDDYN BUTCHER

“Who the hell is he?”

MARCH 1973: TOM WAITS RELEASES HIS FIRST ALBUM AND BEGINS HIS WAYWARD, CREPUSCULAR JOURNEY TO STARDOM. HOW DID AN ASPIRING BEATNIK FROM SAN DIEGO LEARN HIS ART IN THE DIVE BARS, DINERS AND FLOPHOUSES OF OLD LA? GRAEME THOMSON PIECES TOGETHER THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE EARLY WILD YEARS... “THIS WASN’T A PUT-ON, THIS WAS THE REAL TOM WAITS. WHAT HE WROTE ABOUT WAS HIS LIFE.”

ED CARAEFF/GETTY IMAGES

Waits, LA, August 1972: an outtake from the *Closing Time* album shoot

SOMEWHERE IN THE 10 miles between Silver Lake and Burbank on the east side of Los Angeles, Tom Waits has lost his bearings. Aiming for the house of Jerry Yester, formerly of the Modern Folk Quartet and The Lovin' Spoonful, and the man designated to produce the young singer-songwriter's debut album, Waits has instead rolled up outside a used car dealership.

"I got this call," says Yester, who does a pretty mean Waits impression. "'Well now, Jerry, I'm in front of this place called, uh, lemme see, Autos Imports...' Eventually he found the house, I had my baby grand there, I set up a tape recorder and we recorded everything for the first album. In the middle of the first song my wife, who was scrubbing the tub, threw down her rag and came to listen to him. It was amazing. I still have that tape. It's so special. He didn't fit into anything that was going on, that was the great thing about him. He made his own little niche."

It was early 1972, and Yester remembers asking himself the same question people have asked of Tom Waits ever since: "Who the hell is he? You couldn't quite nail him down, what he was and where he was coming from. There was a bit of Kerouac, the beatnik thing, Tin Pan Alley, Lord Buckley. It wasn't like he sat down and said, 'Let me see, what kind of image do I want?' It was all instinctive, from the inside. No-one was doing what he was doing."

For those now well accustomed to the Waitsian world of one-eyed dwarves, three-legged tangos and twisted blues, his debut album, *Closing Time*, released early in 1973, seems almost shocking in its sincere simplicity. There are no clanking chain-gang rhythms, no gravel-voiced, bug-eyed theatrics, no wise-cracking raps, lop-sided shanties or drunken saloon songs. This is as close as Waits will ever get to being a conventional West Coast singer-songwriter: warm, heartfelt, vulnerable, a little hokey and sentimental at times. And yet even at this embryonic stage, he still sounded utterly unique.

Bonnie Raitt, who moved back to LA in 1973 to make *Takin' My Time* with Lowell George, recalls Jackson Browne tipping her off about the new kid on the block. "Tom's first album had just come out and there was a buzz around him among those of us hanging out in the Troubadour," she says. "In the local musicians' circles he was already becoming legendary. He was so original and unexpected, and so authentic early on. He was writing such beautiful lyrics and harking back to an era of classic, great melodies – his appreciation of that style of music knocked us all out. And then he had the persona on top of that. It was amazing to think he came from San Diego!"

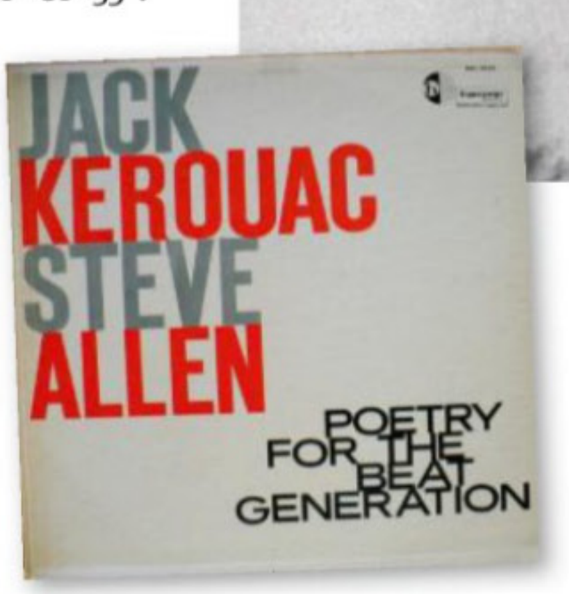
SITUATED 120 MILES south of Los Angeles, San Diego may seem an unlikely breeding ground for dusty mavericks, yet Waits lived in the city and its satellites – National City, Chula Vista – with his mother after his parents' divorce in 1960. It was here he began his apprenticeship. *Closing Time* may have been recorded in Los Angeles, but in many respects it's a fond homage to long San Diego nights spent making music into the wee small hours. The cover photograph depicts Waits slumped at a battered piano, beer and smokes close at hand, the clock set a touch after 3.20am. It not only captures the after-hours melancholy of a Sinatra torch song, but also the origins of Waits as a working musician. "When he made his first album, put that photo on the cover and called it *Closing Time*, to me that was a total nod to that whole scene and how he gained his chops," says his friend and fellow San Diego musician Ray Bierl. "When the clubs closed for the evening and people were cleaning up, getting paid, he'd be at the piano practising."

"TOM DIDN'T FIT INTO ANYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON, THAT WAS THE GREAT THING ABOUT HIM. HE MADE HIS OWN LITTLE NICHE"
JERRY YESTER

Aged 21 in 1971, Waits had started actively engaging with the small but eclectic local music scene the year before. He gravitated towards the Heritage club in Mission Beach, first as a customer, then as a doorman, then performer.

"He wasn't particularly a name on that scene," says Shep Cooke, another San Diego buddy who played guitar on *Closing Time*. "He lived in Chula Vista and we hooked up every couple of months at a little bar on the beach and a place called In The Alley. He was more of a cabaret type, I was more of a folk type. He mostly did his own stuff."

His "stuff" was a ragbag of the past and present. Among the country parodies ("Looks Like I'm Up Shit Creek Again"), bawdy blues ("Ice Cream Man") and late-night jazzbo ruminations ("Midnight Lullaby") were several songs more closely aligned to the West Coast zeitgeist. You could certainly hear why the Eagles would shortly cover "Ol' '55". There were also trace elements of Dylan, whom Waits revered, in "Rosie" and "Old Shoes (And Picture Postcards)", but in general Waits skipped past the sounds of the '60s and drew the greatest inspiration from a very different America. A brief authored piece in *Omaha Rainbow* magazine from 1974 offers a surprisingly undistorted account of where he was coming from at the beginning of the 1970s. As his favourite writers he lists Jack Kerouac, Charles Bukowski, Michael C Ford, Robert Webb, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Larry McMurtry, Harper Lee and John Rechy. Primarily, the Beats, bohos and bums.



"One of the records that Tom loved was a 10-inch LP of Steve Allen ad-libbing piano over Kerouac reading his poetry," says Cooke. "Pretty interesting stuff!" Finger-snappin' raps like "Diamonds On My Windshield" came from his fascination with the City Lights bookstore, Kerouac and Ferlinghetti. "We were too young to be real beatniks, but we were more beatnik than hippy back in 1971 and '72," Cooke continues. "It wasn't a scene. It was pretty underground."

While working as a doorman at the Heritage, Waits became a minor celebrity for his sub-Beats shtick. "Often on a slow night there would be more people outside hanging out with Tom than

"THE TOUGH GUY..."

Who was Waits' first manager, HERB COHEN?

"I WANTED A BIG bruiser, the tough guy in the neighbourhood," said Waits. "And I got it." A hard-nosed South Bronxer, Waits' first manager moved to California in 1952, graduating from running coffee bars to promoting concerts for Pete Seeger and Odetta. By the '70s his management roster included Waits, Tim Buckley, Alice Cooper, Linda Ronstadt, Lenny Bruce and Frank Zappa, with whom he formed the Straight/Bizarre label, responsible for releasing Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*. As with Zappa, Cohen's relationship with Waits ended in litigation in the early '80s amid creative disputes and accusations of financial irregularities. Even so, general manager Robert Duffey emphasises Cohen's importance in Waits' early evolution away from his singer-songwriter roots. "Herb convinced him to use not only more musicians, but props onstage," says Duffey. "Herb was constantly talking to him about the visual aspect of what he did." Herb Cohen died in 2010 aged 77.

Ragged glory: Waits in the Eagle Rock area of Los Angeles, February 14, 1972

inside watching the acts," says Bierl. "He was practising rhymes: *'Car goes by/Looks like it's feeling high/On the fly...'* Keeping loose."

He fused this – at the time – unfashionable revival of the '50s counterculture with the traditional sound of pop standards from the '20s and '30s. Waits had learned to play piano as a teenager, but it was the tuition he got around this time from a friend, Francis Thumm, that "helped Tom develop this rich, chordal, early American pop style", says Bierl. "When he started pulling the piano chops together, that's when you started to think, 'Boy...'" It helped his writing outgrow a mid-'60s obsession with Dylan and become more directly influenced by writers and singers from very different traditions, among them Mose Allison, Thelonious Monk, Randy Newman, Bing Crosby, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Frank Sinatra and Ray Charles. For Bonnie Raitt, "The sound he created in his head even back then was – I wouldn't say anything as defining as retro – but classic."

As well as his songwriting chops, Waits honed his gifts as a performer at the Heritage. He was a good mimic: he could do a great Ray Charles and a version of "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" that served as both Elvis tribute and parody. "I don't think you would have said here's a guy really going places, but you did say here's a guy who is really interesting," says Bierl. "He kinda stood

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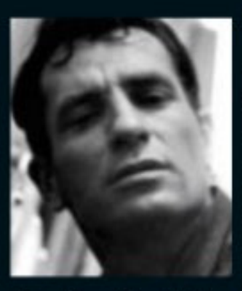
WAITS WORLD

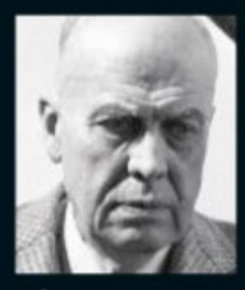
Key influences on early Tom

BING CROSBY: "I wasn't thrilled by Blue Cheer," said Waits, "so I found an alternative, even if it was Bing Crosby." His love of pre-war American pop, evident on his early records and encompassing Crosby, Perry Como, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Sinatra and George Gershwin, stemmed from his parents' collection of 78s.

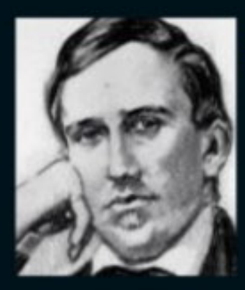
LORD BUCKLEY: The '50s underground comic, whose satirical hep-cat monologues, comical scat singing and "hipsemantic" translations of Shakespeare – *"Hipsters, flipsters and finger-poppin' daddies: knock me your lobes"* – is proto-Waits.



THE BEATS: Waits borrowed much of his boho style and creative substance from the group of writers (including Kerouac, Burroughs, Corso and Ferlinghetti) who mapped out an alternative culture in the '50s. His early work is peppered with direct references and general nods, while he credited the 1957 LP by Kerouac/Allen with "giving me the idea to do some spoken pieces myself".



EDWARD HOPPER: The American painter's 'Nighthawks' (1942) inspired the title and cover image of Waits' *Nighthawks At The Diner* (1975), while Hopper's scenes of late-night urban loneliness are evoked throughout *Closing Time*.



STEPHEN FOSTER: The 19th-Century American songwriter wrote "Oh! Susanna", "My Old Kentucky Home" and many more standards. The richly rhetorical folk element in Waits' early music was influenced by his love of Foster's songs.

KEN NORDINE: "Word Jazz" exponent of the '50s and '60s who fused Beat poetry and storytelling over the cool jazz of Chico Hamilton. Waits later collaborated with him.

Waits, LA, August 1972

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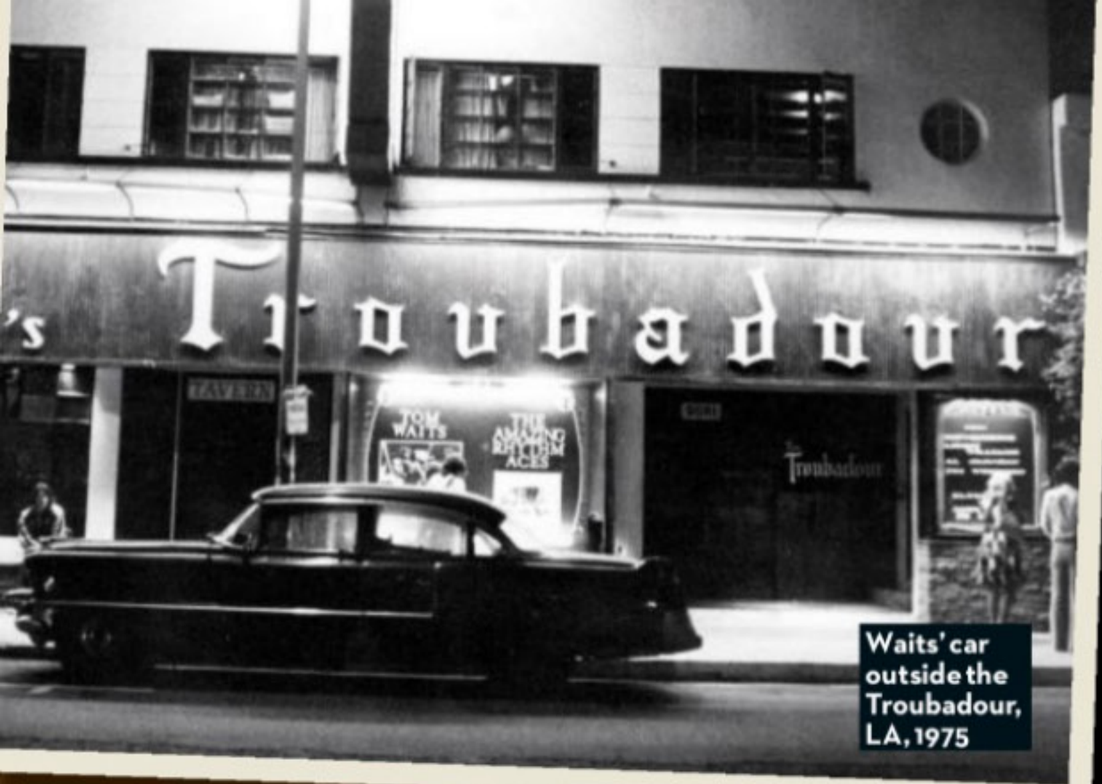
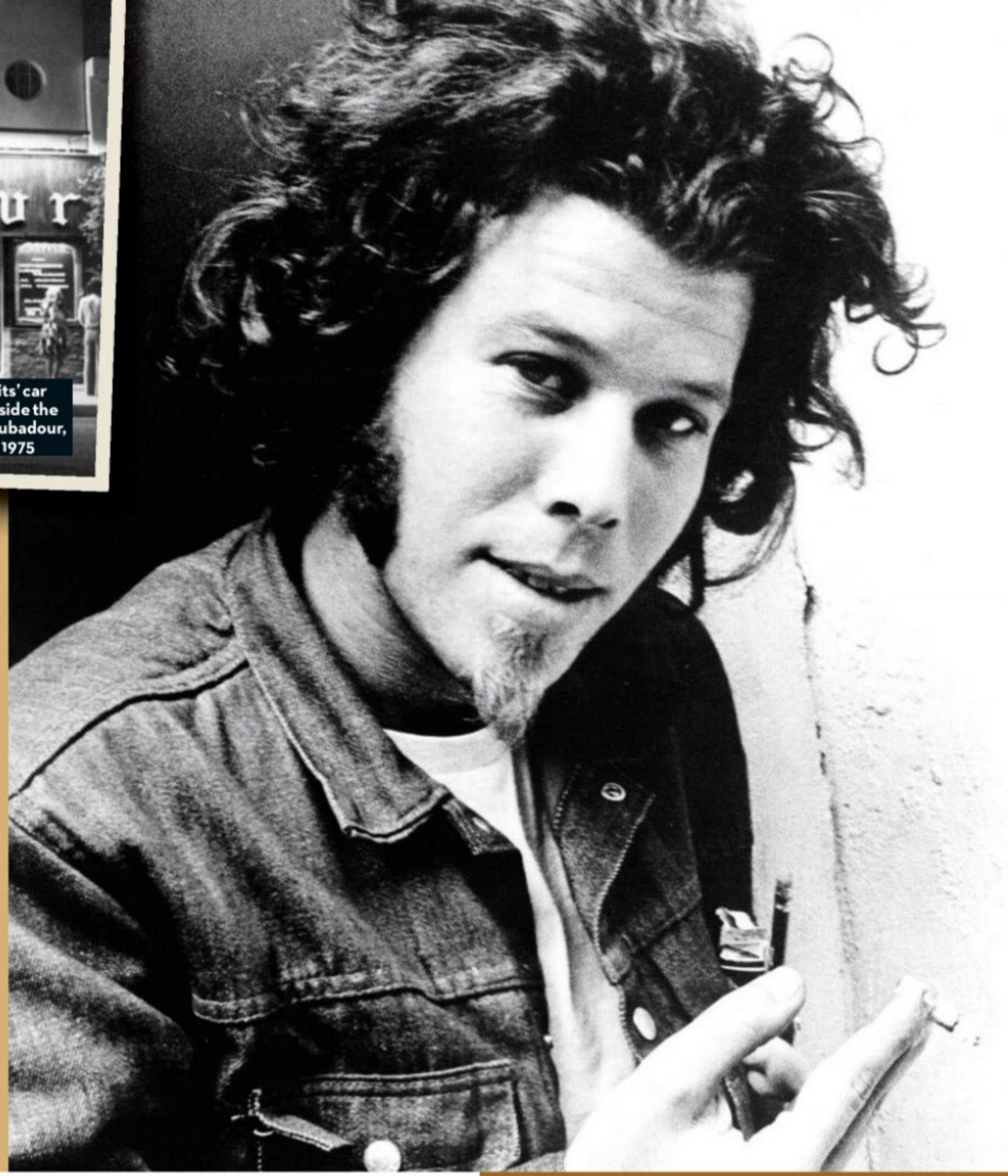


Waits' car outside the Troubadour, LA, 1975



HARDCORE TROUBADOUR

The venue that made Tom Waits

OPENED IN 1957 and still going strong, Doug Weston's West Hollywood club was umbilically linked to LA's early '70s singer-songwriter scene. It provided a communal living room for the city's musical community, a place where James Taylor, David Crosby, Jackson Browne or Carole King could mingle with each other and industry moguls, and where folk, rock, blues and country merged. Making a round trip of 250 miles to play, the young Waits knew how important the club was for his career. "You arrive at 10 in the morning and wait all day," he said. "They let the first several people in line perform that night. When you finally get up there, you're allowed four songs. You can blow it all in 15 minutes. I was scared shitless."

out, the seeds of his persona were already there, though it would develop. He had a great sense of humour and you got a sense of integrity right off the bat that he still has." Raitt, who toured with Waits a little later, recalls that onstage "he was astonishing, his rapport with the audience and where he went and his musical sophistication. There was no-one like him. Plus he was hilarious."

THE TROUBADOUR ON Santa Monica Boulevard was the hub of the burgeoning early '70s singer-songwriter scene. In 1971 Waits began making regular trips to LA by Greyhound bus to play the club's Monday night open-mic spots. He would leave at dawn and arrive at nine or 10 in the morning, queue up for most of the day to secure a 20-minute spot the same night, play – "scared shitless", he later confessed – then head back home.

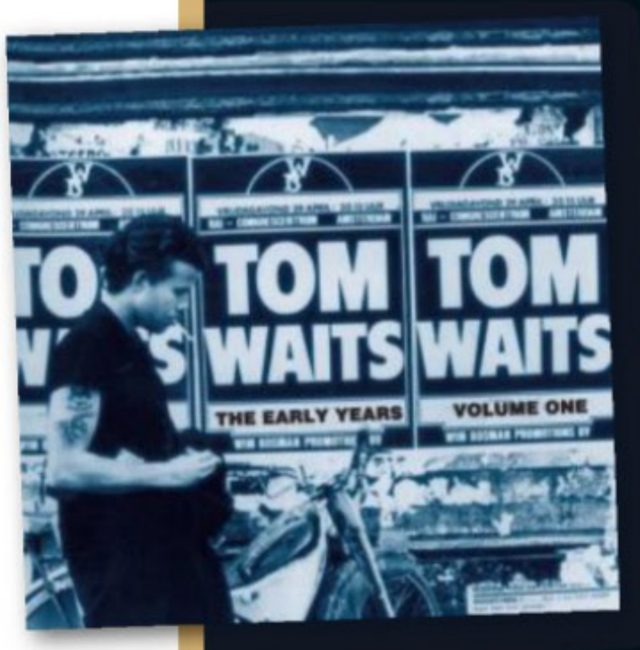
On any given night the Troubadour would be filled with the industry's leading artists, agents and executives. Deceptively ambitious, Waits was actively chasing a break, and it arrived in June 1971 in the form of Herb Cohen, who managed Zappa, Beefheart and Linda Ronstadt. Cohen died in 2010 but his general manager at the time, Robert Duffey, was with him the night they first laid eyes and ears on Waits. "He did a set that was kind of Dylanish, is the only way I can describe it," says Duffey. "He did some of his songs and a couple of covers. He was only on for a short time and he didn't sound anything like he sounds now. He was quite folky. It was almost unrecognisable as 'Tom Waits' at this point."

His tendency to be more "folky" in LA may have been a pragmatic recognition that it wouldn't hurt to bend a little with the prevailing winds. While Duffey acknowledges that Waits was "very good, very captivating" as a performer, Cohen primarily coveted him as a songwriter, signing him to a publishing deal with his Third Story company as well as a management contract. "It was always about the songs with Herb, and Tom's songs were just brilliant," says Duffey. "It was like, 'Wow! Where did this guy come from?' He really was exceptional."

"IN THE LOCAL MUSICIANS' CIRCLES HE WAS ALREADY BECOMING LEGENDARY. HE WAS SO ORIGINAL AND UNEXPECTED"
BONNIE RAITT

THE EARLY YEARS DEMOS

THOUGH WAITS HAS an impressive record when it comes to litigation, he couldn't prevent his 1971 demos being released as *The Early Years Vol. I* and *II* in the '90s. The 26 tracks – solo and sparsely accompanied – confirm that the songs that appeared on the first three albums were already fully formed, while the unreleased tracks are fascinating. "Had Me A Girl" is clearly intended to crack up live audiences, but the sidelining of "Blue Skies" is baffling. "We had so many calls from advertising agencies and Tom just wasn't interested at all," says Robert Duffey. "That was one of his most brilliant songs." There is also the first appearance of Frank, in "Frank's Song".



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; BARRY SCHULTZ/SUNSHINE/RETNA

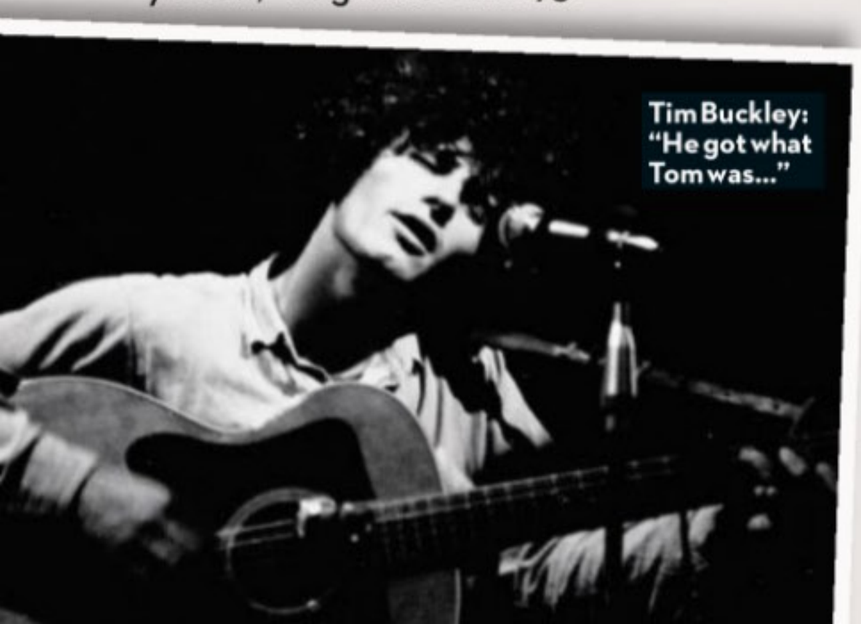
Going Dutch: Waits in Amsterdam, 1973

CLOSING TIME COVERS

The artists who have tried their hand at songs from Waits' debut

"MARTHA"
TIM BUCKLEY
(SEFRONIA, 1973)
A busier, beefier reading, with overcooked strings and Buckley's ethereal voice struggling slightly to match Waits' gravitas. "Tim was a Waits fan," says Robert Duffey. "He got what Tom was."

"OL' '55"
EAGLES
(ON THE BORDER, 1974)
Heavy on the harmonies and pedal steel, Waits' ragged anthem becomes a polished slice of commercial country-rock. "The Eagles made 'Ol' '55' really antiseptic, y'know," he grumbled in '75.



Tim Buckley: "He got what Tom was..."

"ICE CREAM MAN"
SCREAMIN' JAY HAWKINS
(BLACK MUSIC FOR WHITE PEOPLE, 1991)
The bluesman breezes through a cool, clicking, subdued version of *Closing Time*'s most raucous moment, living up to his name only towards the end.

"GRAPEFRUIT MOON"
NANCI GRIFFITH
(RUBY'S TORCH, 2006)
Waits' first great orchestral ballad was handpicked by Griffith for her lush torch songs covers project, and fits the brief to a T.

"LONELY"
BAT FOR LASHES
(TWO SUNS SPECIAL EDITION, 2009)
A transformative live version from 2007, full of drama and sweeping electronic textures. This is early Tom Waits by way of Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love*.

The deal gave Waits a vital sense of validation. Back in San Diego, Bierl recalls giving him a ride home one night and Waits telling him that he "was going to throw himself into this. He was going to go for the gold ring, so to speak. He told me later that if he hadn't gotten that contract it would have put him over the edge. He really gave it all he had, he didn't leave anything behind."

For the rest of 1971 and into '72, Waits continued to travel between San Diego and Los Angeles, playing hoot nights at the Troubadour and writing prolifically in one of the small rooms in Cohen's office, where Zappa would often be rehearsing next door. "Writing was a very solitary activity for him," says Cooke. He recorded numerous demos of his songs at "a little studio in Bel Air" for Duffey to shop around. Before he ever met Waits, Yester recalls his former Lovin' Spoonful bandmate Joe Butler telling him about demos of "Grapefruit Moon" and "Martha". Twenty years later, these early sketches were released, against Waits' wishes, as *The Early Years*. Back in 1971, no-one was quite so keen. "A lot of record companies passed on him," says Duffey. "They would ask me, 'Is this real? I mean, what is this?' Eventually we got Geffen to take a chance on him."

David Geffen and his partner Elliot Roberts had recently set up Asylum Records. With Jackson Browne, Judee Sill and Joni Mitchell on the roster, the label prided itself on its artistic empathy, viewing Waits' uniqueness as a positive point of difference rather than a

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

negative. "We had great respect for him, though I could never understand a word he said!" says Ron Stone, who worked in management at Asylum.

Cohen scheduled the album sessions for the early summer of 1972, hiring Yester, whom he had managed in the Modern Folk Quartet and used as a producer for his other acts, including Tim Buckley. It was Yester who assembled the core band of John Seiter on drums, Bill Plummer on stand-up bass, Peter Klimes on guitar, Delbert Bennett on trumpet and Waits on piano. He planned to record during the night at Sunset Sound but "the only thing they had available was 10am till 6pm. Oh shit! The first couple of days were a little groggy, but we got into it. Tom was like, 'Man, this is like a proper job! I've got a night off, I can go to the movies!'"

THIS BAND OF night owls thus found themselves working office hours for 10 days while recording the quintessential late-night record. Opener "Ol' '55" is the closest *Closing Time* gets to a UV ray, and even then the "*sun's coming up*" only because he's leaving his girl's place after a night to remember. From thereon the mood is indigo and the action takes place firmly after hours: bars are emptying or closing, streets are filled with moons, memories and "*a lazy old tom cat on a midnight spree*". "Midnight Lullaby" is both typical and self-explanatory, Bennett's mournful trumpet spinning out into the darkness. "Virginia Avenue" takes a late-night prowl along Waits' loping piano line, Plummer's taut bass and Klimes' searing blues licks. "Rosie" was written, according to Yester, back in San Diego in response to "a wistful crush" Waits had on the folk singer Rosalie Sorrels. "I Hope That I Don't Fall In Love With You" is a last-orders vignette that puts the listener right next to Waits and the object of his slightly sozzled affections. "You can see the pub, man!" says John Seiter. "You can see the stools and you can see the girl. Oh, it's fabulous. He was a great songwriter. The pictures, the visuals out of his lyrics were just amazing."

The heartstopping piano ballad "Martha" was the most impressive example of Waits' ability to write way beyond his years. Singing as Old Tom Frost, he becomes an elderly man wistfully calling his lover of 40 years ago. Full of tenderness and regret, in 1972 "Martha" thrillingly countered the prevailing trend for solipsistic self-expression. Yester talks about Waits even then being "ageless", while Bierl says that "he always had that older guy thing going on. When Tom was in junior high he liked to walk around with a cane, and go over to his friend's house and play all their dad's records. I remember playing *Closing Time* to [Bruce] Utah Phillips in 1973 and he said, 'How old is this guy? How can he be writing songs like "Martha"? What an imagination!'" The fractured "Lonely", performed solo, crosses over from the album's default setting of mild melancholy into something more painful. Even in the early days, says Bierl, "We didn't talk very much about personal stuff. He was a great guy, very funny, but there was a certain reserve. A lot of artists have that dual thing: they're very private, independent types but still have the need to relate to audiences. He definitely had that."

Early in 1972 Waits had finally moved to LA, renting a tiny apartment in Silver Lake that he shared with Bobi Thomas, an old high-school friend who had become his girlfriend. At home he tended to read voraciously. Otherwise he hung out in diners and dive bars, his social life revolving primarily around pool, cigarettes and alcohol. "We'd go sit in the car and drink a six-pack of beer," says Yester. "He really enjoyed that. And we played a lot of pool. There was a place over in Burbank, 50c an hour for these great old tables covered with cigarette burns in this funky little bar. Man, we loved playing pool and drinking beer."

Waits' parents were both teachers and his background was staunchly middle-class. The extent to which he was now consciously playing a role he had written himself into is open to almost endless conjecture. Bonnie Raitt, who toured with Waits shortly after the release of *Closing Time*, recalls that after arriving in a new town "he would take a bus to the skid-row areas and sit in the lobby of some flophouse hotel all night. Before a gig and afterwards, too. Doing research!"

Yester is adamant that "it wasn't calculated, he just wasn't that kind of guy. I don't think I've met a performer who was so much coming from the inside." For Raitt, contrived or not, "he inhabited it. There was never any aspect of Tom's persona and music that I questioned."

"It was real – definitely," says Duffey. "Tom would prefer to stay in some fleabag hotel than a Marriott. He just felt more comfortable. Actually, I can remember being really quite surprised when it hit me that this is really him – this isn't a put-on, this is the real Tom Waits. What he wrote about was his life."

Later in the '70s Waits embraced the skid-row lifestyle a little too convincingly, but he was "very together during *Closing Time*", says Yester. While Seiter got "a strong sense that he wasn't writing these songs off of someone else's experiences", he adds that "he wasn't out of it. He wasn't foggy at all, he was very creative and soulful at all times."

Waits had never played live or recorded with a full band before and had barely been in a studio, yet he was clear about what he wanted.

"WE HAD GREAT RESPECT FOR TOM, THOUGH I COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND A WORD HE SAID!"
RON STONE, ASYLUM

"THE MUSIC SUGGESTED IT ALL..."
American designer CAL SCHENKEL on the cover of *Closing Time*

"WE ALL USED to hang out after hours on Fridays. We'd wind up at Herb's office and maybe go out to a local bar and have a couple of drinks, and to a great extent the cover is what Tom was like on a Friday night after the bar closed. It was quite subdued, nothing wild! Tom was pretty secure in his ideas about his persona and how he wanted to be seen. The music suggested the atmosphere of it all, so it was just a question of how we would accomplish that.

"We shot it with [*photographer*] Ed Caraeff in my living room, in a dark corner. I had a piano I'd picked up for 25 bucks. It was definitely just a prop, you couldn't really play it! There was just a couple of people involved and it came out real nice, simple and direct. The whole concept was kind of a Sinatra feel. It seemed very natural."

Smoke gets in his eyes: at the recording sessions for *Nighthawks At The Diner*, the Record Plant, LA, 1975

'I WAS THERE!'

Tom Waits at the Record Plant, Los Angeles, July 1975

"WHEN HE HIT the radar in 1973, the dishevelled Tom Waits orbited LA's soft-rock/singer-songwriter scene without being part of it. I didn't get what he was going for until July '75, when I watched Waits cut his third album in front of a live audience at the Record Plant's big tracking room, which had been transformed into a mood-lit bistro for the occasion. The performance he gave, accompanied by an ace jazz band and the clinking of ice cubes, was a revelation – a throwback to a time long passed and a taste of something unprecedented. As much as Bruce Springsteen, Waits came off as a true original, creating and inhabiting a three-dimensional character at once theatrical and authentic, as he wisecracked like a Vaudeville comic, spewed jazzbo poetry like Lord Buckley, and sang in a voice that vacillated between the gutter and the heavens. That evening on West Third Street, laying down much of *Nighthawks At The Diner*, Waits made a convincing case for himself as our generation's Dean Martin. I thought then that, like Dino, he should have his own primetime variety show – or at the very least, a Vegas lounge act." *BUD SCOPPA*

Friendly and laid-back, he was already intransigent about his art. "He knew exactly who and what he was and why he was doing this music," says Duffey.

"He heard it all in his head," agrees Yester. "'I want a stand-up bass, and I want a trumpet in there, and, uhhhh, a guitar...' My job was simply to let everyone hear what was going on, not to tell him what to do or point him in any directions. No-one could get in his head – and if they did, they would fuck it up. He liked those guys, and they fit him like a glove for that record. It was really productive, it fell together really well. Everyone was into it, really awake and happening. There was a lot of camaraderie."

The first couple of days at Sunset Sound were spent learning the songs. "Tom would play 'em down, we worked them out, and that was it," says Seiter. "It was pretty simple for us. All his tunes were so comfortable." The drummer was so enamoured with "Ol' '55" that he insisted on adding a harmony vocal.

"I couldn't help myself, I had to sing along with him – I just busted out! I forced myself onto that song. The same with 'Rosie', but he was cool with it. He allowed us our input. He wasn't stone cold against anything you might bring up that was worth a shit. He was very good that way."

Almost everything was recorded live. "A lot of one-take stuff," says Shep Cooke, who came in to reprise those folky San Diego nights on "I Hope That I Don't Fall In Love With You" and "Old Shoes (And Picture Postcards)". Cooke hung out while some of the other songs were recorded. "When he did 'Martha' he just sat down at the piano and sang the song in one take, and there was literally not a dry eye in the house. It just grabbed everybody." The addition of a cello and a "choir" of voices to "Martha", and particularly the overdubbed strings on the aching "Grapefruit Moon", were the only major production flourishes. Yester recalls, "I said, 'I really hear a string quartet', and he said, "Ahhh God, strings, I dunno, man...' So I said, 'Let's try it and if you don't like it we'll dump it.' So we did it and he loved it. He started using strings a lot after that."

There were moments during the sessions when it became apparent that Waits wasn't quite the careworn veteran of the big city that he sometimes seemed. Yester recalls him getting "studio-itis" one day during mixing at Wally Heider's studio in Hollywood. "So he went out for a walk on Cahuenga Boulevard and went to a bar. He came back white as a sheet, really shaken, and said, 'I just came on to a guy...' He had encountered a transsexual or transvestite

MATT KRAMER

Natural home: Waits in the coffee shop at Dukes Place Motel, Hollywood, 1975

BARRY SCHULTZ/SUNSHINE/RETNA

in the bar who was really convincing. 'I thought I was doing great...' He'd been up from San Diego less than a year, and still wasn't quite accustomed to all the ins and outs of how weird Hollywood had gotten." One other occasion, out driving with Shep Cooke, he was arrested on an outstanding jaywalking warrant. "He went off with the police and I went back to the studio to see if anyone had any money," says Cooke. "They didn't, so I drove home, got money from my mother, went down to the station and bailed Tom out of jail about three hours later. He was playing at the Troubadour that night."

For Seiter, making *Closing Time* "was unalloyed pleasure; I didn't want the LP to be over". The closing instrumental title track, featuring Tony Terran on trumpet and Arni Egilsson on bass, was the last song recorded at a hastily assembled session, which Yester regards as one of the most memorable of his entire career. "We were in the big room at Western Recorders, where Sinatra recorded, a beautiful recording space. Two takes. Magical. It was one of those times in a studio that was so special no-one wanted to leave. We all hung around for a few hours after the damn thing was recorded: 'Let's hear it again!' That's rare. It ended the album so perfectly. That was the capper, and the last thing we did."

THE FIRST TOM Waits album was released by Asylum on March 20, 1973. To promote *Closing Time* he headed out into the remnants of Kerouac's America with a three-piece band, opening for everyone from Zappa to Charlie Rich. Within months, "Martha" had been recorded by Tim Buckley and "Ol' '55" covered by a new Asylum band called the Eagles, yet it would be some years before Waits started making a significant impact. "Nothing really happened until well after *Closing Time*," says Duffey. "We were surprised. We thought the LP was going to come out and it was just going to go crazy, but people weren't sure about it. They weren't even sure where to put it. We'd go into record stores on the road and he would always be in the wrong section, with Eydie Gormé and those kind of people. That was tough."

"HE RECORDED 'MARTHA' IN ONE TAKE... THERE WAS LITERALLY NOT A DRY EYE IN THE HOUSE"
SHEP COOKE

Critics were similarly confused. *Closing Time* attracted generally good reviews, including one in *Rolling Stone* that compared Waits to Randy Newman and Loudon Wainwright III while expressing uncertainty about whether this guy was a parody or for real. At some point in the 40 years since, Waits sidestepped the issue by becoming, in the words of Bonnie Raitt, "his own entire genre".

Closing Time forms only a small part of that long, eccentric narrative, though it does so beautifully, with disarming openness. For some it is a mere teaser for the riches to come; for others it is the last time Waits offered a glimpse of the man behind the curtain. "It's his best album by far," says Cooke. "He actually sings. That rough Satchmo thing he did later was not the real Tom that I knew. Later I was like, 'Who are you and what have you done with Tom Waits!'"

A few years after *Closing Time*, Waits intimated that Yester had pushed him into making a more conventional record than he actually wanted; the producer disagrees.

"When Tom came to my house that first day he had pretty much picked the material that he wanted. He recorded all of it at my house, with one or two extras. It held together perfectly for me, I never questioned the material. Remember, he was still coming out of a folky period down in San Diego..."

He quickly turned away from those roots. On the 1974 follow-up, *The Heart Of Saturday Night*, Waits already sounds looser, more jived up, retrieving raps such as "Diamonds On My Windshield" from his 1971 demos and employing a new band and a new producer, Bones Howe. "Bones had a great grasp of jazz musicians in LA and Tom definitely wanted to go in a jazzier direction," says Yester, who continued working with Waits as a string arranger until the early '80s, by which time he had become much more recognisably the off-piste, one-man genre he remains today.

Now aged 63, Waits has travelled a long way from those long, late nights in San Diego and the young man *"dreaming to the twilight"*, but not so far that you can't trace the road back. "Tom was – and is – a very smart man," says Yester. "*Closing Time* showed him that he could go anywhere with his music. And he did." ♦

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

CLOSING TIME

Old shoes, midnight lullabies and Eagles-friendly anthems... A young Californian songwriter tentatively searches for his own identity. By GRAEME THOMSON

RELEASED MARCH 1973

WE MEET TOM WAITS for the first time on the edge of the night, or somewhere near the end of it. It's a little after 3am. The club is closed, the singer slumped over his upright piano, beer and cigarettes within striking distance. Like his songs, he is enveloped in velvety darkness. The cover of Waits' debut album tells a story all on its own.

Aged 22, deep in the process of reinventing himself, turning the unremarkable son of Alma and Jesse Frank Waits, two middle-class schoolteachers from Pomona, California, into a boho-balladeer, suspended in time, older and wiser than his years. *Closing Time* catches him before this evolution is totally complete, rendering it both flawed and fascinating.

Waits had served his apprenticeship in San Diego, where he had moved with his mother in 1960, aged ten, after his parents' divorce. In 1970 he began playing at the Heritage club in Mission Beach, where he worked as a doorman. With an acoustic guitar in his hand he tended to be overly reverential to Bob Dylan, but honing his rich, romantic piano style pulled Waits away from the sound of the '60s coffee house towards something less easily definable.

Intimates from this period recall Waits as an old soul, drawn to the company of friends' fathers, vintage cars and '50s clothes. Partly it was a form of inverted rebellion in the golden age of youth and flower power, just as drinking alcohol (already a favoured pursuit) seemed somehow more subversive than dropping acid. But it was also where his tastes lay. Creatively, he drew inspiration from the Beat poets (Kerouac, Bukowski, Corso, Ferlinghetti), jazzers (Mose Allison, Thelonious Monk), crooners (Sinatra, Crosby) and the architects of the great American songbook (Gershwin, Berlin, Hoagy Carmichael, Stephen Foster), beside staples like Ray Charles, James Brown and Elvis. They all seeped into his songs.

His ambitions having quickly outgrown San Diego, Waits began drifting up to LA every week, playing open-night spots at the Troubadour, the hub of LA's burgeoning singer-songwriter scene. It was there, in 1971, that he was spotted by Herb Cohen, the manager-mogul behind Frank Zappa, Beefheart and Linda Ronstadt. Although Cohen regarded his new signing as a songwriter rather than a performer, he eventually got Waits a deal with David Geffen's new record label, Asylum.

Demos from this period show Waits writing and recording a mixture of snappy, jive-talking jazz-raps, folk-country weepies, tongue-in-cheek pastiches, rolling piano blues and slightly risqué comedy songs. Only a smattering of this flavour makes its way onto *Closing Time*, which presents him as a rather provisional personality being blown by the prevailing singer-songwriter winds. Elliot Roberts at Asylum may already have been throwing around words like "beatnik" to describe him, but *Closing Time* has its strongest roots in the folk clubs. The album was produced by Jerry Yester, formerly of The Modern Folk Quartet and The Lovin' Spoonful, who had also recently produced Tim Buckley. It was Yester who assembled the core band. Yester, too, who, according to Waits, gently steered *Closing Time* towards more conventional musical territory (although the producer has always denied this).

Recorded in ten days in the summer of 1972, working office hours, *Closing Time* was cut mostly live using first or second takes. The addition of strings to the limpid "Grapefruit Moon" and glorious "Martha" was the only attempt at overt production, although in hindsight they marked an important development in Waits' sound.

Opener "Ol' '55" – naturally, the car he's driving dates to the era of *On The Road* – would be covered the following year by the Eagles on

their third album, *On The Border*, and it requires no great imaginative leap to hear why. It instantly introduces the loose, sweetly melancholic swing that defines much of the album. "Old Shoes (And Picture Postcards)" is a ragged country-rock waltz, steeped in nostalgia, romanticising Waits as a rootless troubadour, breaking hearts then hitting the road. "Rosie" is a more gentle come-hither to folk singer Rosalie Sorrels, burnished with rolling piano and pedal steel, while "I Hope That I Don't Fall In Love With You" uses a nursery rhyme melody and folksy accompaniment to recount a fleeting barroom (non)romance.

These are pleasant songs, full of wit, warmth and character, but they're also a bit soft and ill-defined, mining a seam of romantic wistfulness that delivers diminishing returns. Part of their charm today is the glimpse they offer of another Waits, pursuing a parallel career as a slightly shaggier James Taylor. His jazzbo tendencies, which we now know were already well evolved, are largely set to one side, although on "Virginia Avenue", "Midnight Lullaby" and the instrumental "Closing Time" we catch echoes of the mood Waits may originally have wanted for the album: prowling sketches of the American night, painted in with upright bass, lonely trumpet and piano. These are pleasing but embryonic attempts at creating the after-hours atmosphere Waits would soon master, and at the time they were enough to make him distinct among his peers, but for much of *Closing Time* he plays it too straight to entirely convince. "Ice Cream Man" is the kind of frantic jump-blues he would later gleefully tear to shreds, but here he sounds tame and tentative. On "Little Trip To Heaven", meanwhile, he finally falls off the tightrope the album constantly walks between woozy sentiment and plain mawkishness.

The album's clear highlight is "Martha", a beautiful piano ballad, recorded in one take, in which Waits steps into the skin of an old man phoning his sweetheart from 40 years ago. Plumbing the kind of emotional depths most popular music tended to ignore then (and still does), in "Martha" we hear the first stirrings of a unique sensibility emerging, and evidence that Waits could be whatever he wanted to be.

Tim Buckley's recording of the song on his 1973 album *Sefron ia* gave *Closing Time* the bulk of its limited exposure. The album was not a hit on release, and made few waves. Critics liked it, but couldn't quite work out where Waits was coming from or where he fitted. The man sprawled on the cover has since admitted to sharing similar misgivings, fretting that his debut album could have been harder, sharper, snappier. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice. ♦

TRACKLISTING — CLOSING TIME

1. Ol' '55 ★★★★
2. I Hope That I Don't Fall In Love With You ★★★
3. Virginia Avenue ★★★
4. Old Shoes (And Picture Postcards) ★★★
5. Midnight Lullaby ★★★
6. Martha ★★★★★
7. Rosie ★★★★
8. Lonely ★★
9. Ice Cream Man ★★★
10. Little Trip To Heaven ★★
11. Grapefruit Moon ★★★
12. Closing Time ★★★★

Released: March 1973
Label: Asylum
Recorded at: Sunset Sound, Hollywood; United Western Recorders, Hollywood

Produced by: Jerry Yester
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, piano, celeste, guitar), Delbert Bennett (trumpet), Shep Cooke (guitar, backing vocals), Peter Klimes (guitar), Bill Plummer (bass), John Seiter (drums, backing vocals), Arni Egilsson (bass), Jesse Ehrlich (cello), Tony Terran (trumpet)
Highest chart position: N/A

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

THE HEART OF SATURDAY NIGHT

Waits and a new jazz crew fashion a classic in the wee small hours. *"Never saw the morning, 'til I stayed up all night..."* By NICK HASTED

RELEASED OCTOBER 1974

FOR ALL ITS faults, *Closing Time* had placed Tom Waits in an after-hours, barroom milieu that separated him from his Asylum labelmates. *The Heart Of Saturday Night* fleshed out this persona, with a rich emotional detail that made it feel plausible. Right from the painted cover art by Napoleon (aka Lyn Lascaro), Waits was now turning his life into a romantic lowlife novel.

Sinatra's *In The Wee Small Hours* (1955) was the sleeve's clear model. Waits and Sinatra both stand in a night-time street, heads and eyes downcast, ties loosened at open collars. Smoke curls from the cigarette held in Frank's hand, and the one in Tom's mouth. Waits' goatee, the longish hair he's ruffling and the flat cap replacing Sinatra's fedora leave him undeniably shabbier than the Chairman Of The Board. But only the setting has really changed in 20 years. Sinatra stands alone in a blue, empty street, neon just piercing the fog of his film noir world. Waits is on a Hollywood avenue outside a cocktail bar, with a glamorous blonde in a purple gown giving him an inviting look he can't meet.

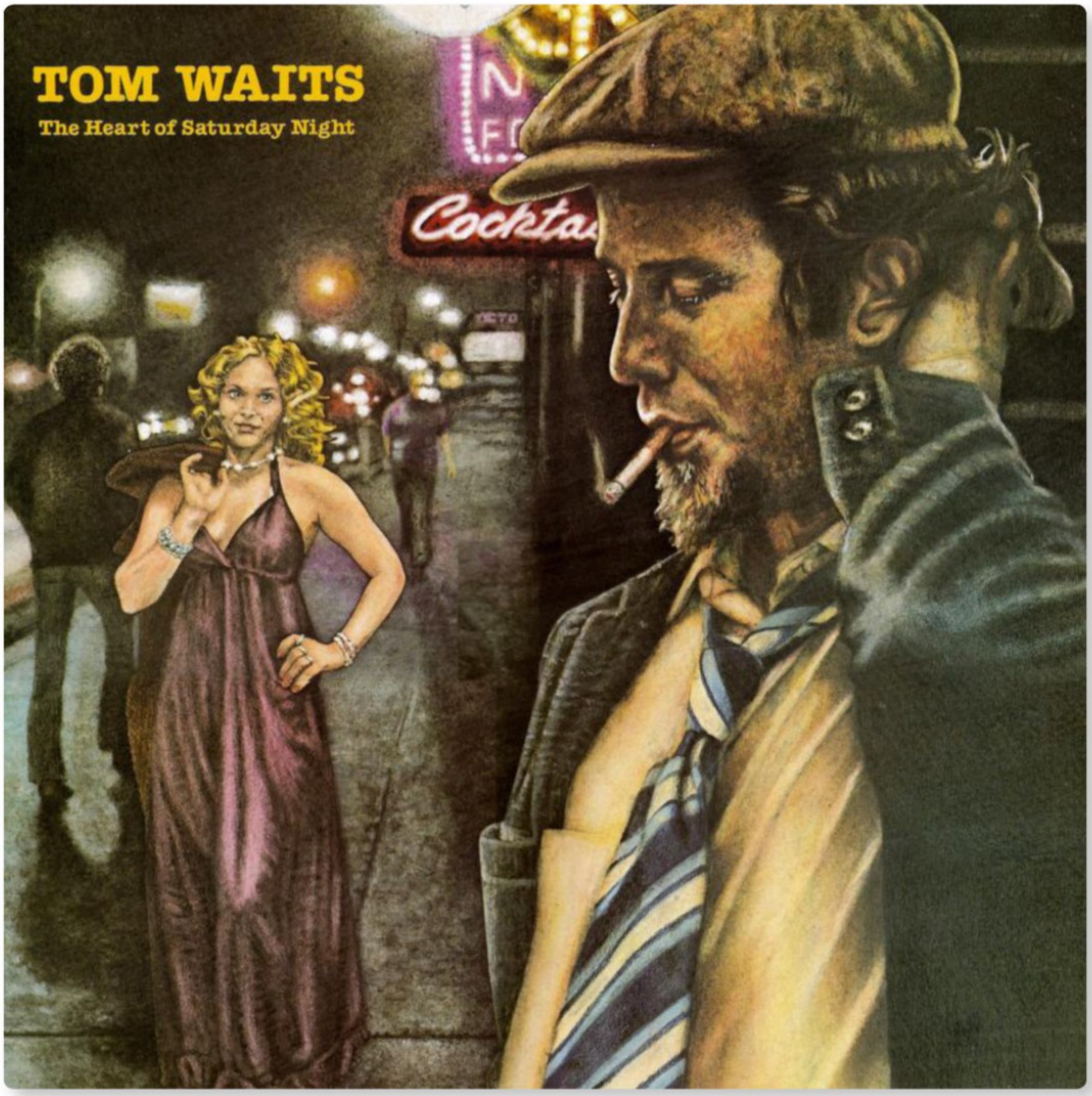
The effect is like watching Elliott Gould's hangdog Philip Marlowe in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, made a year earlier in 1973. There, Chandler's detective remains a '40s figure, updated to wander hopelessly through hippy LA. Waits had felt similarly disconnected, telling an interviewer he "slept" through the '60s, instead absorbing American blues, jazz and songcraft from previous times. *The Heart Of Saturday Night* found a way to express this that could be bought by rock audiences in 1974.

Waits' new producer, Dayton "Bones" Howe, was fundamental to this. Asylum's boss, David Geffen, had been unhappy with *Closing Time's* sales, and believed his friend Howe could make a "more professional record". Geffen was also thinking of Waits' art. Howe, 40, had produced pop hits for The Fifth Dimension and been musical director for Elvis' mighty 1968 "Comeback" TV special. But it was his jazz expertise, as a producer of Ornette Coleman and even a swing album by Sinatra himself, which Geffen believed Waits needed.

Howe's credentials were hip enough for Waits to agree. The same went for the highly experienced and appropriate musicians Howe brought with him to Wally Heider's Studio 3 in Hollywood. Double-bassist Jim Hughart was another Sinatra alumnus; drummer Jim Gordon was an in-demand survivor of Joe Cocker's Mad Gods And Englishmen tour. Most important was the session's pianist, as noted in a strikingly effusive sleeve note. "We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Mike Melvoin," it read, "for his great creative contributions in working out the 'head' arrangements in the studio; and for his complimentary Orchestral arrangements and direction."

THE WHOLE ALBUM MAINTAINS THE OPENING TRACK'S SOZZLED GLOW

"One of the reasons Bones brought me in was that he thought I would have a way of translating what Tom was saying into concrete notes," Melvoin, a jazz session veteran who had also played on *Pet Sounds*, told Waits' biographer Barney Hoskyns. "It was about



how to deal with somebody whose concept of song form was silly putty." *Closing Time's* sometimes shapeless tunes bore this out. "If I can't find the melody to hang the words on to, I just don't worry about it," Waits admitted. Howe and Melvoin clearly did. They helped fashion an album that balanced jazz's expert, elegant looseness with warmly romantic '70s West Coast orchestration, around some of Waits' loveliest melodies. His songs were never framed more beautifully. It was a heartbreaker.

"New Coat Of Paint"'s drums and piano stumble in like a drunk. "*Zzet 'em up, zzet 'em up,*" Waits is soon slurring, "*we'll be knocking 'em down*". The whole album maintains this opening track's sozzled, bittersweet glow. "*Never saw the morning, 'til I stayed up all night,*" Waits further confesses in "San Diego Serenade", over a restrained shiver of strings and the barest sketch of a beat from Gordon. Hughart's double bass, a major element in the arrangements, twangs in low sympathy with "Semi Suite"'s lament for a woman in love with a truck-driving man, the latter represented by Oscar Brashear's trumpet's cocky swagger. Hughart's fast-walking, melodic bassline, cooked up on the spot for "Diamonds On My Windshield", shadows and shapes the metre of Waits' finger-snapping Beat rap.

The authority of Waits' own work is remarkable. "Shiver Me Timbers" is a sweeping fantasy of running away to sea, strings rising to the exposed height of the crow's nest where "*old Captain Ahab's got nothing on me*", the weirder, wilder casts of later albums already hinted at. And what a melody, and what kind vulnerability in the lyrics of "Please Call Me, Baby", where "*the evening fell just like a star*" on its lovers. Waits' then-rich voice is truly Sinatraesque here, squeezing and stretching words to mirror his hero's easy elasticity, on a song worthy of the Chairman's repertoire.

"(Looking For) The Heart Of Saturday Night" was always intended to be the title track. The inspiration, Waits told a radio interviewer, had come while talking with his friend Bob Webb, owner of San Diego's Heritage club, one Saturday afternoon. "We're both real Jack Kerouac fans," he recalled. "So this is kind of a tribute to Kerouacians, I guess." Traffic noise recorded outside the studio in Cahuenga Boulevard introduces a street panorama drawn from Kerouac's *Visions Of Cody*, but peopled with the Californian neon-dwellers Waits was making his own. "The Ghosts Of Saturday Night (After Hours At Napoleone's Pizza House)" fades out on this melancholy street romance, Melvoin's delicate, saloon-bar piano keeping pace just behind the sailors and waitresses. The world Waits would continue to explore through the 1970s is fully born. ♦

TRACKLISTING — THE HEART OF SATURDAY NIGHT

1. New Coat Of Paint ★★★★
2. San Diego Serenade ★★★★
3. Semi Suite ★★★
4. Shiver Me Timbers ★★★★
5. Diamonds On My Windshield ★★★★
6. (Looking For) The Heart Of Saturday Night ★★★★★
7. Fumblin' With The Blues ★★★★
8. Please Call Me, Baby ★★★★★
9. Depot, Depot ★★★★
10. Drunk On The Moon ★★★★
11. The Ghosts Of Saturday Night (After Hours At Napoleone's Pizza House) ★★★★

Released: October, 1974
Label: Asylum
Recorded at: Wally Heider Recorders, Hollywood
Produced by: Bones Howe
Personnel: Waits (vocals, piano, guitar), Mike Melvoin (piano), Jim Hughart (bass), Arthur Richards (guitar), Jim Gordon (drums), Tom Scott (saxophone), Oscar Brashear (trumpet)
Highest chart position: N/A

“I was kinda lost in the ’60s.”

“TOM WAITS IS THE WORST DRESSED MAN I EVER SAW,” REPORTS STEVE LAKE, AS HE SHARES LUNCH WITH A HOTLY TIPPED ODDBALL IN A SUITABLY GRUNGY NEW YORK DINER. THE SUMMER OF LOVE WAS “A WASTE OF TIME”, HE REVEALS, TELLING STORIES OF SEARCHING FOR THE GHOST OF JACK KEROUAC IN THE BEAT BOOKSHOPS OF SAN FRANCISCO.


Melody Maker
Supertramp tour
Emmylou coming
Keyboards extra
THE PRICE OF SUCCESS
TAKEN FROM MELODY MAKER 4/10/1975

THIS IS AN old diner on the funky end of 8th Avenue, hung with grease-stained cardboard plaques that say things like “Hamburg + french fries + coleslaw = 95c” or “Try our soup of the day. Different soup daily 20c.”

Green-tiled walls and green, chipped Formica workbench-type counter tops, the dreary uniformity of colour broken by hulking and battered aluminium urns.

Tom Waits feels at home. Most of the... uh... clientele here are earthy working men, burly construction crew workers, truck drivers, and the odd derelict, most of these red-nosed and grimy and sporting the standard wino trim – three days of stubble, what remains of heads of hair anchored down to scabbed scalps by months, years of sweat and dirt.

Nobody here realises they’re dining with the great leftfield hope of the David Geffen empire. Yes sir, from the team that gave you the Eagles, Joni Mitchell, the Souther Hillman Furay Band, and even (for a while) Bob Dylan – Elektra/Asylum Records presents ... (fanfare of trumpets)... Tom Waits!

Tom Waits is the worst dressed man I ever saw. Impossibly crumpled, three-sizes-too-big, dark grey suit, collar liberally sprinkled with dandruff, voluminous torn T-shirt decorated with axle-grease thumb prints and a flat cap with grimy brim of which has been all but rubbed away by generations of usage. From underneath, straw coloured curls protrude, crowning a drained and pallid face. Bloodshot eyes, hollow cheeks and a wispy goatee.

Although reluctant to admit it, Waits has consciously styled his artistic and personal development along the lines laid down in the ’50s by the so-called Beat Generation – taking as his model writers like Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and particularly Jack Kerouac. And never mind that virtually all the writers involved in that very loose movement ultimately disowned their hobo on-the-road years, Waits is passionately committed to the spirit of the ’50s and all that it entailed.

In the grand Beat tradition, Waits sits in seedy luncheonettes and crowded bars writing down conversations that he hears around him, and later turns these into songs.

And the Kerouac influence makes itself manifest in these songs in more than just general terms. Why, the very title of Waits’ second album, *The Heart Of Saturday Night*, is in direct reference to a passage from Kerouac’s book *Visions Of Cody*, and the theme of the whole album is essentially little more than an elaboration, albeit articulate, on this self-same passage *[pages 80 through 85 in the McGraw Hill paperback edition, if you want to check it out for yourselves]*.

And, when it came to selecting a ’50s style back-up trio for his New York appearance at the swanky Reno Sweeney’s Club, who should Waits choose to front such a band but tenorist Al Cohn, who just happens to be the saxophonist who worked with – you guessed it – ol’ Jack Dulouz Kerouac himself on a 1960 jazz/poetry album called *Blues And Haikus*.

To be sure, then, pianist/guitarist/singer/raconteur Tom Waits walks that most perilous of lines between idolisation on the one hand and downright plagiarism on the other.

But what does Waits have that’s his own, you ask? Well, Kerouac never actually wrote songs as such, of course, and thus, unlike Waits, never got his material recorded by the Eagles, Bette Midler, Ian Matthews, Lee Hazlewood and Tim Buckley – to name but five. Not that Waits likes any of the cover versions overmuch.

“The Eagles made ‘Ol’ ’55’ really antiseptic, y’know, and that song’s on jukeboxes everywhere now. When I hear those songs and the real essence doesn’t come across,

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

> "BEFORE I FOUND KEROUAC I WAS KINDA GROPING FOR SOMETHING TO HANG ON TO"
>
> **TOM WAITS**

West goes East: Waits live in a New York bar, 1975

ARCHIVE 1975

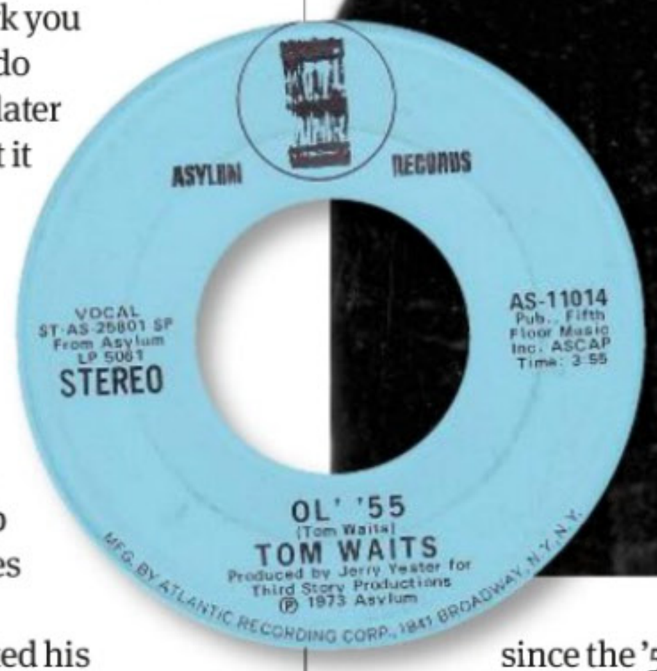
Tom Waits with Allen Ginsberg in a New York bar in 1975

I figure that maybe the songs just ain't strong enough."

This lack of conviction in his songwriting ability has made Waits lean progressively more and more heavily (onstage) on his words.

"If I can't find a melody to hang the words on to, I just don't worry about it. I do it anyway, without music. I got a thing on my upcoming album called 'Spare Parts', which is a thing I wrote but in the final analysis it's a solo effort, it's something you do by yourself and nobody can really tell anybody else how to do it.

"It starts off as a vicarious sort of thrill. Through somebody else's work you get the feeling that you could do something like that, but then later you find out how very difficult it actually is to do something meaningful."



And for Tom Waits, his most "meaningful" effort to date is his new album – a live double album recorded, paradoxically, in the studios. To get the necessary nightclub atmosphere, Tom moved tables and chairs into his favourite studio, opened a bar and invited his friends along. The record is called *Nighthawks At The Diner*.

"It's probably the newness of it that makes me like it the most. I don't know – I never play my old records, so it's difficult to be objective. There's a new thing I've done called 'Eggs And Sausage' which I'm really pleased with, and another one called 'Warm Beer And Cold Women'... oh and there's one called 'Putnam County' which is a little vignette about a Naugahyde town in Kentucky...

"I've always found it awkward to adjust to the studio – that knowledge that you've got the same facilities as any other artist at your disposal – you can go in and make a great album or you can go in and suck raw eggs."

At Reno Sweeney's, Tom Waits looks absurdly incongruous. The T-shirt has been replaced by a white, more conventional variety and a skinny lifeless necktie is knotted about halfway down his chest. But otherwise it's the same sad suit and cap and peeling chisel-toe shoes.

Reno Sweeney's, you should understand, is what London's Biba's Rainbow Room is supposed to be, stylised eleganza.

Al Cohn pushes his tenor through a few genteel paces, blinking owlishly behind his spectacles. Come to think of it, he hasn't changed much since the '50s either. He's still sounding like a bluesier synthesis of Lester Young and Charlie Parker: not an unhealthy combination, let it be said.

But Cohn doesn't get enough room to move. This is Tom Waits' show and the music is secondary to the imagery. Unobtrusive background music, that's all that's required of one of the most important tenorists of the post war years, a guy on a par with Zoot Sims and Stan Getz. Which isn't to knock Waits necessarily – the jazz poetry fusions throughout history have usually transpired in the music losing out, relegated to a backseat role.

And Tom Waits is babbling. "Under the circumcision this is pretty prophylactic," he blurts at one point to more titters, and later I think I hear him cram a couple of stanzas from Kerouac's "Mexico City Blues" into the proceedings, but I can't be sure, and nobody else seems to notice. Seems we can't avoid talking about Kerouac. I prevail on him to explain the roots of this obsession.

"I'm interested in the style mainly. Before I found Kerouac I was kinda groping for something to hang on to, stylistically. I was kinda lost in the '60s. Y'know, I kinda slept in the '60s. Knowing I wanted to do something creative, not knowing how or where to do it."

Living in California, Waits remained immune to the celebrated San Francisco music explosion.

"I thought it was a waste of time, I knew it was going to consume itself pretty rapidly. I was more interested in the early beginnings of that scene than I was in its progress.

"I didn't go to San Francisco until the whole love and flowers bit was all over, and when I did go, I was looking for the City Lights Bookstore and the ghost of Jack Kerouac.

"Writing is a much more easy business to discuss," he croaks, "than to actually get down and do it yourself. You can talk for days about how you write or where you write or how you like the room or what you write about." ♦

"I DIDN'T GO TO SAN FRANCISCO UNTIL THE WHOLE LOVE AND FLOWERS BIT WAS ALL OVER"
TOM WAITS

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

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TOM WAITS ALBUMS

NIGHTHAWKS AT THE DINER

A portrait of the artist as a young boho, as scatty tales unravel before a rapt live audience. By BUD SCOPPA

RELEASED OCTOBER 1975

BY EARLY 1975, the 25-year-old Tom Waits was throwing himself Method-style into the cosmology he'd created around his persona: a pastiche of Beatnik, boozer, street poet and saloon singer. Deeper and deeper, he was inhabiting the same LA demimonde that had proved to be such fertile territory for Bukowski, Chandler and the film noir directors. He holed up at the Tropicana Motor Hotel, the resolutely seedy edifice on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, lubricated his creative process nightly at the Troubadour and the city's plentiful dive bars with his pal and collaborator Chuck E Weiss, and nursed his hangovers at Duke's, the Tropicana's bustling coffee shop. Days started with a breakfast of coffee, cigarettes and eggs over easy as the lunch crowd were clearing the joint. His lifestyle begat his material, which served to further enrich this sustained act of self-invention. In short, Waits was ready for his close-up.

As a rule, artists don't release live albums early on, and live albums of new material are rare for artists of any tenure. But for Waits, at that stage of his burgeoning career, rolling tape while he performed in front of an audience was a total no-brainer in the minds of his manager and producer. "Herb Cohen and I both had a sense that we needed to bring out the jazz in Waits more clearly," Bones Howe explained. "Tom was a great performer onstage." Waits' skill set, in which he crammed his myriad influences – including Lord Buckley, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Ken Nordine, Louis Armstrong and Sinatra – into the sausage-maker and let it rip, extended beyond mere songcraft. In his act, the between-song monologues were as captivating as the songs themselves, and his latest batch of tunes seemed specifically designed for engaging an audience. What better way to capture the fullness of his budding brilliance than having him present them in their intended setting – with extra mustard, as he might put it?

After rejecting the folky, overcrowded Troubadour, where Waits had opened for Little Feat on a three-night-stand the previous December, Cohen and Howe decided to turn the tracking room of a recording studio into a nightclub for the sessions. For the studio band, the producer went with keyboardist/arranger Mike Melvoin and stand-up bass player Jim Hughart, who'd played key roles in creating the vibe of *The Heart Of Saturday Night*; he fine-tuned the unit by bringing in jazz drummer Bill Goodwin and renowned tenor saxophone player Pete Christlieb. "It was a totally jazz rhythm section," Howe noted. When the invited guests entered the Record Plant's big tracking room on the evenings of July 30 and 31, they discovered it had been transformed into a mood-lit bistro for the occasion. The opening act was an old-time burlesque queen who did her bump-and-grind while the band played "Night Train" and the theme from *The Pink Panther*, "put[ting] the room in exactly the right mood", as Howe recalled.

The record, originally issued as a double album with a cover photo inspired by Edward Hopper's iconic painting, *Nighthawks*, opens with Waits setting the scene by welcoming the crowd to "Raphael's Silver Cloud Lounge" before growling a word-jazz rap as the players vamp behind him. The intro provides a vivid portrait of Waits' persona in three minutes, as he laces his shtick with edgy blue quips like, *"I'm so goddamn horny, the crack of dawn better be careful around me"*. The band extends the shuffling groove right into "Emotional Weather Report", as Waits appropriates the lingo of a local TV weatherman to forecast the imminent end of a storm-tossed relationship. He extends the metaphor with "On A Foggy Night", its lost

drifter finding "*no tell-tale light clue/Spun just like the spell you spin/This precarious pandemonium*". "Eggs And Sausage" and the 11-minute-plus "Nighthawk Postcards (From Easy Street)" function as vivid travelogues of Hollywood's underbelly, the antithesis of the street-corner pitchmen hawking maps to the stars' homes. Waits rolls out a litany of sharply drawn details, like his food critic's review of the fare at a pair of local greasy spoons in the "Eggs And Sausage" intro: "*I've had strange-looking patty melts at Norm's/Dangerous veal cutlets at the Copper Penny*". Those two numbers sandwich the bachelor's lament "Better Off Without A Wife", the closest Waits gets to a Tin Pan Alley standard on the album, dialling back the gravel in his delivery to reveal his true voice as he croons the lilting melody.

The barroom ballad "Warm Beer And Cold Women", in which the downcast narrator gazes longingly at "*platinum blondes and tobacco brunettes*", kicks off Side Three, followed by the spoken-word reverie "Putnam County", a cinematic panorama of small-town Americana. The band bops while Waits rap-sings the post-break-up blues on the Weiss co-write "Spare Parts I (A Nocturnal Emission)". He dusts off the melancholy ballad "Nobody" from his '71 demos, providing *Nighthawks* with its most unguarded moments, before closing the set with an odd choice – Tommy Faile's 1967 trucker's tale "Big Joe And Phantom 309", in which a drifter thumbs a ride from the driver of a semi-trailer, who turns out to be a ghost. The show ends in traditional roadhouse fashion with Waits jokingly introducing the band members while they reprise "Spare Parts".

"You can hear on the record how ecstatic the audience was," Goodwin told Waits biographer Barney Hoskyns. "I was so mesmerised that I literally at one point came out of this state where I realised we were recording. We just hit this magical thing, this golden mean of performance."

Though there were no classics on *Nighthawks At The Diner*, the songs served their revelatory purpose as the vehicles for an in-depth character study – a portrait of the artist as a young boho. On those two midsummer nights in '75, Waits came into his own as a true original with the ability to cast a deep, immersive spell, transforming West Third Street and La Cienega Blvd into the corner of Fifth and Vermouth, under a bloodshot moon. He was on his way.

"Right now, what I'm doing is no longer what I do, it's what I am," he told Mick Houghton in 1976. "Anyway, I've quit my day job, so it's too late to go back." ♦

TRACKLISTING | NIGHTHAWKS AT THE DINER

1. Emotional Weather Report ★★★★
2. On A Foggy Night ★★★★
3. Eggs And Sausage (In A Cadillac With Susan Michelson) ★★★★
4. Better Off Without A Wife ★★★★
5. Nighthawk Postcards (From Easy Street) ★★★★
6. Warm Beer And Cold Women ★★★★
7. Putnam County ★★★★
8. Spare Parts I (A Nocturnal Emission) ★★★★
9. Nobody ★★★★
10. Big Joe And Phantom 309 ★★★

Released: October 1975
Label: Asylum

Recorded at: Record Plant, West Hollywood
Produced by: Bones Howe
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, piano, guitar), Pete Christlieb (tenor sax), Bill Goodwin (drums), Jim Hughart (upright bass), Mike Melvoin (piano, electric piano, guitar)
Highest chart position: UK N/A; US 164

ARCHIVE 1976

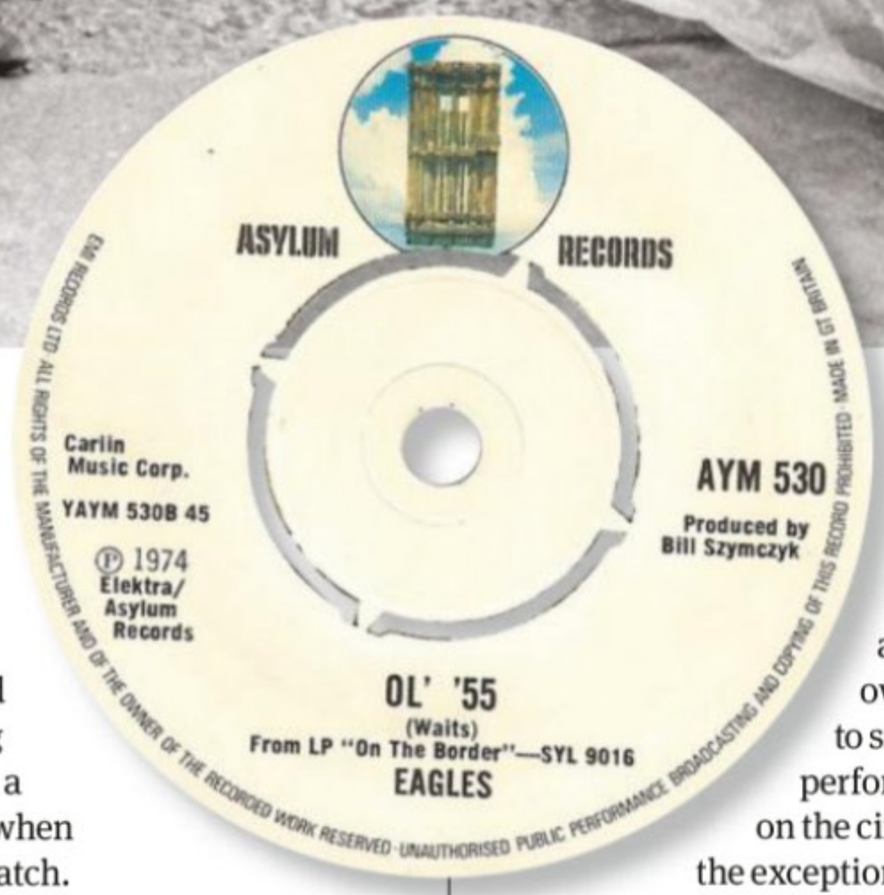
JOE STEVENS

Sultan of scrabble: Waits in a pub in Piccadilly, London, May 1976

"I'm not a household word – I'm a legend in my own mind."

SUCCESS STILL ELUDES TOM WAITS, BUT, SLOWLY, THE MYTH IS GROWING. IN LONDON WITH A "REAL HIGH-VOLTAGE BEBOP TRIO", HE SCHOOLS FRED DELLAR IN MUCKALUCKS, PETERBILTS AND RATSTICKERS, AND PLOTS HIS NEXT MAGNUM OPUS – 'PASTIES AND A G-STRING'? EVER HEARD THE ONE ABOUT WAITS, A '54 CADILLAC, ED BEGLEY JR AND A GIRL FROM PERSIA?

Down, not out: Waits in London, May 25, 1976 – "Naw – I don't like the Eagles... they're about as exciting as watching paint dry"




TAKEN FROM NME 05/06/1976

I CAME IN on the southbound flyer, then hoofed it halfway across town to see Tom. From a nearby window drifted the sound of Billie aqua-freshing 'The Man I Love', Prez singing long, thoughtful phrases and making it, really making it. Was it really like that? Hell, no. But when you're booked to interview Tom Waits, the Brian Case of singer-songwriters, then it's best to get in the mood.

Waits is in the town for a gaggle of nights at Ronnie [Scott]'s. That his gig seems a well-kept secret I'll agree – just another chapter in Waits' as-yet-unwritten biography, 'The Last Of The Big Time Losers'.

The guy's had three albums released so far. The first was deleted after just a fly's life, while the second never received a British pressing order.

And the third, a live-in-the-studio double, got slammed by reviewers who never had a chance to ease on into Waits via the more accessible preceding duo. Three strikes in a row, then.

Writing-wise he's been luckier. It's become fashionable to include at least one Waits song on an album. However, our hero claims this trend doesn't exactly keep him in Savile Row suits – not as though sartorial elegance has ever been a strong line with the Californian, whose bum-of-the-year appearance has brought forth strong accusations of gimmickry from non-believers.

"I'm not a household word – I'm just a legend in my own mind," croaks Waits in a voice that's broken out of Alcatraz and got shot up in the process. "Still, I've come a long way since I was a dishwasher and had a good job sweeping up. I once worked in a jewellery store and when I quit I took a gold watch. I figured they weren't gonna give me one 'cause I'd only been with them six months anyway."

Back to those cover versions, though.

"I don't like any of 'em."

Not even the Eagles' version of "Ol' 55"?

"Naw – I don't like the Eagles. They're about as exciting as watching paint dry. Their albums are good for keeping the dust off your turntable and that's about all."

Eric Andersen then? After all, Andersen's included Waits' songs on his last two albums.

"Naw – I don't like Eric Andersen either."

He takes the copy of Andersen's latest Arista project, which I proffer, and reads the sleeve notes, punctuating the singer's own poetic album jottings with the words "Rod McKuen" every few seconds. I remark that even if Waits has a low opinion of Andersen's output, the reverse would not appear to be true.

"Yeah, right. But I still don't like *him*. I wish he didn't like me. We had a fight once because he was messing about with my girl. Y'know something?... it's really difficult to hit a guy who likes you, so I wish he didn't.

"I guess I shouldn't badmouth anybody though. I mean, who the hell am I? Still I've got my own tastes and I have to say that most of the performers currently on the circuit don't, with the exception of a few, fall into that category."

MANY OF THE people Waits actually admires are long gone... Kerouac, Lenny Bruce, Lester Young, Tim Buckley. While others like Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Charlie Mingus and Thelonius Monk, remain as living reminders of the time when New York's 52nd Street was the hub of music world; all bop, berets and goatees. Waits himself sports a 35-year-old goatee on his 27-year-old chin. His threadbare cap seems even older.

Talk about Kerouac's *Visions Of Cody* ("I've got a first edition that's signed by Jack"); Moondog, the legendary blind street musician who once made an album featuring the sounds of the New York streets; Symphony Sid, the deejay who once preached Bird and Diz from tiny Bronx radio station WBNX; or King Pleasure, the singer who taught the world vocalese, and Waits latches on, swapping story for story.

He digs the whole Beat generation scene ("I was something of a misfit during the '60s,") but resents any suggestion that his act is any part of

MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA

the current boom in nostalgia. He shudders when I toss around names like Bette Midler (who recorded Waits' "Shiver Me Timbers" on her last LP) or The Pointer Sisters.

"The whole thing is rampant, y'know. Those people who go in and enjoy Manhattan Transfer don't know who the hell Lambert, Hendricks and Ross are. Music is not a big part of most people's lives. When it stops becoming something you do and becomes rather what you are – then you begin to understand what's important historically. I don't see anything I do as being nostalgic – I feel very contemporary.

"The thing is to do something that's not necessarily here today and gone tomorrow. But most people don't care about that, they're under a lot of social pressure. When getting laid depends upon what you've got in your record collection then you gotta have all Top 10 hits – that's the way it is."

Interviewing Waits is both easy and difficult. It's easy because he's an inveterate raconteur, a mainman on words, a sultan of scrabble. But the difficulty arises when he opts for being Waits the entertainer, testing whole routines on unsuspecting journalists waiting merely for the short answer.

Already, he'd thrown two monologues my way – one being a hilarious (but true) story involving Waits himself, his '54 Cadillac, Ed Begley Jr and a girl from Persia who couldn't speak English ("I hadda pinned up against a wall, trying to explain things to her"), another being a tale called "Rocky And Charlie Dutton" that's likely to appear on what Waits terms his fourth, coming (geddit?) album. It takes a little time to get him back on course again.

So tell us about your backup band, Tom.

"Well, I've got Frank Vicari on tenor sax, Dr Huntingdon Jenkins III Jr on upright bass, and Chip White on drums. Vicari's been playing since he was about 13 years old. He used to line up outside Birdland when he was a kid... the only white tenor player lining up with a whole lotta black cats – just for a chance to sit in, listen or hang out. Since then he's played for Woody, Maynard Ferguson... lots of others."

Waits has always had a penchant for useful tenor players, people like Tom Scott and Al Cohn, once of Herman's great '48 Herd, along with Zoot Sims and Stan Getz.

"Yeah, I had Tom Scott on one of my albums – but that was before I found out I could get anyone that I wanted. Tom's OK but he's too young and too stylised, more like a rock tenorman, not really what I'd call a jazz player, though he can play jazz. He did some nice stuff on the soundtrack of a movie called *Taxi Driver* that's very big in the States. Al played with me for a couple of weeks once and I hope to have him on my next album if everything fits in with his schedule. I admire him and his style. And he drinks about a quart of Johnnie Walker Red Label a night – though how he does it, I just don't know."

Though Waits plays some guitar and a reasonable line in gin-soaked piano, he describes himself as a pedestrian musician.

"I'D NEVER CUT IT AS A SIDEMAN, I JUST ACCOMPANY, THAT'S WHAT I DO"
TOM WAITS

"I'd never cut it as a sideman, I just accompany, that's what I do. I'm glad to have my band with me, they're a real high-voltage bebop trio. I've been on the road for about five years now but I've never been able to afford a band until recently – and even now I can't afford it, I just pay through the ass."

Reminiscences next – about the time he tried to get a gig with a then unknown Al Jarreau at the Blah Blah Club in LA ("A real toilet, that place"), about Maria Muldaur explaining to Martin Mull just how much an ancient necklace had cost her ("Just imagine what you'd have paid if it had been new," said Mull in mock wonder), and about the multitude of American tradenames and expressions that proliferate throughout Waits' albums...

"Muckalucks are carpet slippers, a Peterbilt is a truck and Stacey Adams once were a very prestigious shoe... if you had them on then nobody messed with you and you could go anywhere. Staceys stayed ahead of current affairs and were considered extremely hip. By the way, the shoes I'm wearing are called Ratstickers!"

It's retaliation time, so Waits begins writing down some of the British expressions he hasn't heard before. "You call them French Letters here?... or Packets Of Three? (*And Tonkies – Ed.*) Yeah, I'll have to remember that."

One last question then. Is there anyone in this wide world who he'd actually like to cover his songs?

"Ray Charles... and I'd like Cleo Laine to do one. The thing is, though, that people never record the songs I'm really proud of. There are songs I do every night and the magic is still there – but there are others that you can ambush and beat the shit out of until they just don't water any more for you.

"I've got a lot of new songs – 'A Bad Liver And A Broken Heart', 'A Briefcase And The Blues', 'Frank Is Here', 'Whitey Ford'... and a lot of these haven't been written yet, but I've got the titles and I'll be glad if somebody covers them.

After a brief discourse regarding that next album – which is likely to be called 'Pasties And A G-String' – the subject moves finally to the ineptitude of some country rockers.

"Those guys grew up in LA and they don't have cowshit on their boots – they just got dogshit from Laurel Canyon. They wouldn't last two minutes in Putnam County, that's for sure. If somebody gets shot and killed there on a Saturday night, the Sunday papers say he just died of natural causes!"

At which point I, in the words of Waits himself, made like a hockey player and got the puck outta there. ♦

First-night nerves: Waits starts his residency at Ronnie Scott's, May 31, 1976

ANDREW PUTLER/GETTY IMAGES

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

SMALL CHANGE

He smells like a brewery, he looks like a tramp... This genius has been drinking again. By MICHAEL BONNER

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1976

THE FIRST TIME Tom Waits played in London was not without incident. While touring to promote *Nighthawks At The Diner*, Waits was offered a residency at Ronnie Scott's from May 31-June 12, 1976, supporting the Monty Alexander Trio. On the first night, he got into a fight with a bouncer. During his set the following night, he flicked a lit cigarette at some hecklers in the audience. Eventually, he later claimed, he was thrown out of the club.

Around the same time, Waits debuted a new song that may well have been inspired by his brief but colourful stint at Ronnie Scott's. "The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me)" was a hairy yarn about a joint where *"the bouncer is a Sumo wrestler cream-puff Casper Milktoast"*, *"the owner is a mental midget with the IQ of a fence post"* and *"you can't find your waitress with a Geiger counter"*. The song – which appeared later that year on *Small Change* – was emblematic of the album's principle theme: drinking. You'll find Waits' narrator *"wasted and wounded"*, nursing regrets *"at the bottom of a bottle of bargain Scotch"*. Metaphorically speaking, *Small Change* was so sloshed it was barely able to stand up.

Drink had become a critical part of Waits' persona by the time he started recording *Small Change* in LA in June, 1976. The rapscallious hipster barfly had been introduced on *The Heart Of Saturday Night*, and Waits let him run loose on *Nighthawks*.... But *Small Change* found Waits going deep into the grain of his creation, blurring the line between his real and stage identity.

Additionally, something had happened to Waits' voice: the wheezy baritone of the early records had been replaced by a rough, phlegmy growl somewhere between Beefheart and Louis Armstrong (listen to the gravelly intake of breath at the start of "I Wish I Was In New Orleans": it sounds like a snake uncoiling). In interviews, Waits routinely deflected questions about his voice, leaving it unclear as to whether he'd damaged his larynx on the October 1975-August 1976 *Nighthawks*... tour or if, in fact, the new voice was simply the next level of detail to Waits' evolving persona. Whatever the truth, the voice is in striking effect on the LP's first hard-luck yarn, "Tom Traubert's Blues". Subtitled "Four Sheets To The Wind In Copenhagen" and interpolating elements of Australian bush ballad "Waltzing Matilda", the song ushers Waits' misshapen voice in gracefully on a soft bed of strings. Described by Waits as being "about throwing up in a foreign country", it is rich with images and a typically colourful supporting cast of "*maverick Chinaman*", "*old men in wheelchairs*", sailors and street sweepers. If Waits had been indebted to Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver in the past, "Tom Traubert's Blues" marks the point where his writing becomes more than the sum of its influences. The first of four spoken-word pieces on *Small Change*, "Step Right Up" recalls the nocturnal jazz vibes of *Nighthawks*, with Waits as a con artist scatting his way through the miraculous benefits of a product he's hawking – "*It mows your lawn and it picks up the kids from school*". Drawing together the mannerisms of fairground barkers and snake-oil salesman with the surreal Beat monologues of Lord Buckley, it's a dextrous piece of songwriting, privileging yet another aspect of Waits' increasingly inventive and vivid

SMALL CHANGE WAS SO SLOSHED IT WAS BARELY ABLE TO STAND UP

songwriting skills. While "Step Right Up" ties Waits to the tradition of carny barkers, "Jitterbug Boy" aligns him to yet another arch bullshitter. Waits' narrator here has *"slept with the lions and Marilyn Monroe... fought Rocky Marciano... got drunk with Louis Armstrong"*, his tall tales unfolding against a gentle piano melody.

"The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me)" marks a shift in tone for the album – here's Waits playing at being drunk, rather than actually *being* drunk. It's a little light relief before Waits reveals "Invitation To The Blues", a noir-ish portrait of life on the margins, focusing on a waitress in a run-down diner. Waits is back documenting his own situation – *"smelling like a brewery, looking like a tramp"* – in the free-wheeling, stream-of-consciousness "Pasties And A G-String", then further amplifying his alcoholic romanticism on "Bad Liver And A Broken Heart": *"I wish you'd a known her, we were quite a pair"*. "The One That Got Away" is more hard-boiled California-noir in the spirit of Hammett or Chandler, with Waits' narrator inhabiting parts of LA where *"the ambulance drivers don't give a shit"*. Perhaps like Robert Altman, whose version of *The Long Goodbye* was released three years earlier, Waits was interested in perceiving the '70s partly through a filter of '50s pulp fiction.

You can even speculate that it is the same version of Waits' persona you see on the LP cover: a Marlowe-esque gumshoe sitting in a stripper's dressing room, surrounded by cigarette packs, make-up, cheap clothes. Waits continued to find inspiration in Chandler and co for the title song, a spoken word inspired by a real-life shooting Waits witnessed near the Chelsea Hotel. The descriptive detail is extraordinary, with Waits even going so far as to catalogue the racing form in the deceased Small Change's pocket, *"circled Blue Boots in the 3rd"*. He exits the album in a sentimental frame of mind: "Can't Wait To Get Off Work" finds Waits in a rare autobiographical moment, revisiting his teenage years spent *"working for Joe and Sal"* at San Diego's Napoleone Pizza House, dreaming about getting home to his girl.

Small Change was recorded at Wally Heider's over five days in July, 1976, with a small band and Jerry Yester providing string arrangements. It was released in September, and became Waits' first album to reach the *Billboard* Top 100. More importantly – creatively, at least – it was the high-water mark of Waits' self-mythologising. "All of a sudden it becomes your image," he told the *Los Angeles Times* in March 1976, "and it's hard to tell where the image stops and you begin, or where you stop and the image begins." ♦

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"We're down to essays in desolation and hopelessness the chilling like of which very few artists have the courage or inclination to tamper with... Waits is not an easily marketable commodity because he will insist in believing in himself. So if you can't afford the import price, you'd better invest in a hangover instead." DAVID HEPWORTH, NME, 20/11/76

TRACKLISTING — SMALL CHANGE

1. Tom Traubert's Blues (Four Sheets To The Wind In Copenhagen) ★★★★★
2. Step Right Up ★★★★
3. Jitterbug Boy (Sharing A Curbstone With Chuck E Weiss, Robert Marchese, Paul Body And The Mug And Artie) ★★★
4. I Wish I Was In New Orleans (In The Ninth Ward) ★★★★
5. The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me) (An Evening With Pete King) ★★★
6. Invitation To The Blues ★★★★
7. Pasties And A G-String (At The Two O'Clock Club) ★★★★
8. Bad Liver And A Broken Heart (In Lowell) ★★★★
9. The One That Got Away ★★★★★
10. Small Change (Got Rained On With His Own .38) ★★★★★
11. I Can't Wait To Get Off Work (And See My Baby On Montgomery Avenue) ★★★★

Released: September 1976
Label: Asylum
Recorded at: Wally Heider Recording Studio
Produced by: Bones Howe
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, piano), Jim Hughart (bass), Lew Tabackin (tenor sax), Shelly Manne (drums), Jerrry Yester (string arranger), Harry Bluestone (violin, strings), Ed Lustgarten (cello, orchestra manager)
Highest chart position: UK N/A; US 89

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"*Your life's a dime-store novel,*" notes Bette Midler. Can Tom Waits avoid becoming a cliché? By ANDREW MUELLER

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1977

FOUR STUDIO ALBUMS into his career, Tom Waits was settled into a carefully curated persona: a goatee-bearded barfly beatnik, inhabiting a world otherwise populated by sassy streetwalkers, wisecracking barbers, jive-talking boulevardiers with whiskey-stained shirtfronts, and so forth. So comfortable was Waits amid this crepuscular demi-monde by the time he made *Foreign Affairs* that he playfully permits, on the album's cute showpiece duet, "I Never Talk To Strangers", the possibility that he is becoming a cliché: "*Your life's a dime-store novel*", sighs his partner in song, Bette Midler. "*This town is full of guys like you*".

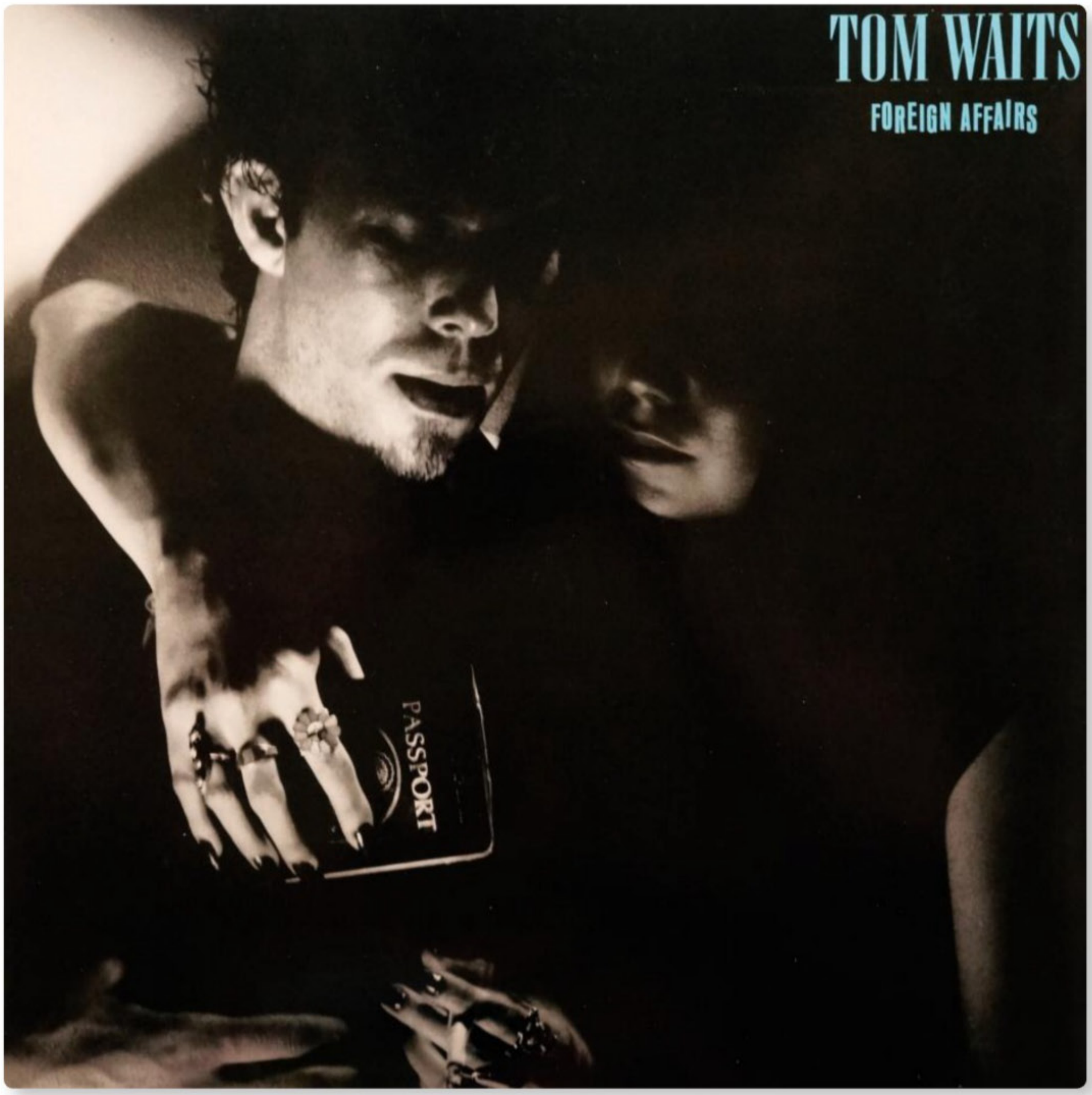
Midler's character was approximately half-right. Waits' existence – or at least his telling of it on *Foreign Affairs* – does, at this point, have the whiff of a melodramatic pulper about it, all heartbreak, desperation and forlorn dreams of escape. The accusation that Waits is but one slurring poet among many, however, is unfair – as, it has to be suspected, Waits well knew. Even four decades later, the sheer confidence of Waits' early years is bracing, this son of Californian schoolteachers deciding and declaring himself all at once an heir to the greats of blues and Beat. For all that *Foreign Affairs* often sounds hopelessly racked and careworn, like the final confession of an elderly resident of the bed nearest the door in some facility for the unregenerate dissolute, Waits was 28 years old when it was released.

The album begins with the instrumental fanfare "Cinny's Waltz", a dainty stumble that sounds as if it might well have been composed by Waits as depicted on the inner sleeve, drunkenly contemplating – possibly even struggling to recognise – a piano. "Cinny's Waltz" also introduces the album's other key player, an orchestra conducted by Bob Alcivar – hitherto known for producing jaunty, folky pop by the likes of The Fifth Dimension, The New Christy Minstrels and The Association. Although little on *Foreign Affairs* sounds terribly much like "The Age Of Aquarius", the partnership clearly worked – the album was recorded, orchestra and all, live in the studio with no overdubs.

IT STRUGGLES – MOSTLY SUCCESSFULLY – AGAINST ITS OWN AMBITION

When Waits' voice growls its first on *Foreign Affairs*, on the winsome jazz lament "Muriel", it's to utter a couplet that – short of actually announcing "You are listening to the new album by Tom Waits" – could not be a clearer indication that one was listening to the new album by Tom Waits. "*Muriel, since you left town the clubs closed down*", Waits drawls, "*And there's one more burned-out lamppost down on Main Street*". At the time, "Muriel" seemed kind of a sequel to such rueful billets-doux as "Martha" and "Rosie" from *Closing Time*; in retrospect, it sounds like a reach towards the lovelorn dispatch from the doghouse Waits would perfect circa *Heartattack And Vine*, with "Saving All My Love For You" and "Jersey Girl".

The simple, modest "Muriel" is also a template Waits would have been well advised to stick with for more of *Foreign Affairs* – an album on which more often winds up being less. Its two more portentous epics – the eight-and-a half-minute "Potter's Field", the wordy hallucination "Medley: Jack & Neal/California Here I Come" both suggest scattershot first drafts for songs that should have



been half those lengths. The former starts well, granted ("*Well, you can buy me a drink and I'll tell you what I seen/And I'll give you a bargain from the edge of a maniac's dream*"), but swiftly starts resembling someone playing with a Tom Waits-themed magnetic poetry kit ("*A shivering nightstick in a miserable heap/The siren for a lullaby singing him to sleep,*" etc). The meandering, semi-improvised-sounding "Medley" is doubtless a homage to the style of its subjects, Beat authors Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, but its somewhat self-indulgent aimlessness rather recalls Truman Capote's immortal critique of *On The Road*: "That's not writing, it's typing."

The album does, however, contain one of the finest examples of Waits' patented song-as-road-movie. "Burma-Shave" is just Waits at his piano, at least until Jack Sheldon's trumpet coda at the finish, and is just about perfect. The title is a reference to the American shaving-cream manufacturer, famous for planting corny slogans as sequential billboards along American roads in the '40s and '50s. In Waits' song, the signposts are the destination of a fugitive with no clue where he's going, and the words are a clear demonstration of the influence Waits would have on a rather more naturally optimistic singer from New Jersey. Just imagine the following with a surging E Street Band backing: "*Marysville ain't nothing but a wide spot in the road/Some nights my heart pounds just like thunder/Don't know why it don't explode/'Cos everyone in this stinking town's got one foot in the grave/And I'd rather take my chances out in Burma Shave.*"

Foreign Affairs is an album that struggles – actually mostly successfully – against its own ambition. The more invested Waits gets in the idea of himself as cockeyed hepcat chronicler of the Hollywood underworld, the more annoying *Foreign Affairs* becomes – see also "Barber Shop", a musically and lyrically fussy vignette that suggests Cookie Monster singing bebop. When Waits keeps it relatively simple, *Foreign Affairs* sounds like one of his two or three best albums. "A Sight For Sore Eyes" is a counter-intuitively joyful soliloquy of sodden wretchedness that really does sound as if someone has hauled a barstool up to a pub piano and started playing: it's one of the (many) Waits songs that was an obvious influence on Shane MacGowan. And closer "Foreign Affair" may be the single prettiest thing Waits has ever sung, a positively shimmering orchestral backdrop shrouding an eloquent argument in favour of rootless restlessness: "*Most vagabonds I knowed don't ever want to find the culprit/That remains the object of their long relentless quest/The obsession's in the chasing and not the apprehending/The pursuit you see and never the arrest*". ♦

TRACKLISTING — FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. Cinny's Waltz ★★★
2. Muriel ★★★★
3. I Never Talk To Strangers ★★★★
4. Medley: Jack & Neal/California Here I Come ★★
5. A Sight For Sore Eyes ★★★★
6. Potter's Field ★★★
7. Burma-Shave ★★★★★
8. Barber Shop ★★★
9. Foreign Affair ★★★★★

Released: September 1977
Label: Asylum
Recorded at: Filmways/Heider Recording, Hollywood, California
Produced by: Bones Howe

Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, piano), Jim Hughart (bass), Shelly Manne (drums), Frank Vicari (tenor saxophone), Jack Sheldon (trumpet), Gene Cipriano (clarinet), Bette Midler (vocals), Bob Alcivar (orchestra arrangements)
Highest chart position: N/A

BLUE VALENTINE

A modest evolution, as Waits steps aside from self-mythologising to tell the stories of fellow Los Angelenos in dire straits.

By JASON ANDERSON

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1978

GIVEN THAT HE'D devoted seven years to the sometimes sorry task of foisting his schtick upon a largely uninterested public, it's no wonder that Waits had grown weary of the character he'd created. Like any performer's persona, this one threatened to become a prison. That said, Waits' cell looked less like Alcatraz than a room at the Tropicana whose terms of confinement included conjugal visits with Rickie Lee Jones. That's her pressed against Waits' 1964 Ford Thunderbird on *Blue Valentine*'s back cover, a sight that doesn't exactly elicit sympathy for the man, whatever woes he may have been feeling.

Waits was weary all the same, as he put aside other projects (like a Vegas-themed book with *Rock Dreams* illustrator Guy Peellaert) to hunker down on new songs in a room near the old Denny's at the corner of Van Ness and Sunset. "I'll tell you one thing for sure," he said to Nick Kent in July 1978, the same month he'd begin recording *Blue Valentine*. "If I have to write one more song about booze... I'm going to throw up! Seriously! I've had enough of all that. It's all become played out. There's changes due."

He was about to make them, too, even if the biggest ones were further around the corner, like moving east to work on *One From The Heart* or meeting his next muse, Kathleen Brennan. The changes on *Blue Valentine* were sometimes hard to spot amid some familiar tics and tricks, like more of the rambling jazzbo patter that became trying on *Foreign Affairs* and threatens to sink this endeavour, too. Even though Waits wouldn't fully bust out of his cell until *Swordfishtrombones* five years later, you can hear him figuring out how to get a nail file past the guards on the best of *Blue Valentine*, an erratic but enthralling set that contains some of his most surprising music to date.

AN ENTHRALLING SET... SOME OF HIS MOST SURPRISING MUSIC TO DATE

Indeed, even his staunchest fans of the day couldn't have expected that he'd open an LP with such an emotionally charged performance of a musical number whose depths had already been plumbed by Julie Andrews and PJ Proby. Even more shocking was the fact that Waits' strings-laden version of the *West Side Story* standout "Somewhere" – music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim – bears not a trace of hipster condescension. Instead, Waits embraces the simplicity and purity of the lyrics' futile wish for "*a time and place for us*", for some impossible haven far from Jets, Sharks and anyone else who'd make mincemeat of their happiness. Perhaps Waits wants to offer a little of the same solace to the sad sacks he's about to introduce on the rest of *Blue Valentine*. In any case, Asylum was sufficiently moved to make it Waits' first commercially available 7" – shoppers opted to wait for the Streisand version instead.

With its eerie tonal colours and novelistic flair, "Red Shoes By The Drugstore" is another curve ball. Growling over an insistent bassline, sparse percussion and eerie washes of keyboard by George Duke (aka Da Willie Gonga), Waits paints a scene of neon-lit intrigues and yet another doomed romantic rendezvous. That Waits sticks with a third-person take is no small thing. The choice reflects the fact that he derived much of his inspiration not from his usual self-mythologising but from real-life stories of fellow Los Angelenos in dire straits, like the teenage suicide in "A Sweet

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"There's a built-in mythology here, and Waits doesn't have to do much to stay in the saddle, and he doesn't. His recapitulation of the boxcars and chinos, nighthawk dinettes with neon letters missing and coldwater walk-ups works like kicking a hive – but I'm not sure it's that hard to do."

BRIAN CASE, MELODY MAKER, 23/12/1978

"If last year's watershed *Foreign Affairs* passed almost unnoticed, don't let *Blue Valentine* meet with a similar fate... Waits' cool bop scat – succinctly backed by a combination of his road band and a pseudonymous George Duke – never sounded more supple."

PAUL RAMBALI, NME, 25/11/1978

Little Bullet From A Pretty Blue Gun". He's never copped to the origins of *Blue Valentine*'s second original – "Christmas Card From A Hooker In Minneapolis" – but this monologue by a working girl at loose ends remains a deft character sketch.

One of two songs here whose titles were borrowed for later motion pictures (in this case, a grisly Gary Oldman thriller from 1993), "Romeo Is Bleeding" is appealing enough, but falls into the category of Waits songs that make for better reading than listening. Allegedly inspired by the death of a Mexican gangleader in a movie theatre, the song is another third-person affair that recounts an outlaw's last hours after a fatal conflagration with the cop who gunned down his brother. The backing of so-so R'n'B vamping makes it seem longer than it ought to, though it qualifies as concise compared to "$29.00", a sordid tale of a predatory pimp and a naïve newcomer that grows thin long before its eight minutes are through. "Wrong Side Of The Road" continues the slump with its surplus of sub-Ferlinghetti doggerel.

Blue Valentine's quality lapse is rectified on "Whistlin' Past The Graveyard", the first of two sterling songs Waits recorded with a set of New Orleans session men including two of Dr John's key players: guitarist Alvin "Shine" Robinson and pianist Harold Battiste. The forte for swamp-funk that Waits would often display in the '80s (think "Clap Hands") is easily discernible here. The same is true on "A Sweet Little Bullet...", which practically screams N'Awlins due to Waits' Mac Rebennack-like drawl and a slinky sax part by ex-Fats Domino sideman Herbert Hardesty.

Since Waits ditched his piano for a guitar for much of *Blue Valentine*, it must've reassured the loyalists to hear him play "Kentucky Avenue", a beautifully rendered song whose most vivid details were drawn from the childhood Waits actually lived rather than the ones he invented.

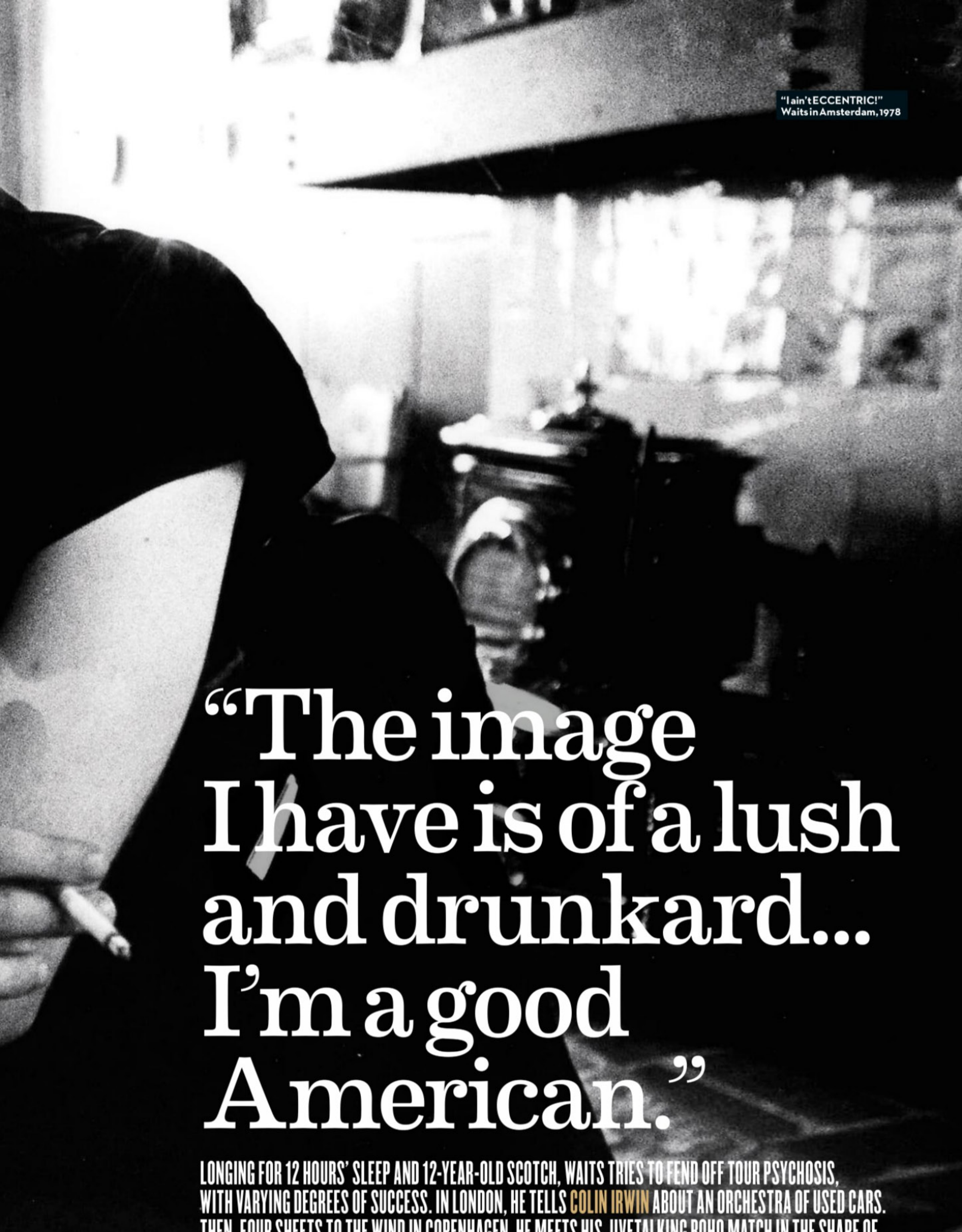
Just as graceful is "Blue Valentines", which may lack the lush strings of "Somewhere" and "Kentucky Avenue", but otherwise completes the LP's trio of exemplary ballads. It also closes the album with its deepest expression of sorrow, which is again saying something given the long litany of tragedies and fatalities that preceded it. Tormented by the valentines from the woman he wronged even after he changed his name and moved to Philly, the narrator knows there is no time and place for him, no "somewhere" where he can live with what he's done. Waits, however, has places to go – and he's picking up steam. ♦

TRACKLISTING — BLUE VALENTINE

1. Somewhere (from *West Side Story*) ★★★★
2. Red Shoes By The Drugstore ★★★★
3. Christmas Card From A Hooker In Minneapolis ★★★★
4. Romeo Is Bleeding ★★★
5. $29.00 ★★
6. Wrong Side Of The Road ★★
7. Whistlin' Past The Graveyard ★★★
8. Kentucky Avenue ★★★★★
9. A Sweet Little Bullet From A Pretty Blue Gun ★★★★
10. Blue Valentines ★★★★★

Released: September 1978
Label: Asylum
Recorded at: Filmways/Heider Recording, Hollywood, California
Produced by: Bones Howe
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, piano, electric guitar), Da Willie Gonga (Yahama electric grand piano), Rick Lawson (drums), Roland Bautista (electric guitar), Byron Miller (bass), Frank Vicari (tenor sax), Ray Crawford (electric guitar), Charles Kynard (organ), Jim Hughart (bass), Chip White (drums), Bobbye Hall (congas), Harold Battiste (piano), Alvin "Shine" Robinson (electric guitar), Herbert Hardesty (tenor sax), Scott Edwards (bass), Earl Palmer (drums), Bob Alcivar (arr. and conducting, "Kentucky Avenue")
Highest chart position: US 181; UK N/A

BARRY SCHULTZ/SUNSHINE/RETNA PICTURES



"The image I have is of a lush and drunkard... I'm a good American."

LONGING FOR 12 HOURS' SLEEP AND 12-YEAR-OLD SCOTCH, WAITS TRIES TO FEND OFF TOUR PSYCHOSIS, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS. IN LONDON, HE TELLS COLIN IRWIN ABOUT AN ORCHESTRA OF USED CARS. THEN, FOUR SHEETS TO THE WIND IN COPENHAGEN, HE MEETS HIS JIVETALKING BOHO MATCH IN THE SHAPE OF BRIAN CASE... "A COUPLE OF CATS WHO KNOW AN EIGHTER FROM DECATUR FROM A BAKED POTATER!"

FORGIVE THE BLASPHEMY, but I reckon God must have been way out of his little box when he deposited Tom Waits among us. Mr Waits is, irrefutably, one of the Almighty's more bizarre and inspired creations. That he also happens to make records which sell in respectable (if not gargantuan) quantities, is a coincidence that makes him an irresistible subject for interviews during a one-day visit to Britain this week...

Employees of Warners, his record label, giggle slyly as they discover the purpose of your visit. "He's going to interview Tom Waits," they whisper pityingly, nudging as you pass. A walk to the scaffold must be more enticing.

Waits is located in a room near the top of the building, and my first reaction is to wonder whether he's actually alive, and second to bolt for the door. He's decorated entirely in black, from pork-pie hat to sinister cloak to winkle-picker shoes; and he's slouched awkwardly and apparently unconscious on a couch.

His body is a tangle of limbs. Long arms thread forever around knees, under ankles and inside calves like the Hampton Court maze. The pallor is white and there's a three or four-day growth of beard, which makes him look like a spare-time bodysnatcher.

The only sign of life is a gentle rocking back and forth; looking at this uninviting figure in black, draped around himself in a misshapen ball, just rocking, the recollection is of one of the inmates of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

A cool nod of greeting seems in place, but Tom knows his manners, and somewhere from the centre of his apparition emerges a thin white hand. "Hi, how are you?" I say doubtfully. A pause, two eyes focus penetratingly on you for the first time, and there's an alarming hiss and throaty growl, like King Kong being woken up suddenly with a colossus of a hangover.

Gradually he cranks into life, and informs us he's come to Europe to discuss plans for a book with *Rock Dreams* artist Guy Peellaert in Paris. Peellaert is doing 80 paintings of American heroes and Waits will supply the text.

"It'll be... uh... big... uh... hard-bound book... d'ing lottawork on it now... uh... reading and stuff. It's 'bout American heroes from Jimmy Durante to Jimmy Hoffa. It's got... uh... Marlene Dietrich and Jack Benny and Mario Lanza and Elvis Presley and Milton Burrell and Lenny Bruce and... uh... stories t'company each painting, my own perspective, not a biography."

Waits himself is straight out of a Kerouac-Steinbeck mould, and even comes within spitting distance of animation when the magic name of Kerouac is mentioned.

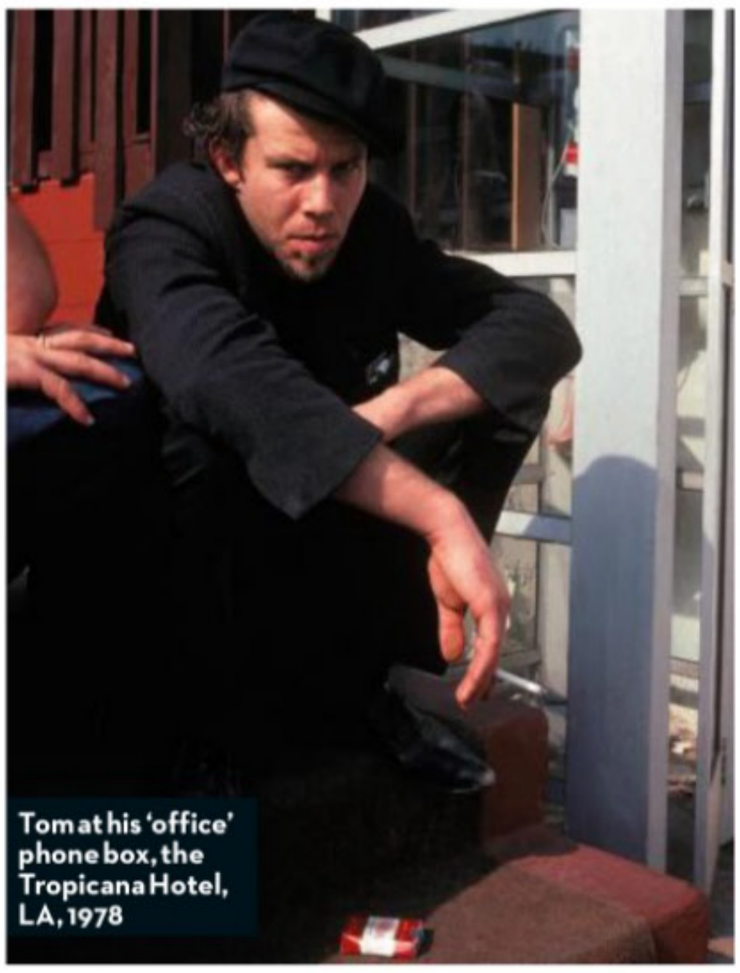
"Kerouac," he groans mournfully, "died in 1969 in St Petersburg, Florida, of a liver disorder... uh... nat'ral causes. Always admired him. He was at the helm of... uh... contemporary American literature almost 20 years ago, and I still feel the ghost of Kerouac no matter where I travel. Real 'portant t'ave heroes."

Who are your other heroes? The question is like an alarm clock trigger – immediately without pause he reels an endless list... "Charles Bukowski, Sam Cooke, George 'Crying In The Rain' Perkins, Rodney Dangerfield, Abe Jefferson, Chuck Weiss, Thelonious Monk, Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Fran Landesman, Jon Hendricks, Victor Borge, who are your heroes?"

I modestly offer Woody Guthrie, Johnny Haynes and Jimmie Rodgers, and he nods, apparently satisfied.

He reveals more of his current exploits – he's been making a movie called *Paradise Alley* with Sylvester Stallone of *Rocky* fame. "S'about New York City in the '40s, three 'talian brothers... I play a drunk in an Irish bar" – a beady eye appears from beneath the hat to gauge reaction. "Character's called Mumbles... never spent so much time in a bar without a drink."

There's a faint hint of an asthmatic guffaw from the man at this. He also wrote the music for the film and got on well with Stallone – "very creative cat". As he talks he continues to rock from side to side with the regularity of a cuckoo clock, and I find myself involuntarily rocking


Tom at his 'office' phone box, the Tropicana Hotel, LA, 1978

too, trying to catch what he's saying and beginning to feel seasick.

Future plans include touring with Bette Midler, including the possibility of dates in the autumn at the London Palladium ("I get a little tired of doing beer joints") and an opera. Not, mind, any old opera: "I been thinkin' long time 'bout using a used car lot conducting with the dipstick, an' using a used car lot as an orchestra... uh... I'm writing a piece for that but I'm still formulating my ideas."

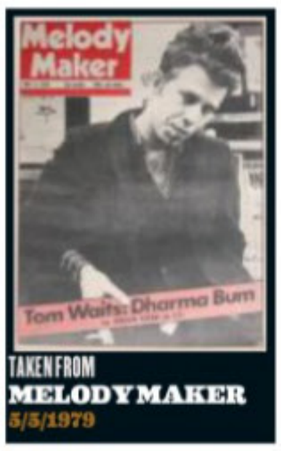
That sounds a little... er... weird, Tom. "I dunno... I gotta get home and... y'know..."

He also tells, with great amusement, of a trip to Las Vegas where he lost 300 bucks at a crap table and got thrown out of his hotel into the bargain. He was just minding his own business watching the girls, he says innocently, and they tapped him on the shoulder, took his photo, made him sign an affidavit swearing he'll never enter the place again and was escorted out by security.

Well, he does seem a trifle eccentric, I tell him delicately. Quite dramatically, he shoots up straight for the first time. "I'M NOT ECCENTRIC... I think I'm a real normal sorta guy. Not a pervert or anythin'. I'm not an axe murderer or a homicidal maniac. I live in a hotel in West Hollywood and I watch *The Rifleman* and *Bonanza* and *Twilight Zone*. I have the kinda image that's damned if you do and damned if you don't, but I ain't ECCENTRIC."

But your image... "The image I have is of a lush and a drunkard... I'm a good American."

Sorry we spoke. ***Colin Irwin***



"Now the dogs are barking And the taxi cabs parking, A lot they can do for me."

Tom Traubert's Blues (Four Sheets To The Wind In Copenhagen)

MORE OF A flounder out of water than the Little Mermaid herself, Tom Waits hunches against the canal wind on an intersection of the Old City quarter of Copenhagen – verdigris green spires and turrets and palaces, one upright heritage – and flags at the passing cabs with a deuce of lunch-hooks no burgher would let near the Lurpak, accompanying each signal failure with a gesture copped – guess I'm guessing here, soldier – from some 37-year-old knock-nutty pug still indelibly inked as The Kid, while the smart money in this town rides on Danny Kaye, fare, tip and anthem.

It is a diligently disseminated no-secret that Tom Waits resembles a freightcar arrival and frightwig, one of those collar-up shivers atop the spine of a transcontinental B&O, who yet feels the iron jolt of unofficial locomotion deep in the tendons of his right hand, and broods upon a new-leaf future of pan-handling with his left. Copenhagen ain't buying, and delivers the back of the neck.

"Mmugh – cabbie!" he roars, as dairymaids churn by on bicycles, and hausfraus and hubbies in snug reindeer-motif knitwear with the pewter clasps stride a wide berth. "Mmugh – taxi!" Hell, maybe it doesn't translate...

A curious joint to open a tour, and he has Vienna, the Palladium, Dublin and Australia yet to come, all of which sounds more like a B Traven predicament than a tilt at the stars. A tricky talent to place, undoubtedly, but this itinerary recalls the Palookaville Scenic, no offertory boxes or blood-bank credit accepted.

"Trying to cut down onna road because everything gets run down. I got run down. Lotta travelling. No sleep. Bad food. Get tired of myself, usually wanna get 12 hours of sleep and some 12-year-old scotch. Huh-huh. Trying to get healthy. Doing push-ups now. In the hotel room. All by myself. Feel kinda stoopid. Hafta do something."

He ducks under his elbow and chafes the back of his head like a man rotating a bowling-alley ball to try the fingerholes. Heavy, everything's heavy, and the white negro delivery just about manages to swat the trigger-words – road, hotel room, sleep, scotch – before dipping before the barometric pressures.

He prowls the thickets of his voice-box, somewhere near the threshold of speech, and it's like watching a pair of six-ounce Everlast gloves pick up a nickel from the canvas.

BRAD ELTERMAN/BUZZFOTO/FILMMAGIC

Conducting with invisible dipstick: onstage with petrol pump and Buick, the Montmartre club, Copenhagen 1979

The '50s marketed two extremes of style, and Tom commutes between both. The Method boxers, Brando as Terry Malloy, Newman as Rocky Graziano, dumped us with the premise that illiterate spells integrity, and Stallone – with whom Tom Waits collaborated on *Paradise Alley* – is mumbling out a retread for the '70s, so don't ah worry 'bout a t'ing, Ma.

The Beat poets took the opposite route to the same righteous end, Kerouac in particular loosening the lexical sphincter and pulling the critical verdict from Norman Podhoretz that "what you get in these books is a man proclaiming that he is alive and offering every trivial experience he has ever had in evidence." We have been here before, and then some.

In the lobby, we talk across the tables and chainsmoke. Didn't Ann Charters' biography of Kerouac prick the myth, the King of the Beats spending much of his life in his mother's parlour?

"No. I actually'd prefer to see the other side. He wasn't a hero who could do no wrong. He saw a lot, got around. He wasn't nearly as mad and impetuous as Neal Cassady. Fact, after Neal died, Kerouac would not admit that he was gone. 'Neal's coming – Neal'll be here,' you know. Never admitted that he was dead. Kept him alive.

"Jack was sittin' poker faced with bullets backed with bitches, Neal hunched at the wheel puttin' everyone in stitches."
– Jack & Neal

Tom drew an ace in a beer puddle on the table-top. "Ace is a bullet, bitches is queens. He died in St Petersburg. I was in St Petersburg, played a concert, thought a lot about Kerouac."

He retreated back into a cloud of tobacco smoke. There was a long silence while he rummaged among his wreaths.

"Emmett Kelly just died," he announced. "Famous American clown. Sad clown. Sarasota, Florida. S'where all the old carnies live in the off-season. Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey circus. Yeah, he died. He was taking the garbage out. Just fell down on the lawn, died. He was old Vaudeville."

American heroes. He is collaborating with *Rock Dreams* artist Guy Peellaert on a book of heroes from Meyer Lansky to Lenny Bruce. He loves lists, hip lists and shit lists, tends to brandish them as credentials, or to rope off the stand from the squares. It's that kind of era: no originals, wide readers.

"I don't know how I'm looked upon in the context of American culture. It has to do with how long you stay around. How long you're allowed to stay around."

We climb into the hotel lift, a phone-booth-sized creaker with a vestigial mezzanine memory, falling short or overshooting the designated floor by a foot or two. Maybe Tom brought it with him.

"I'm trying to do an R'n'B album when I get home. Trying to do something a little more – uh – mix-it-up. Trying to find a way to combine it. Because I don't get played on the radio ever. Marcel Marceau gets more airplay than I do. I heard myself once in North Dakota, that's all. I was in Michigan somewhere and I was listening to the radio, and I called the disc jockey. I said, listen – I just played a concert, sold out a twenty-five hundred auditorium. And I'm bustin' my chops, would ya mind, you know? He said, 'Who is this?' I said, 'My name is Tom Waits.' He said, 'No it isn't.' Hung up on me.

"I'd like to make some kind of breakthrough. When I get home. I've got two months to write an album and I've got no idea of what I'm gonna come up with. I'm waiting for it to drop on me. I usually go to a room and I stay there until I'm done, and that's where my real rewards are. It's a little difficult for me in the studio. I don't feel comfortable. It's like so antiseptic, you know. I pull away from anybody who's tried to give me any sort of direction, never had anybody look over my shoulder, tell me what to do. I don't turn it into a party or anything."

"I don't wanna play beer bars for another seven years. In the States I'm starting to play auditoriums now. Old movie theatres. I like that fine." The lift gulped to a halt, and we clambered down to the carpet. He went off to his room to rest. "How can I miss ya if ya won't go away?" he said.

He has made six albums since Herb Cohen heard him at an audition night at The Troubadour, Los Angeles, in 1972. Back then, Tom Waits was scuffling as a dishwasher, toilet attendant, fireman, ice cream truck driver, bartender and doorman, summed up for him in the phrase "a jack-off of all trades". He sang Ray Charles material before getting his track on 4am and his pipes have grown harsher and heavier since his debut on *Closing Time*. "Uh – they're ALL low notes now. Don't like to listen to my first coupla albums. Sound like a little kid."

Fact or fiction, he is trapped in his own image now, can't extend beyond the hip coterie without endangering both. Last Christmas he wrote a screenplay called *Why Is The Dream Always So Much Sweeter Than The Taste?* about a used-car dealer in downtown LA.

"It's about a guy who's a success at being a failure, and a guy who's a failure at being a success; and it all takes place on New Year's

CHRIS HORLER

Outside the Montmartre club, April, 1979

Eve. Hope it's as good as I think it is. Never done anything that large before."

There's a Super 76 petrol pump on stage at the Montmartre, from the painting, *Gas*, 1940, by Edward Hopper, painter of The Great American Loneliness: "Nighthawks", "Automat", "The Barber Shop", "Corner Saloon", "Drug Store", "The El Station", "Four Lane Road", "Freight Car", "Hotel By A Railroad", "Two On The Aisle", "Second Story Sunlight". There's also half a Buick in the wings, unattributed, but the Beat photographer Robert Frank, who directed *Pull My Daisy*, might have titled it "US 90, Texas".

None of it seems to bed down too well in the Montmartre, Denmark's premier jazz club, which for some unfathomable reason is done up like a home for voles and riverbank folk, with tree-roots and plaster boulders and elves-picnic gingham tablecloths all working outta the Kenneth Grahame bag.

"Anybody know where I can buy a silver dining service set?" asks Herb Hardesty, from a stool on stage, which wouldn't be anybody's first-choice characterisation for Fats Domino's original tenorman. "Everything I've seen has been too dear."

"Ya wanna get married, Herb," says Tom from the piano. "Get given one for free." He fools with a little blues, very Avery Parrish, half-a-yard of jawbone canted back like the shank of a violin. The band leans into "Gee Baby".

They take a break, and Tom goes behind the bar for a beer. It could be better. No brass rail, no pretzel bowl, no sawdust, no bartender's horsecock equalizer, no spitoons. It's nothing like Nelson Algren's Tug & Maul Bar, which carried the shingle over the counter: "I've been punched, kicked, screwed, defaulted, knocked down, held up, held down, lied about, cheated, deceived, conned, laughed at, insulted, hit on the head and married. So go ahead and ask for credit. I don't mind saying NO".

Tom drinks from the bottle, handling it as he handles everything, with the mannered gawkiness of a newsie's gloves. Mismatched halves of a black suit, tongue of tie hanging below the vest, hair springing strongly from his head like a Sov-Art inspirational sculpting, billy goat gruff goatee.

"Where I live, Tropicana Hotel, Santa Monica Boulevard, guy in a rockabilly band has had Eddie Cochran songs tattooed all over his arms. He's committed. When I first played the Roxy with Jimmy Witherspoon, all the lights fused along Sunset Boulevard. I dunno."

"Frying Cody Jarrett on Alcatraz?" I ventured. What was his obsession with gangsters? "Small change got rained on with his own .38."

Did he get "Burma Shave" from the Nick Ray movie, *They Live By Night*, from 1947?

"Yeah, that's the one. That's a great story. Very sad at the end where he gets mowed down at the motel. Farley Granger does soap operas now, I think. He was in Minneapolis and this woman disc jockey played it for him and he got a real kick out of it. He always played the baby-faced hood. He don't work much any more. I guess Sal Mineo got most of his roles. Yeah, I used that. I kept coming back to that movie image.

"Also, I have a lot of relatives in this little town called Marysville, and a cousin, her name is Corrine Johnson, and every time I'd go up there from Los Angeles in the summers, she was always like, you know, 'Christ man – I gotta get outa this fucking town. I wanna go to LA.' She finally did. She hitch-hiked out and stood by this Fosters Freeze on Prom Night. Got in a car with a guy who was just some juvenile

TOM SHEEHAN

delinquent, and he took her all the way to LA where she eventually cracked up. Burma Shave was a shaving cream company. Abandoned in the late '50s. Useta advertise all along the highway. I always thought it was the name of a town." He took a slug of beer, backed away from further definition.

"I twist whatever I see, you know. Most of my writing is a metaphor for something else. This buddy of mine, Paul Hampton, he married this millionaire, got in tight with her old man, and he was like in charge of all the money. He came home one night and caught his wife in bed with the chambermaid and he pulled out a .38 and put it in her ear and – then stopped.

"He was writing at the time, so he wrote this real strange story called 'Two Hour Honeymoon' which is about an automobile accident. It starts with the sound of a car crash, and then – 'AAAGH, don't move me!' – you know, all that, and in the background is a screaming arrangement sounds like 'Harlem Nocturne', I would never have made the connection between him and his ex-wife and an automobile accident, you know." He set fire to another cigarette. "So... there's always something underneath."

Who chose clarinet for "Potter's Field?"

"It was a collaboration between myself and Bob Alcivar. All I had was the story and a bass line, so I came in and we managed to stretch it a little further. I was gonna do it with tenor and upright bass, but he said no. So we took it in sections. Clarinet was like the opening of 'Rhapsody In Blue'. That was what I had in mind." What I had in mind was Widmark on the prow of a barge, bringing Thelma Ritter's coffin back from the pauper's burial ground of Potter's Field in a grey dawn: *Pickup On South Street*, Sam Fuller, 1952. Why the identification with losers? Or was that just LA, where every second cat is a failed something-or-other?

"Yeah, It's kinda sad. The girls still come from like Nebraska and stuff, go out there and, you know, wanna be in pictures. Where I live, I hear a lotta them stories. They end up on their backs in one of the rooms. Yeah, there's a lotta sadness. I see a lot from where I'm living. I don't see much hope. Can't go any further West."

But he wasn't a loser, and he still came on romantic about failure?

"I guess so. Two impostures, huh? I don't care who I hafta step on on my way back down."

And if the career runs out of gas?

"I BEG your pardon? Are you looking as if you're predicting the future? OK – you mean IF it all comes down. Uh. I'll move out to Palmdale somewhere, live in a trailer, raise a family, dunno..." He turns to the stage crew. "Hey – wadda we gonna do with the pump? Leave it draped? Uh-huh."

Somewhere in Copenhagen there must be a couple of cats who know an Eighter from Decatur from a baked potater, because the Montmartre packs solid for the show, wall-to-wall skimmers and stubble, and Herb Cohen finally breaking cover with the kinda expression that reads Stick-With-Me-Kid-And-You-Can-End-Up-Wearing-Stripes.

Tom Waits holds the mic-stand like a rum-dum adhering to railings, stands on one leg, and rubs the back of his head. Onstage, the gesture, which is habitual, takes on the dumb wonder of the wino who wakes on an all-alley cat

"I TWIST WHATEVER I SEE, YOU KNOW. MOST OF MY WRITING IS A METAPHOR FOR SOMETHING ELSE"
TOM WAITS

audience. He shields his eyes from the light, releases a cloud of cigarette smoke, and staggers. Choreographically, he ain't shit, but he does occasionally get a row together that would not be disowned by, say, Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom, the Lard of the Ring. In the lights, he is pavement-coloured.

He lurches into a frowsty "One That Got Away", Greg Cohen's bass walking sweetly, Arthur Richard's guitar whining and withering on the stem, Big John Thomassie's drums – now tamped down with a cushion in the bass drum – cracking them out. He does "Step Right Up", psufferin' psuccotash delivery, all confidential snake-kiss sibilants and birth-flesh cavernous eversions catch one word in five. "Jitterbug" slides into "New Orleans", Waits' mission-hall piano clinging to nostalgia, times gone, loves lost, like convolvulus onna burnsite. For "Sweet Bullet" he beats a guitar, fitting as featly as a grifter in a sandwich-board. He does "Muriel", dedicated to Ernie Kovacs' widow, dons a stingy-brim for "Pasties & A G-String", and it's here we go down'n'dirty for the step right up Little Egypt bump'n'grind.

The spotlights drill for the grainy black-and-white old movie stock finish. A few numbers come dunked in hellish red or a cold Spears and Jackson midnight mortuary blue, and there's a bandage yellow beam that would look good on a gum-shield. Smarter'n a shithouse rat, got th'ole experience, you betcha, Waits plays it for the house percentage, milking "Summertime" for "Burma Shave", "Waltzing Matilda" for "Tom Traubert's Blues", and leaving the crowd with that flush of familiarity that breeds contentment.

Backstage in the bar, he sits dumped and despairing. He stank, he says. He didn't even come up, he says, to his own snuff. He looks as self-recriminatory as Wallace Beery waking with a hangover and his boots on in a Wendy House. It's not like back home, he says, where his father turns up at his shows with a bunch of good loud buddies to heckle him. The memory cheers him up. "Well, huh. He always tells me, 'If it's difficult – do it. And tell ya kids the same. Not that anyone'd marry ya. Hafta be crazy.'"

We sit at the bar. "Y'ever see this?" he says, unslips his tie, drapes it outside his collar with an end in each hand. "Guy I see in Amsterdam, blue-collar workingman, wearing a tie to work. I asked this girl, 'Why does he do that?' She said, 'He's an alcoholic. Shakes all the time. Can't hold a glass, so...'" Tom winds the tie around two fingers and grips his beer, draws on the other end like a pulley to hoist the hooch to his mouth.

I trade him the story of the Durham miners' wives. They buy butcher's hooks, decorate them with sequins, stab them into the bar counter as hangers for their handbags on Ladies Night Out.

"I kinda like that," he says.

"I kinda knew you would," I tell him, but there was a better Tom Waits story waiting for me and Tom Sheehan out in 4am Copenhagen. In the only bar they'd forgotten to dust, we hit on an All-Woman Eskimo Chapter of the Hells Angels and one solitary Mancunian drunk. Copenhagen was a great place, he said. He'd been there two years, slinging hash in a pizza house. Before that, he'd been slinging hash in a Torquay pizza house in the holiday season. He had fallen in love with the summer's sunburned blondes from Scandinavia, couldn't get them out of his mind through the winters, so he'd pulled up stakes and moved direct to source. Copenhagen was where it was at, he said, waving his Carlsberg in the general direction of the Eskimo Chapter, and he came here every night. Soldier, you got it made. ♦

Brian Case

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

HEARTATTACK AND VINE

A brief sojourn in New York, a hiatus from being Coppola's hired man, a significant new love – and a farewell to the old haunts of "Heartattack". By STEPHEN TROUSSÉ

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1980

ON THE FIRST day of the 1980s, Tom Waits flew out of LAX, touched down in JFK and checked in to the Chelsea Hotel. He was moving to New York "for the shoes", or so he told friends. But what was he leaving behind?

He'd just turned 30 and was coming to the end of his contract with Asylum. His fifth LP, 1978's *Blue Valentine*, had barely scraped into the top 200, while his erstwhile squeeze Rickie Lee Jones' debut had become an instant smash and was on its way to selling a cool couple of million. Two projects – a musical with Paul Hampton and a book with artist Guy Peellaert – had come to nothing. The drinking was getting out of hand. "I'm getting a little tired of being referred to as Wino Man," he said. While the Bukowski lifestyle had a deadbeat glamour for the high-school beatnik, as midlife reality it held less allure.

A new decade in a new town: the teacher's boy from San Diego could reinvent himself all over again. He rented a tiny apartment near Macy's, started seeing a psychiatrist and, once he mastered jogging to the YMCA while carrying a cocktail, even started working out. Meanwhile, he made plans for a new musical – Thornton Wilder via Damon Runyon on the mean streets of '70s New York? – and, in the light of Mink Deville's debut, sounded out Jack Nitzsche as a potential producer to help him escape his West Coast jazz ghetto for some vaguely post-punk future.

The experiment barely survived into spring. By the end of April, Waits was back in Los Angeles, summoned by a call from Francis Ford Coppola and those old Hollywood dreams. Just when he thought he was out...

As an arch mythographer of Los Angeles, Waits was wise to Hollywood's siren song. On *Blue Valentine*'s sour "A Sweet Little Bullet From A Pretty Blue Gun" he had drafted the essential scenario of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*: the Nebraskan teen drawn to LA by magazine dreams of Clark Gable, straight off the Greyhound and stranded out on Hollywood and Vine in the rain, winding up a suicide in the Gilbert Hotel.

But even Waits was powerless to resist. Installed in an office with an upright piano on the Zoetrope lot, tasked with writing the soundtrack to Coppola's romantic folly *One From The Heart*, he was living out his teenage Tin Pan Alley fantasies.

The reality of dealing with Coppola's whims and indecision took its toll. Weary of trying to second-guess his director, by June Waits looked to channel his new-found clean-living discipline, moved into the RCA building on Sunset and set about bashing out an album in a month.

You can hear all of Waits' frustration with the Zoetrope fiasco, the way he'd allowed himself to be suckered back to a role he already felt typecast in, spew out on the title track of *Heartattack And Vine*. The album opens not with the tinkling of lounge piano, but with awesome Yardbirds fuzz and smokestack lightnin', Waits loosing his barbaric yawp over the rooftops of LA. For the first time he allows his drummer – New Orleans behemoth Big John Thomassie – to play with sticks rather than brushes. It's the lurching, yowling Beefheart of Saturday night.

There is a kind of disgusted reluctance to even name Hollywood (Waits took to calling it "Heartattack" after the time he watched a local barman turf out a distressed patron, advising her to kindly expire on the sidewalk). The song revisits "Sweet Little Bullet" from the perspective of the predator rather than the dreamer, eyeing up "*the little Jersey girl in the see-through top*", who may be a virgin "*but it's only 25 to nine*". (Funnily enough, as we'll see, the hunter is captured by the game, the LA nighthawk redeemed by the love of that same Jersey girl.)

Waits blasted out the title track, "Downtown", "Til The Money Runs Out", the brazen filler "In Shades" and the rollicking Dr John-y "Mr Siegal" in a matter of days. Cumulatively, the songs felt

Tom Waits

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With
Till The
ns Out
OWLER

DOWNTOWN
By AH FONG

LITTLE TOKYO—redpants and the sugarman in the temple street gloom, drinkin chevis regal on a four dollar zoom, just another dead soldier in a powder blue night, sugarman says baby everythins alright, goin downtown down downtown.

montclaire de havelin doin the st. vitus dance, lookin for someone to chop the lumber in his pants, how am i gonna unload all of this ice and all this mink, all the traffic in the street but its so hard to think, goin down town down downtown.

frankies westin lipstick pierre cardin, i swear to god i seen him holdin hands with jimmy hood, sallys high on crank and hungry for some sweets, shes lem in the sheets but shes butch in the streets, goin down-

Please Turn to Page 3 Col. 4

On The Nickle
By CLANCY CHURCH

LOS ANGELES—sticks and stones will break my bones, but i always will be true, and when your mama is dead and gone, ill sing this lullabye just for you, and what becomes of all the little boys, who never comb their hair, well theyre lined up all around the block, on the nickle over there.

so you better bring a bucket, there is a whole in the pail, and if you dont get my letter, then youll know that im in jail, and what becomes of all the little boys, who never say their prayers, well theyre sleepin like a baby, on the nickle over there.

and if you chew tobacco, and wish upon a star, well youll find out where the scarecrows sit, just like punchlines between the cats, and i know a place where a royal flush, can never beat a pair, and even thomas jefferson, is on the nickle over there.

so ring around the rosie, youre sleepin in the rain, and youre always late for supper, and man you let me down again, i thought i heard a mockingbird, roosevelt knows where, you can skip the light, with grady tick, on the nickle over there.

so what becomes of all the little boys, who run away from home, well the world just keeps gettin bigger, once you get out on your own.

ARMS
R CRAM
i will leave be-
es, i wore when i
eeds my railroad
r jacket, as i say
gonna, although
ng, i will steal
your blinds, for
iking.
has washed your
g is turning blue
your pillow case
do now, as i say
arms, youll find
d i swear to god
theyll be some-
n.
im taking is the
clothesline, ill
hest of drawers,
ind chimes, as i

Shortly before dawn Sunday this South Central Los Angeles man was seen leaving the corner of Western and 110th St. in burnt sienna Chrysler Imperial and heading in the direction of the San Bernardino 5fts.

Savin All My Love For You
By PRESTON GLASS

NEW ORLEANS—its too early for the circus, its to late for the bars, no one's sleepin, but the paperboys

i paid fifteen dollars for a prostitute, with to much makeup and a broken shoe, but her eyes were just a

Heartattack And Vine
By TRACIE O'HARA

HOLLYWOOD—liar liar [illegible] your pants on fire, white sp[illegible]es hangin on the telephone wire, gamblers revaluate along the dotted line, youll never recognize yourself on heartattack and vine.

doctor layer beggar man thief, philly joe remarkable looks on in disbelief, if you want a taste of madness, youll have to wait in line, youll probably see someone you know on heartattack and vine.

honeys high on china white, shorty found a punk, dont you know there aint no devil, theres just gold when hes drunk, well this stuff will probably kill you, lets do another line, what you say you meet me down on heartattack and vine.

better off in iowa against your scrambled eggs, that crawling down cahuenga on a broken pair of legs, youll find your ignorance is blissfull every goddamn time, your waitin for the rid on heartattack and vine.

Please Turn to Page 24 Col. 3

MR. SEIGAL
By BELMONT RIVERA

LAS VEGAS—i spent all my money in a mexican whorehouse, across the street from a catholic church, and then i wiped off my revolver, and i buttoned up my burgundy shirt, i shot the morning in the back, with my red wings on, i told the sun hed better go back down, and if i can find a book of matches, im goin to burn this hotel down.

you got to tell me mr. siegle, why are the wicked so strong, how do the angles get to sleep, when the devil leaves his porchlight on.

well i dropped thirty grand on the nugget slots, i had to sell my ass on fremont street, and the drummer said theres sanctuary, over at the bagdad room, and now its one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and go man go, you got to tell me mr. seigle, how do i get on of here.

well willards knocked on a bottle of heat, drivin dangerous curves across the dirty sheets, he said man you ought to see her, when her parents are gone, man you ought to hear her when the stereo on.

you got to tell me brave captain, why are the wicked so strong, how do the angles get to sleep, when the devil leaves his porchlight on.

dont you know that aint no broken bottle, that i picked up in my headlights, on the otherside of the nevada line, where they live hard die young, and have a good lookin

Jersey Girl
By CHARLES SLATER

NEW YORK—got no time for the corner boys, down in the st. makin all that noise, dont want no whores on eighthavenue, cause tonight im gonna be with you.

cause tonight im gonna take that ride, across the river to the jersey side, take my baby to the carnival, and ill take you on all the rides, sing sha la la la la sha la al al.

down the shore everythings alright, you with your baby on a sat. night, dont you know that all my dreams come true, when im walkin down the street with you, sing sha la la la la sha la la al.

you know she thrills me with all her charms, when im wrapped up in my babys arms, my little angle gives me everything, i know someday that she'll wear my ring.

so dont bother me cause i got no time, im on my way to see that girl

like a cathartic goodbye to the Tropicana motel, the unholy trinity of Waits, Rickie Lee Jones and Chuck E Weiss: days not so much of wine and roses as "*china white*" and "*crank*". "*I sold a quart of blood and bought a half a pint of Scotch*" he sings on "Til The Money Runs Out": a fitting epitaph for the Wino Man.

A week later, Waits returned to the studio with orchestra to say a more bittersweet goodbye. "Saving All My Love For You", a holdover from *Foreign Affairs*, is a corny, almost parodic, but nevertheless lovely, Waits apologia. "On The Nickel", meanwhile, is a classic lush lullaby. Originally written for Ralph Waite's nostalgie de la booze buddy movie, it's as sentimental a hymn to cirrhosis and homelessness as you'll hear outside of the work of Shane MacGowan.

But, closing Side One, "Jersey Girl" offered something new. Coming on like Van Morrison channelling the Drifters and accidently inventing Bruce Springsteen, it felt like the first fruit of Waits' aborted East Coast reinvention. Shamelessly breaking into "*sha la la*"s and, yes, even a glockenspiel, you could see it as a calculatedly cynical bid to write a weepie, bar-band classic and retire on the royalties.

Except Waits convinces you he's entirely invested in the clichés. Or is it only the song's part in the larger Tom Waits myth that convinces us so? "*My little angel gives me everything/I know someday that she'll wear my ring.*" Waits had met Kathleen Brennan (born in Illinois, grew up in New Jersey), at a New Year's Eve party the day before he left for New York. When he arrived back in LA they met again on the Zoetrope lot, where she was an assistant story editor. Within a week they were engaged.

Brennan would become a catalytic figure and artistic partner for Waits, inspiring and helping him complete the reinvention he had attempted in New York. In this context when he sings, "*Tonight I'm gonna take that ride/Across the river to the Jersey side*", it sounds less like a train ride than a crossing of some personal, artistic Rubicon.

And in this biographical light you can't help but hear the gorgeous final track, "Ruby's Arms", as a rueful farewell, if not to Rickie Lee, then to the 1970s, the persona and sound he'd so artfully created. It's another classic Waitsian aubade, and an ironic reprise of "Ol' '55"'s dawning rapture. Summoning his best Salvation Army strings, Waits creeps from the bedroom in his "*railroad boots and leather jacket*", but leaves behind all his clothes. At the end of the first act of his career, he leaves the stage, the costumes, the set design, the lighting and the soundtrack, and hops a train to the wild blue yonder. ♦

TRACKLISTING — HEARTATTACK AND VINE

1. Heartattack And Vine ★★★★★
2. In Shades ★★★
3. Saving All My Love For You ★★★★
4. Downtown ★★★
5. Jersey Girl ★★★★
6. Til The Money Runs Out ★★★★
7. On The Nickel ★★★★
8. Mr. Siegal ★★★
9. Ruby's Arms ★★★★★

Released: September 1980
Label: Asylum
Recorded at: Filmways/Heider Studio B, Hollywood, California
Produced by: Bones Howe

Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, electric guitar, electric rhythm guitar, piano), Larry Taylor (bass) "Big John" Thomassie (drums), Plas Johnson (tenor and baritone saxes), Roland Bautista (guitar), Ronnie Barron (Hammond organ, piano), Jim Hughart (bass), Victor Feldman (chimes, percussion), Bob Alcivar (strings/orchestra arranger and conductor), Greg Cohen (bass), Jerry Yester (orchestra arranger, conductor), Michael Lang (piano)
Highest chart position: UK N/A; US 96

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

ONE FROM THE HEART

In which Tom Waits sells his soul – temporarily – to Francis Ford Coppola and Hollywood. The result? An unlikely, undersung beauty. By LUKE TORN

RELEASED FEBRUARY 1982

AS A KEY chapter in Tom Waits' evolution, and, concomitantly, a jazzy, gin-soaked, near-perfect score for Francis Ford Coppola's most misunderstood film, *One From The Heart* has rarely been given its due. It's the obscured, not-quite-missing link between Waits' Beat beginnings and the anything-goes, junkyard music of his future. In illuminating the style and feel of the great writers, singers and arrangers of Tin Pan Alley's golden era, Waits was perched in his usual position: so far behind the times, he was lapping the competition.

The record is an anomaly, to be sure. For one thing, rather than having him compose music for film scenes already cut, Coppola – in a weird juxtaposition – asked Waits to do it backwards, summoning the music first. The director would pull cinematographic inspiration out of Waits' musical compositions. For another, Waits' pairing with country superstar Crystal Gayle, fresh from "Don't It Make Your Brown Eyes Blue", was certifiably outside-the-box thinking. It would also be Waits' final project with both longtime producer/mentor Bones Howe and his manager Herb Cohen, not to mention the beginning of his relationship with future wife Kathleen Brennan, all of which signalled the radical career rethink to come.

Waits, then, was outside his comfort zone, riddled with self-doubt. Fearing the work was too slick, too overworked, he wanted to excise it all at the 11th hour, and recut everything, solo, at the piano. Lawsuits were filed. "I wasn't used to concentrating on one project for so long," Waits later reflected, "to the point where you start eating your own flesh." Columbia Records, too, became sceptical when the film – Coppola's follow-up to *Apocalypse Now* – received horrific early reviews. Reluctant to issue a soundtrack for a box-office dud, it only reneged months later, when European release of the film was imminent. Waits soon moved himself far away – from this particular type of creative process, from the striking but stylised musical references within – for the watershed that was *Swordfishtrombones*, the game-changer of Waits' estimable career.

Waits needn't have overreacted. *One From The Heart* is one of the most fetching items in his catalogue, featuring some of his most dazzling melodies, battered imagery and sublime singing. The songwriting, delving deep into the pre-rock American songbook for inspiration – cool jazz and torch songs, Gershwin and Basie, Broadway and Tin Pan Alley – is teeming with atmosphere, as Waits continually captures that moment when reality slips into dreamscape and back again.

"I strung [*the songs*] together like an overture for a musical," Waits observed. "What [Coppola] wanted was a glass of music that you could add to or take from. Then we made a scratch tape where we spotted the story for music. I was reworking themes, so I got about 175 musical cues to be extracted from the score. It ain't fun doing that."

Of course, he'd been angling toward this sound for a while, but never with this level of commitment. What emerges is the cream of almost a year's worth of studio focus, the players immersed in the ups and downs, mostly downs, of Coppola's romantic visions. Amid exquisite small jazz-combo backing, Waits' and Gayle's voices inhabit an intimate, adult atmosphere, awash in a shadow world of broken love affairs, ragged memories, the detritus of a once-thriving existence. "*Your shovel's a shot glass, dig your own hole/Bury what's left of your miserable soul*," Waits proffers as its opening sequence, "Once Upon A Town", unfolds. The singers are silk and sandpaper, resolutely "in character" and, as such, often dejected, playing off the poverty of each other's wretched love lives.

The silky piano runs of Waits, Bob Alcivar and Pete Jolly are everywhere, grounding the songs' melodic flights, accentuating moods ranging from anger to perplexion, desperation to

melancholia. Teddy Edwards (sax) and Jack Sheldon (trumpet) provide expressive flourishes, punctuating Waits' characters' fatalism. While Gayle is hardly your standard pop diva (Bette Midler was Coppola's early choice to play Waits' foil), it just means her vocals are pure and unself-conscious. She is divine throughout, and several cuts – "Is There Any Way Out Of This Dream?", "Old Boyfriends" – are emotional tours de force. Her ringing soprano carries the former; on the latter, she wrings every last ounce of pained regret out of the lyric.

Heartbreak and gloom, draped with a kind of noble, lonely eloquence, is the modus operandi. "Picking Up After You", Edwards' desolate, flushed-out sax fluttering out front, Gayle at her Julie London best, finds the singers wearily trading insults, trapped within the remnants of a shattered affair. At the record's core come two all-time Waits classics. "Broken Bicycles" is black as midnight, a ghostly piano outlining the singer's grief, Waits draining the metaphor of sentimental sadness: *"Summer is gone/But our love will remain/Like old broken bicycles out in the rain."* On the strings-heavy "I Beg Your Pardon", Waits' baritone drops deep into the gutter in an effort at contrition, a Duke Ellington feel. Pleading with his lover to overlook his transgressions, to stay put – Sheldon's trumpet outro sums it up – Waits' voice on the chorus morphs into a textured whisper, desperate with desire.

There are hints at Waits' revolution to come. The shivering "You Can't Unring A Bell", with its unconventional percussion and discordant feel, might be considered extremist black comedy, its spoken-word tone presaging "Frank's Wild Years". The off-balance piano bash "Circus Girl", which leads into the so-called "Instrumental Montage", and "Little Boy Blue", featuring a tumbling soundscape and from-the-guts, nursery-rhyme-from-hell vocals, signal a restless mindset and, musically, the kinds of sonic flare-ups and subterranean rumblings in Waits' future.

Still, the music is at its best when achieving a kind of patchwork harmony. The lush, lithe title track, cradled in strings, accented by Sheldon's trumpet trills, is *One From The Heart's* emotional denouement. The singers are in matching moods here, open-hearted, zeroing in on the elusiveness of true love, as random thoughts and off-the-cuff images slink by (the brakes need adjusting, the moon's a yellow tint tonight). Maybe, just maybe, this time, this affair, is the answer to all their prayers. But nothing is for certain in this world. ♦

TRACKLISTING — ONE FROM THE HEART

1. Opening Montage ★★★★
2. Is There Any Way Out Of This Dream? ★★★
3. Picking Up After You ★★★
4. Old Boyfriends ★★★★
5. Broken Bicycles ★★★★
6. I Beg Your Pardon ★★★★
7. Little Boy Blue ★★★
8. Instrumental Montage: The Tango/Circus Girl ★★★★
9. You Can't Unring A Bell ★★★
10. This One's From The Heart ★★★★★
11. Take Me Home ★★★★
12. Presents ★★★

Released: February 1982
Label: CBS/Columbia
Recorded at: Wally Heider Recording, Hollywood, California
Produced by: Bones Howe
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, piano, orchestral arrangements), Crystal Gayle (vocals), Bob Alcivar (piano, orchestral arrangement, conductor), Pete Jolly (piano, accordion, celeste), Teddy Edwards (tenor saxophone), Jack Sheldon (trumpet), John Suhr (guitars), Greg Cohen (bass), Ronnie Barron (organ), Dennis Budimir (guitar), Larry Bunker (drums), Gene Cipriano (tenor saxophone), Victor Feldman (timpani), Chuck Findley (trumpet), Dick Hyde (trombone), Gayle Levant (harp), John Lowe (woodwind), Shelly Manne (drums), Lonny Morgan (woodwinds), Joe Porcaro (glockenspiel), Emil Richards (vibes), John Thomassie (percussion), Leslie Thompson (harmonica), Don Waldrop (tuba)
Highest chart position: N/A

ARCHIVE 1981

"It's the downbeat, the drum roll, the fanfare, and boom! You're baptised!"

RONALD REAGAN, LADY DI, FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA AND BUFFALO BOB AND THE HOWDY DOODY REVIEW... PATRICK HUMPHRIES SHOOTS THE SHIT WITH THE FREESTYLING GENIUS, AND TAKES HIM ON A WHISTLESTOP TOUR OF LONDON. "THIS PART OF TOWN CALLED BEDLAM?"

TAKEN FROM
MELODY MAKER
14/3/1981

THE FIRST THING you notice are the hands. Like two spiders weaving a web, as if trying to scratch his words in the air. Then there's the voice, softer than I imagined, but still the nearest thing imaginable to a Sumo wrestler's jockstrap that talks.

If – as his detractors insist – Tom Waits is simply perpetrating an image, then it's a full-time job. He came into the coffee shop with what seemed like a vampire's distrust of daylight, particularly the sleazy Saturday matinee the grey sky was mounting.

Painfully thin, skeletal hands, a voice like a hangover, Waits coiled himself on the seat opposite, like he was trying to escape from the body he's been saddled with. Saturday midday in Kensington is not the best time to meet Tom Waits, courteous as he was. No, it should have been midnight in a scuzzy Soho bar, with a saxophonist only Brian Case would have heard of, spinning out notes into the cigarette smoke clustering round the dim lights.

The last Tom Waits album, *Heartattack And Vine*, contains a song – one of his finest – called "On The Nickel", a lingering drunkard's lullaby. "The Nickel", according to Waits, is the Los Angeles equivalent of New York's Bowery; the sort of place where the dreams ain't broken, they're just walking with a limp; where the winos and bums congregate. It's the skids, the living end. Now that's the sort of place Tom feels at home.

Waits has been rehearsing until 3am in the East End with his band. The idea of simply a stand-up bass accompanying Waits and his piano had been ditched, and he was coping with jet lag, Silk Cut and daylight when we met.

I've been a fan of the man since I saw him deliver a haunting "Tom Traubert's Blues" on an otherwise forgettable *Whistle Test* some four years ago. That song remains my favourite of his, with its stark, city imagery, and the epitome of urban desolation – where *"No-one speaks English and everything's broken."*

ADRIAN BOOT/URBANIMAGE.TV

Handyman: "Like two spiders weaving a web" – St Katharine Docks, London 1981

Much as he baulks at the description of "poet" ("When someone says they're going to read me a poem, I can think of any number of things I'd rather be doing"), Tom Waits undoubtedly has a poet's acute eye for imagery. To balance his vivid, serious songs, he's capable of mustering an array of one-liners that would leave most comedians open-mouthed.

While not claiming that every song on each of his seven albums has been indispensable, I would say that his track record has been more impressive than most. His first album, 1973's *Closing Time*, surprises people hearing it now, because of Waits' voice – he can actually sing; hold notes, change pitch, and all the other technical stuff. The album also contains one of his best known songs, "Ol' 55", which was memorably covered by Ian Matthews, and not so memorably by the Eagles. "The only good thing I can think of saying about an Eagles album," Waits has remarked, "is that it keeps the dust off your turntable." Subsequent albums like *The Heart Of Saturday Night*, *Small Change*, and *Blue Valentine* have confirmed him as America's leading street poet, with a staunch cult following he has no real wish to expand.

After killing time with the cappuccinos, we agreed on a visit to St Katharine Docks to give Tom an opportunity to get a glimpse of London colour and talk. Tricky, but then so is nursing a hangover you've been on nodding terms with all week, but I managed. While sitting in an Earl's Court traffic jam, Waits spoke of his suspicion about President Reagan, and the other side of "the American Dream" coin. It came as no surprise that he distrusted the whole *Time* magazine cover and "good job/money/success" equation. His songs have, on the whole, concentrated on the victims of a society where "success" is the only standard tolerated; and his sympathies obviously lay with those who have tried, and failed. He is a romantic writer, but his romantic streak is tempered with a gritty reality that not even Springsteen manages.

Waits seemed fascinated by the ritual of the forthcoming Royal Wedding – "She still a virgin? There gonna be a celebration of the Royal screwing on their honeymoon?" Boot [*Adrian, photographer*] and I thought a 21-gun salute on their first night of nuptial bliss may be in order. The Imperial War Museum was pointed out at the site of Bedlam, where the aristocrats used to come and pay their sixpences to see the loonies. "This part of town called Bedlam?" queried Waits. Well no, Lambeth, actually, Tom. "Oh, last time I was here, on the way out to the airport I saw a sign that said 'Bedlam Steel'." Well, that would be of interest to him, as at one time Waits claimed to rent an apartment on the corner of Chaos and Bedlam.

The Tower Of London caused a raised eyebrow. I told him the story of the ravens in the Tower. England would fall, which is why the ravens' wings were clipped in 1940. "Mm, superstitious people," growled Waits, who was fascinated by the proximity of Spitalfields, said to be the home of Jack The Ripper. We digressed onto mass murderers, until the subject of Bruce Springsteen came up. "Nice guy," said Waits, then remembered that his own London dates clashed with Springsteen's at Wembley. "Sure hope that mine don't detract from his ticket sales," he laughed. Well, "*laughed*" is stretching it a little; more like two strips of sandpaper rubbed together.

We made The Charles Dickens without further mishap, and proceeded up to the restaurant. Fish was the order of the day, all sorts of fish – the place was swimming in them. The traditional English virtues of the pub and the docks were pointed out to Waits, only somewhat belied by the high percentage of Filipino waitresses. He scoured the menu like it was his last will and testament, inordinately suspicious of any fish with bones in. Thorny problem that – swimming fish are quite attached to their bones;

"ON TOUR FOR THREE MONTHS, COME BACK WITH A DRINK PROBLEM, TUBERCULOSIS, A WARPED SENSE OF HUMOUR"
TOM WAITS

"Creative maverick" and Waits collaborator Francis Ford Coppola

but all was resolved when the waitress promised to fillet some sole. "Knew a teacher once," commented Waits. "Choked to death on a fish bone."

A dish named "John Dory" attracted his attention. Now, as it happens, my knowledge of fish is pretty scant, once they're outside newspaper, but I did know that John Dory fish are famous for their markings. The legend goes that when Jesus was preaching in Galilee, he took a fish and cooked it for the disciples, and that every John Dory now bears the mark of the hands of the Son Of God! "Mm," muttered Waits, "So 'John Dory' grilled in lemon sauce... you reckon it was '*grilled*' by the Son of God?" Dunno 'bout that Tom, but He was renowned for his versatility.

The conversation moved to marriage. Waits' bride of seven months was over with him, taking time off from her job at 20th Century Fox. She originally wanted to be a nun, but abandoned this when she married Waits. "You could say I've saved her from the Lord." The wedding ceremony was not without incident. Waits found the Marriage Chapel in the Yellow Pages, right next to "Massage": "The registrar's name was Watermelon, and he kept calling me Mr Watts... My mother likes what I do, I guess she's happier now that I'm married, I think she was a little bit worried about me for a while."

The project which has been occupying Waits since April 1980 is the soundtrack for the new Francis Ford Coppola film, *One From The Heart*, which Waits called "the most rewarding experience I've had since I started working".

Originally intended as a bit of light relief after the fiscal and emotional complexities of *Apocalypse Now*, the film, Coppola, and his Zoetrope Studios are in trouble again. The profits from the *Godfather* films have been swallowed, but Waits is fascinated by the man. "He's always changing his mind when he gets inside a film, then he eats his way out... He's a creative maverick who is distrusted by all the cigar-smoking moguls.

"He keeps morale up. Like Orson Welles said, a movie studio is the best train set you could ever want. Coppola keeps a child's wonder at the whole process, even after a business meeting."

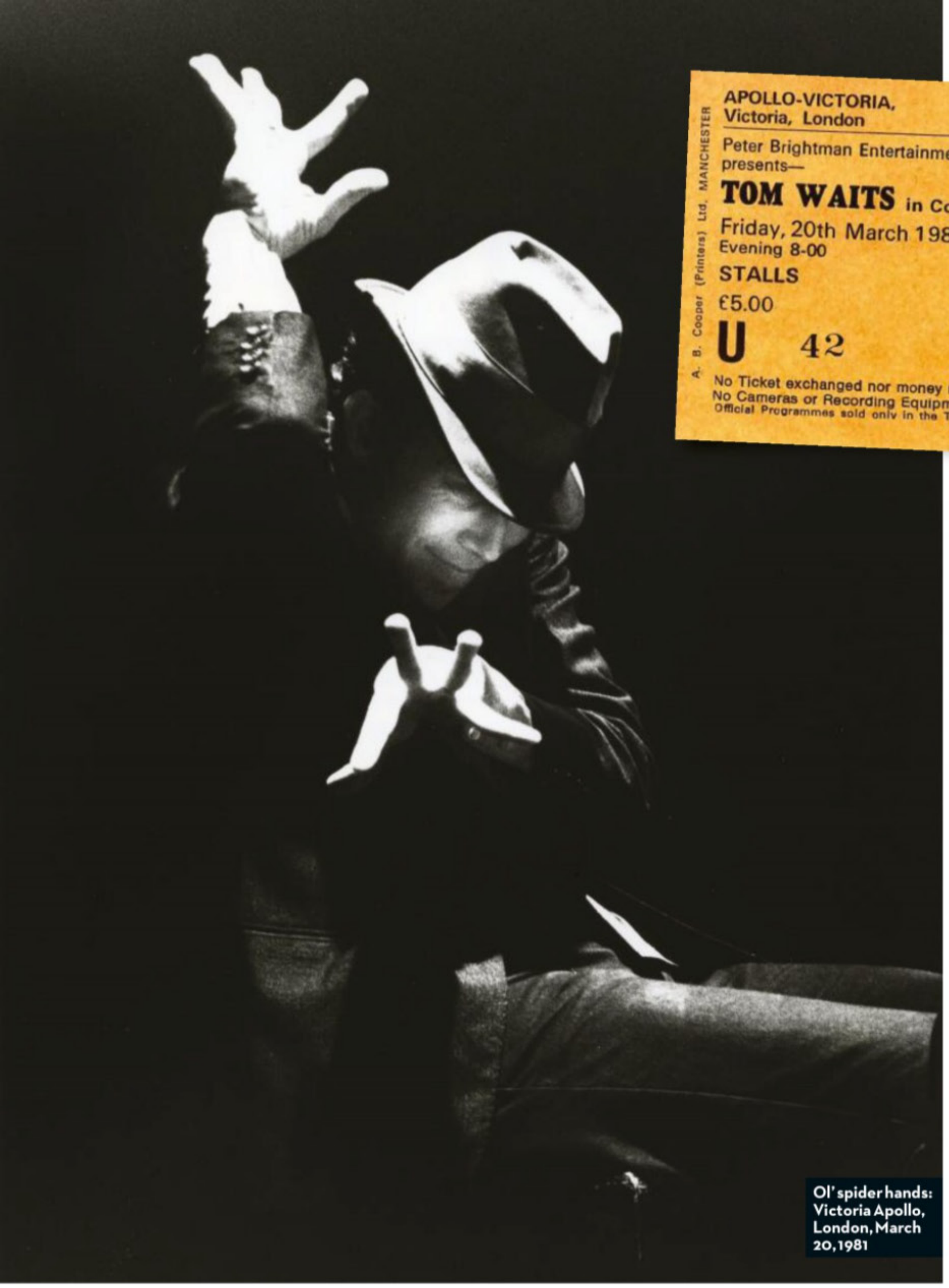
Waits became involved in the *Heart* project after Coppola heard his "I Never Talk To Strangers" from the *Foreign Affairs* album, on which Waits duetted with Bette Midler. Originally, she was going to work with him on the soundtrack, but due to her commitments, Waits found himself in the unlikely company of Crystal Gayle.

The film is due for release in the States on July 4, and the soundtrack will be the next Tom Waits album. Were there any problems, I wondered, working on a film soundtrack as opposed to his own solo work? "In the sense that I'm writing for someone else's approval, yeah. But there are specific musical cues. I started with a lot of titles, and wrote about 12 different scenes, to be used wherever he wanted them, then I strung them together, like an overture for a musical. What he wanted was like a glass of music, that you can add in and take from."

A subject close to Waits' heart was Coppola's proposed film of Jack Kerouac's classic *On The Road*, which has been temporarily shelved. One name being touted as director was Jean Luc Godard, with Coppola producing for Zoetrope.

What about future albums then, Tom? "After the soundtrack, I'm thinking of putting out an album called 'My Favourites'," Oh, you mean you're singing your favourite songs? "Nah, I'm just gonna take 12 songs by other artists and put them on a record, stuff like 'Lady Of Spain', 'Tutti Frutti' and 'Rudy My Dear', and a picture of me on the cover listening to them."

SIPA/REX FEATURES



Ol' spider hands: Victoria Apollo, London, March 20, 1981

He did say he'd be going into the studio in the late summer to record a new Tom Waits album, but he does find writing difficult.

"I was a very undisciplined writer until I began to work with Francis... the seasons, when you're recording for a major company, aren't necessarily the same seasons which coincide with your own creative development. It's all a matter of dangerous choices, where to take it, whether to keep it, whether to abandon it. I write maybe 20 songs and put 12 on a record. The process is excruciating, it's hard work, but I like it when it's finished."

There was a long delay between *Blue Valentine* and *Heartattack And Vine*, when Waits appeared in Sylvester Stallone's *Paradise Alley*, was working on a book with artist Guy Peellaert (which has since been shelved), and an opera about a used car lot.

He has managed to finish a screenplay for the latter, in collusion with Paul Hampton, who used to be at Famous Music in New York with Burt Bacharach, and hopes that Zoetrope will be interested.

"I just got totally disenchanted with the music business. I moved to New York and was seriously considering other possible career alternatives... The whole Modus Operandi" – he made it sound like a particularly militant branch of the Cosa Nostra – "of sitting down and writing, and making an album, going out on the road with a band. Away for three months, come back with high blood pressure, a drinking problem, tuberculosis, a warped sense of humour. It just became predictable."

Early days for Tom Waits included a lot of support dates with incongruous acts. I wondered if there was any particular date which stood out from those days?

"I opened a show once for a guy called Buffalo Bob And The Howdy Doody Review. He was like an American children's programme host, went out on a tour of colleges, and I'd have to do like three matinees for the children and their mothers. He used to call me 'Tommy', I wanted to strangle the sonofabitch... I hoped he'd die of bone cancer the entire week!"

Was there a particular album of his that he was really satisfied with? "Not albums, but songs, individual songs. People think that you do most of your growth before you begin to record. It's the downbeat, the drum roll, the fanfare, and boom! You're baptised! For me, it happened during the whole thing, so I felt I'd snuck in the back way. I had a songwriting contract; I'm sitting at a bus stop on Santa Monica Boulevard, it's pouring with rain, and I'm scared to death. I'm making three hundred dollars a month, and I didn't feel qualified. I've always taken on more than I can handle, bitten off more than I can chew, just so's I can see how much it takes to break my back.

"Keeping your anonymity is important as a writer, so that you can go anywhere, any part of town, sit in a corner. Anytime you're swimming around in the American public... *'Well people just get uglier, and I have no sense of time'*, you know?"

He did get recognised in Ireland though, after a TV appearance, and recently completed the American chat show circuit: "It's the furthest thing from a rogue's gallery. They're just like fixtures, you get on and talk about cooking, about how hard it is to get a cab in the rain... *The Devil's Dictionary* described 'famous' as 'conspicuously miserable'."

For someone who claims to have slept through the '60s, and for whom the '70s mainly meant "living in a hotel for 10 years", the '50s still provide the most fascination. "It gave us Joe McCarthy, the Korean War and Chuck Berry!" And Kerouac, that "strange, solitary, crazy Catholic mystic", who inspired a generation of Americans to go off on the road, to break away from the limitations of the American Dream while pursuing their own. Waits' debt to Kerouac has been well documented.

"My own background was very middle-class – I was desperately keen to get away. My parents were divorced when I was 10 years old, my father's been married about three times, and my mother finally remarried a private investigator.

"I was at home with these three women, my mother and two sisters, and although they were there, I was on my own a lot... I loved Kerouac since I first discovered him.

"I discovered him at the time I could have ended up at Lockheed Aircraft, a jewellery store or a gas station, married with three children, lying on the beach... a lot of Americans went off on the road, just got into a car and drive, for 3,000 miles, East or West."

With a handshake and a growl, Waits disappeared into a tiny lift that looked like a cell on Death Row. He's an acquired taste, but a taste worth acquiring. Try to judge for yourselves when he comes over again at the end of the month.

I was only sorry I hadn't a chance to tell him about my efforts at trying to emulate Dylan and Ginsberg and stand by Jack Kerouac's grave in Lowell, Massachusetts, armed with my Penguin Modern Classics copy of *On The Road*. A friend and I spent most of one Saturday afternoon trying to find the grave, but conspicuously failed to do so, until in exasperation one of us cried, 'Why can't they bury them in alphabetical order?'"

I think Tom Waits might have liked that. ♦

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS

SWORDFISHTROMBONES

The transformation! Waits and Kathleen Brennan make their new home in the junkyard. Out of chaos, a revolutionary masterpiece. By ANDY GILL

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1983

SWORDFISHTROMBONES IS THE pivotal work of Waits' career, marking the border between his earlier, jazz-boho style and the more musically adventurous terrain he'd come to explore. He has since credited the change to Kathleen Brennan, who encouraged him to abandon his previous associations – including longtime producer Bones Howe – and to take more risks artistically, playing him records that broadened his notion of what was possible.

In particular, the work of Harry Partch struck a deep chord. Partch, a maverick who had spent several years as a hobo, not only developed his own musical system, monophony, based on a 43-note scale of just intonation, but invented and built the instruments on which to play his monophonic creations – outlandish and beautiful devices such as the 72-string Kithara and the Chromelodeon. His clunky, astringent music sought to bring classical form to the rudest material – one piece, "Barstow", was derived from hitchhiker inscriptions carved on a fencepost outside the California town.

This collision of high and low art resonated with Waits who, during a fortnight break in Ireland, conceived and wrote *Swordfishtrombones* as a loose operetta about a homesick serviceman. Back home, he set about recording it with a small core group of musicians, crucially percussionist Victor Feldman and guitarist Fred Tackett, whose marimbas and angular twangs lend the album its distinctive sound, and Francis Thumm of Partch's Gate 5 Ensemble, whose advice helped reinforce Waits' own instincts.

At their best, the results were shockingly beautiful in a revolutionary manner, like "Shore Leave", a sailor's homesick lament Waits aptly described as having "an oriental Bobby 'Blue' Bland approach". While essentially a straight blues, the use of sounds as a kind of foley board of expressionist effects – low groaning trombones like buses passing by, rice on a drumhead like waves on a shore – animated the song in a vibrant new way. And his newfound confidence encouraged Waits to include the squeal of a chair being dragged across the studio floor, a sound perfectly in tune with the angular, atonal guitar and clunking marimba.

Opener "Underground" he likened to the sound of a "mutant dwarf community" supposedly living in the steam tunnels beneath NYC, while the similarly percussive "Trouble's Braids" drew a fugitive feel from woody drums, and urgent momentum from Larry Taylor's pulsing bass. The standout "16 Shells From A Thirty-Ought-Six", meanwhile, employed Feldman's brake drum and bell plate to lend a chuntering industrial character Waits described as a "chain-gang work-song field-holler feel". The song lyric mirrored its musical invention, with images of transformative junkyard genius: a ladder built from a pawn-shop marimba; the strings of a guitar used as the cage for a crow. Here and on the title track, Waits stripped away layers of sound to cut to the meat of the matter. "I liked the holes as much as what had been in them," he explained. As for the title, he quipped with typical offhand wit that it was "either a musical instrument that smells bad, or a fish that makes a lot of noise".

Elsewhere, the bluesy leanings of *Heartattack And Vine* resurfaced in the Howlin' Wolf-influenced "Gin Soaked Boy", on which he attempted to recreate the primitive recording conditions of classic R'n'B. "Everyone recorded around one mic, so your dominance in the track depended entirely on your distance from it," he explained, while engineer Biff Dawes captured the "sense of air in the place" by attaching contact mics to the walls: the gritty result prefigures *Rain Dogs*' rumbustious "Union Square".

For those still yearning for the classic dirty-realist balladry of Waits' earlier career, the album contained several prime examples. The brief "Johnsburg, Illinois" offered a hometown

THE CRITICS VERDICT

"His prismatic troubadour's bluesjazzfolketc is not the instance of someone living on in around or off the past – nostalgia over the loss of a 'simpler' life – but something genuinely American, as its instability reflects the immigrant flux point of any origin, of its origin-soaked sources."

IAN PENMAN, NME, 24/12/83

"With 15 tracks, this is sketchbook Waits and indicates the range of his writing gifts... There's no doubt of a new concision about his work here... A good album, full of good lines and clever, original musical ideas."

BRIAN CASE, MM, 8/11/83

sweetheart snapshot from a sailor's wallet, clearly dedicated to Kathleen Brennan, who was born there. At just a minute and a half, it was the epitome of short and sweet: "I just wanted to get it all said in one verse," he said.

"Soldier's Things" continued the service demob theme by depicting the discarded "*cufflinks and hubcaps, trophies and paperbacks*" offered at a garage sale. His explanation touched on Flann O'Brien's notion of how possessions take on human attributes (and vice versa): "*Shoes, in particular, that have walked around with somebody else inside them, seem to be able to talk*". And "In The Neighborhood", the album's chosen single, offered a sentimental portrait of Waits' and Brennan's LA locale stuffed with characters called Sey and Butch and Big Mambo, presented in what he likened to "an *Auld Lang Syne* drinking song" with "a Salvation Army feel". For the singer, the banishment of sax from the LP was emblematic of his move beyond jazz; and even here, the horns were not allowed to slip into the cool. "I tried to bring the music outdoors," he noted, "with tuba, trombone, trumpets, snare, cymbals, accordion – kind of a Fellini-esque marching band going down a dirt road."

The Fellini reference indicated how, with *Swordfishtrombones*, Waits was moving from purely verbal imagery to visual inspiration. The instrumental tracks were rooted in cinematic references: "Just Another Sucker On The Vine" he described as having a "Nino Rota feel", scoring the in-flight insults of a pair of Italian brothers as they passed each other in a trapeze act; while for the organ instrumental "Dave The Butcher" he aimed to evoke the sinister carnival atmosphere of the Tyrone Power film noir *Nightmare Alley*. The short, spoken-word scenario of "Frank's Wild Years", meanwhile, would be expanded into a more substantial theatrical presence, as the singer followed his muse into new areas.

The LP closed with the evocative "Rainbirds", on which Francis Thumm's glass harmonica provided the intro to a piano piece with an elegaic Huck Finn feel, an epilogue in which the hero "*floats down the stream on an old dead tree... off on another adventure somewhere*". For Tom Waits, that stream would take him to New York, and the cosmopolitan world it contained. But he would no longer be riding the Asylum train, perplexed label boss Joe Smith demurring at Tom's new direction. Island's Chris Blackwell, an expert at making mavericks successful, swooped in to sign him, and Waits' transformation was complete. ♦

TRACKLISTING SWORDFISHTROMBONES

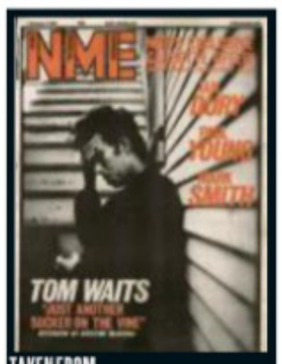
1. Underground ★★★★★
2. Shore Leave ★★★★★
3. Dave The Butcher ★★★
4. Johnsburg, Illinois ★★★★
5. 16 Shells From A Thirty-Ought-Six ★★★★★
6. Town With No Cheer ★★★
7. In The Neighborhood ★★★★★
8. Just Another Sucker On The Vine ★★★★
9. Frank's Wild Years ★★★★
10. Swordfishtrombone ★★★★★
11. Down, Down, Down ★★★★★
12. Soldier's Things ★★★★★
13. Gin Soaked Boy ★★★★★
14. Trouble's Braids ★★★★
15. Rainbirds ★★★★

Released: September 1983
Label: Island
Recorded at: Sunset Sound, Los Angeles; Leeds Instrument Rental
Produced by: Tom Waits
Personnel includes: Waits (vocals, piano, B3 organ, chair, harmonium, synth, Freedom Bell), Victor Feldman (marimbas, shaker, bass drum with rice, bass boo bams, brake drum, bell plate, snare drum, bells, B3 organ, conga, dabuki drum, tambourine, African talking drum), Larry Taylor, Greg Cohen (bass), Fred Tackett (electric guitar, banjo guitar), Francis Thumm (glass harmonica, metal aunglongs), Richard Gibbs (glass harmonica), Joe Romano, Bill Reichenbach (trombone)
Highest chart position: UK 62; US 167

“We’re gonna have an oversized cocktail glass with a midget in scuba gear swimming in it.”

A NEW START. TOM WAITS HAS GIVEN UP SMOKING, EMBRACED MARRIAGE AND FATHERHOOD, CHANGED LABEL AND RADICALLY ADJUSTED HIS SOUND. CUE *SWORDFISHTROMBONES* – “SORT OF AN ODYSSEY, AND I ALSO THOUGHT OF IT AS A WRECK COLLECTION,” HE TELLS KRISTINE McKENNA, IN AN EXHAUSTIVE LA INTERVIEW. THERE ARE ALSO LIVE PLANS FOR – WHAT ELSE? – “DEMENTED KABUKI BURLESQUE”.

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS



TAKEN FROM NME 1/10/1983

AMERICA'S URBAN UNDERBELLY has been kitschified, neutered, defanged, rendered cute'n'cosy. Film noir, Damon Runyon, carnies and circus folk, the '50s Beats, pulp mysteries – all have congealed into a familiar lineup of lovable moth-eaten types. Two-bit gangsters, wino philosophers, whores with hearts of gold – you've seen 'em in a million corny movies.

None of this, however, changes the fact that actual poor people, transients drifting through life on a river of alcohol, social outlaws and fringe characters still exist, many of whom have stories and ideas worth hearing.

Tom Waits makes music about these people and he does it with an impressively even hand. Waits never patronises his subjects, nor does he go for the sympathy vote. His songs are often brutally funny, and Waits calls an asshole an asshole regardless of what is or isn't in his wallet. Being broke and drunk doesn't necessarily make a man brilliant. Nonetheless, some monumental souls do get lost in the cracks of this creaking world, and Waits is out to resurrect a few of them.

Contrary to popular opinion, Tom Waits is not a bum. He is a performer with a palette of colours, a set of skills, and it's a credit to his abilities as an entertainer that people believe he is the picture he paints.

This is not to say Waits is a fake. He frequents the boozy netherworld not as a social researcher, but because he genuinely likes it there. But Waits wasn't raised in a smoky pool hall either.

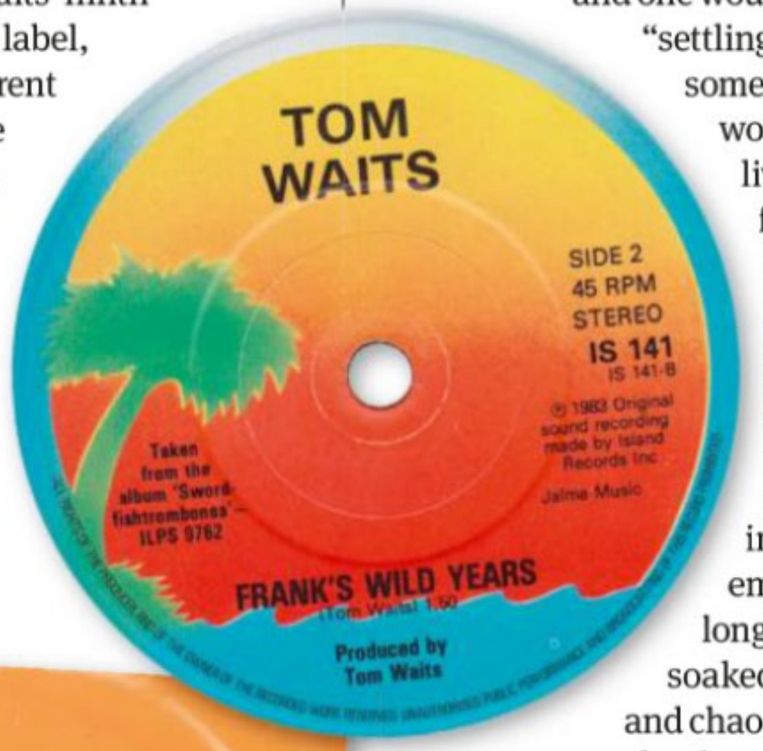
Born December 7, 1949, as one of three children to a school-teaching mom and pop, Waits grew up in Southern California and had what he describes as a standard childhood. His parents divorced when he was 12 and he worked his way through the full course of miserable jobs until 1972, when he was discovered in an LA club and signed to Elektra Records.

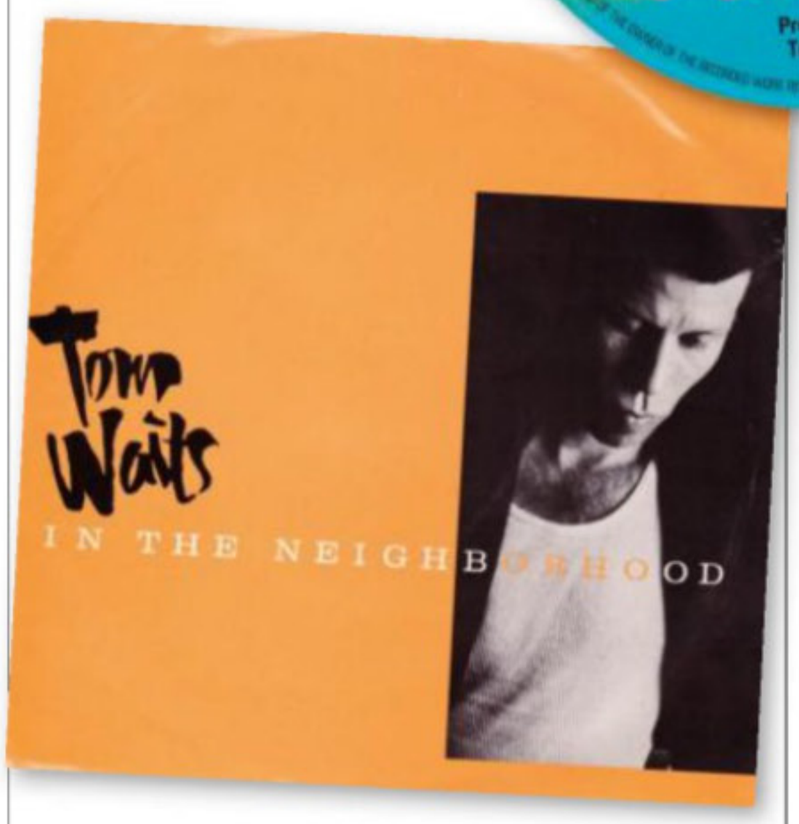
Waits reckons vocabulary is his main instrument, and although his growling, whisky-whisper of a voice certainly wouldn't do much for Gilbert & Sullivan, it is ideally suited to his material.

Well versed in American musical idioms, Waits positions his characters in aural landscapes that incorporate blues, jazz, Tin Pan Alley, be-bop and R'n'B. There's a considerable amount of Lord Buckley's hipsemantic in Waits' work, too. Like Buckley, Waits is a latter-day vaudevillian who weaves folk tale and street patois into a hip new suit of his own design. Words count for a lot in his music – but that's not all. He is a gifted melodicist as well, and many of his tunes exude a gorgeous, epic melancholy evocative of Gershwin; particularly evident on his 1974 masterpiece, *The Heart Of Saturday Night*. Waits has released eight critically acclaimed albums, and though other performers have scored hits with his tunes (the Eagles, Bette Midler), Tom has never had one of his own. And he doesn't particularly hanker after one either.

I recently met Waits to discuss some current developments in his life and career one hot afternoon at Wayne's Cafeteria, a greasy diner located in the heart of old downtown LA. He lives in this district (as does the ghost of Raymond Chandler, in case you've been looking for that), and he arrives punctually. He is a courteous, articulate and rather shy man who measures his words carefully. He is boyish, yet old-fashioned; the kind of guy who watches what he says in front of ladies. I was charmed. Topics to be discussed include his new album (a significant stylistic change), his blossoming career as an actor and his relationship with Francis Ford Coppola, and the change in his life brought about by his marriage.

Swordfishtrombones is Waits' ninth LP, and the first for his new label, Island. Musically, it is different from his previous work; the instrumentation is bizarre, almost Beefheartian, incorporating marimba, bagpipe, harmonium and accordian. It also has a cinematic quality, segueing ballads, instrumental passages, raw blues, and the hilarious monologue,





"Frank's Wild Years". What exactly, is this movie about? Lonesome soldiers, sweet Midwestern girls (Waits married one of those) and middle-class dreams gone to seed. One of the highlights of the LP is a thumping cut called "16 Shells From A Thirty-Ought-Six", whose jivey, nonsensical verse is worthy of [*American poet*] Vachel Lindsay.

Waits recently completed a video for the *Swordfishtrombones* single, "In The Neighborhood", which was shot by heavyweight cinematographer Haskell Wexler. It never hurts to have friends in the film community, and Waits has some powerful ones. He did the soundtrack for Francis Ford Coppola's star-crossed experimental film, *One From The Heart*, and has since become a permanent member of the Coppola troupe.

He played a bartender in Coppola's *The Outsiders*, proprietor of a pool hall in *Rumble Fish*, and he has been cast as the backstage manager in *The Cotton Club*, another Coppola film currently in production, whose story is built around the famous Harlem nightspot of the '30s and '40s. He also had small parts in *Wolfen*, *Paradise Alley*, and is scheduled to appear with Robert Duvall in *The Stone Boy*.

It was through Coppola that Waits met his wife Kathleen, who was a script reader at Coppola's Zoetrope Studios. They married in 1981, and had their first child, a girl, last month.

There was a period when Waits had quite a reputation in LA. Living in a rundown hotel room crammed full of pawnshop junk, out all night, drinking hard, keeping company with colourful kooks. Waits really did look to be a character from one of his songs. His music has always been rooted in that sort of neon living and one would assume that his "settling down" would signal some major changes in his work. But the walls you live in don't necessarily frame your view of the world, and it's apparent listening to his new album that, having found a peaceful valley he can live in, it has not impaired his ability to empathise. He may no longer be living a gin-soaked life of busted dreams and chaos, but he still sees the people who are, with a sharp and compassionate eye.

You once commented that "people will write about you in a way that what they're essentially doing is constructing your personality on rumour". Has the press shackled you to a persona of their own invention?

A certain amount of it is fiction. It's like when you tell somebody something which they tell somebody else who tells somebody else, and by the time it gets back to you, you had three black eyes and a busted collarbone. So yeah, in terms of the folk process, a certain amount of information gets embellished. Pieces of 'my image' are right, and others aren't.

Much of your music exudes a melancholy sense of the past, a yearning for some intangible thing that seems to have been lost. Is memory a source of comfort and joy for most people, or is it more apt to be a source of pain?

My memory isn't a source of pain. Parts of it are like a pawnshop, other parts are like an aquarium, and other parts are like a closet. I think there's a place where your memory becomes distorted like a funhouse mirror and that's the area I'm most interested in.

Do experiences tend to be idealised by the memory?

Some things, yes. It makes other things worse than they really were.

What's your earliest memory fixed in your mind?

Waits in Rotterdam, February 6, 1983

I have a very early memory of getting up in the middle of the night and standing at my doorway by the hall in the house and having to stand there and wait while a train went by. And after the train passed, I could cross the hall into my parents' room.

Was there a trainyard nearby where you grew up?
Not at that particular house, but there were trains in all the places I grew up. My grandmother lived by an orange grove and I remember sleeping at her house and hearing the Southern Pacific go by. This was in La Verne, California. My father moved from Texas to La Verne and he worked in the orange groves there. I also have a memory of wild gourds that grew by the railroad tracks, and putting pennies on the tracks.

What sort of music were you exposed to when you were growing up?
The earliest music I remember was mariachi, ranchera, romantica – Mexican music. My father used to tune that in on the car radio. He didn't listen to jitterbug or anything like that.

You once told an interviewer that "there's a common loneliness that sprawls from coast to coast here. It's very tragic and it's very American". Can you elaborate on that?
At the time I made that remark I was on the road a lot, so I think that loneliness was something I had in my billfold.

You don't think that there's a loneliness, a melancholy that's peculiar to the American people?
Yes I think there is. This friend of mine named Paul Hampton and I once collaborated on a thing [*play*] called *Why Is The Dream Always So Much Sweeter Than the Taste?* that was sort of about this subject.

> **"THERE'S A PLACE WHERE YOUR MEMORY BECOMES DISTORTED LIKE A FUNHOUSE MIRROR..."**
> **TOM WAITS**

Could that loneliness have to do with the sheer size of this country, and the fact that there are often great distances between people and places?
I think that's exhilarating, especially when you set out in the morning in a late model Ford, and you're leaving California, driving to New York. It's thrilling to know that the country is big enough that you can aim your car in one direction and not have to turn the wheel for seven days. There's a great feeling of flight there.

Are the clichés about Los Angeles true?
It depends on where you live and what your experience here is. People come here to escape. LA is where everything's supposed to be all right. As soon as we get to California, honey, I'll have a flowered shirt and we'll have a little place at the beach.

Does that dream ever pan out for people?
Sometimes. You can make a lot of money in America and nobody will ask you how you made it – if you were a slumlord, or sold drugs, or smuggled illegal aliens into the country.

Does the Los Angeles that Nathanael West wrote about still exist? He had a very dark, surreal view of LA.
Yes, there are parts of his Hollywood that still remain.

You've often expressed your admiration for Jack Kerouac. Exactly what was it about him and his work that appealed to you?
He had a great stool at the bar and nobody sat there except Jack. But you know, he was writing his own obituary from the moment he began, and I think he was tragically seduced by his own destiny – though I'm not really qualified to say. But there have been countless biographies on him by people who knew him well, and it seems he did believe in the American Dream. I enjoy his impressions of America, certainly more than anything you'd find in *Reader's Digest*. The roar of the crowd in a bar after work; working for the railroad; living in cheap hotels; jazz.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS

Was Kerouac instrumental in your falling in love with those things, too?
I think so, yeah. He made several recordings of himself doing readings, and his records are really funny. I think he was very bitter when he died, and it isn't so nice to leave with the feeling you've been kicked in the pants. Ultimately, he will have his place.

In reading over some reviews of your work, I came across a critic who attacked your music on the grounds that "it romanticises failure". Do you think there's any truth to that?
No, I don't accept that as a valid criticism. I resent that remark and I'll have his job!

What sorts of things usually trigger a song for you?
Sometimes the title comes first. Here are a few I'm working on right now (pulls a small notepad out of his pocket)... "Martini Plans", "The Colour Of Dolls", "Bad Directions"...

Do you enjoy writing?
Yes I do... I don't enjoy it when I'm not writing.

How do you feel about yourself as a vocalist?
At best I'm a barking dog, but I think my voice is well-suited to my material.

Have you taken steps to protect your voice?
Protect it from what? Vandals?

There was talk for a while that you were destroying your voice with the way you were living, and I notice that you're no longer smoking.
Yeah, I quit smoking so I've got more wind now, but I've never taken voice lessons or anything like that. Giving up tobacco was tough.

What do you consider your chief strength as an artist?
That's a good set-up for a very flippant remark – I'd say it would be my Get Out Of Jail Free card. I don't have parties and sit down at the piano and play old favourites. I don't enjoy sitting down at the piano in that sense. Lately I'd say my strength is an ability to take something and combine it with something it doesn't belong with, and make sense out of it. I'm trying to find different ways to use an umbrella and get away from just chronicling things.

What do you consider your best work?
I like the story in "Burma Shave" off *Foreign Affairs*, "Tom Traubert's Blues" off the new album. I like "Dave The Butcher" and "In The Neighborhood".

What do you see as being the dominant themes that recur throughout all of your work?


New York, 1983: "I'm lucky I don't have to work in a rotten kitchen"

GEORGE DUBOSE/LFI; ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS

You try not to just chew your cud but, thematically, you do tend to wind up in a particular, comfortable musical geography. I'm trying to break away from that, though. I don't want to feel as though I'm knitting something, then unravelling it and knitting it again. And I think I did get beyond that with the new record. Musically, it's pretty different. There are no saxophones on the record and that's a conquest for me.

"AT BEST I'M A BARKING DOG... BUT I THINK MY VOICE IS WELL-SUITED TO MY MATERIAL"
TOM WAITS

What was the central idea that took you through the making of the new record?
I wanted it to be a bit exotic, and to be more like a painting than a photograph. I see it as being sort of an odyssey, and I also thought of it as a wreck collection.

Why haven't you ever assembled a band with whom you could consistently work?
I don't know. You're usually worried about money when you have a road band. Studio musicians are reluctant to leave town, because they're making good dough in the studio. It's awkward. I'm gonna try to put a band together in New York. I'm going there next week and I'm gonna try to do a show there. An off-Broadway run of my own demented kabuki burlesque. I want to work it out in New York, get all the snags out, and maybe we'll take it on the road. All the people who play on the new record live in LA, so I'm gonna use different musicians. I don't know what the show will be called, but it'll include some earlier songs, and I'll write new things for it, too. I don't know if I'll use sets but there will be some props. I think we're gonna have an oversized cocktail glass with a midget in scuba gear swimming in it.

Sounds great!
Just trying it out on you. Thanks. Maybe we'll keep it in the act.

How do you work up the arrangements for your songs?
It's sort of like casting a movie. You select the correct players and the arrangements seem to follow.

How do you see your music evolving? How is the new record different from your first?
Harry Dean Stanton once told me he found a copy of my first album across a railroad track. He was in the middle of nowhere shooting a movie and he found this record melted over the tracks. I kinda like that. Nicer place to end up than in a cut-out bin at a record store. You tend to cram a lot onto your first album. I'd say the new one is a little more adventuresome than ones I've previously made in terms of subject matter, detail and arrangement.

It feels like a film score to me. The specific film it reminds me of is *The Last Detail*.
Oh yeah? I just saw that again recently. "Gets his kicks fuckin' over charity. Up your ghi-ghi with a wah-wah brush and break it off". (That's some dialogue from the film.)

How has working in film changed the way you approach making music?
It's given me a better sense of developing pictures, but its effects haven't been all good. Music shouldn't necessarily give you a feeling of some other place or remind you of the beach or your girlfriend. At its best, it exists alone and carries all the properties of an independent apparatus.

Do visuals always enhance music for you?
No. I don't think you can arbitrarily nail a piece of music to a discombobulated piece of film, and it's rare when it works. One thing I did learn from working with Francis Coppola, and that whole process with *One From The Heart*, is that your first idea isn't always right. Francis will wait and wait. He never finishes anything, somebody just takes it away from him, and he continues to make changes up until the very last minute.

Rotterdam,
February 6,
1983

"Time is a funny thing": Waits as Bennie the pool-hall proprietor in *Rumble Fish* (1983)

Isn't it hard for those around him to work, when the central core is always in a state of flux?
That is a problem, but you just have to be committed to that process, and to him. There are many people who work with Coppola who become disturbed, paranoid and anxiety ridden when they're between films. They need a mission, and in between films they just wait. Film swallows up so much of your life and your life becomes much smaller than the work that you're feeding, and that's why you have to be very careful about the kinds of projects you work on. You have to make sure that what you're feeding is an animal you're gonna want to take care of.

What do you think are the qualities that you and Coppola share that make you compatible workmates?
You'd have to ask him that. For me, I just like the way his mind works. He's unlearned a lot of things and he's managed to remain very childlike in terms of his imagination. He also has a considerable amount of leadership quality, and that's rare. He inspires the people around him.

Your persona as a musician is almost like a character out of a movie. Do you expect to have a hard time shaking that stereotype and assuming other characters as an actor? In *Rumble Fish*, for instance, you play the proprietor of a pool hall.
Yes, which was very easily done. It's true it would be much tougher for me to play an attorney. In *Cotton Club* (Coppola's next film), I play a backstage manager. It's not a principal role, but it's a chance to work with Francis again and I feel comfortable with that.

What are your ambitions for yourself as an actor?
I don't really have any training in it and there's a great deal involved in being able to become completely lost in a character. I have spent a fair amount of time in the film world and you can learn a lot from watching, but you can't learn everything.

Do you feel comfortable in front of a movie camera?
Not always. In some ways it's like playing music onstage, but it's still like somebody's holding a flashlight on your face in the dark. You can feel the place where the light is. Onstage, doing

"IF I HEARD MYSELF COME OUT OF A JUKEBOX SOMEWHERE, MY FACE WOULD PROBABLY TURN RED"
TOM WAITS

music, my eyes can roll back in my head and I can get lost somewhere, but you can't do that when you're making a movie.

What are your favourite movies?
La Strada, *8 ½*, that Kurosawa film, *Ikiru*.

Is video as important to music as everyone's claiming it is?
It's unbelievable how many people watch them. It's not just people with tight pants. I don't see them too often, but I don't think they're the saviour in any way, and a lot of them are real cheap. It's arcade shit. It looks real good right then but it doesn't hold up when you get it home.

Do you keep up with musical trends?
I try to keep up on some stuff.
What do you mean? Like what's going on in the music business?

No, not the economics of it. Have you heard any rap music for instance?
Is that the big thing now? That free associating thing? Ultimately the only thing America can claim as a native musical form is black. Miles Davis can play two chords for an hour and keep you interested. Yeah, I've heard some rap music and I think anything that mirrors the dreams and frustrations of the black community is always urgent, important and valuable. But I generally don't keep up on pop trends. Pop music is money and business sleeping in the same bed together. You see these trends come down the pike and you know you've seen 'em before and that they won't be around too long. You keep getting newly elected officials in pop music, but there are no new offices.

Is it a goal of yours to have a hit single?
I don't know that you should wish for things you don't understand, for reasons that you question. A hit single means that you make a lot of money and a lot of people will know who you are, and I don't know that's so attractive. I don't see the importance of having your face on a lunchbox in Connecticut. I don't see how that fits into the grand scheme of things as far as being something to strive for. And it rears its ugly head. It makes you a geek, and you don't want to destroy the very thing that makes it possible for you to do what you do. A lot of people are looking for affection and acceptance in the form of this anonymous group of people thinking they're wonderful. People they don't even know. You don't want to choose your friends arbitrarily.

Why did you leave Elektra Records?
Record companies are sort of like large department stores. I was at Elektra for over 10 years and while I was there I spent a considerable amount of time on the road and blowing my own horn. They liked dropping my name in terms of me being a 'prestige' artist, but when it came down to it, they didn't invest a whole lot in me in terms of faith. Their identity was always more aligned with that California rock thing.

What was the last record you bought?
This thing with Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli. Beautiful stuff on there like "Nature Boy". I like the kind of notes they play, notes like skipping a stone across water. Just go with those notes, they take you away.

What's your favourite beverage?
I enjoy a nice vintage port around February. On

THE KOBAL COLLECTION/UNIVERSAL

The Rotterdam Hilton, February 6, 1983

a day-to-day basis I'd say a good stout malt liquor, a dark beer, or a pale ale, just in terms of quenching my thirst.

Does the public demand too much of popular musicians?
It seems to me that in many ways they're expected to be saintly beings. I don't know if they're expected to be saint-like, but people do expect you to wear the same jacket all the time and they're upset, nervous, and disappointed when you attempt growth at their expense. *The Devil's Dictionary* defines fame as "being conspicuously miserable". A lot of the problems connected with fame are perpetuated by the performers more than the public, because many performers use the press as if it's a priest. They tell journalists very private details of their lives and you have to be careful about that because it can be dangerous and damaging. It's a little cheap, too, considering that you should probably reserve a lot of that for your close personal friends and relatives.

Nature boys: Waits favourites Stêphane Grappelli (left) and Django Reinhardt (centre)

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS; GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

Is fame fraught with anxiety for you?
No, because I'm not famous to the degree that it becomes a physical problem. There's a certain luxury in anonymity. It's like notice me, notice me, leave me alone. You want to be accepted, but you don't want to be bothered with it. You don't want people around your neck slowing you down, but you also don't want to stand in line at the post office for an hour. There was a period of time when I was living at the Tropicana, that I made my address public and it became difficult. But it was my own damn fault and I think I orchestrated and arranged a lot of it just to be able to conduct, but now I'm different.

Most of your music has grown out of a lifestyle I assume you're no longer living. You're married now and last week your wife gave birth to your first child (a daughter, named Kelly). Do you expect these changes to have a profound impact on your music?
Yes and no. My writing has never chronicled my days verbatim. If that was the way I wrote, I'd probably have to be rather busy in order for it to be entertaining. At the same time, there is a certain clarity that you get from having a very safe booth that you don't have when you're behind the register. Now that I have a wife and family, I no longer feel as if I'm out in the world having to make new friends every day.

Do you believe in luck?
Yeah, there is luck, but the best luck you make yourself. I think I've been lucky. I make these things out of air and I don't have to use a hammer and nails, or work 12 hours in a rotten kitchen and get yelled at.

What is your dream?
I think my dream is a feeling more than it's an actual piece of geography. Some of my dreams have come true. Going on the road and playing nightclubs was an enormous dream for me. I can remember working in a restaurant and hearing music come out of the jukebox and wondering how to get from where I was, in my apron and paper hat, through all the convoluted stuff that takes you to where you're coming out of the jukebox. I'm still not played on jukeboxes though, which is OK. If I heard myself come out of a jukebox somewhere, my face would probably turn red.

If you could arm your daughter with one piece of wisdom to help her make her way through life, what would it be?
That you can dream your way out of things and into things. And I don't mean being in a lousy place and pretending you're someplace else. I think you can dream yourself out of one place and into another place that's better for you. To dream hard enough. I hope I can teach her how to do that. ♦

Waiting for the muse: Lower West Side, New York City, 1985

ADRIAN BOOT/URBANIMAGE.TV

“You don’t want to end up like a shoehorn or a desk lamp...”

IN A DOWNTOWN NEW YORK CAFÉ, OUR HERO IS PLOTTING HIS NEXT UNPREDICTABLE MOVES. A “BENT AND MISSHAPEN, TAWDRY AND WARM” BROADWAY MUSICAL BASED ON “FRANK’S WILD YEARS”? AN “EVEN MORE ODDBALL” SEQUEL TO *SWORDFISHTROMBONES*? A CAREER IN GOLF? BARNEY HOSKYNS CHECKS HIS HANDICAP...

TAKEN FROM
NME
25/05/1985

DID HIS wife die in the fire?

"No, I didn't want to give the impression that she went up in the smoke. She was at the beauty parlour."

But the dog...

"The dog, yeah, the dog may have..."

TOM WAITS IS slouched against the wall in a downtown café, talking about the aftermath of "Frank's Wild Years" and the musical into which it has turned. "It's a story about failed dreams, about an accordion player from a small California town called Rainville who goes off to seek fame and fortune and ends up hoist on his own petard, as they say."

It's not the Frank of the San Fernando Valley.

"It is, but he's been altered a little bit. He burns his house down and goes off to be an entertainer in Las Vegas."

Will there be dancing in the grand musical tradition?

"A little tap dancing... I would describe it as a cross between *Eraserhead* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. It's bent and misshapen tawdry and warm and... something for all the family. I don't know how interesting this really is to your readers in England, so I don't want to talk tedious business stuff about the play."

Well, I think there are five or six of us wondering what happened to Frank.

"Uh... OK. Frank goes to Las Vegas and becomes a spokesman for an all-night clothing store. He wins a talent contest and some money on the crap tables, but then he gets rolled by a cigarette girl, and – despondent and penniless – he finds an accordion in a trashcan, and one thing leads to another, and before you know it he's onstage.

"Y' see, when he was a kid, Frank's parents ran a funeral parlour, and while his mother did hair and makeup for the passengers, Frank played accordion. So he'd already started a career in showbiz as a child."

The musical of Frank Leroux's wild Vegas days has now been occupying Tom Waits for the better part of a year. He has still to find a director – getting a project like this off the ground in New York is tough when you're an outsider.

"The ritual around the theatre here is very well-established, and if you're comin' in from some other place, well, you wait for a table.

"It's a hard city, y'know, you have to be on your toes... when I arrived, I actually had a cab-driver say, If yer can make it here, yer can make it anywhere, jus' like Frank said...

"I could go out on the street and drop my trousers and start singin' 'Fly Me To The Moon' and no-one would notice. I could shave my head and put on a dress and pee in a beer glass and... you invent your own apartment that you travel with in New York, you have to be a little off-centre because the things that you see are overwhelming... unless you stare at your shoes, which a lot of people choose to do in order to make it here. I'm absorbing a lot here, it all goes in someplace, but it's hard to tell what effect it's had on you till you move on."

Backhander: Waits in '85

TOM WAITS, THE great chronicler of the Edward Hopper shadow world of flickering neon and drizzle, of the half-lives of barflies and blondes and junkies, is a little way into what might be his second great phase. A decade of bebop lounge schmaltz, pitched between sleaze and sweet sadness, is over, and a bizarre music of mutation and incongruity, of burrowing into the weirdest outbreaks and outtakes of humanity, has begun.

He is about to enter the studio and make the follow-up to *Swordfishtrombones*, provisionally to be called 'Evening Trains' (or 'Evening Train Wrecks') and provisionally to be as diverse and startling as its predecessor.

"Uh, it's more rhythmic, but maybe even more oddball... I mean, oddball for me, y'know, one man's ceiling another man's floor. The things is, you have ideas, and the hardest thing is bringing them up and bringing them out and making them as clear on the outside as they were to you on the inside, so it's like digging a hole and a lot of things don't make the trip.

"There are things I imagine and that thrill me and that I want to hear and that I'm gonna try to accomplish in the studio, but sometimes you only get halfway there. The way I'm constructing songs now is different from the way I used to, it's more like collage, maybe. You know, I'll take this and I'll put that there and I'll nail that to the side and then we'll paint it yellow and...

"What I usually do is I write two songs and I put 'em in a room together and they have children. I have to start with two. I don't write year round, I write like a season and then I'm done. I would like to be able to write through it all, but... it gets hard, so you say I'm gonna set this time aside and for me a lot of it's like going back to a place where you go a lot, but the season changed and the vines grew over the entrance.. and you get back there and you say well, I'm standing right where I was, how come I can't get back in... and then you realise that things grew over and then you get through that and you see the little path and then you're on your way."

What do you do when the writing season is over? "Oh, I entertain guests; I'm a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce; I do bus tours round New York; I repair lamps; I play golf..."

Well, even Iggy plays golf...

"He does? Well, I don't know. If golf really was a part of my life, I don't think I'd tell anybody. I'd put sunglasses and a raincoat and sneak off to do it at night. I don't know if I'd be able to be open and candid about my career in golf. But I guess it's all down to how well-adjusted you are...

ADRIAN BOOT/URBAN IMAGE.TV

"I used to be more hung up about who I was, y'know, this is me, that's not me... now I'm more secure. Hell, Bing Crosby died on the course. When I read that, I said this is not for me."

One of the great rock'n'roll casualties.

"Yeah, the world lost a great golfer there, and a great father."

Swordfishtrombones, voted 1983's best LP by *NME*'s critics, was a singular joker for Tom Waits to pull out of his pack. Rarely does one performer, in the space of a year, make two such different records as *Swordfishtrombones* and the soundtrack to *One From The Heart*.

In a sense, the latter was a lush curtain closing on Waits' grand style, a wonderfully sentimental coda to his affair with Hollywood musicals and Tin Pan Alley. "Your musical diet determines a lot of what comes out of you, and I was listening to Ellington at the time of 'I Beg Your Pardon'. In fact, there's a quote from 'Sophisticated Lady' in that song. I've always had a real fascination with Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Mercer..."

Swordfishtrombones, on the other hand, was like the ghost of Captain Beefheart coming out to play on the homemade orchestra of Harry Partch, a "small exotic orchestra" or "demented little parade band" consisting of tuba, trombone, guitar, bass marimba, accordion and piano. The 15 songs explore Waitsian backwaters with a marvellously rich and eccentric array of noises, the sounds themselves conveying the environments he depicted.

How come it took so long for influences like those of Beefheart and Partch to surface?

"Well, it goes in there and it stays there for a while and pretty soon it ends up... it's like soup, you know, you don't know what's going to end up important. It's usually your own perception of the things you listen to that influence you."

Did *Swordfishtrombones* enable you to escape the prestige cultishness of the Asylum years?

"You get to the point where the things you hear and see and react to... you can kind of nail 'em all together and call it your own. I think for a while I had a certain romance with Tin Pan Alley and that type of thing, and a certain way the songs were constructed and... it was actually rather rigid for me, y'know, 'cos I wrote primarily at the piano, and you write a certain kind of song at the piano. The piano brings you indoors immediately, so those types of songs were all a different shade of the same colour.

"Now I'm trying to go outside more, to write more from my imagination, rather than being a chronicler."

I wonder if most people don't still hang on to this idea of you as the best wino chronicler – a rather easily assimilable image – when your material now embraces so many landscapes and types of character.

"They don't want you to sober up."

Even though you've kept to your word you'd write no more booze songs.

"You can't be too concerned with what people really think of you, you just kinda have to pursue your own... you're on your own adventure of growth and discovery. Like Charles Bukowski once said, people think I'm down on 5th and Main at the Blarneystone, throwin' back shooters and smokin' a cigar, but I'm on the top floor of the health club with a towel in my lap, watchin' ... *Johnny Carson*.

"So it's not always good to be where they think you are, especially if you subscribe to it as well, which is easily done 'cos you don't have to figure out who you are, you just ask somebody else..."

When you were living the Tropicana life in LA, was it ever a pose?

"Oh gosh, you know... when I moved into that place it was, like, $9 a night, but it became a... a stage, because I became associated with it, and people came looking for me and calling me in the middle of the night, so I think I really wanted to get lost in it all... so I did. When they finally painted the pool black, that's when I said this has gone too far. It was a heavy place at times."

Are you still a "private eye", a Marlowe of the ivories?

"My eyes are a lot more private that they used to be, but I don't know, it's a little over-romantic."

There's less of you, less of the observer at the centre of the stage. You're really entering into these characters and into the Americana of "Soldier's Things" and "In The Neighborhood".

"TALKING ABOUT WHAT YOU DO IS ALWAYS SO DIFFICULT, LIKE A BLIND MAN TRYING TO DESCRIBE AN ELEPHANT"
TOM WAITS

"Yah, maybe, there's something very American about taking a piece of wire and some broken glass and an old T-shirt and some feathers... it's like, the garbage in New York is unbelievable, it's just... thrilling! As a matter of fact, I furnished an entire apartment with things I found on the street. I wanted to do a record called 'Wreck Collections', 'cos you know when you're moving and everything gets thrown into the same box, and that's always interesting. I'm very interested in the work of people like Joseph Cornell.

Waits' other outlet is acting, his latest role being a bit-part in Coppola's *The Cotton Club*. A first shot at a leading part may come next year with a road picture directed by photographer Robert Frank and written by Rudy Wurlitzer, who scripted that Samuel Beckett-in-Arkansas oddity *Two-Lane Blacktop*. Has he yet been offered a role that isn't typecast?

"You know, it's hard, film people look at you and they get a sense of you and they cast you according to how they feel about you. You can't expect someone to think of you as a banker if you come on like a longshoreman. It's a real insecure way to live, y'know...hoping someone thinks of you."

How do you see the current state of pop music?

"Music is always reinventing itself. Ideally it's always moving, but if it isn't it soon gets rolling again, and then it goes off here and it's all new clover and then it's like, no, the thing we had before, let's bring that back in... and it's always like, that guy was all right, we shoulda brought him with us. But... I dunno, when a scene starts to develop an anatomy and elect a president, then you have problems sometimes, the thing just becomes a popularity contest.

"England is constantly rediscovering, re-establishing, reinventing everything, it's like when they blow all the tickets up in the air to draw the winning ticket. But you can trace just about everything that's called new back to something old. Something compels you to be popular, but at the same time you hate the trappings of it. I like to be considered, but you also don't want to end up like a shoehorn or a desk lamp. Seems like the politics of music do to a lot of musicians the same things they do to politicians... they sell all their ideas to get into office. It's hard to make it through on the road with all the things you set out with... it's like the wagon going up the hill, and they throw out the pump organ and the... desk lamp and the... wedding dress and the... bowling ball, and by the time they get to the top, well, they've had an easier ride, but they sold everything off on the way up. A lot of things get lost that way."

FINALLY, WILL we ever see your "demented little parade band" in Britain?

"Yeah, I am coming, in the Fall, October. Exactly what form it's gonna take I don't know, but I intend to put together something that's... well, I'm puttin' a band together right now."

Tom Waits looks mildly pained as he shakes my hand farewell. "Talking about what you do is always so difficult," he sighs. "It's like a blind man trying to describe an elephant. You usually make most of it up." Thanks Tom. ♦

EYEVINE

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

RAIN DOGS

High on Brecht and New York noise, Waits constructs a phantasmagoric vision of Reagan's America. The anti-*Born In The USA*? By STEPHEN TROUSSÉ

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1985

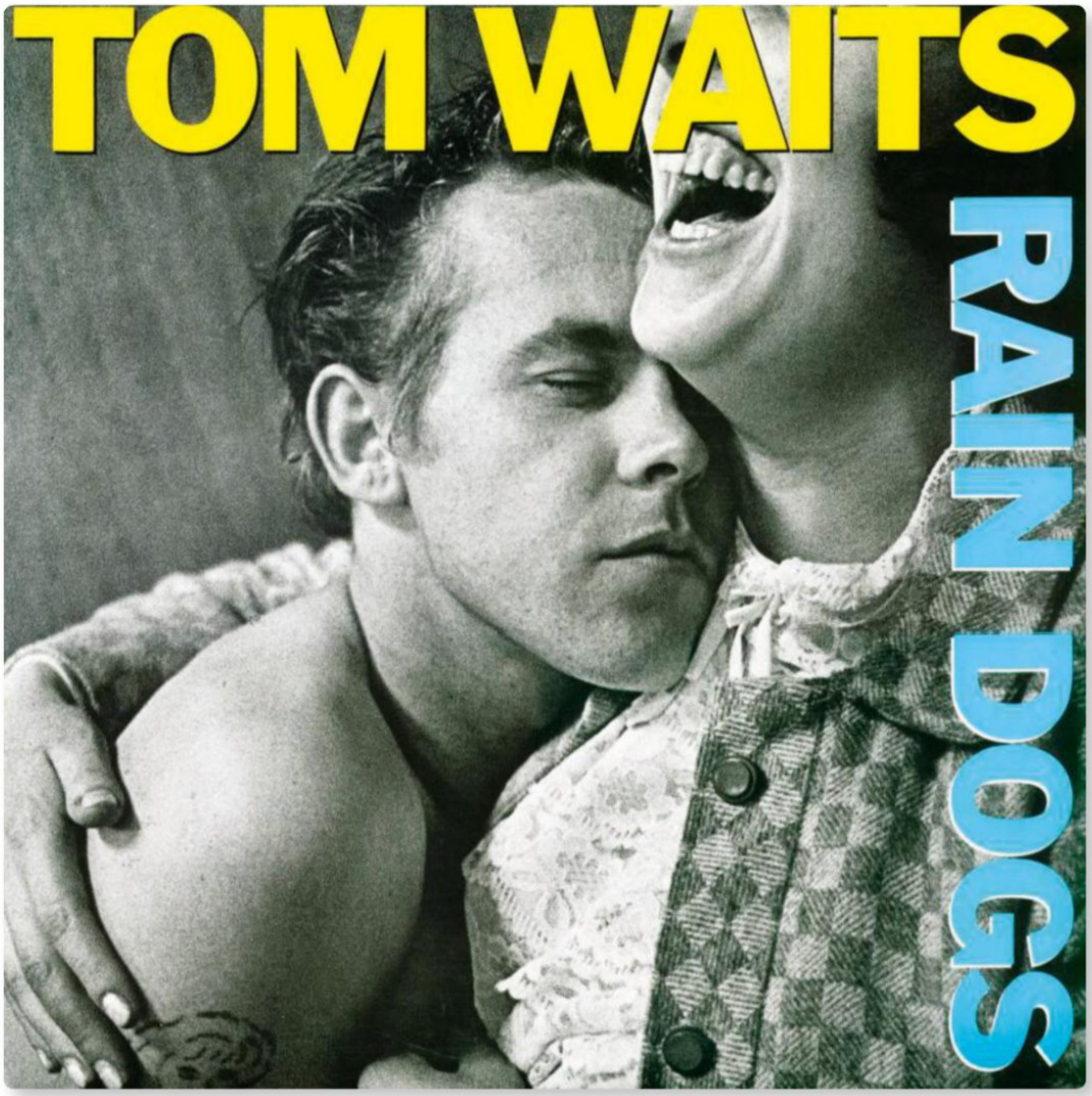
AT THE START of 1980, Tom Waits briefly moved to New York and attempted to forge a fresh path into the new decade. The results, when they eventually surfaced on *Heartattack And Vine*, in the form of the song "Jersey Girl", sounded uncannily like Bruce Springsteen.

Four years later, Waits and his new family moved back more permanently and happily. The results, when they surfaced on *Rain Dogs*, in the form of the song "Downtown Train", once again sounded inescapably like Bruce Springsteen – albeit the mid-'80s, MTV model.

But the contrast between the two songs is telling. At the start of the decade Waits had been a man adrift, casting around desperately for fresh inspiration and a new direction. Five years later, "Downtown Train" is a calculated foray into Springsteen territory. In a sense it's a gesture of rapprochement, an attempt to build a bridge or tunnel, to lure an audience from the main street of Bruceland into the back alleys of Tomtown.

Because the song's parent album, *Rain Dogs*, recorded in the fall of 1984, as the Republicans shamelessly press-ganged the Boss into the Reagan re-election campaign, is the anti-*Born In The USA*. The ghosts of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht stalk the docks and bars of Waits' new music and, just as their Weimar collaboration was a systematic attempt to "smash the Wagner cult" – the dangerously intoxicating German romanticism they felt befuddled its audience – you could see *Rain Dogs* as a similar plot to dismantle the Bruce myth, to fracture the monolith of the new stadium rock. *Rain Dogs* could never be mistaken for an album about the new morning in America. Rather it's the lurid twilight, witnessed "*from the yellow window of the evening train*". Rain dogs, said Waits at the end of 1985, are "people who sleep in doorways. People who don't have credit cards. People who don't go to church... Who fly in this whole plane by the seat of their pants..." Which is to say, pretty much the standard cast of boozers, losers and substance abusers who have populated every Tom Waits album since 1973. What's new is their landscape, first sighted on *Swordfishtrombones*, now brilliantly explored and mapped. Waits' horizons have expanded from Edward Hopper interiors to an entire nation. With its richness, diversity, humour and horror, you could hear *Rain Dogs* as an attempt, following Harry Smith's *Anthology* and Dylan and The Band's *Basement Tapes*, to once more conjure the spirit and sprawl of that Old Weird America at the high noon of Reaganism. The transformation completed on *Rain Dogs* is as radical as Dylan's going electric; the record has the same relation to the Asylum LPs as Thomas Pynchon's novels do to his Beat forebears. The poignant, picaresque vignettes are now carnivalised, fractured, surreal and epic.

You could credit this new audacity to Kathleen Brennan, Waits' wife, who by all accounts introduced him to Beefheart and Brecht, encouraged him to enrich his creative slumgullion. But you can't discount the influence of New York. On arrival in 1984 Waits was soon hanging out at parties with Warholistas, no-wave jazzateers and off-Broadway auteurs. *Rain Dogs* was written in a lower Manhattan basement, in the epicentre of NY's noise and neuroses, and you can hear this new stimulant in the Mingus / Mancini car horn blare of "Midtown", in the humid nocturne of "Downtown Train", the Spanish Harlem rumba of "Jockey Full Of Bourbon". But you can also hear it in the crosstown traffic and casual surrealism of the inspired band Waits assembled, the junkyard orchestra core trio of percussionist Michael Blair (on marimba, chest of drawers, bones of the uncivil dead), drummer Stephen Hodges and, especially, Lounge Lizards guitarist Marc Ribot, whose sly, spidery guitar lines scuttle up the walls and across the ceilings of these tunes.



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"*Rain Dogs* continues his continental drift through the crannies and corners of America's varied cultures... The great achievement is how Waits draws the shapes of its 19(?) pieces from the nuances and nonsenses, the rhymes and rhythms locked in his language."

BIBA KOPF, NME, 12/10/85

"They very rarely make long-players like this these days. *Rain Dogs* is more like some sprawling, picaresque novel... Buy one, and set aside a few evenings. It's cheaper than flying, and you'll probably see more." ADAM SWEETING, MM, 12/10/85

Together they pilot songs that traverse America in space and time. The opening ramshackle polka "Singapore", featuring Waits' pie-eyed impression of Richard Burton, promises a voyage from "*the Land of Nod*" to the "*sewers of Paris*", and the album proceeds from Californian boneyards ("Cemetery Polka") via Storyville bordellos ("Tango Till They're Sore") to Minnesotan pimp wars ("9th & Hennepin"), Bakersfield roadhouses ("Blind Love") and New Orleans funerals ("Anywhere I Lay My Head").

They're abetted by some inspired guest appearances, notably Keith Richards, who seems to have rediscovered his own piratical swagger in contributing to the slash and burn of "Big Black Mariah" and "Union Square", and even rediscovered his voice on the wasted, Merle Haggard-ish "Blind Love". But also Robert Quine, who sours the song's sweet country whine with Jimmy Reed blues, and whose soloing on "Downtown Train" provides the warped moonlight to the song's classic rock chug.

Rain Dogs' reputation has wavered over the years. In 1985, *NME* named it album of the year, beating, among others, *Psychocandy*, *Hounds Of Love* and *Flip Your Wig*. But when Barney Hoskyns appended his favourite Waits tracks to his 2009 biog, nothing from the LP made his Top 20. Today, tracks like "Singapore" and "Cemetery Polka", populated by one-armed dwarfs, one-eyed kings and Puerto Rican mistresses with wooden legs, sung in that Cookie Monster growl over garbage-can percussion, can seem as much clichés of quirk as the dream sequences of David Lynch or the "hysterical realism" of Thomas Pynchon. But this is a narrow view, determined as much by the subsequent direction of Waits' career and the use of songs on sundry soundtracks as a stylistic shorthand for surreal lowlife.

Listen to *Rain Dogs* afresh and it feels like one of Tom Waits' most enduring masterpieces, his Great American Novel. It could serve as a Greatest Hits collection or one-disc survey of his career. Nowhere else do you get the full spectrum and sweep of Waitsiana: the heartstring-zinging balladry of "Time", the avant blues primitivism of "Gun Street Girl", the strung-out bop prosody of "9th And Hennepin" and the R'n'B lounge lizardry of "Walking Spanish". Like America itself, *Rain Dogs* is large, it contains multitudes. ♦

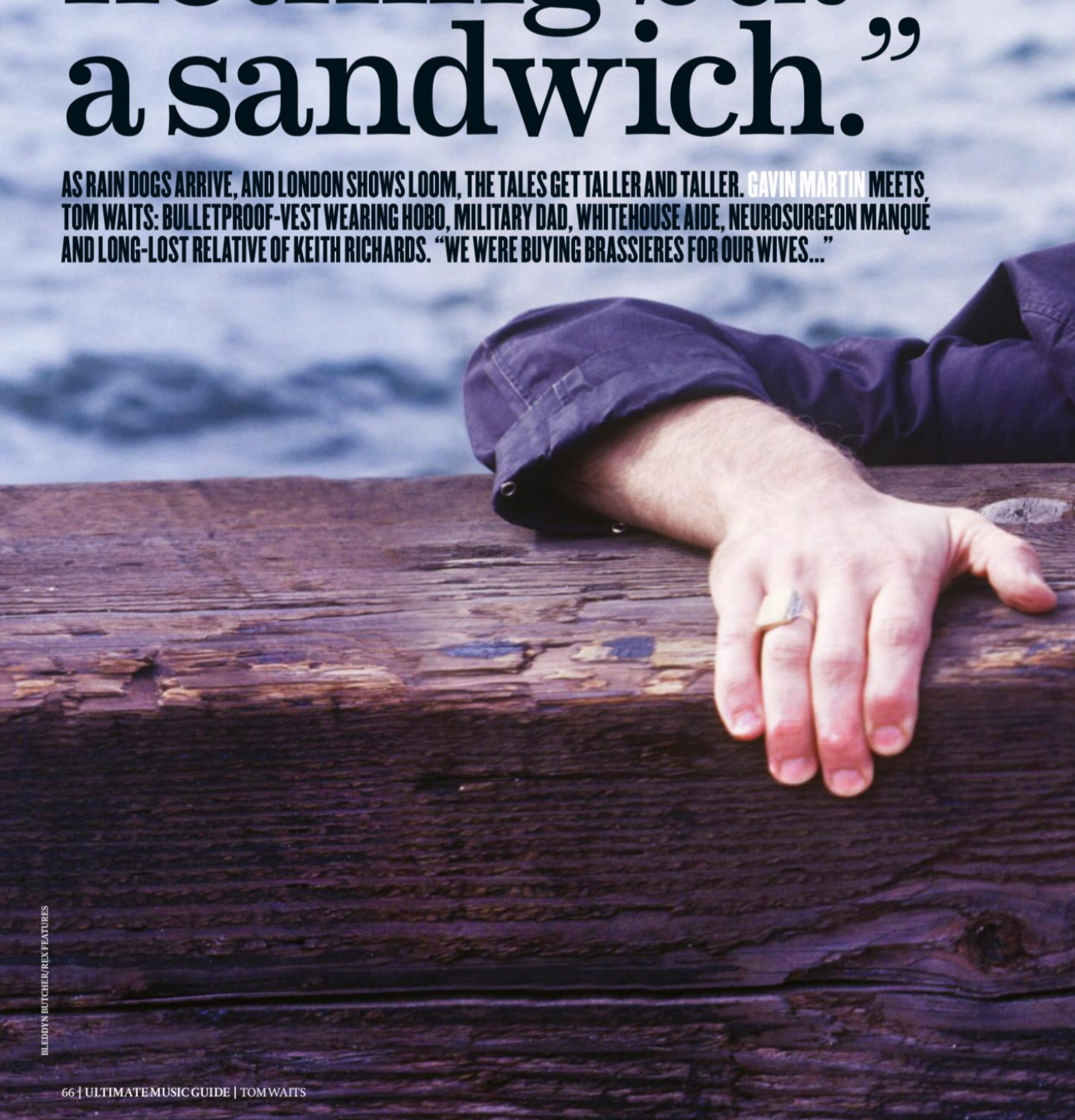
TRACKLISTING RAIN DOGS

1. Singapore ★★★★
2. Clap Hands ★★★★
3. Cemetery Polka ★★★
4. Jockey Full Of Bourbon ★★★★★
5. Tango Till They're Sore ★★★★
6. Big Black Mariah ★★★★
7. Diamonds & Gold ★★★★
8. Hang Down Your Head ★★★★
9. Time ★★★★★
10. Rain Dogs ★★★★
11. Midtown ★★★★
12. 9th & Hennepin ★★★★★
13. Gun Street Girl ★★★★★
14. Union Square ★★★★
15. Blind Love ★★★★
16. Walking Spanish ★★★★
17. Downtown Train ★★★★★
18. Bride Of Rain Dog ★★★
19. Anywhere I Lay My Head ★★★★

Released: September 30, 1985
Label: Island
Recorded at: RCA Studios, New York
Produced by: Tom Waits
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (vocals, guitar, Farfisa organ, piano, pump organ, banjo, harmonium), Greg Cohen (double bass), Michael Blair (percussion, marimba, conga, drums, metal percussion, bowed saw, parade drum), Stephen Hodges (drums, parade drums), Larry Taylor (double bass), Marc Ribot (guitar), Ralph Carney (bass sax, sax, clarinet), Chris Spedding (guitar), William Schimmel (accordion), Tony Garnier (double bass), Robert Previte (percussion, marimba), Mickey Curry (drums), Robert Kilgore (organ), Tony Levin (bass), Robert Quine (guitar), John Lurie (alto sax), Arno Hecht (tenor sax), Hollywood Paul Litteral (trumpet), Crispin Cioe (sax), Bob Funk (trombone), Ross Levinson (violins)
Highest chart position: UK 28; US 188

"A hero ain't nothing but a sandwich."

AS RAIN DOGS ARRIVE, AND LONDON SHOWS LOOM, THE TALES GET TALLER AND TALLER. GAVIN MARTIN MEETS TOM WAITS: BULLETPROOF-VEST WEARING HOBO, MILITARY DAD, WHITEHOUSE AIDE, NEUROSURGEON MANQUÉ AND LONG-LOST RELATIVE OF KEITH RICHARDS. "WE WERE BUYING BRASSIERES FOR OUR WIVES..."



BLEDDYN BUTCHER/REX FEATURES

"JESUS CHRIST, I'M 19 YEARS OLD AND YOU'RE ASKING ME HOW I WANT TO BE REMEMBERED!"

TOM WAITS

TAKEN FROM NME 19/10/1985

"SO THEY TELL me the shows we're doing in London are sold out already. I can hardly believe that."

Well, *Swordfishtrombones* had quite a big impact, Tom.

"Mmm, but there's the other side of that, it doesn't last too long. Everything is temporary – they pump you up for a little while, dye your hair, see you in a different shape. It goes around for a while and comes back down again. It's not something you can really build on."

Are you nervous about coming to London?

"I am, I'm scared to death, Jesus, I'll need a bulletproof vest. I need a new hat, a new suit – I can't go over there in a raincoat. I've told the band to smarten up too. They're more attuned to the stuff I'm doing now but they're also capable of doing some pre-*Swordfish* stuff but with a different slant to it. So I think it will be OK, I hope it will be OK. I will have to talk to my sax player, Ralph Carney, about his white socks, the white socks and the Navy uniform, I'm not sure about that.

"Ralph, I haven't been able to confront you about this face to face so I'm using this opportunity to talk to you through the press – we must do something about the white socks."

The only time I've seen Tom Waits live was in London, the Victoria Apollo in 1981. The appearance came just after the release of *Heartattack And Vine*, notable for its move into bone-crushing electric blues. Waits' ability to rework the sleazy nightclub setting had already been proven by the double live album *Nighthawks At The Diner*, but in this large auditorium his stand-up bass, drum and piano setup couldn't really carry. I left before the end.

"It's kinda hard to do that on a big stage... the basic economics of touring kept me in tow there."

How did you overcome that problem?

"The new band is all midgets, they share a room, they don't want to be paid for their work. They all have a basic persecution complex and they want me to punish them for things that have happened in their past life and I have agreed – I've just signed something."

Your generosity is quite touching.

"No, they're all good chaps, most of them have never been in jail, though I'm not sure about Ralph Carney."

IT WASN'T THE best time to interview Tom Waits; he was in the middle of arranging to shoot a video for either "Singapore" or "Cemetery Polka" off the new *Rain Dogs* album, he was rehearsing a live band, finalising details for his first major film role (to be shot in New Orleans later in the year), arranging the staging of the musical *Frank's Wild Years* (to open in Chicago after Christmas), and he'd just become a father for the third time.

We meet in a diner on New York's Lower West Side. Waits arrives a little late, wearing an old '40s Burberry, heavy-duty denims and unbuckled motorcycle boots. The face is grey, the features weasel-like and his hair bears red traces of Henna dye. He looks haggard and a little shy at first, eyeing us cautiously as we exchange handshakes. Today is Sunday and the Waits family are observing tradition – the interview is squeezed between babysitting and a visit from the in-laws. His wife, Kathleen Brennan, is the girl eulogised on *Swordfishtrombones*' "Johnsburg, Illinois" and a scriptwriter at Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope studios. "We've got three children now – Ajax, Edith and Montgomery – I must get them enrolled in military school immediately. I see it like *Tobacco Road*, the old hillbilly movie, we'll all be heading down that long path together."

A Tom Waits interview is not a place to come looking for serious analysis. Waits has sung of the displaced, the dime-store loser and the hobo for so long that he seems to have taken on a composite persona, drawn from his crazy cast of characters. Although kind and respectful, he can't resist turning the conversation around with an enigmatic metaphor or some brazen bullshitting. Whenever necessary he'll substitute an entertaining lie for a boring truth.

"Music paper interviews, I hate to tell ya, but two days after they're printed they're lining the trashcan. They're not binding, they're not locked away in a vault somewhere, tying you to your word."

"MUSIC PAPER INTERVIEWS ARE NOT LOCKED AWAY IN A VAULT SOMEWHERE, TYING YOU TO YOUR WORD..."
TOM WAITS

The Waits case history is necessarily littered with truths, half-truths and downright lies. He used to tell writers he was born in the back of a truck travelling though South LA on December 7, 1949. In high school he played in soul groups but dropped out to play accordion in a polka band. He drifted through a variety of jobs – "a jack-off of all trades" – and was working in a Hollywood diner when he met West Coast manager Herb Cohen at the turn of the '70s.

He signed for Asylum Records, then a small independent rather than a branch of WEA. After releasing a few promising albums he found his true artistry on *Small Change* and the essential *Foreign Affairs* and *Blue Valentine*. As an arranger and tunesmith working the cool blue jazz sphere, Waits was peerless, but his unique power came from contrasting those talents with his coarse gut-bucket growl and mesmerising wordplay. Waits mined the post-war fault line of Kerouac and the beats, focusing on the loners and losers that littered America's highways and byways. *Foreign Affairs* had "Potter's Field", its epic atmospherics – all deathly strings and orchestral cadences – straight out of Sam Fuller's classic noir B-Movie *Pickup On South Street*, and "I Never Talk To Strangers", a divine duet with Bette Midler, recreating an idiom everyone thought died with Tin Pan Alley. He would later revisit the territory with Crystal Gayle on the *One From The Heart* soundtrack.

"I guess I did borrow a lot to do stuff like that. But it's good to borrow, borrowing implies that you're going to give back. That's the way all music works: you take a little something from here, you bring it over there and pretty soon it finds its way back."

Blue Valentine has the Waits song I keep coming back to. "Kentucky Avenue" starts as fanciful childhood reminiscence and builds to a climax that is at once absurd and heartbreaking.

"Childhood is very important to me as a writer, I think the things that happen then, the way you perceive them and remember them in later life, have a very big effect on what you do later on. That one came over a little dramatic, a little puffed up, but when I was 10, my best friend was called Kipper, he had polio and was in a wheelchair – we used to race each other to the bus stop."

His relationship with WEA turned sour when he tried to release *Swordfishtrombones* as the follow up to *Heartattack And Vine*.

"They heard it but they didn't recognise it, so amidst all the broken glass and barbed wire I crawled out between the legs of the presidents. It was the big shakedown at Gimbels – business, I guess."

It closed a chapter in Waits' life – he moved out of Hollywood's infamous Tropicana Motel, split with Cohen and his girlfriend Rickie Lee Jones and signed to Island. The '70s hadn't been an altogether easy ride for Waits – constantly on the road, often as a stadium support to an incongruous Frank Zappa, it's rumoured he employed a $250-a-week stooge to bawl at backstage and came close to being ruined by the lifestyle he drew on. Certainly his business was not always conducted wisely; publishing rights for some of his greatest compositions fell into other hands. "Maybe that's why I write so many songs now, the songs I write now belong to me, not someone in the Bronx. I did not stay abreast of what was happening to me. I'm happier to be on a small label, Blackwell is artistic, a philanthropist. You can sit and talk with him and you don't feel you're at Texaco or Heineken or Budweiser. There's something operating here that has a brain, curiosity and imagination."

SWORDFISHTROMBONES INTRODUCED

A demented, exotic parade band to deal with the musical junk lying in American attics and basements. *Rain Dogs* continues where it left off and, though Waits is writing about the same sort of characters he has for the past 15 years, the situations he places them in differ wildly – maybe they've been transplanted to a dusty Western ghost town where the saloon bar pianist never stops, or cast adrift on *The Titanic* while the band play mariachi tangos and crazy polkas. He can still play it straight, too – dig the country blue bitters of "Blind Love", the lonesome lullaby "Hang Down Your Head" – but in general, the reassembling of musical influences is perfectly in keeping with the new images and rhythms of his own language. *Rain Dogs* is the first Waits LP made entirely in New York, the bleakness and claustrophobia

BLEDDYN BUTCHER/REX FEATURES

never far from the surface bearing this out. He's lived in nine different places since moving here – at the moment he resides between the New York State Armoury and National Guard recruiting centre, and The Salvation Army Headquarters.

Why did you come here? "I came here for the shoes, it's a real good town for shoes. It amazes me, I think it's a good time for music when it's a good time for shoes. You look in the shoe store and you see them trimmed down with the points just so – they thrill me, really."

When was the last time shoes were so good? "You wait 15 years, it's a long wait. In the meantime you go where you have to – Fairfax, 36th and Downing, 9th and Hennepin, Minneapolis."

When you're putting together your group is a sense of humour important? "That's how you audition them, you tell them a joke and if they don't laugh then it's hit the bricks, pal."

You used to be noted for a "professional drunk" image – has that changed? "Sincerely, I don't want to romanticise liquor to the point of ridiculousness."

Would you like a drink now? "Maybe I should have a beer, what do you think? I mean, what time is it here? I'll have a Beck's."

You have got your younger listeners to think of, you've got to set an example. "Yah, setting an example. Well I don't think there's anything wrong with a little sherry before retiring, read a little Balzac and then lay out. I don't drink and drive, I enjoy a little cocktail before supper, who doesn't?"

America seems to be swamped with heroes like never before – bulky bull-headed killing machines like Stallone, Norris and Schwarzenegger are packing them in at the movie theatres on Times Square. It's a complete contrast to the characters you create on *Rain Dogs*. "A hero ain't nothing but a sandwich. It's tough on the heroes, all they want to do is strip you of your name, rank, and serial number. It's like a hanging, a burlesque, it's spooky. They have you all dressed up with a hat on, make-up and a stick that goes up the back of your neck. Then they take a 12-gauge shotgun and blow your head off."

You worked with Sylvester Stallone once in the movie *Paradise Alley*. Have you seen *Rambo*? "No I haven't, I don't want to get drawn into something here just because I did some work once because I needed the bread. America has been looking for somewhere to put the Vietnam War for so long. We're making movies to help us forget. You hear the budget for the film was so many millions of bucks and here's this guy with all his muscles and a big machine gun. But the veterans were treated like dogmeat, the film budget was so many millions of dollars and they get $100 a month."

How did you avoid the draft during the'60s? "I was in Israel on a kibbutz. No I wasn't, that's a lie, I was in Washington, sir. I was in the White House as an aide. I got excused, the way anyone would get a note from school: 'Dear Mr President, Tom is sick today and won't be able to come along'."

Can you remember why you became a musician in the first place? "I couldn't get into medical school... the administration made it difficult for me."

I heard you wanted to do neurosurgery. "I wanted to help out, I wanted to combine yardwork and medicine. When I was young I wanted to be a policeman. I liked the uniform, I wanted a bit of authority but that changed too."

The influence and approach of the late Harry Partch (a sometime hobo and creator of a new musical notation played on his own range of instruments) is evident on *Swordfishtrombones*. What about his work appealed to you? "I have a friend called Francis Thumm who played the Partch chromelodeon. He lives down by the beach in Leisure World. He drinks the Ballantines, loves the Scotch, the 12-year-old single malt. He drinks plenty of it and it's got him into plenty of trouble.

"Anyway, he showed me Partch had an instrument called the blowboy, it sounded like a train whistle, it was a train whistle, only

it was his train whistle. It blew from out of bellows, reeds and organ pipes, he could play it with his foot like a pump organ and go 'hooway, hooway'. I swear it was a sound that would break your heart. They said in a little documentary that the instruments he made were so beautiful, they looked like skeletons.

"I guess I just got more curious, I was getting lazy. I'm just trying to find different ways of saying the same thing. I used to hear everything with a tenor saxophone, I had a very particular musical wardrobe. I've opened up a bit more."

Do you think you can tell a lot about a country from the things that it discards? "I guess you can, I don't know. Everything in the United States is made so that – I vaant eet and I vaant eet all now. People just don't have the time, what do you do? They want things fast but it's like an aquarium – you sit waiting and it all comes by again. I like to mix it, you can learn something from everything."

Your writing seems to follow a similar path – you're neither a curator nor a documenter, the world you create jumbles memory, reality and imagination to make its own reality. How the listener applies that to their reality is up to them. "A lot of that comes from being in New York, everything is heightened, you're looking through that into this, beyond this into that. You get picked up by a Chinese cab driver in the Jewish district, go to a Spanish restaurant where you listen to a Japanese tango band and eat Brazilian food. It's all blended.

"New York's been settled by people that are very separate in a way. They retain their own culture, its rules, religions and customs. You know when you pass over the border from one into the other."

For you as a musician is it all up for grabs? "Not so much to be used, I just try to enjoy. There's a place where Nigeria will lapse into Louisiana, there's things about music that happen spontaneously and you move into places that would otherwise have no connection. If you play a certain rhythm and move it a little, it becomes something else, move it back and it becomes a Carpathian waltz, move it further and you have a Gamelan trajectory coming in. It creates its own geography.

"I overdub now, I'm more paranoid. When I was working on two-track I did everything straight. Or maybe that means I'm less paranoid now because I'm not afraid to use it. But you can't get any ideas from machinery."

The *Rain Dogs* album was written at the same time as the *Frank's Wild Years* musical. Did they overlap? "I tried to keep them separate. *Rain Dogs* is like, well, I don't want to sound too dramatic but I wanted there to be a connection between the tracks. I was going to call it 'Beautiful Train Wrecks' or 'Evening Train Wrecks'. Sometimes I close my eyes real hard and I see a picture of what I want; that song 'Singapore' started like that, Richard Burton with a bottle of festival brandy preparing to go on board ship. I tried to make my voice like his – *"In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king"* – I took that from Orwell, I think." [*Erasmus – Ed*]

Waits in New York, mid-'80s

Which book? "*Mary Poppins*, one of the big ones."

Films and childhood seem important to your work. Where did you first see films when you were a kid? "It was called The Globe Theatre and they had some unusual double bills. I saw *The Pawnbroker* on the same bill as *101 Dalmatians* when I was 11. I didn't understand it and now I think the programme director must have been mentally disturbed or had a sick sense of humour.

"I liked going to movies but I didn't get lost in them. Some people would rather spend time in the movies than anywhere else. On certain days I would watch 10 movies, spend all day from 10 in the morning to midnight going from movie to movie. But then it's the world outside that becomes the film, the time in between takes on a very weird arrangement, that's what you watch, not the movies."

A lot of the songs on *Rain Dogs* seem to be about death. "'Cemetery Polka' is a family album, a lot of my relatives are farmers, they're eccentric, aren't everyone's relatives? Maybe it was stupid to put them on the album because now I get irate calls saying, Tom how can you talk about your Aunt Maime and your Uncle Biltmore like that? But Mum, I say, they did make a million during World War II and you'll never see any of it. It's time someone exposed them."

Waits on *The Tube*, October 25, 1985

How did Keith Richards come to be on the album? "We're relatives, I didn't realise it. We met in a woman's lingerie shop, we were buying brassieres for our wives. They had a little place at the back there where you could have a drink, two cups at a time.

"No, he's been borrowing money from me for so long that I had to put a stop to it. He's a gentleman, he came into the studio and took his hat off and all these birds flew out."

"Union Square" is great, it sounds like the Stones haven't been able to for years. "I was going to throw that song out. I said call the dustman, this one's chewing on the dead. But somebody said, there's something there. Hell I said, there isn't. Then he came in – on the clock he stands with his head at 3 and his arm at 10. I said how can a man stand like that without falling over, unless he has a 200lb test fishing line suspending him from the ceiling? It was like something out of *Arthur*, he comes in with his guitar valet and it's 'Oh Keef, shall we try the Rickenbacker?'"

How did "Frank's Wild Years" turn into a musical? "The song was like a fortune cookie. After I wrote it, I thought what happened to this guy? Everybody knows guys like that, people you haven't seen in a longtime, what happens to them? What happened to John Chrisswicky? Oh Jesus, John's second wife left him and he went to work in a slaughterhouse. Then he was in a rendering unit, of course, his dad was always in the wine business, but that didn't interest John, I hear he ended up as a mercenary soldier.

"People go through those permutations in different stages of their life, and perceived by someone else it can look strange. I imagined Frank along those lines. Y'see my folks split up when I was a kid and... hey, look let me give you $100 and I'll lie down on the couch over there, you take notes and see if we can't get to the bottom of this."

How does it feel to be getting older and seeing your influence spread? The Pogues write about "Rain Dogs" in London; I'm sure they'd acknowledge you as an inspiration. "Well, that's great, that's what it's all about. You break a little trail, you come through to here and you leave some things behind.

"The Pogues I like, they're ragged and full of it. They seem to come on traditional and eccentric. They shout... I like the shouting. I like Agnes Bernelle, Falling James and The Leaving Trains, Jack Drake and The Black Ducks, they play a drunken reverie, no instruments, they just bang on things. I like some of that metal music, making music out of things that come to hand."

"ON CERTAIN DAYS I WOULD WATCH 10 MOVIES... BUT THEN IT'S THE WORLD OUTSIDE THAT BECOMES THE FILM"
TOM WAITS

Do you have any advice for would-be musicians? "Champagne for your real friends, real pain for your sham friends. I tell them it's good to write on instruments you don't understand."

No jolly-ups around the old Joanna? "It's firewood as far as I'm concerned. Slowly I've started peeling the boards off until there's nothing left but metal, strings and ivory."

Many of your prime influences were self-destructive. Do you feel a sense of duty not to get ensnared in that myth? "I think it's better to burn hard than to rot, I think that's right. I don't really feel a sense of duty, I'm not in the army. Things that you write about have been written about before so I don't feel I'm breaking new ground or anything.

"All that you can do is listen to the things that are of value to you and try to find a place for yourself. I don't want to sound too serious here, but it's like when you're together with people for a long time and talking about the things only you know. That must be the very sad thing about getting very old and all your friends die and you're talking to some guy and he's nodding and saying yeah, yeah, and you're thinking, yeah, but he doesn't really know."

How would you like to be remembered? "Jesus Christ, I'm 19 years old and you're asking me how I want to be remembered. On my gravestone I want it to say 'I told you I was sick'. Achievement is for the senators and scholars. At one time I had ambitions but I had them removed by a doctor in Buffalo. It started as a cyst, it grew under my arm and I had to have new shirts made, it was awful. But I have them in a jar at home now."

SOMETIME LATER WE'RE driving around New York looking for a suitable photo location. Down towards the river the apartment blocks get more dilapidated, the wind howls and we watch a bum foraging in a litter bin.

"There's that guy, I haven't seen him in ages, I wonder where he's been," says Tom, like he'd just seen an old friend. He tells me he thought Paul Young's version of "Soldier's Things" was a little puffed up, but "it's always nice when someone covers your songs, some of them are orphans, they need a home". He talks about leaving New York.

"As you get older, the things that it was once important to have around you become less so, especially when you have children. New York is like a weapon... you live with all these contradictions and it's intense, sometimes unbearable.

"It's a place where you think you should be doing more about what you see around you, a place where the deadline to get the picture of the bum outside your apartment becomes more important than his deadline to get a crust or a place to sleep, which is a real deadline.

"You see things like the $400 shoe followed by the $500 ballgown stepping into the pool of blood from the bum that was killed the night before. That's what I was trying to get in that song 'Clap Hands' – *"You can always get a millionaire to shovel all the coal"* because millionaires like to go places that are downbeat, that aren't so chi-chi."

Where would you like to live, Tom? "Kansas, it's a good place to dream. You wake up in the morning, look out the window and don't see anything, you make it all up. I'd have a porch, a mean dog and a 12-gauge shotgun. You wouldn't throw your baseball into my yard buddy, you'd never see it again." ♦

ITV/REX FEATURES, A J BARRATT

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

FRANKS WILD YEARS

The neglected third part of the "Island Trilogy". "A cross between *Eraserhead* and *It's A Wonderful Life*," says Waits, not unreasonably. By DAMIEN LOVE

RELEASED AUGUST 1987

IT'S RARELY EASY with Tom Waits. Thanks to five seasons of *The Wire* using variously snaky, soulful and rattling permutations of "Way Down In The Hole" as theme tune, *Franks Wild Years* is the album that contains arguably his most famous song. Yet, while it sold as well as any Tom Waits record sold back then, it has been somewhat overlooked, unfairly overshadowed by its two predecessors in the "Island Trilogy".

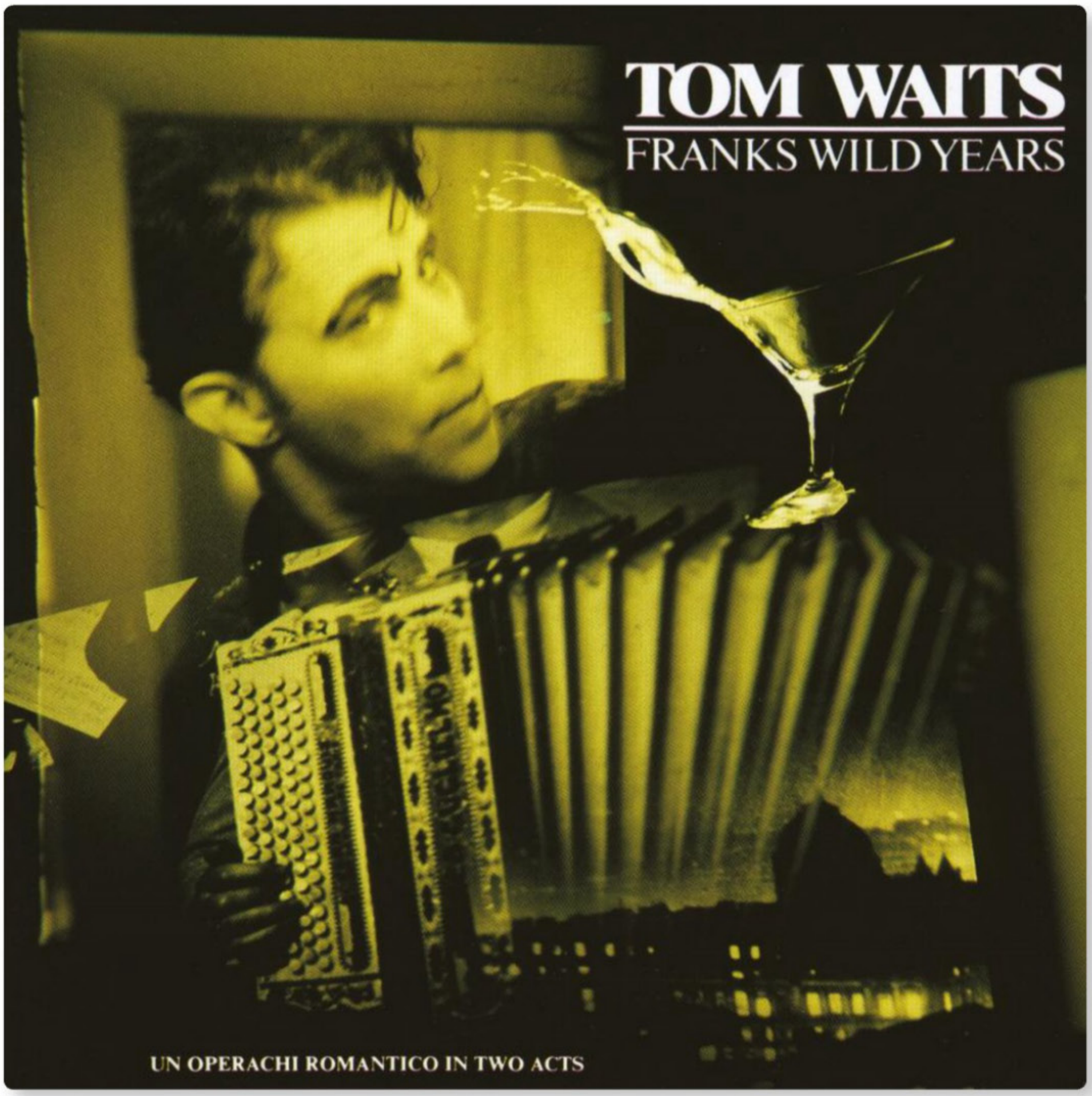
The reasons for it getting a little lost in the shuffle are easy to unpick. *Swordfishtrombones* was such a strikingly radical break with the past – the equivalent of Waits setting the old house on fire and laughing while he watched it burn – and *Rain Dogs* such a magnificent consolidation and expansion of the "New Waits" aesthetic. By contrast, at first glance, *Franks Wild Years* can be mistaken as an afterthought. There's a curious blur around the edges, the suspicion that it's more part of something else than a thing all its own. For starters, it's named after a song that first appeared four years earlier on *Swordfish...* (but seems to have lost its apostrophe somewhere along the way). For seconds, it's the soundtrack to a short-lived stage play of the same title; these songs were written to glue together a larger narrative few ever got to see, a lost story that hangs around the record like a ghost. (Although four of the LP's most affecting tracks, "Way Down In The Hole", "Cold Cold Ground", "I'll Be Gone" and the demented "Telephone Call From Istanbul", were never part of the play.) And for thirds, it runs into *Big Time*, the brilliant concert film of the *Franks Wild Years* tour, which draws 50 per cent of its songs from this LP. (The film has gone missing itself now, unavailable on DVD.)

To make it all the knottier, Frank's story also owes something to another lost story dating from even earlier, a script Waits started in 1978, for a projected movie about a guy "who's a success at being a failure", called *Why Is The Dream Always So Much Sweeter Than The Taste?* The film was never made, but the idea stubbornly hung around – for a while, it turned into an aborted opera, *Used Carlotta*, a fragment of which then became a scene in Coppola's *One From The Heart*, in which Frederic Forrest conducts an opera of salvaged cars, while Nastassja Kinski walks high wire.

Working on it while simultaneously making *Rain Dogs*, Waits and his wife, Kathleen Brennan, finally completed the *Franks Wild Years* script in 1985. Following tense rehearsals with Chicago's Steppenwolf theatre group, it opened in the city in June 1986, directed by future *CSI:NY* man Gary Sinise, after original director Terry Kinney quit, having clashed with Waits. Roping in his touring band to play the music, Waits starred as Frank for a three-month run. It attracted equivocal reviews, and plans to take it to New York were shelved.

After the play closed, Waits and the band stayed on in Chicago for a fortnight to work the songs over and record the bulk of an album; a document of the play, but also a statement in itself. In the studio, Waits concentrated on keeping edges ragged, ordering musicians to swap instruments, or play them in unaccustomed ways. Meanwhile, the instrumentation, led by pump organ, Optigan and vocals hollered through a bullhorn, grew ever more archaic. Waits had been employing instruments that sounded as if they'd come from a pawn shop for a while, but here the band sound as if they're using stuff dug up from the ground.

Who is this Frank, who squatted, mutating, in Waits' mind for the best part of a decade? Is it the same Frank who burnt down his house and drove out of *Swordfish...*, headed north on the Hollywood freeway? Yes and no is the inevitable answer. Fantastic opener "Hang On St Christopher" – "mutant James Brown" is how Waits described the groove, using organ pedals for the filthy bassline – finds him still out there, hellishly on the road, white-knuckled. But this Frank is a deluded dude: an accordion player who thought he had ideas that were too big for his



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The Waits of this 'trilogy' is something very different, something like the keeper of a travelling museum of antiques and pawnshop curios and peculiar snatches of music from bars and carnivals and silent movies from the last hundred years... It's hard to see how he could get much further off the beaten path than he's done here."
BARNEY HOSKYNS, NME, 29/8/87

"It's here that Waits gets to the dichotomy of his own motivations: does the luscious twist of language actually MEAN anything when you're parading this grandly grubby self-mythology?" PAUL MATHUR, MM, 29/8/87

small town, then found out he was too small for the big time. To quote Waits, in his programme notes for the play: "Quite a guy. Grew up in a Birds Eye frozen, oven-ready, rural American town where Bing, Bob, Dean, Wayne & Jerry are considered major constellations. Frank, mistakenly, thinks he can stuff himself into their shorts and present himself to an adoring world..."

The title for the unfinished movie script that started it all summarises the album's theme: *Why Is The Dream Always So Much Sweeter Than The Taste?* Dreams resonate throughout, the dreams of making it big that take Frank away from home in the first place (the hilarious, terrifying "I'll Take New York", an extreme poison pastiche of every soused karaoke legend who ever treated a barroom to "New York, New York"), and then, when bitter reality hits, the dreams of the home he left behind, epitomised by "Innocent When You Dream", a ballad in the lost early pop tradition of Irish tenor John McCormack.

Waits described *Franks Wild Years*, more than once, as "a cross between *Eraserhead* and *It's A Wonderful Life*". The David Lynch film seems to have been particularly on his mind. He shot TV ads for the LP – flickering black-and-white nightmares, with Waits as a ventriloquist working a living female dummy with a fake leg – in the same mode of American grotesque. Considered alongside the original *Swordfish*... track, the LP itself recalls *Eraserhead*'s 'lady in the radiator' sequence: it's as if Waits, in a midnight fever, had stared long and hard at "Frank's Wild Years", until he suddenly saw this whole other little weird world opening up behind the song.

Franks Wild Years stands in a similar relation to *Swordfish*... and *Rain Dogs*. Rather than widening, or moving out from that territory, Waits digs and crawls further and further into it here. Everything becomes more extreme, dirtier, louder, more desperate, more claustrophobic. The influences – Beniamino Gigli operas, Morricone soundtracks, mariachi bands, Ken Nordine-style word jazz, Bukowski reading Carver or vice versa, gospel ranters, cloying barroom balladeers, Vegas also-rans, garage rhumba, steam machines – slide and collide. It's like half-caught stations, slipping past on the badly tuned radio of a car barrelling along a blind lost highway at night. Frank goes straight to nowhere, but it's a hell of a ride. ♦

TRACKLISTING FRANKS WILD YEARS

1. Hang On St Christopher ★★★★★
2. Straight To The Top (Rhumba) ★★★
3. Blow Wind Blow ★★★★
4. Temptation ★★★★
5. Innocent When You Dream (Barroom) ★★★★★
6. I'll Be Gone ★★★★
7. Yesterday Is Here ★★★★★
8. Please Wake Me Up ★★★★
9. Franks Theme ★★★
10. More Than Rain ★★★
11. Way Down In The Hole ★★★★★
12. Straight To The Top (Vegas) ★★★
13. I'll Take New York ★★★★
14. Telephone Call From Istanbul ★★★★★
15. Cold Cold Ground ★★★★★
16. Train Song ★★★★★
17. Innocent When You Dream (78) ★★★★

Released: August, 1987
Label: Island
Recorded at: Sunset Sound, Los Angeles; Universal Recording Corp., Chicago
Produced by: Tom Waits
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, pump organ, Optigan, conga, guitar, rooster, tambourine, Mellotron, Farfisa, drums), Greg Cohen (bass, alto horn, Leslie bass pedals), Ralph Carney (saxophones, violin), Marc Ribot (guitar, banjo), William Schimmel (Leslie bass pedals, pump organ, piano, accordion), Michael Blair (drums, percussion, conga, glockenspiel, maracas, marimba, orquestra bells), Larry Taylor (upright bass, bass), Francis Thumm (pump organ, prepared piano), Morris Tepper (guitar), Jay Anderson (bass), David Hidalgo (accordion)
Highest chart position: UK 20; US 115

"Music for the electric chair..."

"MUSIC FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE... IT'S KINDA LIKE TABASCO. YOU CAN USE IT ON FISH, FOWL OR POULTRY." TOM WAITS ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN WHAT HE DOES TO AN ENTRANCED SEAN O'HAGAN, AT A KNOCKDOWN RATE OF $29.95. WHAT'S MORE DESIRABLE – A BAND THAT'S A LITTLE MORE ZSA ZSA GABOR, OR A LITTLE MORE KARL MALDEN?

TAKEN FROM NME 14/11/1987

SOMETIMES YOU CAN get a pretty good idea about someone's music just by checking out their appearance. If clothes maketh the man, they also speak volumes about his songs. Look at Shane MacGowan. Or Paul Weller. Look at John Lydon or Miles Davis. Now, look at Tom Waits...

Tom Waits is thin. Thinner even than his photographs. Stick insect thin, stuck inside a bumfreezer jacket and matching drainpipes. Hair greased back at one end, worn out winklepickers at the other. Angular, exaggerated, out of step with things. All he needs is a preacher's hat to match the black necktie and he's Hazel Motes incarnate, straight out of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*.

He's got the fidgety, nervous, rather be-some-place-else feel off pat as well. The wisp of a beard's gone, accentuating the long, lived in face and greased back pile of hair. He looks hungover, pallid white, chewing on the icecubes that lace a large soda water on the rocks.

We're in *Nighthawks* territory – a dark and faded East LA diner which doubles as Waits' "office". A solitary Filipino barman proffers the San Miguels, the TV broadcasts the ballgames and the ghosts of an older, more beat-soaked singer filter through the shadows.

The Traveller's Cafe has a 'For Sale' sign out front. Tom Waits is in the midst of moving house, lock, stock and barrel organ. It feels like I've wandered into one of his songs. A place where memories lay in wait behind each faded poster, where every beer stain tells a tale. Where Frank may have sipped a Southern Comfort and began his wild years.

When the words drop out, they're low and laboured, sandpaper slow, dragged up from the gravel throat that sings like no other. Somehow, Tom Waits has colonised his own exaggerated space in today's scheme of things, a space where everything fits – that voice, that attitude, this whole sense of otherness.

"I HAD GOVERNORS ON A LOTTA THINGS IN MY HEAD... HAD TO SHAKE 'EM OFF, BE A BIT MORE HONEST WITH MYSELF"
TOM WAITS

By default or design – probably a helping of both – Tom Waits is a refugee from a time when eccentricity was the storyteller's prerequisite. Part play actor, part genuine boho, Waits has a few stories to tell. American stories, shot through, since the watershed that was *Swordfishtrombones*, with a peculiarly formulated, utterly distinctive world view.

Like his appearance, Waits' songs are jerky, angular, exaggerated and compelling. Surreal music for surreal times, echoing the bohemian ambience of Brecht/Weill or the late-night resonance of an Edward Hopper painting rather than any antecedents in rock'n'roll.

Post -*Swordfishtrombones*, we have a different Tom Waits, a singer who has reinvented himself, broadened his scope and opened his eyes and ears to a whole new world of received and reconstructed music. *Rain Dogs* and the recent "romantic opera", *Franks Wild Years*, complete a period of transition and clear the way for another step sideways. It's a good time to reflect.

"I like to think I got more angry with *Swordfish*... More fractured. I sorta reached an impasse, y'know. Lookin' back, I can see I had governors on a lotta the things in my head. Had to shake 'em off. Uh, be a little more honest with myself. I sorta provided a commentary on things in my old songs, now I kinda escape into the song more. More extreme, I guess."

If the two previous albums freed the

LAWRENCE WATSON

Waits in '87: "a sense of otherness"

demons in Tom Waits' creative soul, *Franks Wild Years* conjured up a few more. With what sounds like a troupe of inebriated multi-instrumentalists for company, Waits crosses all the known borders of musical and theatrical taste. The album grew out of a stage play he co-wrote with his wife, Kathleen Brennan, and was performed by Steppenwolf Theatre of Chicago. Waits describes it as "a positive experience. They're like a garage band. Three-chord theatre. Turn it up loud and see what happens". On record, *Franks Wild Years* veers from the sublime to the ridiculous as it loosely chronicles the shadowy protagonist's journey from rags to riches and back to rags.

"It's a scary business. Like creating a Frankenstein monster. You gotta make sure you don't kill the music even as you're creatin' it. That's the hard thing – pullin' out the feathers without killin' the chicken."

Originally *Franks Wild Years* was just a lowlife fragment of a song, tucked away on *Swordfishtrombones*. Why'd he choose this particular tale of ordinary madness to expand on...? "The story. It was a place to begin. It just lent itself to elaboration. I opened it up, screwed the head off it. Spontaneously. From the pressures of modern life. Heh heh."

Biographical?

"Well, I don't own a dog. I like dogs but I don't own one. Never burned down a house either. Least, not intentionally."

SOMETIMES YOU JUST have to wonder about Tom Waits. About Tom Waits' songs. They come at you out of left field, raggedly ramshackle things pumped out on makeshift orchestration and that parched alcoholic voice. some Tom Waits songs are wheezy; broken down things in bad need of a shave. Others are consummately detailed fragments from a life out of step.

Think of the physicality of "Underground" or "Temptation", the carnival lope of "In The Neighborhood", the Spartan, far away sound of despair on "Yesterday Is Here". I tell him Shane and Spider from The Pogues reckon "Johnsburg, Illinois" – a romantic fragment written for his wife – is one of their favourite songs of all time.

"Heh, that's real good, y'know. When someone else sings your song that means it's got a life. See, a song can belong to you but that don't mean it's yours. I make 'em out of wood and I ain't too sure where they float off to."

Describe Tom Waits' music. "Uh, music for the electric chair. Music for the criminally insane. Harmless music. I dunno, it's kinda like Tabasco. You can use it on fish, fowl or poultry. See, I really only listen to 'em to see if they're ready, then I send them off runnin' out into the street. Like chickens. Some come back and stay with you, some disappear. It's kinda like a shipwreck with all these things floatin' on the water."

OK. Then, what is the point of Tom Waits' music? "Boy. I dunno. You should ask yourself. See, I ain't usually around when people are listenin' to my stuff. I don't get to hang around listenin' to the listener listenin'. Uh, I really dunno how they fit into all of this. See, over here, we mark time with songs. That's really all we do in this culture. Other places, music's got a more direct relationship to the culture – wedding songs, funeral songs. I guess Ireland still has some of that left. More spontaneous too, people join in, update the words, sing along.

"I don't think my music is that social. It sure ain't part of the advertisin' industry either. Some guys in this town write songs to fit a bottle of beer or a tennis shoe. Jingles. Singin' adverts. I ain't part of that too much."

For Tom Waits the idea of only listening to popular music is akin to "a starvation diet". A roll call of current interests takes everything from "bush recordings to *Nightmare On Elm Street 3* – you seen that? Man, it's a conundrum. They're tamperin' with something there, something old as the devil."

The Pogues, Henry Rollins, Alan Lomax, Fats Waller, Agustín Lara, Peter Tosh and Irish tenor John McCormack, all cop a mention from a crumpled sheet of notes extracted from an inside pocket. Nico's "Camera Obscura" too – must be the harmonium. The common thread is...

"...Stuff that sounds unfinished. Then you can get in there. If it's too beautiful, too produced, I back off a little, start gettin' intimidated. You heard The Replacements? They seem broken, y'know? One leg is missin'. I like that. Songs scrawled on the wall with a nail – The Pogues, Henry Rollins – local kid. He's bush. Primitive.

"You done any of these rappers? Hell, Ice T – that looks like one bad dude. Jail poems. I listen to all that rap stuff. Can't escape it. This neighbourhood you got stereos in the cars and they're more expensive than the car itself. Walls in the house going CHUNGA! CHUNGA! CHUNGA! From a stereo five miles away.

"I like that kind of vitality. It's an important musical force and it ain't been stolen yet. You can't just step into it and try it on like a hat or a cape. You can't put it on like a disguise. I like music that feels like it's growin' somewhere..."

"AIN'T NO RULES FOR SONGS. POLICE DON'T TELL YOU HOW TO WRITE 'EM OR SING 'EM..."
TOM WAITS

Ever thought of doing an album of cover versions? Could be an interesting experiment. "Yep. Maybe... found songs. Some day, I might just do that. I got some lined up. 'Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me' an old hymn. I like that, Jesus songs. Always liked that song offa 'Exile On Main St' – 'I Just Wanne See His Face' . Uh huh. Here we go! *'Don' wanna walk and talk with my Jesus/Jus' wanna see his face.'* Yessir. *'And every time we say goodbye, I cry a little'* – hell of a song."

One recent aspect of Tom Waits' own music is its ever increasing theatricality. With a stage show and a bevy of celluloid appearances – *Rumble Fish*, *Down By Law* and *Ironweed* – behind him, the lure of the greasepaint has filtered into his live shows. The tour that hits England and Ireland next week should be something to see. "We got a sort of revue. MC and all. So as when things go wrong it's 'cos you wanted 'em to. Like a Filipino floorshow. See, live is a place where there are always too many elements cutting on the back of a pickup truck."

A tightrope walk? "Sorta. Yea, you kinda get a certain kick watchin' it to see if the guy's gonna fall off. Y'know, we all slow down for the wreck on the highway or stare at the guy throwin' up on his shoes. Kinda thankful it ain't us. Tightrope all right."

You don't play the bar circuit anymore. "Nah, I don't miss it either. Man, it's like performing in a steel mill."

You did Ronnie Scott's when you first came to London... "Oh boy. You remember that. That was a tightrope. The rope was round my neck. Nightmares. Playing a lounge in the middle of a golf course with this nomadic audience all waiting for a Moroccan jazz combo. That was a rough gig. Two weeks! Man, I had to dry out after that one. That was like spending two weeks at somebody else's grandmother's house. It was miscasting. I was miscast."

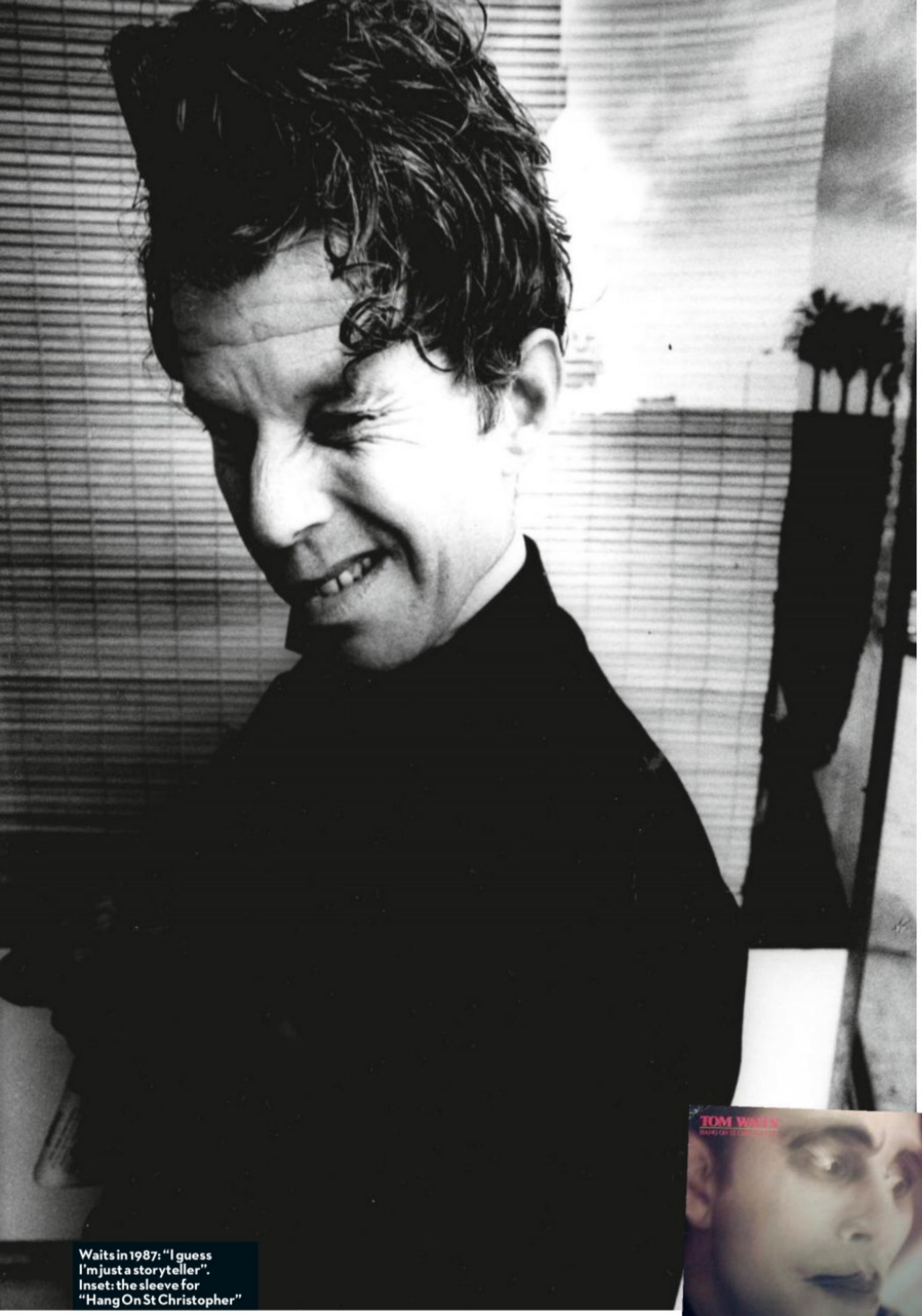
The worst gig you ever played? "Opening for The Mothers Of Invention. I wake up in the night sweatin', 'bout that one. Hordes of long hairs approaching the stage. I didn't really translate to baseball arenas and rodeos. I did it for the money. Initiation. Throw him to the lions. Frank was a nice guy though. Ronnie Scott, too."

It seems *Franks Wild Years* is the end of something... of a journey that began with *Swordfishtrombones*, reached a halfway house on *Rain Dogs* and ended up off Broadway with a stageshow and soundtrack. There's only one place Waits can go now... further out on a limb.

Curled up in the corner of a booth, creased up and crumpled, he reflects on the process wherein he

Waits with Jack Nicholson in Depression drama *Ironweed*, 1987

EYEVINE; LAWRENCE WATSON



Waits in 1987: "I guess I'm just a storyteller". Inset: the sleeve for "Hang On St Christopher"

"started looking out over the fence a bit more". In came the fragments from other musics, the broadening out, the tightrope walk into the middle distance. Out went the boozy beatnik of yore, the drunken piano and sprawling narratives from the heart of Saturday night. Listening to *Small Change* or *Nighthawks At The Diner* now is like looking back on another man's work. A place where the bottle seemed to be the main catalyst.

"Uh, I dunno. Strangely enough, I think the music was more, uh, underwater then."

Are you still a drinker? "Am I still a drunk? Heh heh. I have a little sherry before retiring, sure. It helps me sleep. Got nothin' against a little sherry or port. When I'm writing I'm usually pretty clean. I don't think it's alcohol that makes the music come out. It's hard to tell. Sometimes alcohol massages the beast, sometimes it doesn't. I kinda subscribe to my own particular madness rather than soak it."

Waits' particular madness manifests itself in a music that pays scant regard to the vagaries of pop. When you hear a song like "Straight To The Top" – an out-of-kilter, blind-drunk ode to Ol' Blue Eyes – or "Innocent When You Dream" – John McCormack at the end of his tether – you enter a world where the rules of the game are made up on a wing and a prayer. All his musicians seem totally in tune with Waits' particular methodology. How the hell does he convey his ideas? "Well, making music is like everything else, it subscribes to the same laws of the universe. What happens is you sorta evolve a language. I got my own shorthand. I'll line the guys up and tell 'em I need a little more Zsa Zsa Gabor, little less Karl Malden. More table and chairs. That sorta thing. Think of a dwarf in a fish tank, boys. That usually works. I'm usually a little more crude, though. Think about your grandparents, boys. Think about 25 chickens on fire running across a barren landscape at night and you're a fireman with a hose and you gotta douse the chickens before they turn into a burnt meal. You don't always get there. Sometimes, you gotta blindfold the musicians."

You always manage to sound exotic and on the verge of collapse. "Oh yeh? Maybe... maybe... gotta think 'bout that one. See I used to hang out in a lotta stripclubs and you'd hear a band who'd be playin' behind a curtain, maybe all you'd see would be the drummer's left leg. They'd tend to play their own Latin versions of American show tunes or you'd have a cocktail band coverin' a salsa number. Maybe a chamber orchestra attempting a rhumba... I'm onta something here.

"That's the sort of thing that can work wonders, y'know. They always give the music an added kick all their own. They might bet it all wrong but something else is created along the way. The song survives if it's got a life. That's when you know a song's got stamina, when somebody can pick it up and renew it. The Pogues do it with old songs – they put their own polka dots all over a striped tie, part their hair on the wrong side. Ain't no rules for songs. Police don't tell you how to write 'em or sing 'em."

The barman comes and tells him his wife's on the line. Time's up. Before he departs he offers us a glimpse into his pocket book ideas for the next LP. "Gonna blow my nose at the world on the next one... I get angry 'bout some of the things I see in the world but I never say anything about it. I think next time I will. Gonna call the album 'The World I Hate To Live In'. How 'bout that? Or maybe 'Pitch Black', heh heh. Maybe 'For Cryin' Out Loud'. I like that one. Gonna be a whole new thing – Swiss bells, drum machine, electric stick. The best that money can buy..."

Last words, Tom? "Uh, I guess I'm just a storyteller. I tell stories for money.... That'll be $29.95, please..." ♦

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

BONE MACHINE

Raw dread proliferates, as Tom Waits descends to hell – via a cement-floored basement in Sonoma County. By GRAEME THOMSON

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1992

IF *SWORDFISHTROMBONES* ANNOUNCED a bold new aesthetic that served Waits admirably throughout the '80s, *Bone Machine*, his first LP of the '90s following a lengthy hiatus, sounds suspiciously like the beginning of another new chapter. In the five years since *Franks Wild Years*, Waits had toured, acted, given up booze, become embroiled in a lawsuit with Levi's, collaborated with Robert Wilson and William Burroughs on the theatrical production of *The Black Rider*, and written and recorded the largely instrumental soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch's *Night On Earth*.

Little wonder, then, that his return to the fray with *Bone Machine* bears all the hallmarks of a clean slate. As the title implies, mostly this is music stripped back to its leanest components. Eschewing the comforts of a traditional recording environment, Waits opted to work in a storeroom in the basement of Prairie Sun Studios, near his home in Sonoma County. "It's just a cement floor and a hot-water heater," he recalled. "It's got some good echo." There was no padding or proofing. *Bone Machine* is the sound of a man literally bouncing off the walls.

This is a record built on the most rudimentary rhythm imaginable – one of the primary percussive instruments is "sticks" – while the rich instrumental palette of the past is pared back to the extent that Waits' piano features on only two songs. There are no tangos, rhumbas or tarantella. Stripped of the carnival colour of much of his '80s work, *Bone Machine* marks a move away from Weillian European influences back to the dusty roots of US blues and folk, even if they are bashed and defiled into abstraction.

Lyrically, too, it's stark stuff, both haunted and animated by the knowledge that death and decay lurk everywhere. There's a funereal thrill in the way Waits casts up a series of nightmares, alternately roaring in their face or wailing at their feet. Opener "Earth Died Screaming" fades in like a chain-gang chant from the bowels of hell, marching to the molten core where the "*devil shovels coal*". His voice on the chorus is truly bloodcurdling, as is his shrieking falsetto on the next track, "Dirt In The Ground", which ponders the same sombre subject matter at a slower pace and with a more sorrowful gait.

IT'S THE SOUND OF A MAN LITERALLY BOUNCING OFF THE WALLS

And on it goes. "All Stripped Down" and "Jesus Gonna Be Here" stand sentinel over Judgement Day. On the former – on which Waits sounds like a crazed wasp trapped in a bell jar – sinners pitch up at the gate devoid of all their meaningless worldly accoutrements, "*no big mink coat/No diamond ring*". The latter is a dirt-bare gospel-blues with a country twang, Waits lisping like a demented preacher about getting himself "*unfurled from this mortal-coiled-up world*". Even when the textures drift into experimental waters, the same grim preoccupations remain. "The Ocean Doesn't Want Me" is a dislocated spoken-word contemplation of a suicide delayed, if only for 24 hours.

Kathleen Brennan is now firmly implemented as a co-writer on eight of the 16 tracks, and it's tempting to see one of her roles as weeding out Waits' more carnivalesque flourishes. Fittingly, the rangy cast of characters of old are largely absent on *Bone Machine*, although not entirely. "A Little Rain", an unbearably wistful ballad that harks back to the glorious melancholy of "Time", features a

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"He's dancin' what he's previously labelled the obituary mambo... It's scary, mournful, morbid and easily one of Tom's best."
TERRY STAUNTON, NME, 5/12/92

"Okay, so it's the mythology of The Real, but Waits doesn't prettify, he just simplifies, as the best storytellers must, and he makes hurting flesh and blood of all those faded characters like no-one else. Beside him, Nick Cave's dramas seem like stylised fumblings."
SHARON O'CONNELL, MM, 12/9/92

German dwarf and a man with missing fingers. However, these are mere walk-ons in yet another song of loss that ends with a teenage girl climbing into a van with a vagabond and vanishing, a tragic twist inspired by the abduction and murder of a 15-year-old near Waits' home. "Whistle Down The Wind" is the LP's other tear-streaked ballad, and another elegy, this time for folk musician Tom Jans, who died of a drugs overdose in 1984. Its fragile poignancy is heightened by a simple fiddle solo from Los Lobos' David Hidalgo.

The creeping backyard blues of "Murder In The Red Barn" also has its roots in fact, taking its title from the 1820s broadside ballad "The Murder Of Maria Marten", which recounts a woman's death at the hands of her wealthy lover; Marten was discovered in a shallow grave in the red barn of a farm in Polstead, Suffolk. Waits doesn't stick to this story, but clearly knows it. Halfway through, he delivers the most striking line on an LP obsessed with how death marks the living: *"For some murder is the only door through which they enter life"*. The same atmosphere of dread hangs over "Black Wings". Borrowing the menace of latterday Leonard Cohen and the mood of Dylan's "Man In The Long Black Coat", Waits conjures up a sinister spirit, drifting through the land to the accompaniment of some lost Morricone theme, dispensing a very biblical kind of vengeance. Even on the rolling "Who Are You", the one song that seems to live in the real world and to possess the imprimatur of autobiography, Waits sounds dark and defeated, his catalogue of put-downs bearing comparison with Dylan at his most beautifully embittered.

Among these shadows there are chinks of light relief. "Goin' Out West" is a boisterous comic vignette starring a deluded would-be star – "*I know karate/Voodoo too*" – propelled towards Hollywood obscurity by a mutant Duane Eddy riff. "I Don't Wanna Grow Up", later covered by the Ramones, is wonderful, rattling folk-punk, and a welcome reminder of Waits' ability to convey a child's-eye view of the world, while "Such A Scream" is more concerned with *le petit mort* than death itself, the singer hissing with lust over a deeply eccentric rhythm track.

The LP ends on a tentatively upbeat note with "That Feel", which features Waits and his co-writer Keith Richards as two alley cats, out by the dustbins, mewling at the moon, musing on the mysterious nature of inspiration. With *Bone Machine*, Waits proved it could be found in the very darkest of corners. ♦

TRACKLISTING — BONE MACHINE

1. Earth Died Screaming ★★★★
2. Dirt In The Ground ★★★★
3. Such A Scream ★★★
4. All Stripped Down ★★★
5. Who Are You ★★★★★
6. The Ocean Doesn't Want Me ★★★
7. Jesus Gonna Be Here ★★★★
8. A Little Rain ★★★★★
9. In The Colosseum ★★★
10. Goin' Out West ★★★
11. Murder In The Red Barn ★★★★
12. Black Wings ★★★★
13. Whistle Down The Wind ★★★★
14. I Don't Wanna Grow Up ★★★★
15. Let Me Get Up On It ★★
16. That Feel ★★★

Released: September, 1992
Label: Island
Recorded at: Prairie Sun Recording, California
Produced by: Tom Waits, Kathleen Brennan
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, Chamberlin, percussion, guitar, sticks, piano, upright bass, conundrum, drums), Brain (drums), Larry Taylor (upright bass, guitar), Les Claypool (electric bass), Joe Gore (guitar), Ralph Carney (sax, clarinet), David Hidalgo (violin, accordion), Joe Marquez (sticks, banjo), David Phillips (pedal steel), Keith Richards (guitar, vocal), Waddy Wachtel (guitar), Kathleen Brennan (sticks)
Highest chart position: UK N/A; US 176

"Oh Jesus, I should have been a butcher."

THE FIENDISH INVENTOR OF THE BONE MACHINE TAKES TIME OUT OF HIS PARISIAN HOLIDAY FOR A LITTLE LIGHT FIBBING. "THE TRUTH OF THINGS IS NOT SOMETHING I PARTICULARLY LIKE," HE TELLS A NOT-ENTIRELY-CREDULOUS PETE SILVERTON. BUT WHO, ALLEGEDLY, WANTS TO DIG UP ELVIS AND MAKE A NECKLACE OUT OF HIS TEETH?

TO CONVERSE WITH Tom Waits is to be lied to, consistently, determinedly, entertainingly. *"I'll tell you all my secrets but I'll lie about my past,"* he once sang. Take that livid comma of a scar in the middle of his forehead.

"Gee," he says, a word with an innocence on the page that it doesn't have on his lips. He doesn't know how he got that scar. He can't remember. He pauses, gives his eyes time to roam and his body to twist and untwist itself as he thinks. And then he can remember. A bullet went right in there. The scar marked the entry point and the bullet continued its journey through the Waits cranium until it emerged in the outside world from the back of his skull. "And I never felt better in my life," he growls into his morning coffee.

Or take the tale of his first meeting with Joe Strummer, when Waits played Ronnie Scott's in 1976. The unknown Clash guitarist met Waits and turned up at the club to claim his promised free entry. Waits came to the door in a long dark coat, stared hard and blank at Strummer, then reached into his coat and pulled a full pint of freshly poured Guinness from an inner pocket. He drank it right off and told the doorman to let Strummer in.

It's a tale that evokes no memories with the modern Waits, but he loves it, he warms to it. "Gee, it's a great story. Yeah, the truth of things is not something I particularly like. I go more for a good story than what really happened. That's just the way I am. I'm a big liar."

"I GO MORE FOR A GOOD STORY THAN WHAT REALLY HAPPENED... THAT'S JUST THE WAY I AM. I'M A BIG LIAR"
TOM WAITS

What doesn't he lie about?

"Er, er." Waits pauses, searching for inspiration in the pattern of the table cloth, or perhaps just hoping I'll shut up, go away and leave him to enjoy the rest of the day with his wife and children. "Whatever I tell you right now would probably be a lie."

Tom Waits has a new album and Tom Waits has to do some interviews, so Tom Waits is sitting on a warm, early summer day, at a table in a Paris street café. He is staying at a quiet, reserved and expensive hotel across the way. For him it was an early breakfast. For the rest of the Place des Vosges it was a regular Saturday lunchtime. Like the good American he is, Waits has a Coca-Cola and a large white coffee in front of him, and makes no attempt to speak French.

"Not a man's town, Paris, not a man's town," he chants now and again. As ever, he is scrunched in his chair, constantly twisting, turning and scratching in that way of his. His black motorcycle boots shuffle their way around underneath the table. And the grey tuft of facial hair, all that currently remains of the variety of whiskers Waits has experimented with over

DEREK RIDGERS

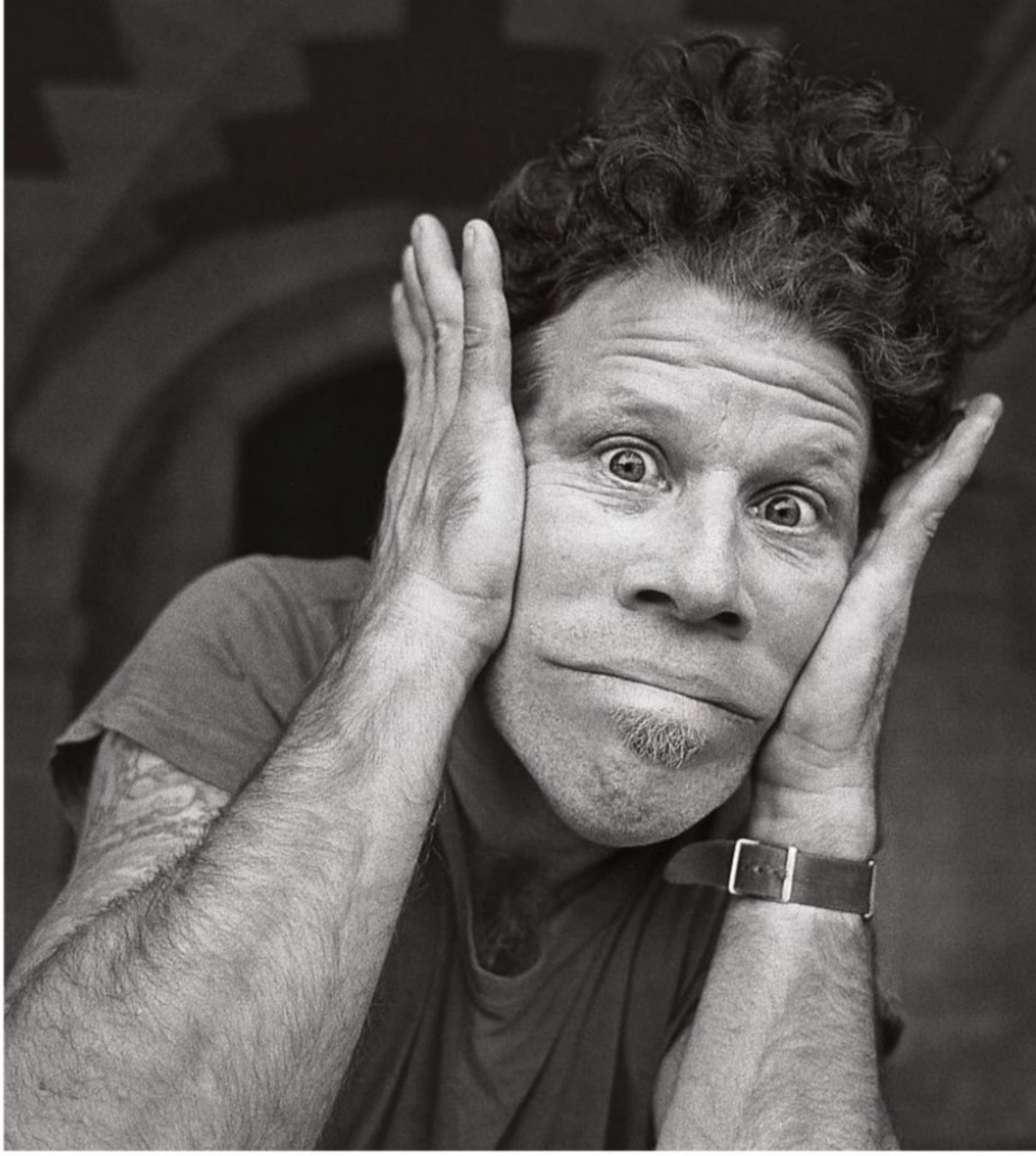
Waits in Paris, 1992: "Not a man's town..."

the years, stays pretty much where it always does, immediately below his lower lip.

It's a somewhat unlikely setting for a man whose reviews, inevitably, are shot through with clichés about cheap booze and nicotine stains, Edward Hopper paintings and Jack Kerouac novels. Here he is, in one of the most distinctive remnants of pre-revolutionary Paris, a short walk from the Bastille, where a glass-walled opera house dominates the scene much as the prison once did.

If the real Waits matched the clichés that surround him, he would have felt more at home in the area when its principal features were the prison and its most renowned inhabitant, the Marquis de Sade. Mention would have to be made of the time Waits announced his address as the fictitious junction of Bedlam and Squalor, or perhaps his longterm (real) residence in Los Angeles' Tropicana motel, with its fine collection of antique junkies and splendid black swimming pool.

Alternatively, and equally likely, Waits could even be looking forward to a Sunday in the Place des Vosges, watching the French royalists turn up for their weekly parade in their neat blue suits, and their small children in neat blue corduroy shorts. Always corduroy – it's a royalist word, from corde du roy (king's cords).



DON'T LET ANYONE tell you otherwise. Whatever his idiosyncrasies, and they are legion, Waits just isn't that kind of cliché. Even when he seemed most wrapped in obliqueness, Rickie Lee Jones, his girlfriend at the time, begged to differ. She believed what Tom really wanted was to live in a bungalow with screaming kids and spend Saturday nights at the movies. Which is, give or take a scream or two, more or less what he's got.

He's now a man of 42, with a wife of nearly 12 years who was once a script editor and with whom he now writes his lyrics. The former Kathleen Brennan has straight, fair hair and pale skin. She was once an Illinois farm girl who was familiar with the sight of dead cats hanging from doorways, and now she lives with Tom Waits in a small California town. And, no, she won't talk, although she will gossip and sip her tea.

But Tom'll talk about his wife's help with songwriting. Difficult working with your wife, is it? "Sure, we beat each other up over stuff, but when you got kids and you live together, you do everything together. So why not, you know, write together?"

What does she bring to lyrics that wasn't there before? "A whip and a chair. The Bible. Book Of Revelations. She grew up Catholic, you know, blood and liquor and guilt. She pulverises me so that I don't just write the same song over and over again. Which is what a lot of people do, including myself."

And he's now a man with two small children, although... well, true or false, let him tell the story. "I was in Memphis about three weeks ago, for a wedding. While I was there I went to Graceland. It's like a sideshow. It's like the ultimate sideshow on a carnival. Paying to go in and look at a room where people used to drink and get loaded. I would have rather seen his pickled head in a jar. Then I would have felt like I got what I paid for. We walked by the grave. My little boy said: 'I wish they'd dig him up and take all his teeth out so I can make a necklace.' I don't think anybody had thought of that yet. Elvis' teeth necklace."

And he is also now a man who's had an international hit record, thanks to Rod Stewart and his convincingly melodramatic version of 'Downtown Train'.

Waits is on a two-week trip to Europe, in part on holiday, in part to see a Seville production of *The Black Rider*, the opera he has worked on with Robert Wilson and William Burroughs. He calls it a "contraption", using his favourite word of the moment. He usually has a favourite word of the moment which he likes to sprinkle in a fair number of suitable sentences.

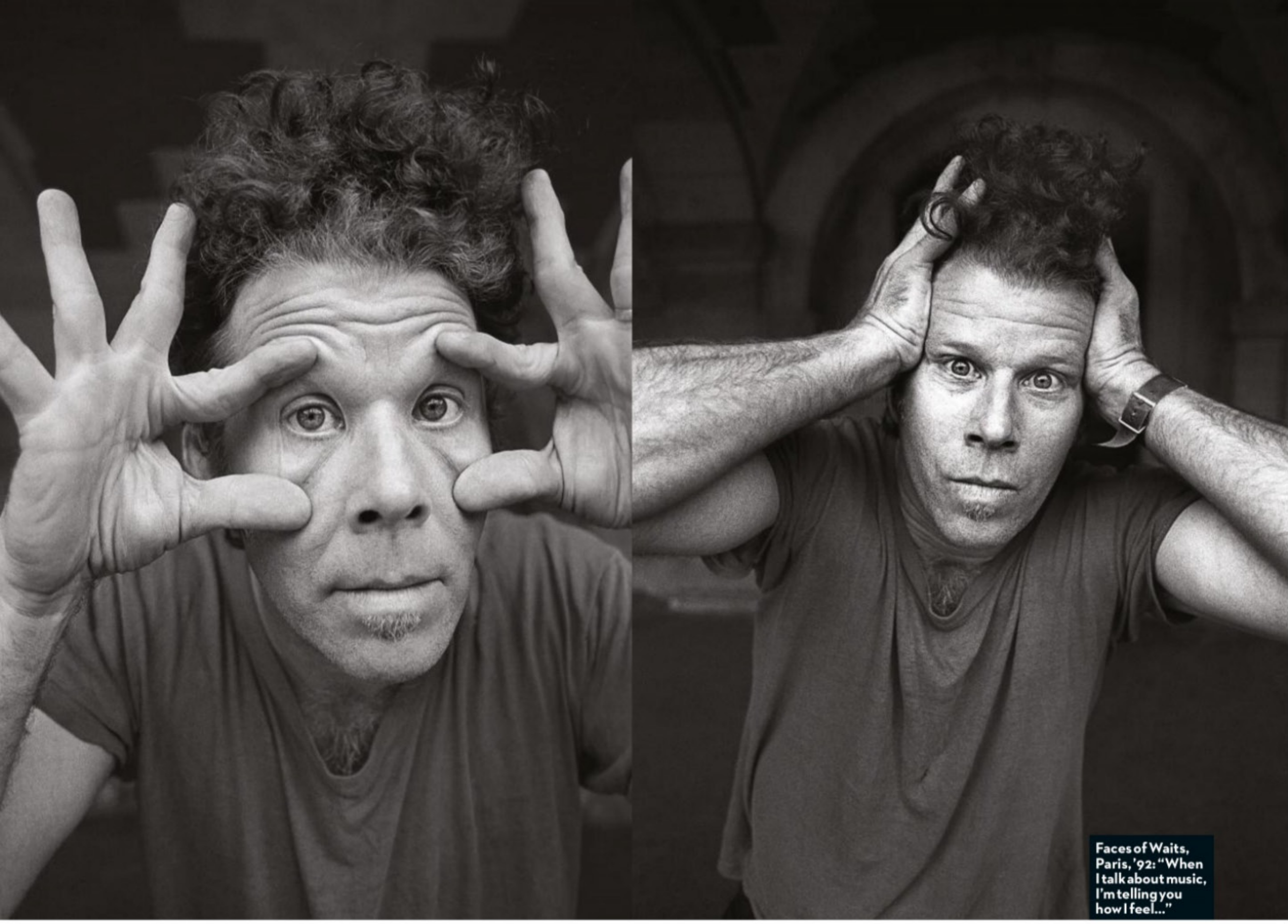
Then came promoting the record. "No, not this," he thinks out loud. "Oh Jesus, I should have been a butcher." He doesn't crave attention, affection and encouragement as much as he used to – though you should doubt that kind of statement when it comes from the mouth of a professional performer. He says it anyway, pointing out his own contradictions as he goes along. "At times it feels like a rain dance. But I don't like it when it rains anyway. So here I am trying to get it to rain." It's a long time since it rained. *Bone Machine*, titled as a reference of sorts to the human body, is Waits' first album for four years, and his first album of new songs for five.

"Never thought about it before. I don't know how long it's been. It takes a while to get started. I collect ideas and I usually got them on me somewhere. It's just a matter of getting them all in one place. The songs came kind of fast. If you think you've got one in you, you take a fly at it. I think recording can sometimes be a violent operation. Recording studios sometimes can be like a slaughterhouse, where you have some ideas you want to try and wrestle with. Many times you end up with a lot of feathers. A dead bird and a mouthful of feathers. It's not easy for me. Music is like a living thing. You don't wanna murder it."

He really does say "wanna".

"You don't wanna splatter it all over the walls. You wanna go into certain worlds; you wanna go into a teardrop or go through a hole in the crack in the plaster. You wanna go someplace you've never been before and sometimes those journeys are successful and sometimes you're left with just dead bodies all over the meadow. Sometimes you realise you didn't bring enough supplies, you're outta water. But I love the process of it all. It's a bit like taking a pill. If you're doing it right, there's nothing in the world that's as thrilling. Songs are really simple. You hold them in your hand. I can make one right now and finish it. But because they're so simple, it's like bird watching, you know. You gotta know something about birds or you won't see anything: just you and your binoculars and a stupid look on your face.

"You have to make yourself some kind of an antenna for the songs to come to you. So you have to make yourself a kind of a musical yourself. You have to be of music



Faces of Waits, Paris, '92: "When I talk about music, I'm telling you how I feel..."

and have music in you; some way for songs to continue to want to live in you, in or near you. You gotta be real quiet sometimes if you wanna catch the big ones."

What were the signposts on the map for *Bone Machine*? "Well, certain areas you wanna cover. There was a certain kind of end-of-the-world aspect we wanted."

The first track on the album, for example: "Earth Died Screaming".

"Sometimes you think it's going to be seven feet tall with rocks glued to it and it turns out to be something else. You don't always come back with what you set out to find. You have an imagination about it and the reality is very different. Sometimes a song just comes out of nowhere. Other times you chase one for a couple of days and wind up with nothing. Then you have to bring them back from where you found them. And sometimes they escape. Sometimes they die. Sometimes they get sick first and die. Sometimes they kill you."

It's a clattering, clanging, thumping album with a menagerie of percussion – a conundrum, for example, which is "like an iron cross with these metal things hanging off. You hit it with a big hammer. Real hard. It's like hitting a dumpster." Elsewhere the record features Keith Richards, co-author of one track – "He's a real gypsy. Music stalks him" – and the Chamberlin, an analogue forerunner of the synthesiser. "It's a contraption, you know," he explains, using that favoured word.

If he listens to other people's music at all these days, it's old favourites or the rap stations.

"I CAN'T WAIT UNTIL THE WORMS ARE EATING ME... THAT'S A BIG DREAM"
TOM WAITS

"I love rap. It's raw and hollering and violent. Black music in America is the only music that's changing and evolving. Maybe that's not accurate. It just seems that black music is a living music as opposed to a dead music. It's growing and it gets angry and then it shuts up and it breaks windows and it disappears and it comes back."

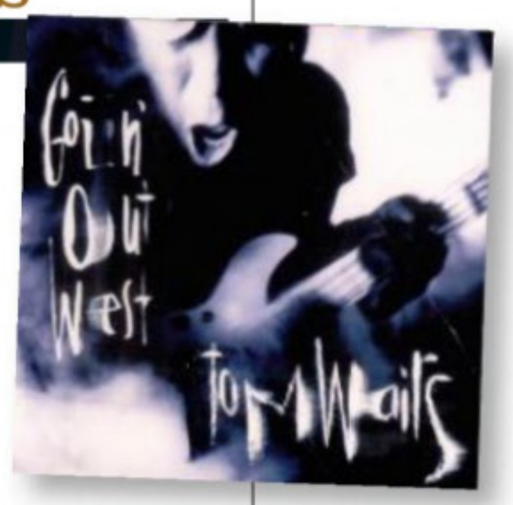
Truth or storytelling?

"When I'm talking about ideas or music, I'm telling you how I feel. I'm very sincere about the things that I'm talking about."

To say there are two Tom Waits is scarcely original, and maybe not even true, but it's not something he'd necessarily dispute.

"Yeah. I'm like a ventriloquist. You end up doing it to survive. So you never have to be where you say you are. It's just simpler after a while. You have at least two rooms in your house. And you're never in both at the same time."

But there's also a third Tom Waits, the one who cropped up on an American TV ad for Doritos Fritos. "They imitated my voice. The guy was like a fan of mine who does an impersonation of me and lives in Texas; plays in a band." Waits sued, eventually winning a judgment in his favour of $2.5m, but of course it's still in appeal. The impersonator was Tom's star witness. "He felt so bad that he did this. He knew when he did it he was doing a bad thing. But he vindicated himself by helping us win the case.



"I haven't seen a dime. These things go on forever and forever. Never get involved in litigation. Your hair will fall out, your bones will turn to sand. And it will still be going on. It was like throwing a rock through a window – but you wait for five years to hear the sound. Litigation is like picking up a glass of water with a prosthetic hand. It's very frustrating, and you'll never get it to your lips. But when you have to, you have to. If somebody burned your house down, you'd have to do something about it."

But what does the future hold?

"I think about... the worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play pinochle on your snout. A snake just crawled in your eye. I can't wait till the worms are eating me. That's a big dream." ♦

DEREK RIDGERS

THE BLACK RIDER

William Burroughs and Robert Wilson invite a "flattered and scared" Waits into their theatrical nightmares. Magic bullets, anyone? By JOHN ROBINSON

RELEASED SEPTEMBER 1993

HE WASN'T WHAT you'd call a singer, but occasionally William S Burroughs could still be persuaded to sing. Dinner guests at his home would sometimes hear his rendition, for example, of the German song "Falling In Love Again", a version that in its bibulous and guttural nature was probably more reminiscent of The Fall's Mark E Smith than its original interpreter, Marlene Dietrich. His was an instinctive, swaying *Sprechgesang*, and so it is clearly in very good company when it turns up again a third of the way through the 11th and most Germanic album by Tom Waits. A bass clarinet tootles abstractly; Waits himself plays a bony marimba. And then here is Burroughs, a skeleton on a summer day, singing a song called "'T'ain't No Sin". "*When it gets too hot for comfort and you can't get an ice cream cone...*" he croaks, Captain Beefheart in a suit and tie, "*It ain't no sin to take off your skin and dance around in your bones...*"

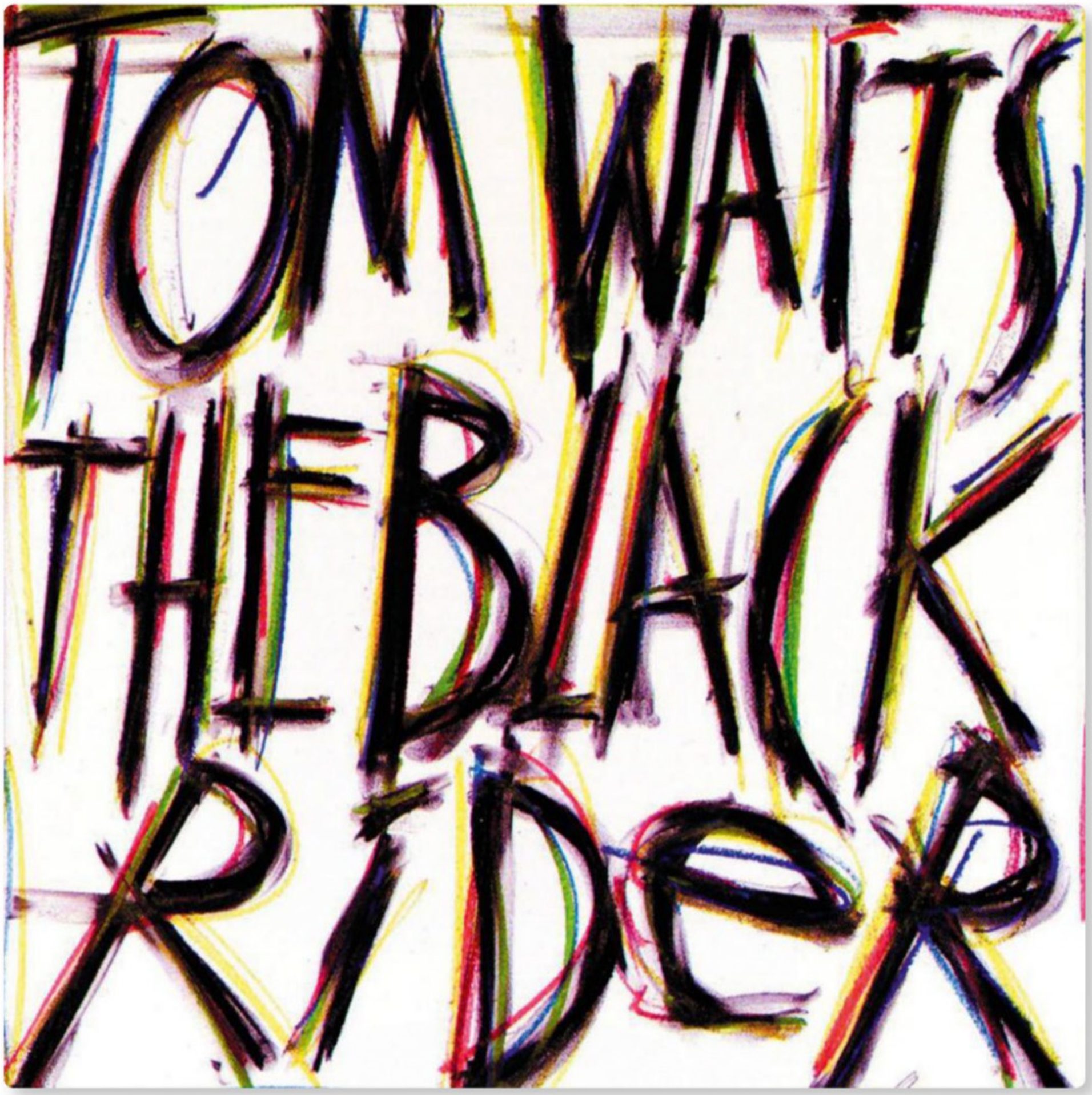
Collaboration is an imprecise art, but on *The Black Rider*, Waits and Burroughs certainly staked out some mutually interesting territory. A book, a play and rock album, *The Black Rider* is at root a retelling of a German folk tale. In that tale – which has resonance with both the Faust legend and Burroughs' own life – Wilhelm, a clerk and a rotten shot, must try to win the hand of his love, a huntsman's daughter. In order to impress his prospective father-in-law, he accepts from a mysterious stranger the offer of magic bullets – one of which the stranger retains. Suffice to say, things don't end well.

Burroughs (who wrote a book based on the original story) was working with theatre director Robert Wilson on a production to take place in Germany. "Intrigued, flattered and scared," Waits accepted the offer of working on the music for the piece. *The Black Rider*, the Waits album, is different again, being a composite of songs recorded for the original show (in Hamburg, in 1989) and added to later on (in Los Angeles in 1992). As befits an LP that duly abuts both *Franks Wild Years* and *Bone Machine*, it is a work of moving songcraft and dramatic clanking.

The album is quite theatrical, much as you might say Laurence Olivier was quite theatrical, and its music is played by a pit orchestra of musicians from different traditions, high and popular – running from bassoon to saw. Waits called them the Devil's Rhubato Band. Punctuated by short themes, introductions and interludes, the album has a slightly disjointed feel, and the vague suspicion you're missing something. Watching the German production on YouTube doesn't do much to eliminate that suspicion, so maybe that's just expressionist theatre for you.

LOVE, SEX AND VIOLENT DEATH ARE IN AN UNEASY CONFLUENCE THROUGHOUT

The album opens with Waits bellowing into a megaphone, a Brechtian sideshow caller for the coming event, announcing the characters we'll meet inside the tent: "*The three headed baby*"; "*Lea Graff the German midget*"; "*Ko Ko the bird girl*"; "*Radion the human torso*". As a Waits aficionado might observe: usual crowd's in tonight, then, Tom. That feeling, in fact, may be one of the album's chief successes. Dark ballads like "November" ("*Made of wet boots and rain/ And shiny black ravens/On chimney smoke lanes...*"), rather than signposts to plot points, feel



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"With records as challenging, tuneful (just!) and blackly comic as *The Black Rider*, Waits threatens to come as close as anyone since Brecht to piecing together a cross-cultural jigsaw that doesn't fall apart as soon as you jog the coffee table."
DANNY FROST, NME, 13/11/93

"Roll up for ringside seats and prepare to be amazed, astounded and bedevilled. For this ringmaster has no living equal." CATHI UNSWORTH, MM, 13/9/93

more like impressionistic nudges in the direction of where the stage play and Tom Waits might happily hang out together. The relationship between the pair can occasionally be confusing, however. In spite of advancing the plot, and displaying a theatrical love of vocabulary, the great "Just The Right Bullets" ("*You can never go a-hunting with just a flintlock and a hound*") turns out to be a later, Californian addition.

There's much to admire in what Waits supervises here: maintaining continuity over separate continents and separate sessions, several years apart. Really though, what you are most likely to take away from *The Black Rider* is the strength of the standout ballads, in which Waits turns his Tin Pan Alley melodies to work on sinister imagery from the natural world. "The Briar And The Rose" proposes the idea of love that is inseparable, however suffocating it may seem to outsiders. Waits sings of being born in "*Brennan's Glenn*" and seeing a briar and a rose grow there. "*I tried to tear them both apart*", he sings, stirringly, "*I felt a bullet in my heart...*"

Love, sex and violent death are in an uneasy confluence throughout. "I'll Shoot The Moon" takes the traditional declaration of love and turns it into something more sinister ("*A vulture circles over your head... I'll be the flowers/After you're dead*"). "The Last Rose Of Summer", the LP's last vocal number, is as moving as it is minimal.

As far as telling a story goes, however, what we take from *The Black Rider* album is less about Wilhelm, more about William – as the tale of Burroughs' own disastrous association with heroin is incrementally suggested. You'll hear, for example, occasional reference to a spoon. You'll note also that this story features a loved one's death by accidental shooting (Burroughs shot and killed his second wife in 1951). Most particularly, on "Crossroads" you'll hear about those magic bullets themselves. A hipster talking blues about a character in a tight spot, it's a classic Waits lyric – albeit written by William Burroughs.

"*The more of them magics you use*", sings Waits, calmly explaining Burroughs' own addiction psychology, "*the more bad days you have without them*". These magic bullets now having become a full-blown analogy for heroin shots, eventually, he explains, you'll find you can't do without them. "*So it comes down to finally*", Waits says, evenly, "*all your days being bad without the bullets*". The song is a superb meeting of styles and minds. Some territory, however, was clearly best left to Burroughs to walk alone. ♦

TRACKLISTING THE BLACK RIDER

1. Lucky Day (Overture) ★★★
2. The Black Rider ★★★
3. November ★★★★
4. Just The Right Bullets ★★★
5. Black Box Theme ★★★
6. 'T'ain't No Sin ★★★★
7. Flash Pan Hunter/Intro ★★★
8. That's The Way ★★★★
9. The Briar And The Rose ★★★★★
10. Russian Dance ★★★
11. Gospel Train/Orchestra ★★★
12. I'll Shoot The Moon ★★★★
13. Flash Pan Hunter ★★★
14. Crossroads ★★★★★
15. Gospel Train ★★★★
16. Interlude (instr) ★★★
17. Oily Night ★★★
18. Lucky Day ★★★★
19. The Last Rose Of Summer ★★★★
20. Carnival ★★★

Label: Island
Released: September 1993
Recorded at: Music Factory, Hamburg; Prairie Sun Studios, Cotati, California
Produced by: Tom Waits
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (vocal, calliope, marimba, Chamberlin, harmonium, guitar, banjo), William Burroughs (vocals), Greg Cohen (bass, accordion), Don Neely (saw), Henning Stoll (contra bassoon), Stefan Schåfer (bass), Volker Hemken (clarinet), Hans-Jörn Braudenberg (organ)
Highest chart position: N/A

MULE VARIATIONS

After a six-year break, Waits returns to the donkey work, and an idiosyncratically "surrural" take on the blues.

By SHARON O'CONNELL

RELEASED APRIL 1999

SO MUCH FOR a muse descending unannounced and directing the artist to write – even against his or her will. "There's only one reason you write new songs," Tom Waits has repeatedly stated. "You get sick of the old songs." In which case, the 16-track *Mule Variations* can be seen as an extensive easing of the artist's boredom with his own catalogue.

Mule Variations was Waits' first studio LP in six years, although he'd not been idle in that time. Along with raising a family, he'd overseen a comp of his Island recordings, written the foreword to *Gravikords, Whirlies & Pyrophones*, Bart Hopkin's compendium of unusual instruments, and contributed one track ("Babbachichuija") to the CD that accompanied Hopkin's follow-up book.

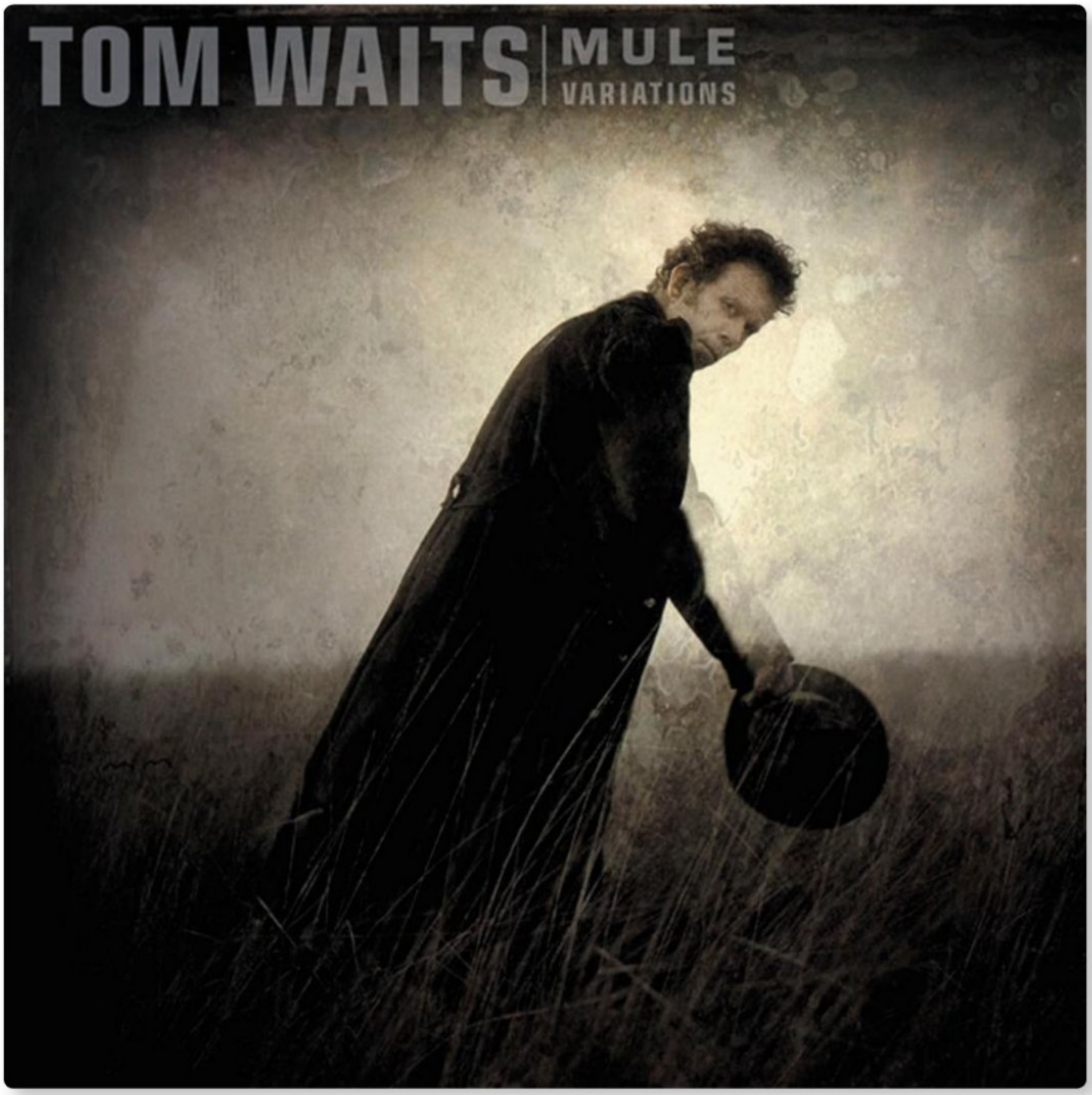
Mule Variations was also Waits' first release for the punk label Epitaph, although he was actually signed (initially for one album only) to Anti-, its sibling imprint. The deal was struck by Waits and label boss Brett Gurewitz following a casual meeting in 1996 and sealed at Zoya's Diner in Petaluma, CA. "We shook on the deal over coffee at a truck stop," Waits revealed, in Epitaph's official announcement in 1998, describing the label as "run by and for artists and musicians, where it feels much more like a partnership than a plantation". Two years previously, Epitaph had agreed a joint-venture deal with Fat Possum, home to modern blues legends like RL Burnside and Junior Kimbrough. It was company that Waits would obviously relish keeping.

The signing linked him to a vast heritage that sustains this collection of scratched and dog-eared, irresistibly rusted-up songs. There's nothing of Vaudeville here, no pre-war pop and little in the way of mutant European folk, Tin Pan Alley and beatnik jazz; rather, *Mule Variations* is a reprise of the clanking percussion and experimental texturing of *Bone Machine*, as applied almost exclusively to the blues, albeit with more conventional song structures. "I guess it's where I keep coming back to," he said of his return to the source, in the July/August 1999 issue of *Performing Songwriter*. "As an art form, it has endless possibilities, as an ingredient or a whole meal. Definitely part of the original idea was to do something somewhere between surreal and rural. We call it 'surrural'. That's what these songs are – surrural. There's an element of something old about them and yet it's kind of disorienting, because it's not an old record by an old guy."

What it is, is a Grammy award-winning record that is sometimes regarded as a water-treading exercise. True, it fails to reinvent the wheel, but it's hugely enjoyable on its own terms – every bit as humorous and heartfelt as the sound of a man delightedly rolling around on his home turf should be – and it features the enduringly creepy, Ken Nordine-styled curio, "What's He Building?" along with what remains one of Waits' most touching love songs, "Take It With Me".

And, as well as indulging an obsession with the blues from Lead Belly to Beefheart, *Mule Variations* also taps Waits' deep appreciation of country soul, notably on "House Where Nobody Lives", a sweetly sentimental number about desertion and family disintegration cast along Charlie Rich lines, which features a respectful nod to the Southern style from lead guitarist and band mainstay Marc Ribot. Not hugely surprising, since Waits had namechecked Rich on 1975's "Putnam County" and supported him live in the early '90s, while Ribot had played in a pickup soul band that backed touring acts such as Solomon Burke in New York in the early 1980s.

Of the 16 songs on the record, 12 were co-written by Waits' wife and creative co-conspirator Kathleen Brennan (whom he once described as "the egret of the family" – he's famously the mule), and she also plays percussion as one of The Boners on "Filipino Box Spring Hog". As to the LP's title, Waits told *Performing Songwriter*: "We'd done the song 'Get Behind The Mule'. We'd



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Once more, he's mutating jazz, blues, parade music, show tunes, fairground banter, immigrant songs and beatnik spiel into a classy vernacular... Familiar stuff, sometimes disappointingly so... His most commercial record in a long time."
STUART BAILIE, NME, 24/4/99

"He still sounds like no-one around. This is thanks in no small part to his very own magic band whose angular approach, ingenious textures and sense of space and time is always refreshing, often truly startling and sometimes emotionally devastating."
GAVIN MARTIN, UNCUT, 5/99

done it several times. We did a Chinese version and we did a cha-cha version and a raga version and a cappella... And so, at one point, somebody mentioned that we had all these variations on the same song. We had these mule variations. So we started referring to the record as *Mule Variations*, but in kind of a humorous way. And then it stuck.

"It wasn't like a lightning bolt," Waits said of his inspiration for the record, in the same interview. "It just kind of starts with something amusing. Something amuses me and I let it pass through my mind, along with a lot of other things. Hundreds of melodies and ideas go through your head when you're not writing. You just let them wash over you. When we start writing we put up a little dam and start catching them. It's the old butterfly net theory." The biggest catches, if not necessarily the most creatively clever, include driving opener "Big In Japan", a sly comment on the double-edged sword of celebrity that echoes *Swordfishtrombones*' "16 Shells From A Thirty-Ought-Six" (where a mule also figures). It thunders in on the most brutally basic percussion imaginable, apparently recorded in a Mexican hotel room by Waits, who was yelling and banging on a chest of drawers "really hard, 'til it was like kindling, trying to make a full sound like a band". The song also features guitarist Larry LaLonde, drummer Bryan "Brain" Mantia and bass player Les Claypool, all of LA experimental funk-metal outfit Primus. Equally undeniable are "Cold Water" – an extravagantly slurred exercise in flophouse blues that recalls "Honky Tonk Women" and is so comically emphysemic, you half expect to hear Waits coughing up phlegm halfway through – and the filthily lurching "Filipino Box Spring Hog", on which kick drum and snapping snare unite in dead-eyed determination while Charlie Musselwhite honks on a harmonica. It describes a barbecue scene of Brueghel-like chaos and is the first time Brennan appears by name – *"sittin' down in Little Red's recovery room in her criminal underwear bra"*.

As Waits' rediscovered rootsy bedrock, the blues stuck around for longer than just *Mule Variations*. He may have retired it in favour of Brecht for *Blood Money* and *Alice*, but in between those twinned albums, the producing of '60s bluesman John Hammond's *Wicked Grin* – a collection of Waits covers, in fact – beckoned. ♦

TRACKLISTING MULE VARIATIONS

1. Big In Japan ★★★★
2. Lowside Of The Road ★★★★
3. Hold On ★★★
4. Get Behind The Mule ★★★★
5. House Where Nobody Lives ★★★★
6. Cold Water ★★★
7. Pony ★★★
8. What's He Building? ★★★★★
9. Black Market Baby ★★★★
10. Eyeball Kid ★★★
11. Picture In A Frame ★★★
12. Chocolate Jesus ★★★★
13. Georgia Lee ★★★
14. Filipino Box Spring Hog ★★★★★
15. Take It With Me ★★★★★
16. Come On Up To The House ★★★

Released: April 16, 1999
Label: ANTI-
Recorded at: Prairie Sun Recording Studios, Cotati, CA; Sputnik Sound, Nashville, TN
Produced by: Tom Waits, Kathleen Brennan
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (vocals, guitar, piano, Optigan, pump organ, chamberlin, percussion), Marc Ribot (guitar), Larry LaLonde (guitar), Joe Gore (guitar), Smokey Hormel (guitars), Les Claypool (bass), Larry Taylor (bass), Dalton Dillingham III (bass), Greg Cohen (bass and percussion), Bryan Mantia (drums), Stephen Hodges (percussion), Jeff Sloan (percussion), "The Boners" (percussion), Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica), John Hammond (harmonica), Ralph Carney (saxophone, trumpet), Chris Grady (trumpet), Ralph Carney (reeds, saxophone), Larry Rhodes (bassoon), Linda Delucia-Gbidossi (violin), DJ M Mark "The III Media" Reitman (turntable)
Highest chart position: UK 9; US 30

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

BLOOD MONEY

A dramatic double whammy. Act One: the gritty horrorshow of *Woyzeck*. "You'll never get out alive!" By PETER WATTS

RELEASED MAY 2002

"I LIKE BEAUTIFUL MELODIES telling you terrible things. I don't know why. It's a curse," said Tom Waits in 2002. While the sentiment is true of almost everything Waits has ever recorded, he was talking specifically about *Blood Money*, an album of gorgeously miserable songs written for Robert Wilson's stage adaptation of Georg Büchner's tragedy, *Woyzeck*.

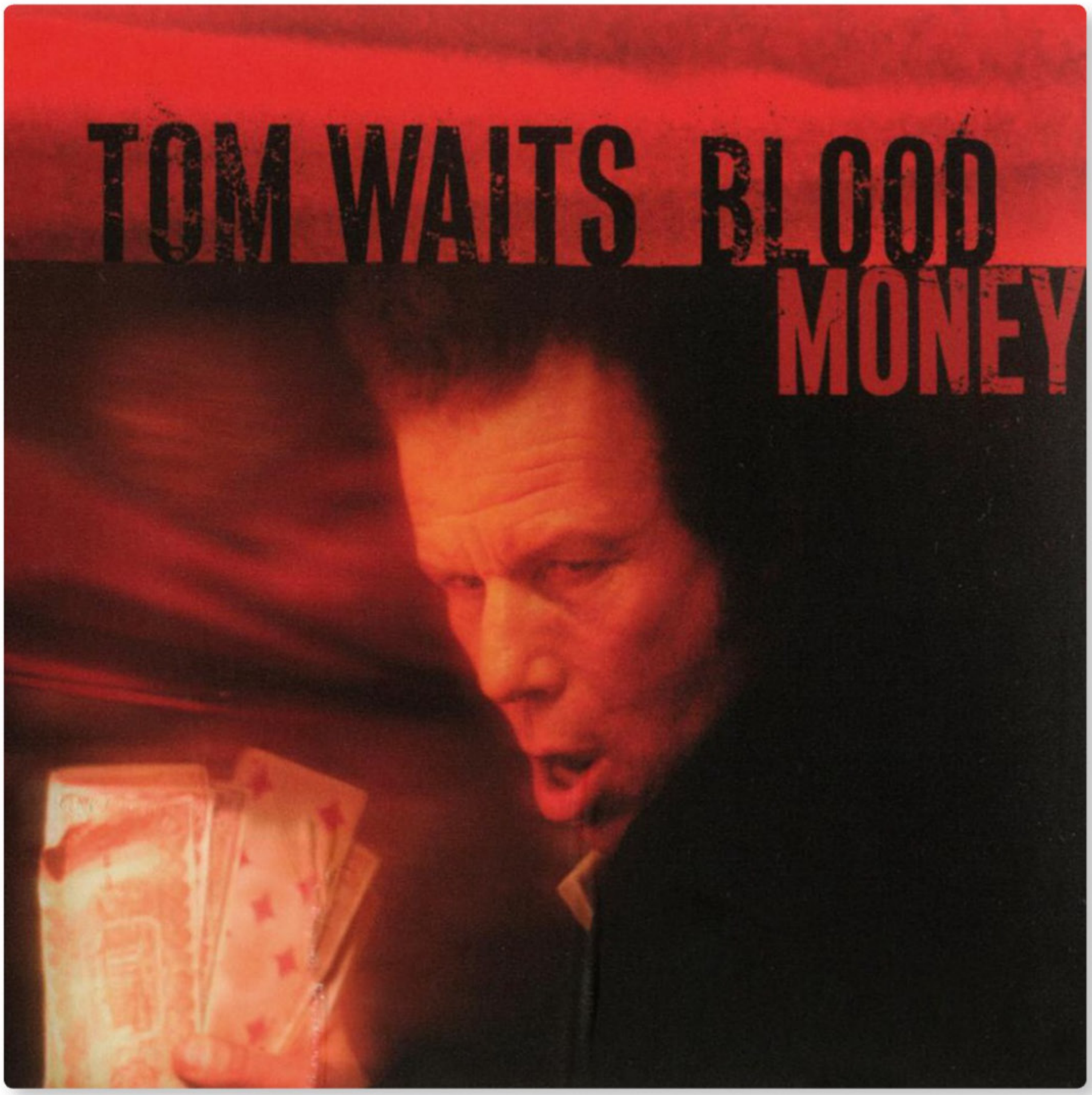
"Wilson told me about this lowly soldier who submitted to medical experiments and went slowly mad from taking medications," explained Waits. "He finds out his wife is unfaithful. He slits her throat, throws the knife in the lake, goes in after it and drowns, then his child is raised by the village idiot. I said, 'You had me at *slit her throat*.'"

Given the outsized theatricality of Waits' music and persona, it's little surprise that one of his most rewarding collaborations should be with a director-artist such as Wilson. They met when Waits asked Wilson to direct *Franks Wild Years*. Wilson turned down that commission but Waits, Wilson and Kathleen Brennan – the oft-mentioned, never-seen, third part of this trinity – worked on three plays, starting with 1990's *The Black Rider*. Next came *Alice* in 1992 and then *Woyzeck* in 2000. Wilson has said his responsibility was to "provide a space where I can hear Tom's music... a picture, or colour or setting". On *Woyzeck*, Waits and Brennan wrote together, often in the theatre where Wilson was rehearsing, "sitting out in the dark" and waiting for a song title or melody to strike them. Waits then coached the actors. Or tried to. "Some people take lecturing very well and others just want you to go away and let them do it the way they want to do it," he said. "As soon as you leave everyone goes, 'I hate the way that fucker made me sing that song. He's gone now, so I'm going to do it as I want.' That's human nature."

Woyzeck premiered on November 18, 2000, in Copenhagen, with Danish dialogue and English songs. The opening number, "Misery Is The River Of The World", was sung by the entire cast, lurid freaks including a Lynchian giant dressed like a fluorescent green exclamation mark and a monkey puppet with Waits' voice. It has a sinister surrealism, but none of the roaring anger that fires the version Waits recorded a year later on the LP he named *Blood Money*, figuring, with a rare eye on the bottom line, that no-one would buy anything called *Woyzeck*. "*If there's one thing you can say about mankind/There's nothing kind about man*," he growls, and the album seethes and boils from the start. There's little of Waits' usual playful absurdity on *Blood Money*; instead he rages at power structures and the piracy of fate. It's a mood he carried into 2004's splenetic *Real Gone*, a sense of urgency driven partly by the presence of George W Bush in the White House.

Although Waits left the songs from *Alice* unrecorded for a decade, he was itching to have his own run at *Woyzeck* and ended up releasing the two albums simultaneously in 2002. "Writing songs for other people is just mortifying," he said. "You watch other people completely butcher them. Sometimes they're elevated, but I figured I could improve upon most of them." (It may be notable that Wilson and Waits have not collaborated since *Woyzeck*.) *Blood Money* is not a straight transfer of the stage production – the songs appear in a different order and some from *Woyzeck* were unreleased for a few years (two appear on *Orphans*, while Solomon Burke covered "Diamond In Your Mind"). But while Waits has said "the songs aren't really a linear narrative; you couldn't understand the story from hearing them", their origin gives them a consistency of tone. That tone is bitter.

Thieves, snakes, lawyers and drunkards populate the semi-crooned "Everything Goes To Hell", but the clearest articulation of the nihilist philosophy comes on the wheezing oompah "God's Away On Business", with Waits spitting,



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The darker twin... These songs, Waits says, are his musical dispatches from the dark, human carnival of life... A cacophonous, fearsome and shadowy delight."
PAUL McNAMEE, NME, 18/5/2002

"Sometimes the music's unseductively oompah-oompah. But Waits – now in complete mastery of his unique art – knows what he's doing, and the stark, unforgiving brutality is leavened, or granted grace, by passages of purple pathos."
CHRIS ROBERTS, UNCUT, 06/2002

"*Who are the ones that we kept in charge?/Killers, thieves and lawyers*", against a livid marching beat provided by Stewart Copeland. This military tempo, first heard on "Misery...", reappears on "Starving In The Belly Of A Whale", with Waits bellowing "*You'll never get out alive*" like a rampaging ape-general at the head of an army of degenerates. Elsewhere, there's a distinctly Germanic, Kurt Weill inflection, even on "Coney Island Baby", a bittersweet love song that's like being serenaded by Frankenstein's monster.

Woyzeck is partly a love story and, despite the anger of *Blood Money*, there's also much tenderness. "Coney Island Baby" is followed by the whispering "All The World Is Green", a lolloping lament underpinned by Colin Stetson's melancholic clarinet. It's an understated marvel in the Waits canon. It's also filled with references to colour – both Wilson and Waits share a synaesthetic bent. "God's Away On Business" leads to the drawled "Another Man's Vine", which carries shades of "(Looking For) The Heart Of Saturday Night", slowed down and wrapped in brass. Much of the LP – including the marches – seem to unspool at a slower tempo, reflecting one of Wilson's tricks. "He's compelled to create a world where everyone conforms to his laws of physics," says Waits. "He has everyone move real slow because you can't grasp the full drama of a movement onstage that happens in real time."

So even "Knife Chase", a jagged black-and-white bit of incidental music (featuring Casey Waits on drums), has an over-exposed feel, like a Herrmann score played through the aural equivalent of a what-the-butler-saw machine. After the creepy "Lullaby" ("*Sun is red; moon is cracked/Daddy's never coming back*") and the clanging, stomping "Starving In The Belly Of A Whale", come a trio of throwaways – charming medieval waltz "The Part You Throw Away", pithy "Woe" and another instrumental, the atmospheric "Calliope", with Waits on calliope (steam organ) and toy piano, and ending with a belly laugh. Not performed in the play, it's indicative of the LP's freak spirit. *Blood Money* closes with Waits doing his best Louis Armstrong impression on the elegant blues of "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" – note once more the admirable adaptability of the voice – with Waits finding a fine payoff for an LP about surrendering to death, hell and Godless misery: "*My favourite words are good-bye/And my favourite colour is red.*" ♦

TRACKLISTING BLOOD MONEY

1. Misery Is The River Of The World ★★★★★
2. Everything Goes To Hell ★★★★
3. Coney Island Baby ★★★★
4. All The World Is Green ★★★★★
5. God's Away On Business ★★★★★
6. Another Man's Vine ★★★★
7. Knife Chase ★★★
8. Lullaby ★★★
9. Starving In The Belly Of A Whale ★★★★★
10. The Part You Throw Away ★★★
11. Woe ★★★
12. Calliope ★★★
13. A Good Man Is Hard To Find ★★★★

Released: May 7, 2002
Label: ANTI-
Recorded at: In The Pocket Studio, Forestville, California
Produced by: Kathleen Brennan, Tom Waits
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (vocals, piano, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, calliope, Chamberlin, toy piano, pump organ), Joe Gore (electric guitar), Nik Phelps (trumpet, baby tuba), Larry Taylor (bass, electric guitar), Stewart Copeland (drums, log drums), Matthew Sperry (bass), Bebe Risenfors (bass clarinet, accordian), Gino Robair (marimba, bells, gongs, bongos, timpani, floor toms), Colin Stetson (baritone sax, bass clarinet, baritone horn, tenor and alto sax), Don Plonsey (clarinet), Mule Patterson (pod), Matt Brubeck (cello), Ara Anderson (trumpet), Bent Clausen (marimba, pod, bass drums), Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica)
Highest chart position: UK 21; US 32

ALICE

Act Two: *Blood Money*'s twisted romantic twin, set in Wonderland's hitherto uncharted red-light district... By ROB YOUNG

RELEASED MAY 2002

"I THINK THE BEST collaboration is... the blind crippled midget on the shoulders of the sighted giant," Waits told an interviewer around the time of the production of Robert Wilson's *Alice*. "So, I guess Wilson's the, uh, sighted giant and I'm, uh, the crippled midget." The heroine of *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* was forever necking substances that made her grow or shrink, so the comparison was apt, as were the freak-show implications of the midget. For *Alice* – whose scenic concept had been worked out by Robert Wilson, Paul Schmidt and Wolfgang Wiens in August 1991 – was inspired by Lewis Carroll's books, with characters inhabiting multiple parallel identities in a sleazy, threatening series of encounters.

The corrupt, boozy *mise-en-scène* was a perfect reflection of Waits' imaginative underworld. Alice was both a present-day gamine and the adult Alice Liddell, the Victorian schoolgirl who inspired Carroll. The author – real name Charles Dodgson – also appears. The play put everyone involved, even Alice herself, on trial, and no-one emerged entirely innocent.

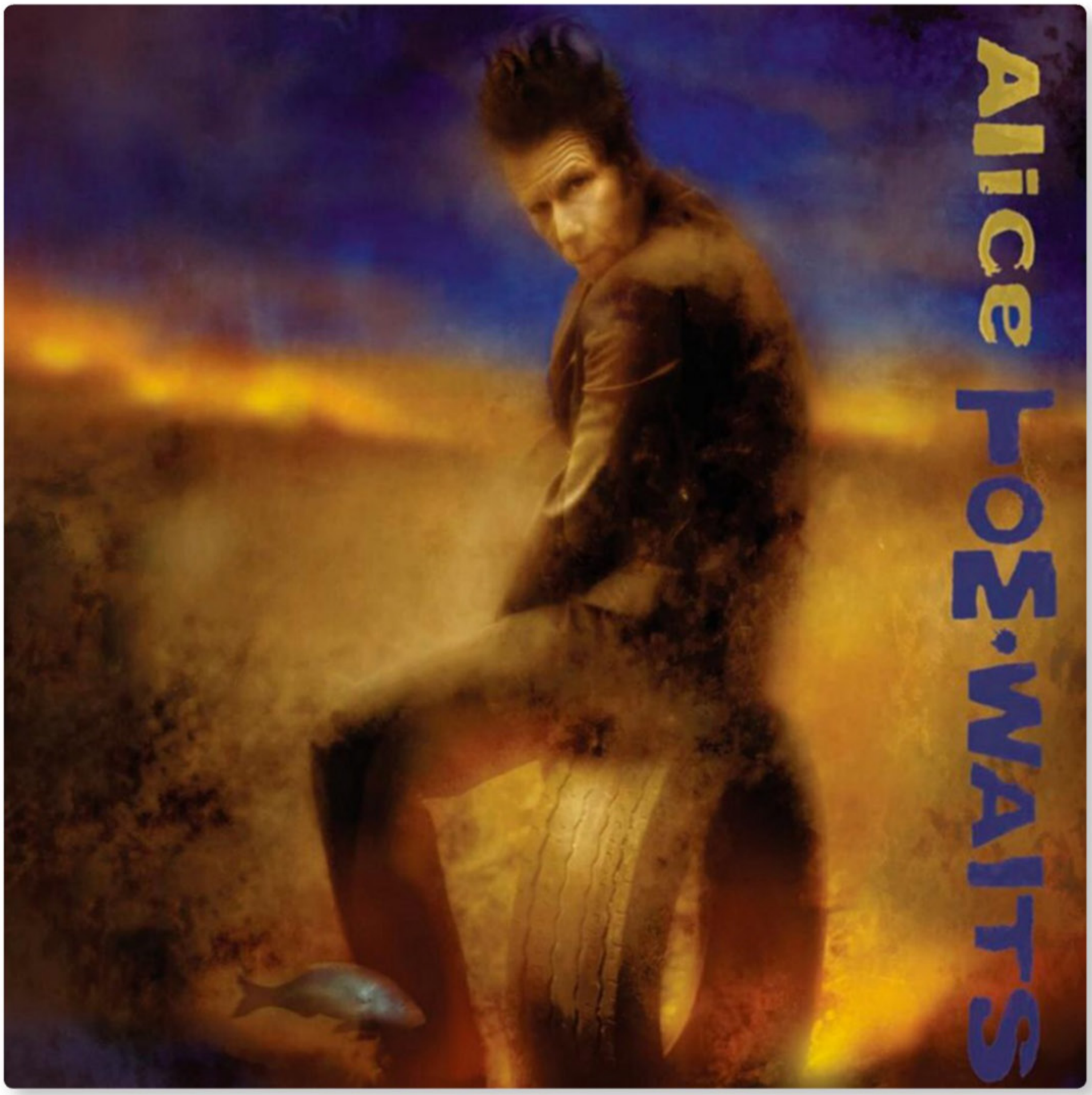
Alice premiered on December 19, 1992, at Hamburg's Thalia Theatre, and the show moved on to Ludwigshafen, Lisbon, Messina and New York. Waits and Kathleen Brennan were brought in during the autumn to write songs that would provide breaks in the narrative, contributing to each scene's mood. Although they share writing credits, Waits was left to spend a stressful six weeks holed up in a seedy Hamburg hotel in the weeks leading up to Christmas 1992, trying to hit the deadline. Pining for family life in California, Waits assembled a downbeat, melancholic suite of after-hours ballads tinged with minor-key jazz and borderline psychosis. In soundtracking a tale of Alice Liddell having grown up and become an alcoholic, there must have been plenty of real-life inspiration for Waits in Hamburg's notorious red-light district.

A PERFECT REFLECTION OF WAITS' IMAGINATIVE UNDERWORLD

Much of the *Alice* songbook was demoed around the same time, but the tapes were stolen from Waits' car, and he never got round to recording the songs again until 2002, by which time the early tapes had leaked out as a bootleg. (Waits eventually paid a ransom to get his recordings back, handing over a suitcase of cash to a bunch of shady characters in a dark café in a situation that could have been one of his own songs.) These are his definitive versions, released simultaneously with *Blood Money*.

Elsewhere, Waits described his approach to the *Alice* songs: "You don't want to be the garlic in the cinnamon cake. Yet a little garlic in the cinnamon cake might be in order here..." It's well put, as the music ranges from soured ballads to depressive lounge jazz to knife-edge acoustic punk. The opening theme, with a lyrical conceit hingeing on the thin "ice" embedded in the heroine's name, is a downbeat overture that reveals one of the LP's key assets, saxophonist Colin Stetson. His rich, Sonny Rollins-ish tone leers over many of the tunes like the Cheshire cat's lugubrious smile, and here sets an appropriately nocturnal tone.

"Everything You Can Think", which follows, is the first of several grotesque tracks barked out by Waits in a brutish, troll-like rasp. Waits reserves this vocal style for various reprobates Alice



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Close to *Mule Variations* in its generous scope and its musing on love and death, it's also a companion piece to *Blue Valentine*, full of Sinatra-like phrasing and bar-room, late-night philosophising."
PAUL McNAMEE, NME, 18/5/2002

"*Alice*, in particular, is touched by genius... These flights of alienating perversity, which have marred most of his work since *Rain Dogs*, are kept to a minimum... Difficult but not too difficult, which is a real plus."
CHRIS ROBERTS, UNCUT, JUNE 2002

encounters on her journey: here a band of piratical bandits, there the melancholic seadog of "Fish & Bird". For "Table Top Joe" – a ragtime showstopper sung by the "Caterpillar" – Waits drops into an unforgettable scat somewhere between Satchmo and Fozzie Bear.

"If you don't change time in some way," Waits once commented, "it's not theatre. It's real." For the singer, the appeal of Wilson's work was the way time seemed to slow down onstage, allowing the full force of his vignettes to transmit their power. Most of the music here is downtempo, languid and contemplative, with the singer's voice placed theatrically upfront in the mix, such as "No One Knows I'm Gone", "Poor Edward" and the exquisite "Lost In The Harbour", where Waits' fluty pump organ merges magically with the small string section. He's equally impressive on "Watch Her Disappear", a grizzled monologue whose feverish voyeurism (again, echoes of Carroll's infatuation with Alice Liddell) is magnified by the intimacy of its pump organ/violin/cello arrangement. "Reeperbahn" is as bleak as it gets in Waits' universe, a jaundiced croak that emanates from a personality utterly destroyed. Immediately afterwards comes "I'm Still Here", a gorgeous yet disappointingly brief interlude in which the fictional Alice regards her author with pity and compassion and wonders about the changes that have ravaged him ("*You haven't looked at me that way in years/You dreamed me up and left me here/How long was I dreaming for/What was it you wanted me for?*"). The penultimate "Barcarolle" etches a skating scene that mirrors the ice of the opener, and the curtain comes down over a wistfully hopeful instrumental – Carla Kihlstedt's swooping violin deployed to superb effect – entitled "Fawn". Only "Flower's Grave", with its Irish folk air overtones, hits an uncomfortably mawkish note: a rare instance of Waits losing control over the sentimentality stopcock.

Set against its gritty brother, *Blood Money*, the latent romanticism buried within *Alice* becomes even more apparent. Not only does much of it gesture back to the maudlin, bottom-of-a-glass haze of his earliest work; at the same time the album recording represents a rethink of a project written and wrapped up 10 years previously. Perhaps that's what makes *Alice* an enduring, occasionally uncanny Waits release that, in the final tally, keeps its emotional distance. ♦

TRACKLISTING ALICE

1. Alice ★★★★
2. Everything You Can Think ★★★
3. Flower's Grave ★★
4. No One Knows I'm Gone ★★★★
5. Kommienezuspadt ★★★★
6. Poor Edward ★★★★
7. Table Top Joe ★★★★
8. Lost In The Harbour ★★★★★
9. We're All Mad Here ★★★★
10. Watch Her Disappear ★★★★
11. Reeperbahn ★★★★
12. I'm Still Here ★★★★
13. Fish & Bird ★★★★
14. Barcarolle ★★★★
15. Fawn ★★★★

Released: May 2002
Label: ANTI-
Recorded at: In The Pocket Studio, Forestville, California
Produced by: Kathleen Brennan, Tom Waits
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (voice, piano, Mellotron, pump organ, pod, stomp, circular violin, chamberlin, toy glockenspiel, vibes, cymbals), Colin Stetson (sax, baritone sax, clarinet, bass clarinet), Gino Robair (drums, percussion, marimba), Larry Taylor (bass, guitars, percussion), Ara Anderson (trumpet, baritone horn), Matt Brubeck (cello, bass), Bent Clausen (Swiss hand bells, piano), Bebe Risenfors (Stroh violin, viola, alto viola, fiddle, clarinet, baby bass, marimba, bass clarinet, percussion), Nik Phelps (French horn, trumpet), Dawn Harms (violin, Stroh violin), Andrew Borger (oil drums, frame drum, percussion), Tim Allen (scraper), Stewart Copeland (trap kit), Joe Gore (electric guitar), Eric Perney (bass), Myles Boisen (banjo)
Highest chart position:
UK 20; US 33

ARCHIVE 2002

“You must remember, toys are not for children”

TOM WAITS SETS UP CAMP IN THE FLAMINGO HOTEL, SANTA ROSA, SURROUNDED BY A TRUNKLOAD OF DISTRACTING PROPS. AS GAVIN MARTIN SOON DISCOVERS, THOUGH, HE IS ACTUALLY MORE REFLECTIVE AND CANDID THAN USUAL: ABOUT HIS SONGS, HIS DRINKING, AND EVEN HIS METICULOUSLY PRIVATE WIFE: “WE USED TO PLAY A GAME CALLED LET’S GO GET LOST!”

TOM SHEEHAN

Waits at The Flamingo Resort Hotel, Santa Rosa, CA, 2002

Bottle fatigue, Copenhagen, 1979: "When you begin, it's a man takes a drink; when you end up, it's a drink takes a man"

ON A SUNNY Californian morning, Tom Waits pulls his family-size Suburban Chevrolet into the car park of Santa Rosa's Flamingo Hotel and begins to unpack the trunk. Every day for the next week he'll make the 30-minute drive from his home to the hotel to meet the international press, and he's brought along some effects to give the room a personalised touch. There's a small library of books, including various encyclopaedias filled with Weird, Wonderful and Exotic facts, Paul Auster's *I Thought My Father Was God* and Mel Clay's strikingly titled *Jazz – Jail And God*, a soundbox and a selection of CDs. Pride of place is given to *The Worlds Of Charley Patton* CD box.

When I arrive for my allotted 60 minutes, he's just finished lunch and is making a brew on the kitchenette Mister Coffee machine. Springing round to offer a handshake, precariously balanced on beat-up biker boots but surprisingly agile for his 53 years, he signals towards the Patton boxset.

"Have you seen this? Oh boy, it's a killer," he says. "I've had three copies of it but I keep giving 'em away. Everyone knows Patton – well, that's not quite accurate. But they will if I keep buying the boxsets and giving them away," he laughs.

"I first heard him when I was 18, playing coffee houses and folk festivals. I was very curious about the evolution of American music and the migration of seeds and all that business."

He pauses, then adds: "I guess there was something in that fat deep rich voice that taught me more than I could ever quantify."

The last time I interviewed Waits was in 1985, just as *Rain Dogs* – his first LP since the classic *Swordfishtrombones* had signalled a fascinating sonic departure from the B-movie atmospherics, dime-store rhapsodies and lowlife jazz of his early career – was about to be released. The interview took place on a Sunday morning in a rundown New York diner. Tom was bleary-eyed, unshaven, breakfasting on dark beer and cigarettes. Part Bowery bum, part bohemian savant, he took pleasure in improvising answers that played fast and loose with the facts, determined to entertain as much as enlighten.

He seemed immersed in the city, and *Rain Dogs* put an inspired spin on its colourful characters and junkshop musical polyglot. But he and his wife Kathleen Brennan had just become parents for the second time, and Tom figured that the Big Apple was no place to raise children.

"New York is like a weapon," he told me, "you live with all these contradictions and it's intense, sometimes unbearable. It's a place where the deadline to get a picture of the bum outside your apartment is more important than his deadline to get a place to sleep."

In the years since, Waits has moved to Los Angeles, San Francisco and finally the place 30 minutes away that he now calls home. He's forsworn drink and cigarettes, won a landmark $2.4m lawsuit against Frito-Lay for using a Waits soundalike in Dorito chip radio ads, and acted in several movies, notably alongside Lily Tomlin in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*. Though he continued to add to his musical legacy with *Bone Machine* (1992) and *The Black Rider* (1993), for most of the '90s he was a full-time father raising kids with Kathleen.

I ask whether he didn't get the cabin fever out there with the family, not releasing any records between *The Black Rider* and 1999's Grammy-winning *Mule Variations*, by far the most commercially successful album of his career? By way of a reply, he fumbles in his jacket pockets and produces a small plastic microphone with a built-in recording device.

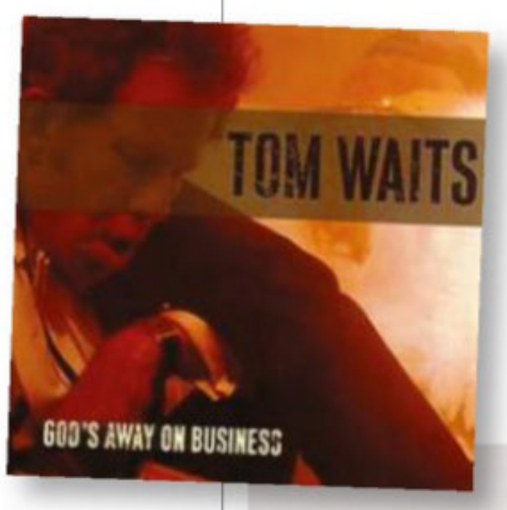
"Not at all. Y'see, you must remember toys are not for children," he grins. He spits a few human beat-box noises into the mic to demonstrate. Then, from an inside jacket pocket, he produces an identical microphone. He plays the recording on the first one back as he spits out a few more beats, and records the result with the second. Multi-tracked technology at its finest.

"If you're a creative person you're always

TOM SHEEHAN

doing something creative," he laughs. "There's an old expression: 'The way you do anything is the way you do everything.' So if you're creative about how you make dinner, then you'll be creative about whatever else you do. So I didn't really feel like someone was stepping on my tail. I just thought I was looking out a different window. But music's what I love. I find myself doing it whether or not there's going to be any result or product at the end of it."

Dressed in a black suit, curly hair neatly coiffed and goatee finely trimmed, Waits is undoubtedly a wiser, more thoughtful, and indeed sober interviewee than the man I met 17 years ago. But once he sits down at the kitchen table to talk, he displays a few traits that suggest he's not quite at ease. There's a tendency to mumble and speak with his hand over his mouth and, once he finds his train of thought, he rocks back and forth, hands wrapped around his torso, straitjacket-style. But he's unfailingly polite and modest, uneasy about acknowledging the considerable influence he's had since sounding the rallying call to *"a world going on underground"* on the opening track of *Swordfishtrombones* ("Underground").



"It's nice to feel that you're having some effect, but I don't want to put too much stock on it or put too much weight on my contribution," he cautions. "I'm not someone who has a lot of hit records. My effect is more subversive, I guess."

Waits' voyage into the undergrowth of Americana and worlds beyond has been unparalleled in the past 20 years. His first albums, *Closing Time* (1973) and *The Heart Of Saturday Night* (1974), saw him compared to Bruce Springsteen – but where The Boss struck out for the heartland, Waits found teeming life in the margins. Over the years on his journey into bizarre, enchanted and terrifying lands, he's been joined by a cast of co-conspirators. His two new LPs, *Alice* and *Blood Money*, separate but simultaneous releases, initially grew out of collaborations with avant-garde theatre director Robert Wilson (who also worked with Lou Reed on a production based around the work of Edgar Allan Poe). Waits' relationship with Wilson goes back to *The Black Rider* (which also saw Waits collaborating with William Burroughs), and he talks about him with a mixture of awe and personal identification.

"He's like a scientist, medical student or an architect – he has that quality when you first meet him. He also probably has an attention deficit disorder, dyslexia and probably a little compulsive disorder syndrome, too. I must have recognised aspects of myself in him. He seems almost autistic as he's compelled to communicate, but has the limits of certain known forms of communication, and he's gone far beyond in developing others.

"In theatre, he's developed a whole language for himself and those he works with... right down to the way he has people move. He's compelled to create a world where everyone conforms to his laws of physics. He has everyone move real slow, because you can't grasp the full drama of a movement onstage that happens in real time, it won't register with you. It makes you think about the simplest movement, the act of getting out of a chair or reaching for a glass.

"When I met him I felt I was with an inventor, Alexander Graham Bell or one of those guys. He's a deep thinker, a man who chooses his words carefully and is not to be trifled with. We found out we were very different, but there was something we understood about each other, which is a good thing. If you're too much alike, there's not much you can learn from each other."

BOTH *ALICE* AND *Blood Money* display a sense of wonder, intimacy and fearlessness in keeping with their instigators' theatre work. Just as significantly, they are the first records that are

"WHEN YOU'RE A TEENAGER MUSIC IS A WHOLE OTHER THING. YOU'RE EMOTIONALLY FRAGILE, THE MUSIC IS TALKING TO YOU"
TOM WAITS

50/50 collaborations between Waits and Kathleen Brennan.

Brennan and her hometown were eulogised in one of Waits' simplest but most beautiful compositions, 'Johnsburg, Illinois'. A character bearing her name appears in *Mule Variations*' crazed barbecue party piece, 'Filipino Box Spring Hog', sporting *"a criminal underwear bra"*. Although she shuns the limelight ("She hates all this," shudders Waits, pointing at my MiniDisc recorder), her presence shines not just in his songs but in the man himself. "She does everything blood, spit and polish," he enthuses. "She has a great background in music and a great business head. She's fabulous, ominous and hilarious. And all for us."

When they originally met, Brennan was a script editor at Zoetrope Studios. Tom was penning what became the Oscar-nominated score for Coppola's *One From The Heart*. The album required him to write in a style he was trying to leave behind, and it was Brennan who helped him find the confidence, security and self-respect to follow his esoteric leanings and make the leap to '83's *Swordfishtrombones*. Their working relationship developed gradually.

"The love came first," nods Waits, "but we used to play a game called Let's Go Get Lost. We'd drive into a town, and I would say, 'But, baby – I know this place like the back of my hand, I can't get lost.' And she'd say, 'Oh hell you can't, turn here, now turn here. Now go back, now turn left, now go right again.' And we'd do that all night, until we got lost, and she'd say, 'See, I thought you knew this town?' Now you're getting somewhere, now you're lost. That's kind of a good metaphor for how we collaborate."

The benefits of that collaboration shine through, polished to perfection, on ballads like "All The World Is Green" (from *Blood Money*), Waits' tender vocal giving delicate life to the gem-like images. "We do talk about what we're doing all the time. The way we work is like a quarrel that results in either blood or ink. You find you may not have known how you felt about a particular sound or issue or phrase or melody until you are challenged to expand or change it. If it's a successful collaboration, you end up with more things in there than occurred at the outside. But, hell, we got kids. Once you've raised kids together, you find songs come easy, actually."

Robert Wilson's original stage production of *Alice* – performed as an "avant-garde opera" in Hamburg in 1992 – centred on the relationship between Reverend Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) and Alice Liddell, the girl who inspired both *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* and *Through The Looking Glass*. *Blood Money*, meanwhile, is based on *Woyzeck*, a play

Left: theatre director and Waits collaborator Robert Wilson, NYC, 1997. Right: Waits with wife Kathleen Brennan at the premiere of *One From The Heart*, 1982

JOHN JONAS GRUEN/GETTY IMAGES; ROBIN PLATZER/TWIN IMAGES/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

Awkward moment: with Iggy Pop in Jim Jarmusch's *Coffee And Cigarettes*, 2003

written in 1837 by German poet Georg Büchner about a tormented 19th-Century Polish soldier, a fable previously filmed by Werner Herzog. "We were going to call the album 'Woyzeck', but it was thought nobody knew who he was," Waits explains. "Kathleen said, 'Let's call it *Blood Money*,' and that made sense. The guy's a lowly soldier who's offered money for medical experiments, which contribute to his loss of balance and sanity. His wife's been flirting with the drum major and one thing leads to another. It's kind of a sad tale, without explaining it in too much detail.

"The songs aren't really a linear narrative; you couldn't understand the story from hearing them. They might have been part of a theatre piece to begin with, but if you are going to do a record it has to stand alone. You have to get beyond the original concept; it's like making a movie out of a book."

Both albums are populated by compositions that draw from every era of Waits' music: Tin Pan Alley ballads, spoken-word reveries, cantankerous punk blues. In 1985, he told me the piano was "firewood as far as I'm concerned. I've started peeling the boards off until there's nothing left but metal strings and ivory." But the new albums suggest he's at ease with all aspects of his past.

"I'm drawn to melody as much as dissonance. Both are completely valid," he nods, "but it was hard recording the two albums at the same time, using a lot of the same musicians and trying to keep them sounding completely different."

Even so, the contrast is striking. *Alice* is light and mournful, reflective and contemplative, while *Blood Money* is dark, angry and inflamed. Indeed, on the latter, songs like "Everything Goes To Hell" and "God's Away On Business" transcend their theatrical origins. They sound like anguished howls at the present state of the universe in general, and America in particular.

"Who are the ones we've left in charge?/Killers, thieves and lawyers," Waits thunders on "God's Away On Business", his voice scorched and horrified. It's as if his woebegone character has legitimised and given a voice to his own sense of despair and outrage.

"Possibly," he says. "It's real cathartic to rail and rant and stomp into a mic. It's kind of cleansing and feels good. There were a lot of preachers and teachers in my family. In fact, my father was more than a little disappointed when he found out I was going to be neither. It was like, 'We aren't going to be able to help you, then.' Music wasn't the family business."

The way Waits describes it, when he was growing up he had no option but to make music his business. A watershed experience was seeing James Brown And The Famous Flames in the early '60s.

"It was like you'd been dosed or taken a pill. I didn't recover my balance for weeks. When you're a teenager music is a whole other thing.

"IF YOU LISTEN TO A SONG, YOU'RE ASKING TO BE CONFUSED OR MYSTIFIED. YOU'RE ASKING TO GO GET LOST"
TOM WAITS

You're emotionally fragile, and the music is for you; it's talking to you. It was like a revival meeting with an insane preacher at the pulpit talking in tongues. To have that and Bob Dylan, who I saw during the same period playing in a college gym, it set me reeling."

THE WAITS OF *Alice* and *Blood Money* projects a magisterial reach across time and musical nuance. Sometimes the songs sound as if they've been rescued from a ghostly past – "Going back in time to locate something you can't find in the future," as he puts it. In his live show, unseen in Britain for 15 years, he assumes a range of identities, from hillbilly eccentric to Brechtian outcast. But he has had to fight to create his own artistic space.

"On my first tours I had to open for Frank Zappa," he recalls. "I'd go out and get beer cans thrown at me, people spitting at me. I always felt like I was a rectal thermometer taking the temperature of the audience for Frank. I told myself, 'This is good for me; it's called paying your dues.' At least I wasn't driving a school bus or selling arms for a living. It was painful, but you move on, get your own band together and suddenly some other guy is your rectal thermometer."

He's always been out of step with musical and cultural trends. When Haight-Ashbury was the place to be he was "looking for Bing Crosby records in the Salvation Army shop, anything I could call my own path outside the course my generation was taking".

But there was a point, while Waits was living at Los Angeles' notorious Tropicana Motel, when the barfly image threatened to swallow him whole. Dissolution and the big nowhere beckoned.

"Oh sure, it's inevitable, y'know? When you begin, it's a man takes a drink. When you end up, it's a drink takes a man. Keeping my balance during that period was tricky. When I was in my twenties, I thought I was invincible, made out of rubber. You skate along the straight razor and flirt with it all the time. I've been sober now for nine years; the best thing I ever did apart from getting married. Was it hard to quit? No, the hard part was before I quit. This is the easy part."

He hasn't acted in a film for three years and doesn't know whether he ever will again, though he thinks the experience has allowed his songs to grow.

"When you sing, you're kind of acting. The whole act of singing is like a big question you're asking, something you are reaching towards, wondering about or ranting over. In *Alice* there's a lot of images and reflections, like a fever dream or something. Songs are sometimes at their most satisfying when they confuse you – you don't listen to them for information. It's not like you read a recipe on a box of macaroni. If you listen to a song, you're asking to be confused or mystified. You're asking to go get lost."

And, as the man says, sometimes that is the best way to find what you're looking for. ♦

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17S

REAL GONE

Blues in the barn, beatboxing in the bathroom, "Cubist funk" – and a fierce indictment of George W Bush. By ANDY GILL

RELEASED OCTOBER 2004

LIKE ALL GREAT performers whose worth is borne out by the longevity of their careers, from Dylan and Bowie to Cohen and Young, Tom Waits has always had a compulsion to change direction, to revitalise his muse through new ways of expression. "Other people are nervous when they have to digress or deviate from the script," he acknowledged, "and I'm compelled to change things all the time." Thus it was that, following the double shot of measured, European-influenced restraint that had been *Alice* and *Blood Money*, he swung back to primitive American mode with a vengeance.

"*When the river is low, they find old bones/And when they plough they always dig up chains*," he sings on *Real Gone's* sinister "Don't Go Into That Barn". From the sound of it, he had been doing some feverish farming of his own, in a dried-up creek bed. Like 1999's *Mule Variations*, this is an album full of troubled ghosts and rustic superstitions, cranky, croaked-out blues, spindly, jagged guitars, gritty rhythmic potholes and what Waits termed "Cubist funk" – a series of glorious, double-jointed R'n'B grooves leading from Captain Beefheart's dust-blown desert trailer all the way to Fat Possum's Mississippi base.

Using a compact combo of old hands Larry Taylor on bass and Marc Ribot on guitar, and – except for three tracks featuring his son Casey on drums – mostly eschewing trap drums for the more varied, Moondog-style percussion beds supplied by Brain Mantia, along with his own human-beatbox mouth-percussion, Waits paints a series of grim backwoods tableaux that expose the rotten underbelly of the American pioneer mythos.

The centrepiece is the 10-minute opus "Sins Of My Father" where, against a percussion-speckled, atmospheric setting akin to Dylan's *Time Out Of Mind*, Waits' Woodbine-rasp vocals build up a suffocating air of ancestral guilt and retribution through charnel-house images such as "*Night is falling like a bloody axe*". A coded condemnation of the Bush administration's bellicose adventurism, it develops a gripping, hypnotic power that sets the present atrocities within the album's grisly narratives of mythic Americana, songs populated by dead souls, lurking killers, frightened soldiers and men "*high on potato and tulip wine*". But throughout, their plights are depicted with a tenderness that belies the gruff, angular presentation.

Waits had admitted that when writing lyrics for songs, the first thing would often just be vocal sounds, which he would then review in an attempt to "get it to explain what it's trying to say to you". For *Real Gone*, he went one further, using his own vocal noise as the basis for many of the rhythm tracks, in the manner of hip-hop human-beatboxes. Drawn by the acoustics of the bathroom in his farmhouse home, Waits would spend nights in there, grunting and hissing into a Shure SM58 microphone, overdubbing rhythmic accents and counterpoints on a Fostex four-track recorder, using a four-second delay and allowing things to bounce well into the red, to get a harsh, distorted edge to the sounds. Rather than just loop segments, he would perform the entire track each time, explaining that he preferred to inhabit the piece as a whole, "with everything sliding a little bit". The results are onomatopoeically evoked in the track title "Clang Boom Steam", a brief snatch of bathroom business.

Waits' intention had been to re-record the mouth-percussion parts when he and his musicians assembled to finish the album at a studio set up in an abandoned schoolhouse in Locke, a small rural community south of Sacramento designated a National Historic Landmark District. But his ambitions were foiled by the different acoustics in the schoolhouse rooms, so he was forced to use the original rhythm beds recorded in his bathroom, to which he and Brain Mantia added terse wooden and metallic percussion.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Waits is still taking more risks than most US 'singer-songwriters' of his generation – and parts of this album rock righteously. It's just that some of Waits' musical modes have been done before, and much better. By him."

BARNEY HOSKYNS, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 2004

" Waits lives in a hermetically sealed world where it makes perfect sense to mix twitchy Afro-Cuban funk, blues, beatboxing and lo-fi Appalachian music with the sound of slamming doors and rattling chains while he mutters and wheezes like a bus station madman... It is, possibly, a new type of music. And how often can you say that?"

PAT LONG, NME, 2/10/2004

"Top Of The Hill" lays out the sonic territory, with Waits' slinky, syncopated beatbox groove striated by the turntable scratches of his son Casey and pierced with Marc Ribot's sly guitar figures: it's almost as if the actual vocal line is oozing out of the fabric of the rhythm, squeezed from between the beats. "It's like harmonising with yourself in a way," he explained, "there's already a rapport." "Hoist That Rag" capitalises on Ribot's Cuban connection, his guitar line twirling elegantly over a lurching Latin groove that resembles Frankenstein's monster dancing a rhumba, while a hoarsely bawling Waits delivers a lacerating anti-war lyric of almost treasonous contempt, the rag in question surely being the Stars & Stripes. It leaves no doubt as to the political intent of "Sins Of My Father", the thinly veiled denigration of the Bush dynasty that follows, its dusty plunk of banjo and percussion sounding like an exhausted survivor of the "*humiliation of our fallen state*", slouching sadly into a ghost town on a blind horse.

Gritty, unrefined blues forms the basis of most tracks, from the louche "Shake It" – a feral cousin to the Stonesy raunch of "Gin Soaked Boy" and "Big Black Mariah" – and the etiolated Chess Records sound of the stalking blues "Make It Rain", to the swagger-sway groove of "Don't Go Into That Barn", borne along on a relaxed stride rooted in Beefheart's "Gimme Dat Harp Boy". The Captain's influence is also discernible in the boho funk of "Metropolitan Glide", along with the explosive expostulations of James Brown.

Counterbalancing the more burly, primitive material are a handful of sorrowful ballads that on earlier albums would have been accompanied by piano, completely absent here. The lilting "Dead And Lovely" mourns a middle-class girl, out of her depth with a no-goodnik succinctly described as "*not the kind of wheel you fall asleep at*", while the haunting "Trampled Rose" serves as an allegory for a dead relationship, Waits' vocal straying wanly to the upper edge of his register over a slow, stumbling rhumba.

But the most moving ballad is the epistolary "Day After Tomorrow", which, save for a further hidden burst of beatboxing, closes the album on a disconsolate, forlorn note. A young soldier's traumatised letter home, it poses the ethical and religious questions in a manner that recalls the protest plaints of the young Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs: "*Don't they pray to the same God that we do?/And tell me, how does God choose, whose prayers does he refuse?*" It seemed that, after years avoiding moral prescription, Tom Waits had finally been driven to express his political rage, in ways both angry and affecting: just one of several surprising developments on *Real Gone*. ♦

TRACKLISTING REAL GONE

1. Top Of The Hill ★★★★
2. Hoist That Rag ★★★★★
3. Sins Of My Father ★★★★★
4. Shake It ★★★★
5. Don't Go Into That Barn ★★★★★
6. How's It Gonna End ★★★★
7. Metropolitan Glide ★★★★★
8. Dead And Lovely ★★★★
9. Circus ★★★
10. Trampled Rose ★★★★★
11. Green Grass ★★★
12. Baby Gonna Leave Me ★★★★
13. Clang Boom Steam ★★★
14. Make It Rain ★★★★
15. Day After Tomorrow ★★★★★
16. Chickaboom (hidden track) ★★

Released: October 2004
Label: ANTI-
Recorded at: Tom's bathroom; Sacramento school studio

Produced by: Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (vocals, guitar, percussion, Chamberlin, shakers), Marc Ribot (guitar, banjo, cigar-box banjo), Larry Taylor (bass, guitar), Casey Waits (drums, turntables, percussion, claps), Brain Mantia (percussion, claps)
Highest chart position: UK 16; US 28

ORPHANS

Brawlers, Bawlers & Bastards: 56 songs that "fell behind the stove while making dinner..." A curious, unexpectedly satisfying feast. By ROB HUGHES

RELEASED NOVEMBER 2006

NEVER BELIEVE WHAT Tom Waits tells you. Or at least take it with a pinch of the proverbial. Despite its girth, the advance blurb on three-disc set *Orphans: Brawlers, Bawlers & Bastards* didn't exactly promise a horde of riches. Instead, said Waits in throwaway fashion, these were songs that "fell behind the stove while making dinner... Some is stuff that didn't fit on a record, things I recorded in the garage with kids. Oddball things, orphaned tunes."

The happy surprise of this florid undersell was that *Orphans* turned out to be one of the most engaging records of Tom Waits' career: 56 rarities that showed him off in all his contrary, multifaceted glory. Each disc had its own distinct theme. *Brawlers* burst with rough-cut rockabilly and hard blues; *Bawlers* was full of tipsy ballads that reeked of witchy jazz and downtempo folk; *Bastards* made a nest for the weird stuff – shanties, poems and all shades of strange.

Many of its songs had already cropped up on tribute albums, film soundtracks and compilations. There were covers of Skip Spence, Daniel Johnston, Lead Belly and the Ramones. But *Orphans* wasn't merely salvage. More than half of the tracks – 30 in fact – were brand new.

Two of them, "Lie To Me" and "LowDown", kicked off *Brawlers* with Waits attempting to bottle the buzz and boom of early rock'n'roll via lusty tales of men and women gone bad. "Fish In The Jailhouse" is a great song about a prison break, with the *44*. Kid and Whitfield Faraday prowling an imagistic America of Yazoo City and Rollin' Fork. This is Waits the *littérateur*, rubbing words together for the sheer joy of hearing them crackle. The protagonist of "Lucinda", for example, is expertly drawn, hair the colour of tar and "*skin as white as a cuttlefish bone*".

Elsewhere there are barroom honks, gospel songs lashed to chain-gang rhythms, voodoo blues tunes about terrible floods and no-good women, plus a busted version of "Sea Of Love".

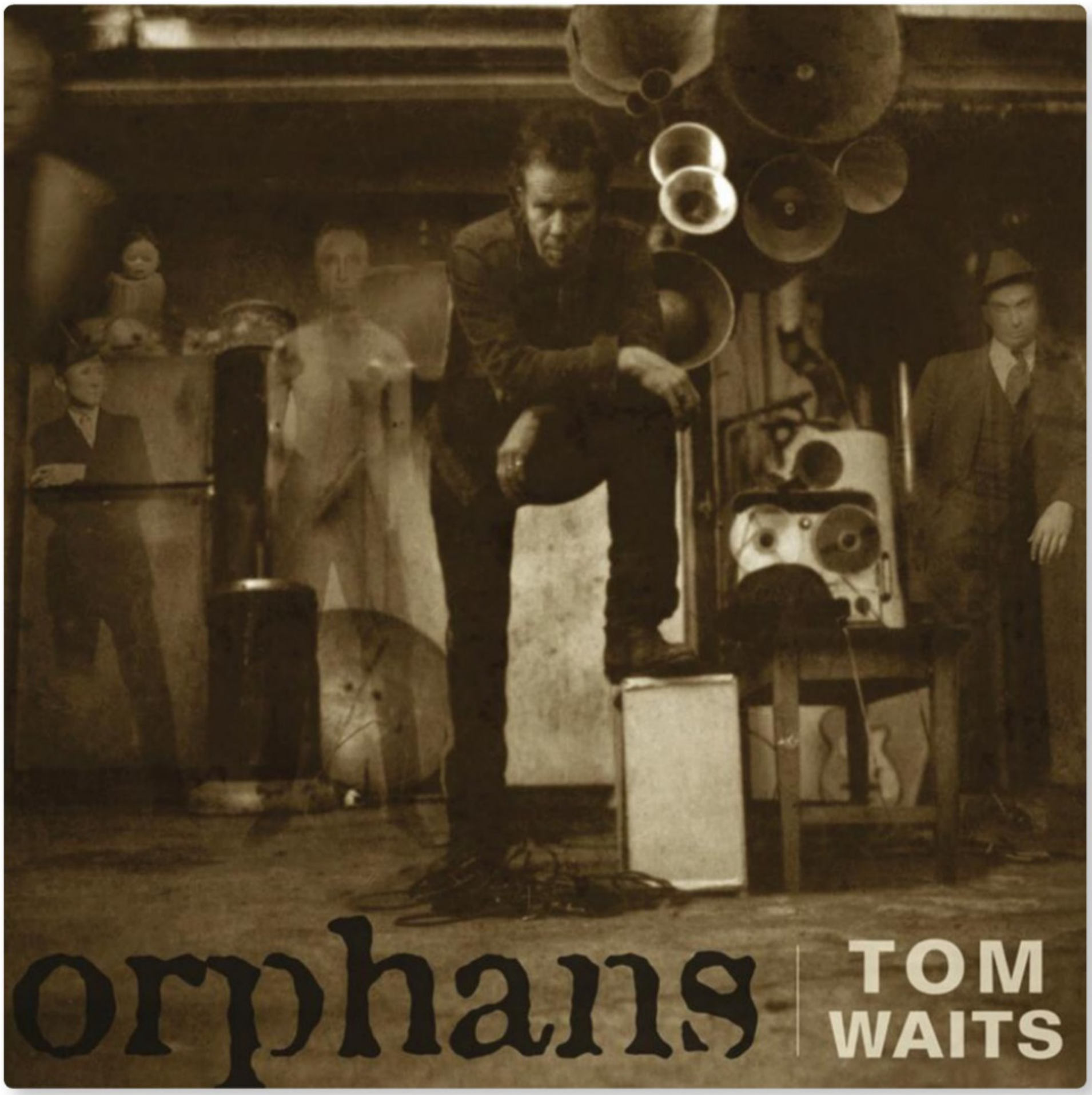
Waits the politico appears briefly, and soberingly, on "Road To Peace". An adjunct to "Day After Tomorrow", the anti-Iraq War song from *Real Gone*, it examines the culture of bloody retribution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Amid the surrounding ruckus of *Brawlers*, the song seems misplaced.

Longtime fans were catered for on *Bawlers*, which revisited the subterranean barfly persona of his early years. Waits plays the lost romantic, pouring tales of regret, longing and resignation into the bottom of a glass. The range of flavours is wide – gospel, country, jazz-blues, spirituals – but everything feels part of an overarching theme. He sounds utterly bereft on "Widow's Grove", which doubles as both a hopeless love song and murder ballad, his loneliness compounded by a stark gypsy fiddle.

On "Long Way Home" he curses a head full of lightning and a hat full of rain. Double bass and the steady tick of an acoustic guitar provide the backdrop to "Tell It To Me", with Waits pining for the woman that slipped away.

Some songs, like "If I Have To Go" and "Take Care Of All My Children", date back to the mid-'80s. Others have been reclaimed by their owner from better-known covers, namely "Long Way Home" (Norah Jones) and the redemptive "Down There By The Train" (Johnny Cash). Waits' own reworkings are frequently as effective. Chief

ORPHANS SERVES AS A MICROCOSM OF WAITS' ENTIRE CAREER



among them is "Goodnight Irene", where the gruff demeanour and vocal delivery – like a razor drawn across stubble – magnify the sense of creeping dread in Lead Belly's classic.

The final disc, *Bastards*, is a deliciously random set that feels like someone poking around in the rusted junk of an old attic. It's disquieting, funny, odd and often downright bizarre, Waits revelling in the *carte blanche* of sound and verse. Old trolley cars clink by, wedding bells chime, accordions wheeze. There's more of the human beatboxing and percussive vocals that defined *Real Gone*. "Altar Boy"'s rhythm even manages to feel like the swish of a cassock.

The words of the Brecht-Weill composition "What Keeps Mankind Alive?" are almost spat rather than sung. "Children's Story", his dry appropriation of 19th-Century dramatist Georg Büchner, is anything but a bedtime lullaby. Instead, the lonely child is left with his dreams shattered and the earth an overturned piss pot.

Waits also pays homage to two of his key literary inspirations. Charles Bukowski's poem "Nirvana" is backed by a minimal accordion, while Kerouac's "On The Road" comes with slide guitar, harmonica and a distorted blues rattle. The whole thing should end right there, but Waits tacks on two "hidden" offerings: a between-song riff to a live audience about the peculiarities of meat snacks and Gregory Peck marrying his mum; and a cock-and-bull story about being conned by a supermarket shopper.

It's a typically perverse way to bring down the curtain, as if Waits thought that anything too meaningful just wouldn't do for an album intended to celebrate the circus of the imagination. As such, *Orphans* serves as a window into Waitsville for both die-hards and the uninitiated, a microcosm of his entire career.

It would be five years before Waits returned to the studio. Until then, *Orphans* wasn't a bad stockpile to be getting on with. ♦

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"It's remarkable, though, how much of a piece the entire set is, reflecting how skilfully Waits has welded the various tributary styles into a seamless whole... For sure, there's plenty that's old and beautiful about these *Orphans*."
ANDY GILL, UNCUT, DECEMBER 2006

"*Orphans*... is a 54-song monster, with reworkings of his old songs, covers and curios – a combo of twisted tales of barroom low-lifes and outsiders, and crazy flailing, percussive barks and yelps... Genius."
PAUL McNAMEE, NME, 18/11/2006

TRACKLISTING ORPHANS

BRAWLERS
1. Lie To Me ★★★★★
2. LowDown ★★★★
3. 2:19 ★★★
4. Fish In The Jailhouse ★★★★★
5. Bottom Of The World ★★★
6. Lucinda ★★★★
7. Ain't Goin' Down To The Well ★★★
8. Lord I've Been Changed ★★★
9. Puttin' On The Dog ★★★★
10. Road To Peace ★★★
11. All The Time ★★★★
12. The Return Of Jackie And Judy ★★★
13. Walk Away ★★
14. Sea Of Love ★★★
15. Buzz Fledderjohn ★★★★
16. Rains On Me ★★★★★

BAWLERS
1. Bend Down The Branches ★★★
2. You Can Never Hold Back Spring ★★★★
3. Long Way Home ★★★★
4. Widow's Grove ★★★★★
5. Little Drop Of Poison ★★★
6. Shiny Things ★★★★
7. World Keeps Turning ★★★
8. Tell It To Me ★★★★
9. Never Let Go ★★★★
10. Fannin Street ★★★★
11. Little Man ★★★
12. It's Over ★★★★
13. If I Have To Go ★★
14. Goodnight Irene ★★★★
15. The Fall Of Troy ★★★★
16. Take Care Of All My Children ★★★
17. Down There By The Train ★★★★
18. Danny Says ★★★
19. Jayne's Blue Wish ★★
20. Young At Heart ★★★

BASTARDS
1. What Keeps Mankind Alive? ★★★★
2. Children's Story ★★★
3. Heigh Ho ★★★
4. Army Ants ★★★★
5. Books Of Moses ★★★★
6. Bone Chain ★★★
7. Two Sisters ★★★★
8. First Kiss ★★★★
9. Dog Door ★★★★★
10. Redrum ★★
11. Nirvana ★★★★
12. Home I'll Never Be ★★★
13. Poor Little Lamb ★★★★
14. Altar Boy ★★★★
15. The Pontiac ★★★
16. Spidey's Wild Ride ★★★★
17. King Kong ★★★★
18. On The Road ★★★★

Released: November 20, 2006
Label: ANTI-
Recorded at: Various locations
Produced by: Kathleen Brennan, Tom Waits
Personnel includes: Tom Waits (vocals, guitar, pump organ, keyboards, percussion), Marc Ribot (guitar), Dave Alvin (guitar), Ralph Carney (saxophone)
Highest chart position: UK 49; US 74

MICHAEL O'BRIEN

“What kind of fucking world are we living in?”

WHAT IS A FIASCO? HOW DO YOU STEAL SOMEONE’S THUNDER? WHAT CONNECTS KEITH RICHARDS AND THE US ARMY? WHY SHOULD YOU TAKE A MALLET INTO A HARDWARE STORE? AND WHAT’S THE SECRET OF A GREAT TOMATO SAUCE? ANDY GILL IS WHISKED AWAY TO PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA, FOR ONE MORE MIND-BOGGLING AUDIENCE WITH THE GREAT TOM WAITS...

TAKEN FROM
UNCUT
12/2011

THE LAST I see of Tom Waits as I pull out of the parking lot, he is crouched down among some bushes, taking a photograph of a cow’s arse in the adjoining field. Waits has a sharp, enquiring mind and a range of interesting pursuits, but this is unexpected even by his standards.

We’ve just spent a leisurely couple of hours chatting in the Washoe House, an antique roadhouse in the area near his Northern California home. Legend has it that during the Civil War, a bunch of Union soldiers from down the road in Petaluma set off north, intent on kicking Confederate butt in nearby Santa Rosa. They got as far as the Washoe House, stopped for a few beers, and several hours later the idea of fighting didn’t seem quite as compelling, so they went home. The place has

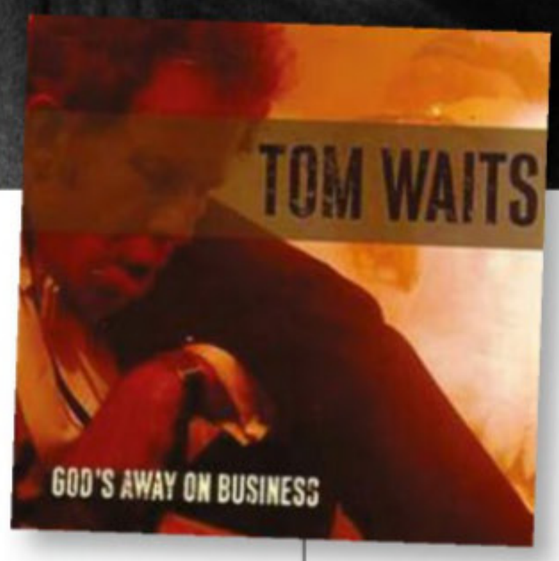
At home in his den, Sonoma County, California

ANTON CORBIJN

been delaying travellers ever since, their presence confirmed by literally thousands of signed dollar bills pinned to the walls and ceiling, which flutter like a flock of roosting songbirds every time the door opens. One bill, over by a rear door, bears the inscription, incarnadine red, "BLOOD MONEY".

This area of California, up in Sonoma County, seems a natural fit for someone of Tom Waits' relaxed, open-minded but private sensibilities. There's none of the intensity of Los Angeles or even San Francisco, some 50 miles down the freeway. Downtown Santa Rosa, for instance, seems to have more than its fair share of superannuated hippies, their flaxen white, freak-flag hair and whiskers still flying proudly as they shuffle about among the street-corner statues of *Peanuts* characters which memorialise the town's most famous former resident, Charles M Schulz.

The local freesheet is called *The Bohemian*, and this week's cover-story about the 10th anniversary of 9/11 is written by Tom Hayden, liberal-left activist and one-time partner of Jane Fonda, back when she was Hanoi Jane and not pimping for wrinkle-cream. Petaluma was also once home to Harry Partch, the composer whose idiosyncratic instruments had such a profound effect on Waits' approach to music. It's as if the warm beatnik/hippy spirit of San Francisco's North Beach and Haight-Ashbury had drifted slowly north over the past few decades, and settled over this area.



Waits is toting an attaché case when we meet, one of the old-style kind which expands outwards at the bottom. From this, he pulls a sheaf of papers and notebooks which are deposited on the table alongside the tea and coffee cups, as if this is a meeting between counsellor and client. At one point in the conversation he says, "OK, I'll throw some stuff at you," and proceeds to regale me with various little fragments of weirdness, riddles, bits of lexicographical flotsam and jetsam he's chanced upon, the kind of stuff that featured in the *Tom Tales* bonus disc of the *Glitter And Doom Live* set.

"In 1976 a woman in LA married a 50lb rock," he says. "And 125 people came to her wedding! What kind of a fucking world are we living in?"

That's one step up from a pet rock...

"Apparently, that's how they started. It was just a pet, and then one day they looked at each other and said, 'Y'know, you're the one!' It was a glacial thing that slowly built... We've come a long way. Lepers used to have to wear a bell, y'know, and they used to have to carry a stick so they could point to shit...

"I have some origins of words here: the word 'sabotage' comes from the French industrial revolution. If you were working in a factory and were let go, fired, sometimes the worker would take off his shoe, his sabot, and drop it into the machine, until it ground to a halt. 'Pumpernickel', the German bread? Napoleon was famous for feeding his horses better than he fed his men, and pumpernickel was a special bread that he had made for his horse, whose name was Nicole. Here's another one, 'fiasco': glass-blowers in Italy, if they were creating something really elaborate, and there was a flaw in it, a bubble or a crack, they would have to junk it. What they'd do instead was say, 'We could always turn this into a water-glass.' Which is a fiasco. It's like a kid making something in ceramics and it turns out wrong, he says, 'Well, I could always turn it into an ashtray for my dad.'

"And 'bedlam' comes from 'St Mary Of Bethlehem', a religious organisation which ran a hospital [*Bethlem, in London*] for the indigent, and over time it came to refer to any kind of pandemonium."

Which is itself a great word. Sounds like a funfair ride.

"Or an animal on a pump-organ..."

Along the way, we discover a shared love of palindromes, and I trade him "So Many Dynamos" and "Madam, I'm Adam" for "Ma is as selfless as I am" and "He Lived As A Devil, Eh?". But I prove hopeless at solving his riddles.

"A man gets on the elevator at the 10th floor, goes down to the ground floor, gets off, and goes to work every day. When he comes home that day, he gets on the elevator, goes up to the 7th floor, gets out and walks up the remaining three floors. Except when it's raining, then he goes all the way to the top.*

"Another one: a man was put on trial for murder, and found guilty by a jury of his peers, and when it came to the sentencing, the judge leaned over and said, 'You've been convicted of this crime of which you've been accused, but I cannot jail an innocent man', and he let him go. What were the circumstances which led to his being set free?**

"One last word thing. We've all heard the expression 'stealing my thunder'. Before Shakespeare, they devised all these techniques to create audio illusions in the theatre – there were no soundsystems, so everything was done in a very crude, hands-on way. To make the sound of thunder, this man devised a big round bin, into which they put cannonballs, which they pushed around. But the production in which it was first used was completely canned, shut down after just two nights.

"A few months later, another director's play used the thunder effect. This guy who created the effect was there in the audience that night, and he stood up and shouted out, 'He stole my thunder!' True! In those days, publishing was not very sophisticated, so if you had something which was yours, you had to defend it, or someone would just take it. And they did."

Given Waits' own experiences defending his copyrights and distinctive vocal stylings from advertising hucksters, his sympathies are doubtless with the hapless inventor.

In between times, Waits talks about his delightful new album, *Bad As Me*, a typically stubborn, individualistic collection of burly R'n'B and wilful bizarrerie, of heartbreaking pathos and comical bathos. It has that great clanking, squawking, compelling rustic-engine quality that sets Tom Waits albums apart from those of his peers, but all the sonic invention can't disguise the solidity of these songs, their seriousness and depth and, yes, their charm. You could perform them unaccompanied save for piano or acoustic guitar, and they would still wield an undeniable impact; but having heard them this way, why would you want to strip away those starkly patinated arrangements?

Great American Songwriters are (thankfully) still in no short supply; but Tom Waits taps into the spirit of the Great American Primitives, one-off artists like Partch and Moondog and Beefheart, which is something far rarer and more precious.

As expected, your new album sounds great.
OK, cool, thanks a lot. It was a lot of work, but it was fun, y'know? It was fun to do. We recorded it right here in our hometown.

"SONGS DON'T REALLY ENJOY BEING RECORDED. IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL, YOU CAN MANGLE THE WHOLE THING..."
TOM WAITS

Do you have a studio here?
I have... a joint, where I bring stuff in. They're liquidating a lot of studios now, so we threw our own studio together.

Studios are another part of the music industry being hit hard by the digital revolution, along with download piracy.
It's awkward because it's intellectual property. Basically, it's a very mechanical process, putting a record together. You could say it starts with, like, music lessons, learning to play an instrument, and working your ass off 'til you can get a sound out of it, then taking your chances and trying to create just the whole act of recording, hoping you're going to capture a bird in there, y'know? And then, of course, everything is compressed into an aerosol, regular or menthol, and it can go anywhere – what the fuck is it with that? If sofas were like that, the furniture business would be hurting. If you could buy an invisible sofa and just snap your fingers and have it. It's really an awkward time, because when one industry dies, others die with it... it's terrible.

When you write the songs, do you work in a particular study or studio, or is it wherever the muse catches you?
You go where it is, y'know, you hope to catch some of it – set a trap for it, y'know? My theory is that songs don't really enjoy being recorded. If you're not careful, you can mangle the whole thing in the recording process. I always thought songs lived in the air. Figure if you open up a window, they might float in, go in your ear, come out the other ear, and wind up on the radio. I remember when I worked in a restaurant, sweeping up by a jukebox, and thinking, 'OK, how do you get in the jukebox and come out of it? That's the real trick.'

The opening track, "Chicago", reminded me of one of those John Adams pieces when it started, that intense rhythmic hubbub... then I realised it was a railroad rhythm.
Yeah, a train song. We had two horn players from New Orleans, from the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Clint Maedgen on saxes and Ben Jaffe on trombone and bass clarinet. I had never worked with horns that way, as rhythm instruments: pah! pah! pah! pah! As a choral, pulsing rhythm meister, it was something new to me, I loved it. We also used them as the backbeat on "Talking At The Same Time".

On the new album, there seem to be quite a few songs about departure, and change, and people reaching the end of their tether. Everybody's moving on: in "Chicago", they're going there; "Get Lost", "Face To The Highway" – they're all about departure.
Oh yeah, I see. Good point. I hadn't thought about that. I guess there's certain topics for songs that we keep coming back to. Cautionary tale, lullaby, train song, highway song, work songs, jump-rope songs – the interesting ones are where the rhythm of the song comes from the act of doing the thing itself. That's why "Chicago" works so well – we're going to Chicago, that whole migration thing, what they call The Great Migration.

Live on the Glitter And Doom Tour, the Playhouse Theatre, Edinburgh, 2008

DREW FARRELL/RETNA

"JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE A BUCOLIC ENVIRONMENT, IT MAY STIMULATE THOUGHTS OF MASS MURDER..."
TOM WAITS

I like "Hell Broke Luce". It reminded me of that scene in *The Glenn Miller Story*, where they're drilling on the parade ground, and it's really dull, then Miller and his band put a little swing in it, and the soldiers start swaggering along. Your song might be just what today's GIs might like to hear...
Well, Keith Richards said, "Y'know, the generals and officers are gonna fucking hate this song, but the enlisted men are gonna love it!" But I don't want to be so presumptuous to think I might have a line on that subject, but I just felt compelled to do it. I just remember that line from when I was a kid: *"I had a good home but I left, right, left"* – ohh, man, that's a heartbreaker, there you were but now you're in. Those lines come from a real place.

You seem to have found a new voice, too. You're always finding new voices, new ways of expression. There's a hysterical edge creeping in on some songs.
Oh yeah, the rockabilly kind of thing! [*Does little falsetto tic*] I don't know where that came from! Must be that I'm getting older and I want to be younger! It's got a hiccup to it.

It's a very bequiffed sound...
Oh, well, I'll take that as a compliment! Betwixt, bequiffed, be-bothered and bewildered!

You seem to be more open than most musicians to different sounds, like the Harry Partch flavour that came through on *Swordfishtrombones*. I have a Partch album called *And On The Seventh Day Petals Fell In Petaluma*, so I was intrigued to visit this area. And you did the introduction to that compilation of weird new instruments, *Gravikords, Whirlies & Pyrophones*.
Oh yeah. There's a lot of those guys up here. I think maybe they're descendants of the Partch phenomenon – that this was a place where he lived and worked early on, and he was such an innovator. The way he put it was, "Once there was a little boy, and he went outside – that little boy was me, I went outside in music." Because he was born into the conventions of the day, but he started incorporating haikus and Chinese instruments, and ultimately started creating his own instruments in order to play his own music – to play a scale and a form of musical notation that was also his own invention.
All those micro-micro-tonalities – it's just captivating. Very hard not to have that call attention to yourself.

And they're such beautiful, sculptural instruments, all polished wood and strings. I loved the phrase he used about

JESSE DYLAN

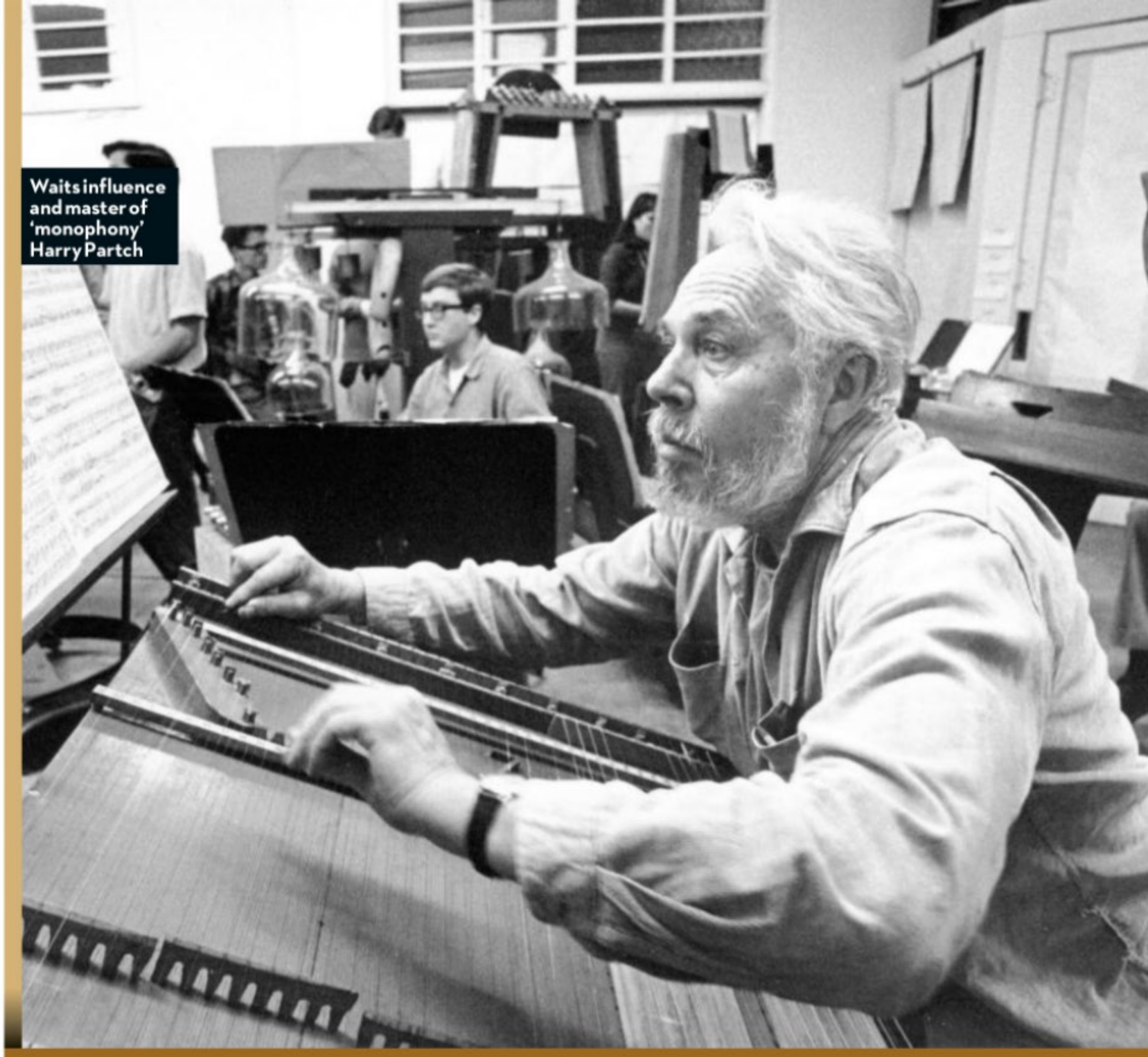
himself, that he was "a musician seduced into carpentry".
Aaawww! That's pretty nice, isn't it? And then those Cloud Chamber Bowls – my god! It's kinda like that he was a fine artist in both forms, creating new forms both for the eyes and for the ears. It's fitting that it should look how it sounds; and that the existing instruments that were available to him, which I'm sure he was fascinated with, and loved, but just wasn't interested in, as related to his art. So I was inspired by that. It's hard not to be. After I started listening to him, I started seeing things by the side of the road, and saying to myself, "I wonder what that sounds like?". I'd go into a hardware store and think, 'I have to bring a mallet in here, start hitting things.' It's a place to go, and if you go there in earnest, and with curiosity, it's amazing what you can discover, just because you're willing to go.

It brings a whole dramatic effect to your music that you just don't find in other people's music.
Well, that's good to hear.

And I also like that it's not necessarily "beautiful" – that ugliness itself can be a kind of beauty.
Yeah, right. Then you have to redefine beauty.

It used to be said that art was all about truth and beauty. But I wonder if it's not more to do with interesting lies.
Yeah, right. Well, my feeling is that there are so many different perspectives that the word 'truth' should always have an 's' at the end of it. 'Cos there's your truth, and my truth... I was just thinking, we're never good at predicting what's going to happen. We're real good at taking some phenomenon, once it's taken place, and explaining how it got here. But we can never say that's it's coming, or that it'll be here soon – or warn everybody that it's right around the corner. We can't predict on any level at all. How, then, could you explain a balding man in an ill-fitting suit aiming his clarinet at the sky: Benny Goodman? How can you explain that? And he's gonna be rockin' the joint, sweatin', and people are gonna be movin' to him, falling in love with him on a deep level. How can you ever plan for that? The only way we can see it is once it's happened. We have a thousand reasons why it got here, but we can't tell you before it gets here that it's coming. That's interesting.

The melting-pot aspect of American culture is something that comes through your work strongly: there are elements of German polkas in there, mambos, rhumbas, things from all over. It's a redefinition of folk music as not just an old Wobbly with a banjo, but something that comes from all these places.
Well, there's still an art to it. It's like those culinary things – if you try and mix too many flavours from too many different cultures, it's like a joke in your mouth. Like tomato ice-cream. So it does require a certain amount of decision-making as to what stage you stop. Like recognising that there's a place where Chinese music and Irish music overlap. Even in the



Waits influence and master of 'monophony' Harry Partch

"HE WAS SUCH AN INNOVATOR"

Petaluma resident, outsider composer, inventor of remarkable instruments, key influence on the music of Tom Waits... A beginner's guide to the strange world of HARRY PARTCH

PARTCH WAS a prodigy, accomplished on both piano and viola. He had learnt to play six instruments by the age of six.

● Frustrated by the limitations of the 12-tone scale, Partch developed his own musical form, monophony, which utilised a 43-note scale – then had to invent and build the instruments on which to play it, breathtakingly beautiful objects fashioned from wood, glass and wire. Some of the larger instruments, such as the Gourd Tree and the huge Quadrangularis Reversum, have been exhibited purely as sculpture at the San Francisco Art Museum.

● Partch recognised no limits to instrumental possibility, and could expatiate at length upon the differing resonance qualities of whisky bottles, whose contents he'd consume by way of research.

● Partch's deeper percussion instruments, such as the Bass Marimba and Marimba Eroica, use sitka spruce blocks and resonators so colossal they require platforms half a metre high for the players to stand on. The Marimba Eroica was capable of producing an F note below the lowest piano A.

● During the Great Depression, Partch became a wandering hobo. His piece "US Highball" evokes the world passing by from a train, while another piece, "Barstow", featured lyrics derived from hitchhiker graffiti he encountered on a post outside Barstow in California.

● One of Partch's instruments, the Mazda Marimba, was made from 24 tuned lightbulbs.

● Partch's more operatic compositions were inspired by Greek drama, reflecting his absurdist humour. His 1955 "dance satire", *The Bewitched*, featured scenes subtitled "Visions Fill The Eyes Of A Defeated Basketball Team In The Shower Room" and "The Cognoscenti Are Plunged Into A Demonic Descent While At Cocktails".

● Partch fantasised about building a gigantic marimba with concrete resonators sunk into the ground, to literally make the earth move.

● Partch believed that his work paralleled the attitudes and actions of primitive man, whom he claimed found "sound-magic in the common materials around him. He then proceeded to make the vehicle, the instrument, as visually beautiful as he could. Finally, he involved the sound-magic and the visual beauty in his everyday words and experiences, his ritual and drama, in order to lend greater meaning to his life."

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

Out there: Waits in Sebastopol, California, 2011

way that musical instruments evolve. They may have evolved separately in different cultures, without contact – they can't really trace the origin of the banjo, it happened in so many different places at the same time. The rudiments of the banjo are skin, string, a gourd or whatever. I love this stuff. But when you're making a song, you still have to decide what belongs, and how far you can stretch it.

You have to keep tasting.
Keep tasting, right. Sometimes you have to throw a whole batch out, and that really hurts. I had to do that once to a batch of tomato sauce. I was too heavy on the bay leaves, or something. Too much olive oil, or too much salt, then you try and balance it out, then it goes too far the other way, until finally you say, "Oh man, we're gonna scratch this and start all over." You do that with songs, too. You can mix something for three days until it's just mush. Your ears are the same. You have to admit, "I don't even know what this is any more. Let's start again."

So there are songs you've literally not found the right instrumental blend for?
Yeah. There are surprises that happen – you try something a bunch of different ways and finally you say, "Oh man!" Like that "New Year's Eve" song – I was listening to it in the car the other day and I started singing it a completely different way, like I imagine Mick Jagger might sing it, or Sam Cooke, way behind the beat. Like "Bring It On Home To Me". I thought, 'Oh, that's a good way to sing it – but we've done it now, we can't go back and redo it.'

Do you listen back to your LPs much once you've finished them? There are some artists, like Scott Walker, who never listen to their work again once it's completed.
People are like that with movies, too. There's people that make movies that have never even seen the movie. Like Jimmy Stewart, towards the end of his career, didn't like the way he looked, he was unhappy with his appearance, he'd gotten older... and Johnny Depp, I don't think, has ever seen one of his movies. I listen to the hell out of this stuff as we're making it, then once it's completed and out, the thing is, you'll never listen as closely as you do when you're making it – there's a lot of micro-, macro-determinations that you're making, you're listening on many levels, but once it's over...

"I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT SONGS ARE MOVIES FOR THE EARS, AND AT ITS BEST, A FILM CAN BE A SONG FOR THE EYES"
TOM WAITS

it's kinda like the ashes of the work, and what you really want is new wood.

"Pay Me" has some lovely cantina piano, like the stuff Henry Mancini did for *Touch Of Evil*.
Remember the last line in *Touch Of Evil*? [*Together*] "He was some kind of a man!" What does that mean? I really got a kick out of that! The other thing I remember from that movie is Dennis Weaver holding onto a small tree, shouting, "I'm the night man! I'm just the night man!" Like, don't ask me, I don't know what goes on around here, I'm the night man!

You know that Hugh Laurie series, *House*? He [Dr Wilson] has the one-sheet for *Touch Of Evil* on his office wall, and every time we wait for the camera to pan by – 'There it is! *Touch Of Evil*!'. That was a Mancini score? That clanky piano, sounds like it has tacks on it, that was good. You don't think of border music being played on a piano. I asked David Hidalgo about a song called "La Golondrina", sung by a mariachi band at the end of *The Wild Bunch*, and he said it's about a bird. Then I asked a Mexican cab driver, and he said kids sing it in school when they're going away for the summer, saying goodbye to their teachers. I was trying to get a bit of that on "Pay Me". The line, *"The only way down from the gallows is to swing"* – that was going to be the title, except I'm not sure how many times you can hear that in a song! Imagine getting to the chorus: "All right, everybody! The only way down from the gallows... Come on, you know the words!"

There's lots of highly quotable lines on the album. I love *"I'm the last leaf on the tree, the autumn took the rest, but they won't take me."*
That was Keith Richards singing. He really can sing, y'know? We're singing in unison for the most part, but he has a real country voice. He embellishes, and does these flights. We tried it once or twice, and got it, and that's it.

How did he take to being mentioned in "Satisfied" (*"Now Mr Jagger and Mr Richards/I will scratch where I've been itching"*)?
That just came out, y'know? We wanted to make it a reaction song – 'cos everytime I hear "Satisfaction", I think the same thing: if you guys can't get any satisfaction, nobody's getting

JAMES MINCHIN III


With wife Kathleen Brennan, 2010

it! I always joke about it, and we decided to make a tune that said, "Fuck it, I will be satisfied!... oh, and by the way, Mr Jagger and Mr Richards...?" That was how that happened. It's a bit of a rant.

The phrase "*I will have satisfaction*" comes from duelling, doesn't it? It's the slap in the face with the glove.
Yeah! Somebody heard it, and they told me, "You sound so upset about it!" [*Laughs*]

Do you find your own tastes in music changing as you grow older?
Some things you just deepen your appreciation for. Other things you deepen your dislike for. It don't matter how many times you hear Johnny Cash – he endures. Some writers and singers nourish you, and continue to; others you discover for the first time.

Who've you discovered recently that you've liked?
Well, the thing is, when you have kids, you don't run the turntable any more! So whatever comes in the house, it ain't you that's deciding what gets played. You're a patron. Serving whatever they call the arts. It challenges your sense of what's enduring in you, and what we rebel against when we hear something new. You go, "Oh man! You know where that shit came from? You know who the Clancy Brothers are? Let me tell you..." You get real uppity about it. "You never heard of Howlin' Wolf?! Have you stopped breathing?" But it's their world, we just live in it, as they say. I have a perverse appreciation for the pandemonium of the musical pantheon, and what gets challenged and knocked off the horse. But it's interesting to see what kids will hear once or twice, and then it's in there – I played Little Richard and Buddy Holly for my boy when he was young, every day on the way to school: "You gotta get this shit in you!"

And did it work?
Yeah! Now, he hears it, and he's, like, "Oh, it's Little Richard." You try to instil things, and at the same time, learn yourself – they have you listen to things, and I'm always open to stuff.

It's odd how we come to music in our own time. When I was growing up, I'd listen to Beefheart, and it was only later that I heard Howlin' Wolf, and this big lightbulb came on, the penny dropped. It's not the order that novels are written in that matters,

it's the order in which they're read.
Oh, that's a really nice way to see it. Because it's not a linear learning experience, ever. That's what I loved about *Theme Time Radio Hour*, because the discoveries were your own. [*Does Dylan impression*] "This one's about roses. Red roses. Yellow roses. Thorns on roses – watch out, it'll prick your finger...", and oh, man, you're off to the races, you'd hear "Yellow Rose Of Texas", "My Love Is Like A Red Red Rose"... I loved that show, you got to see connections that you might never make yourself – between Judy Garland, and Sylvia Plath reading her poetry, and Henry Threadgill. It reminded me more of the radio that I used to hear when I was a kid, when you'd have a DJ who'd say, "Hey, check this out," and he'd play Lightnin' Hopkins, then maybe transition into some classical piece or maybe Gershwin: it helps you see things. As you said, it's the order they're heard in, not the order they're recorded in. You don't wanna be a prisoner of time. Otherwise, you're a goldfish in a plastic bag, and you've just been lowered into the aquarium, and told to stay in the bag. An aquarium is isolating enough, but to be in a bag in the aquarium is really depressing!

The tragedy about radio is that now all the stations are programmed by the same computer in Omaha, or somewhere.
There was a story in North Dakota, where there's so many little communities, and they had a big gas leak – natural gas, which is colourless, odourless, and poisonous. They thought, 'We gotta get on the radio and get the word out.' They went to every station, and they're like pillboxes: they don't even have windows, and inside there are no people, just a machine. People were shocked that there's not an actual arterial unit we can benefit from on a real level: they thought they were listening to the radio, but they were listening to a show that was recorded about 12 years ago, y'know? That bothers me, too.

You were inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame this year. It must have been gratifying, after a career where you've struggled, and been resolute in retaining your integrity.
It was discussed a lot at our house. I remember saying to my wife, "I'm being inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame? OK, fine. How long do I have to wait out here in the hall?" And she said, "You can't say that! No-one will get it!" I was just kiddin' around...

It's funny, 'cos you go a long time not giving a shit about it, and not knowing anything about it, and then all of a sudden it's a very cool thing, and they're interested in putting you in there. It's like, oh, there's real value in there, y'know? I had never seen any of the inductions or performances before, and now here I was going to be inducted, and I'm fascinated with it all. A very weird thing.

But everybody wants to be acknowledged – plumbers, carpenters – and I guess everybody has their own form of Hall of Fame – you know, baseball, you name it.

What has your involvement in theatre and movies brought to your music?
In a sense, it all comes from the same place. Ideas come from the same place; the form that they take, it's like, do you want to be a beverage or do you want to be a vegetable, or a dessert or a nut or a hat or a banana peel? You can start with an idea for a tune, and they're like sea-monkeys, you can add water and they'll grow into something else. I always thought that songs are movies for the ears, and at its best, a film can be like a song for the eyes.

But there's something so modular about a song, they fit in your pocket just like bagels. Which was the whole idea behind bagels to begin with: a hard crust on the outside so it couldn't be infected or ripped, and it was the perfect size for your pocket, because the food had to travel. Songs are like that – you keep a thousand in your mind all the time. Nobody ever says, "I've heard enough songs, don't play me another song" – there's always room for another song. It's not like "I have no place to put these books, I need to get a storage locker." There's always room inside for songs.

How has moving from city to country affected what you do? You always seemed such a city guy.
The thing with an urban environment is it's amazing how many words come through your windshield, hundreds and hundreds, all the time. Up here, when you're driving, you're not reading. Not that it's affected my songs that much. Like Bob Dylan says, there's a lot of songs created in chaos that have a certain peace to them, and other songs created in peaceful conditions that have an air of chaos. This does not necessarily offer itself up as an environment for peaceful material. Just because you're in what appears to be a bucolic environment, it may stimulate thoughts of mass murder. Naked with an axe, y'know? Burning down the chicken-coop! Kidnapping the mayor's daughter! They say that out here, your mind can grow long...

In the country, no-one can hear you scream, but in the city, they can hear you scream...
...But nobody cares! ♦

TOM'S RIDDLES

The answers...

*"HE'S A DWARF! When he gets on the elevator in the morning, he presses the button for the ground floor, but when he comes back he can't reach the button for the 10th floor, just the 7th; but when it's raining, he has an umbrella, with which he can reach the 10th button."

** "The accused was one of two conjoined twins. 'You have committed the murder, but he is totally innocent. How can I jail you without jailing him?'."

, STEFANIE KEENAN/WIREIMAGE

BAD AS ME

Hell breaks loose, again... A raucous, wide-ranging and unusually accessible return to action. *"Before I'm gone... I will have satisfaction!"* By NEIL SPENCER

RELEASED OCTOBER 2011

"SHE WASHES, I dry," was one standard response from Waits when asked about his songwriting collaborations with his wife, Kathleen Brennan. "One swings the hammer, the other holds the nail," was another. Although the singer was ever effusive about his marriage in conversation, the pair maintained strict secrecy about both their private life and the precise nature of their creative partnership. Their songs, after all, were impersonal acts of invention; their "I" and more rarely "we" belonged to imaginary characters. It was "stuff out of newspapers", growled Waits. Glimpses of anything more autobiographical, more (dreaded word, the curse of singer-songwriterdom) confessional, were few and easily attributed to someone else entirely. Wasn't Brennan, after all, a scriptwriter first, a songsmith second?

On Waits' first album of new material in seven years, it's hard not to sense the masks of dramatis personae slipping to reveal something more personal, something that sounds like a bumpy ride on that rosy marital road.

When it was observed by *Uncut's* interviewer that many of the tracks were about departure, leaving, getting lost, hitting the highway (*see interview, page 102*), Waits was all surprise. "Good point. I hadn't thought of that."

Of course he had. Images of leaving and separation are etched into most of the record's standouts: the accusatory title track; the restless "Get Lost", whose narrator "*feels like I'm on a chain*", the bleak "Face To The Highway", with its pained promise that "*I'll turn my back on you*". Most naked of all is "Back In The Crowd", a tender break-up ballad delivered to a simple Spanish-tinged acoustic backing with none of Waits' normal strangulation. He simply croons to his lover that she doesn't want him: "*Take back your name.../Take my picture from the frame/ And put me back in the crowd*". Waits has written bundles of sad songs – "weepers" – but this is among his most forlorn.

BAD AS ME IS A SHOWCASE FOR WAITS' DIVERSITY, A RESUMÉ OF HIS CAREER

Bad As Me is not Waits' *Blood On The Tracks* – it's way too mannered and diverse for such a description – but if the album has a theme it's break-up, albeit one clearly averted in the case of Tom'n'Kath. The album opens with escape on "Chicago", one of Waits' many train songs, full of the migrant's blind optimism that relocation will bring salvation: "*I'm not alone, I'm not afraid/This bird has flown from his cage*". It's a terrific opener, playing Waits' gravel-gargling vocals against the punch of horns from New Orleans' Preservation Hall Jazz Band, its wheels oiled by Berryesque licks from Keith Richards and train-whistle harp from Charlie Musselwhite.

Musically, *Bad As Me* is a showcase for Waits' diversity, almost a resumé of his career. The tinkling piano and woozy, late-night mood of "Kiss Me" is a ringer for "Blue Valentines". The bluesy howl of "Satisfied", set to Keith Richards' ugliest guitar, is testimony to the influence of Beefheart and Howlin' Wolf (its lyrics also tipping a nod to "*Mr Jagger and Mr Richards*"). The title track is a meld of junkyard clangorama familiar from *Swordfish*... onwards, with Waits' vocals at their most hysterical. "Talking At The Same Time", delivered in a tense falsetto to Marc Ribot's eerie 1950s twang, might have come from

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"*Bad As Me* has something of the aspect of a Tom Waits best-of, yet comprised of new material... The sound of a supremely confident artist convening a raucous celebration of his own myth."
ANDREW MUELLER, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 2011

"The postmodern blues croaker has enjoyed a career arc in stark opposition to rock's littered landscape of beautiful corpses, only improving as age has made him sound more in need of a throat lozenge."
ALEX DENNEY, NME, 29/10/2011

The Black Rider, its lyrics sounding like something from Depression-era Kurt Weill: "*All the news is bad/Is there any other kind?*"

Yet there are surprises, too. "Hell Broke Luce" is a storming assault on military life, overlaying sheens of industrial noise (and more Richards licks) on a relentless left-right march. It's a brutal affair. Waits has often been accused of trying too hard to be weird, his torrents of imagery too strained, but here he barks out shards of entirely credible army conversation to evoke the sheer nastiness of combat: "*My face was scorched/I miss my home, I miss my porch*"; "*Kelly Presutto got his thumbs blown off*"; "*That big fucking bomb made me deaf*"; "*My mom she died and never wrote*". It's a coruscating, subversive piece of work, taking the grunts' side against the military and political establishment.

From another place entirely comes "Get Lost", a jittery piece of supercharged 1950s R'n'B, with guitarists Ribot and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos strafing rubbery Bo Diddley riffs while Waits revisits his rockabilly teenage years. "Raised Right Men", with its shrill Vox organ, is different again, an anguished rant over a ticking blues backdrop. The band Waits assembled for the sessions is formidable.

Aside from his three guitar aces, Waits has his son Casey behind the drumkit, and visitors like Flea and Les Claypool adding chunky basslines. Quite simply, they cook.

Leavening the pace and controlled fury come a couple of conversational, accordion-led cuts. "Pay Me" is rueful and enigmatic, its narrator (once again it seems personal) talking defiance – "*I won't eat crow*" – but sounding defeated, with lyrical flourishes like "*all roads lead to the end of the world*". With "New Year's Eve" we're into familiar territory, Waits drawling a laconic tale of drunken revelry gone wrong.

If there's a track that fails to hits its mark it's "Last Leaf", a spindly ballad with Richards adding his croak to Waits', which doesn't get much past its title. Still, the old boys evidently enjoyed making it.

Its mix of swagger, sweat, anger and pathos won *Bad As Me* glowing reviews and surprisingly good sales; recognition, perhaps, of Waits' uniqueness, but also of an accessibility that earlier albums had spurned in pursuit of purity. Approachable but uncompromising, Waits' album of departures brought him home in style. ♦

TRACKLISTING — BAD AS ME

1. Chicago ★★★★
2. Raised Right Men ★★★
3. Talking At The Same Time ★★★★★
4. Get Lost ★★★★
5. Face To The Highway ★★★★★
6. Pay Me ★★★★
7. Back In The Crowd ★★★★★
8. Bad As Me ★★★★
9. Kiss Me ★★★★
10. Satisfied ★★★
11. Last Leaf ★★★
12. Hell Broke Luce ★★★★★
13. New Year's Eve ★★★★

Released: October 21, 2011
Label: ANTI-
Recorded at: Studio Miraval, France; Compass Point Studios, Bahamas
Produced by: Tom Waits, Kathleen Brennan
Personnel: Tom Waits (vocals, guitar, piano, percussion, banjo, tablas, pump organ), Marc Ribot (guitar), Clint Maedgen (sax), Casey Waits (drums), David Hidalgo (guitar, violin, percussion, accordion, bass, background vocals), Ben Jaffe (trombone, bass clarinet, tuba), Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica), Patrick Warren (keyboards), James Whiton (bass), Keith Richards (guitar, vocals), Augie Meyers (Vox organ, piano, accordion), Gino Robair (percussion, vibraphone), Larry Taylor (guitar, bass), Chris Grady (trumpet), Flea (bass), Will Bernard (guitar), Dawn Harms (violin), Marcus Shelby (bass), Les Claypool (bass), Zack Sumner (bass)
Highest chart position: UK 10; US 6

TOM WAITS ON FILM

TOM AT THE MOVIES

The filmography of Tom Waits. Involves barflies, crooks, serial killers, vampires, mad scientists and, of course, the Devil. "Not the shoes!" By JASON ANDERSON

LIKE THE OLD-TIME character actors who set a humble course for him to follow, Tom Waits has rarely had ideas above his station when he gets in front of a movie camera. Careful to keep his cool, he's usually been content to claim the space that was left over in a scene once the stars – a coterie that's included everyone from Jack Nicholson to Ben Stiller to Denzel Washington – were through with their business. Therefore, it's perfectly fitting that the first character Waits would ever play on screen – a piano player in Sylvester Stallone's ***Paradise Alley*** (1978) – went by the name of Mumbles.

The result wasn't the kind of work that wins Oscars, even the supporting-actor kind. The closest Waits got to one of Hollywood's shiny statuettes was sharing a special Golden Globe with the rest of the ensemble in ***Short Cuts*** (1993). Starring as a limo driver who hits a rocky stretch with Lily Tomlin as his waitress wife, Waits provides one of the few notes of sweetness in Robert Altman's symphony of cruelty.

But over the course of a screen career that's stretched on for nearly as long as his recording one, Waits has repeatedly proved how much he can do by doing very little. Indeed, he's fared less well in roles that have required more strenuous exertions. As he demonstrated with his howling and bug-eating in Bram Stoker's ***Dracula*** (1992) – the most overripe performance in a run of collaborations with Francis Ford Coppola that began with the score for ***One From The Heart*** (1982) – his wildness is best served in small doses.

The effectiveness of his less-is-more strategy is plain to see in Waits' first big scene in ***Down By Law*** (1986), the strongest of his teamings with another filmmaker friend, Jim Jarmusch. (He'd later be heard on a radio in ***Night On Earth*** and have an awkward encounter with Iggy Pop in ***Coffee And Cigarettes***.) Waits plays Zack, a nighttime DJ in New Orleans on a downwardly mobile trajectory that he'll soon share with John Lurie's sad-sack pimp and Roberto Benigni's unhinged Italian tourist. But before those misadventures can begin, Zack's got to get thrown out of his apartment by Ellen Barkin as an aggrieved girlfriend.

ON SCREEN, WAITS HAS PROVED HOW MUCH HE CAN DO BY DOING VERY LITTLE

Their approaches to the scene comprise a fascinating study in contrasts. Sporting a nightie and smeared make-up, Barkin emotes as hard as she can, chucking clothes and lamps around as she berates Zack in an accent that betrays the craftsmanship befitting a professional actor. Waits just nods, his voice barely rising above a hoarse whisper. Poor Zack hardly reacts even when she dumps his 45s on him. She only gets a rise out of him when she makes a move to the window with his most prized possession. "Not the shoes!" he says, to no avail.

In the scene that follows, he forlornly heads to the street to survey the wreckage. After fishing out his shoes and wiping them with a shirt, he nods again, this time more happily. Homeless he may suddenly be, but the man is clearly relieved to get some peace before making his next step in the wrong direction.

In his busiest years as an actor, in the '80s and first half of the '90s, Waits kept a steady trade playing men who shared Zack's diminished

His Satanic majesty: Waits as the Devil in *The Imaginarium Of Doctor Parnassus*

expectations, as well as the flickers of vitality and humour that distinguished them from the lumps on the neighbouring barstools. As the pal of the alcoholic played by Nicholson in ***Ironweed*** (1987), Waits is downright gleeful when he returns from the hospital and exclaims, "Doc says I got cancer – first thing I ever got!"

Given his aptitude in the better-known part of his career, it's unsurprising that Waits knew what to do with his choicest lines. In ***Candy Mountain*** (1987) – a little-seen but marvellous road comedy by photographer Robert Frank and cult writer Rudy Wurlitzer that also includes bit parts by Joe Strummer, David Johansen and Mary Margaret O'Hara – he donned golfwear to play the businessman brother of a legendary guitar-maker. Pointing to his home while enjoying a stiff one on the patio, he brags, "I've got rooms in that house I've never even been in!"

Talking to *Pitchfork* in 2006, Waits was careful to categorise his excursions in the movie business. "I do some acting," he said. "And there's a difference between 'I do some acting' and 'I'm an actor.' People don't really trust people to do two things well."

Waits' unfussy attitude was the right one to take – he'd run into trouble whenever he neglected his strategy to tackle bigger, broader parts. Cast as a wingnut crook and killer named Kenny in the caper ***Cold Feet*** (1989), Waits wears out his welcome with sloppy attempts at physical comedy, opposite a charmless Sally Kirkland and a befuddled Keith Carradine. His Renfield in ***Dracula*** for Coppola is nearly as gruelling in terms of his rampant chewing of scenery and live critters. "The master will come, and he has promised to make me immortal!" he yelps, before taking a bite out of Richard E Grant.

More recent efforts prove that Waits' kookier extremes work fine as long as his fellow actors are going even further over the top. In the superhero parody ***Mystery Men*** (1999), his mad-scientist character doesn't seem that mad at all, despite the loopiness of his non-lethal weaponry and his lascivious interests in much older women. A thriller that's bombastic even by the standards of the late Tony Scott, ***Domino*** (2005) is so crowded with motor-mouthed creeps and lunatics that Waits' turn as a mysterious desert seer seems almost restrained.

The same goes for Waits' two most enjoyable movie appearances of the last decade. As a slow-talking, bunny-clutching oddball who fesses up to a long history of "serial-killer killing", he's the most unnervingly laid-back member of the titular septet in ***Seven Psychopaths*** (2012). And such is the general level of chaos in ***The Imaginarium Of Doctor Parnassus*** (2009) – the freewheeling fantasy flick that Terry Gilliam cobbled together after the death of his leading man, Heath Ledger, one third of the way through the shoot – Waits has little trouble underplaying his turn as the devil himself. Known here as Mr Nick, he's an elegant fellow with a pencil-thin moustache, a fondness for wagers and a forte for the tango. As screen Satans go, Waits' incarnation is as far from Robert De Niro's sinister heavy in ***Angel Heart*** as it is from Peter Cook's louche trickster in ***Bedazzled***. Of course, like all the rest, Mr Nick still gets the best lines. ♦

Cellmates: Waits with John Lurie (centre) and Roberto Benigni in Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law*

EVERETT COLLECTION/REX; MOVIESTORE COLLECTION/REX

TOM WAITS
ALBUMS

LIVE ALBUMS AND COMPILATIONS

Glitter, doom, bounced checks and beautiful maladies... Tom Waits' live albums and anthologies, anthologised.

By DAVID QUANTICK

TOM WAITS IS a superb live performer and it makes total sense for there to be a lot of Tom Waits live albums out there. But then there are a lot of Tom Waitses out there, too. While not quite as much of a musical shape-shifter as some, Waits' decision to give his career a second act meant two things: one, a radical stepping away from the boho beatnik boozer blues and jazz of his 1970s work towards the rattle and honk of his spikier, more challenging later work; and two, the somewhat tricky decision whether or not Waits would continue to refer to his previous work in "a live situation". And where many artists see no dichotomy in filling the gaps between the new, difficult songs with the old pop hits (David Bowie comes to mind in this regard), Waits has always seemed less comfortable with this idea. Indeed, it would be a weird concert that lurched from, say, *Bone Machine's* "Such A Scream" (1992) to "Ol' '55" (1973).

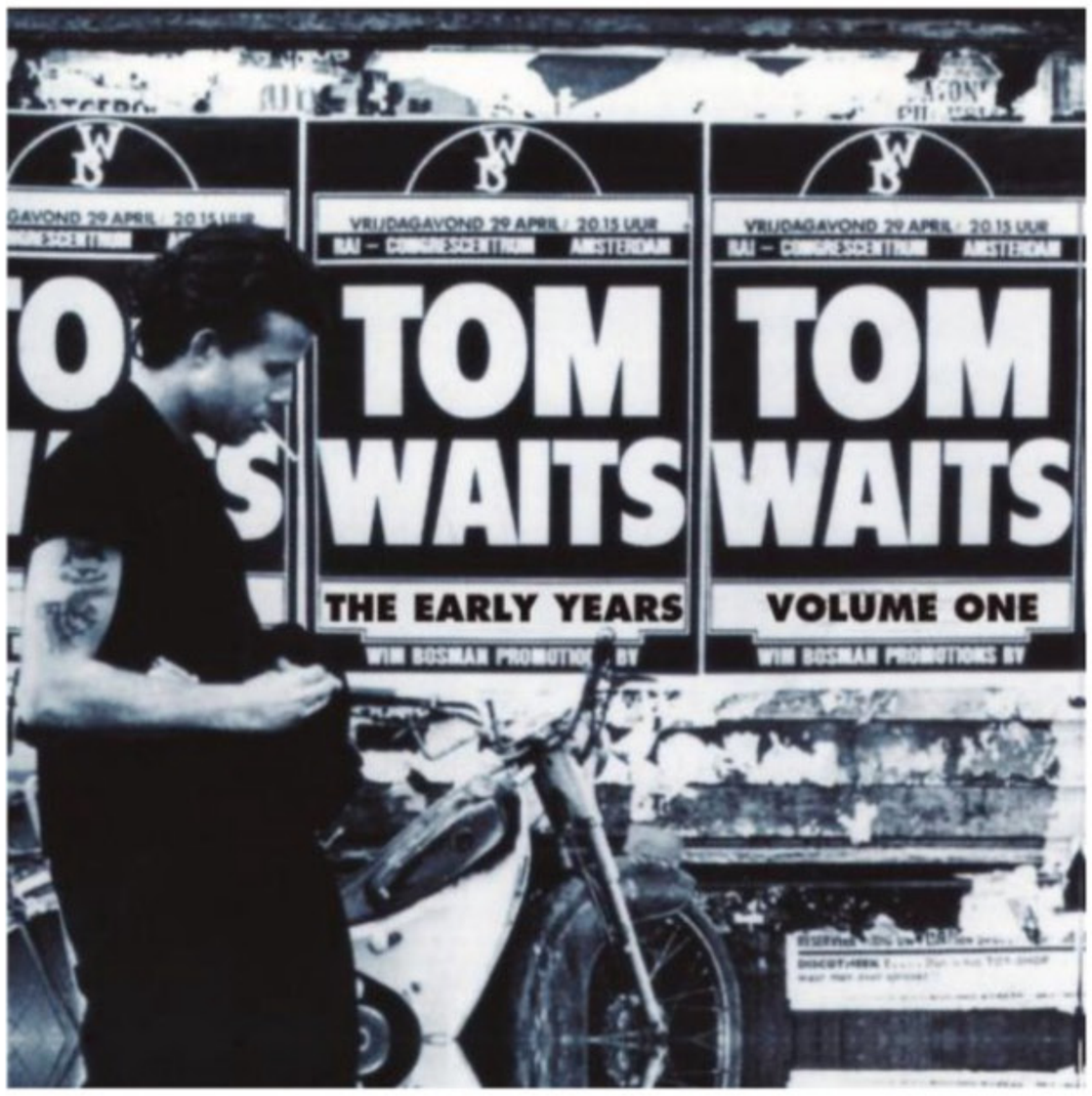
But somehow he's managed to pull it off (largely by dropping off huge chunks of his catalogue as he goes, like spent fuel tanks), and Waits' continually changing career is always accurately reflected onstage. And why not? His blend of theatricality, theatricality, dramatic performance and theatricality has always made for a powerful live experience, whether it's the early gin-soaked-boy-in-an-enormous-hat years, all jazz and monologues and squooshy vocal delivery, with the odd ballad thrown in, the mid-period creak'n'squeak era, with its unbeatable combination of Captain Beefheart and Kurt Weill, or the more recent fusion of clanking Partch, nightmare visions and actual barking.

The first live album proper in Waits' career – 1975's *Nighthawks At The Diner* – was therefore a sensible career move and is covered elsewhere. Waits' constantly evolving musical journey saw his live shows change accordingly (when I saw him in the early 1980s, he was still mixing in old classics like "Christmas Card From A Hooker" with newer songs), but by 1988 the new Waits was far enough from the old Waits to merit a new live album. ***Big Time*** ★★★ is of course also a movie and therefore technically a soundtrack album, but as it's also a record of two concerts (recorded in Los Angeles and San Francisco), it's a proper live album. And it works well enough: Waits is at his most growly, the Marc Ribot-led band on top form, and the repertoire is entirely culled from Waits' "Island Trilogy" (with the exception of "Strange Weather", written for Marianne Faithfull, and "Ruby's Arms" from *Heartattack And Vine*). Its main fault is that it doesn't sound brilliant. Gone are the subtleties of *Rain Dogs* and *Swordfishtrombones*, replaced by a distant, lumpy thud. Waits' decision to sing everything in his deafening mid-'80s croak is also somewhat vexing. And at times, the sound is variable ("Time" sounds as if it was, and may well have been, recorded from a balcony). If you want a rougher and readier collection of Waits' songs, however, *Big Time* is a good place to go.

WAITS' CONTINUALLY CHANGING CAREER IS REFLECTED ONSTAGE

By the early 21st Century, Tom Waits was an established part of popular music culture, his


TOM WAITS
BIG
TIME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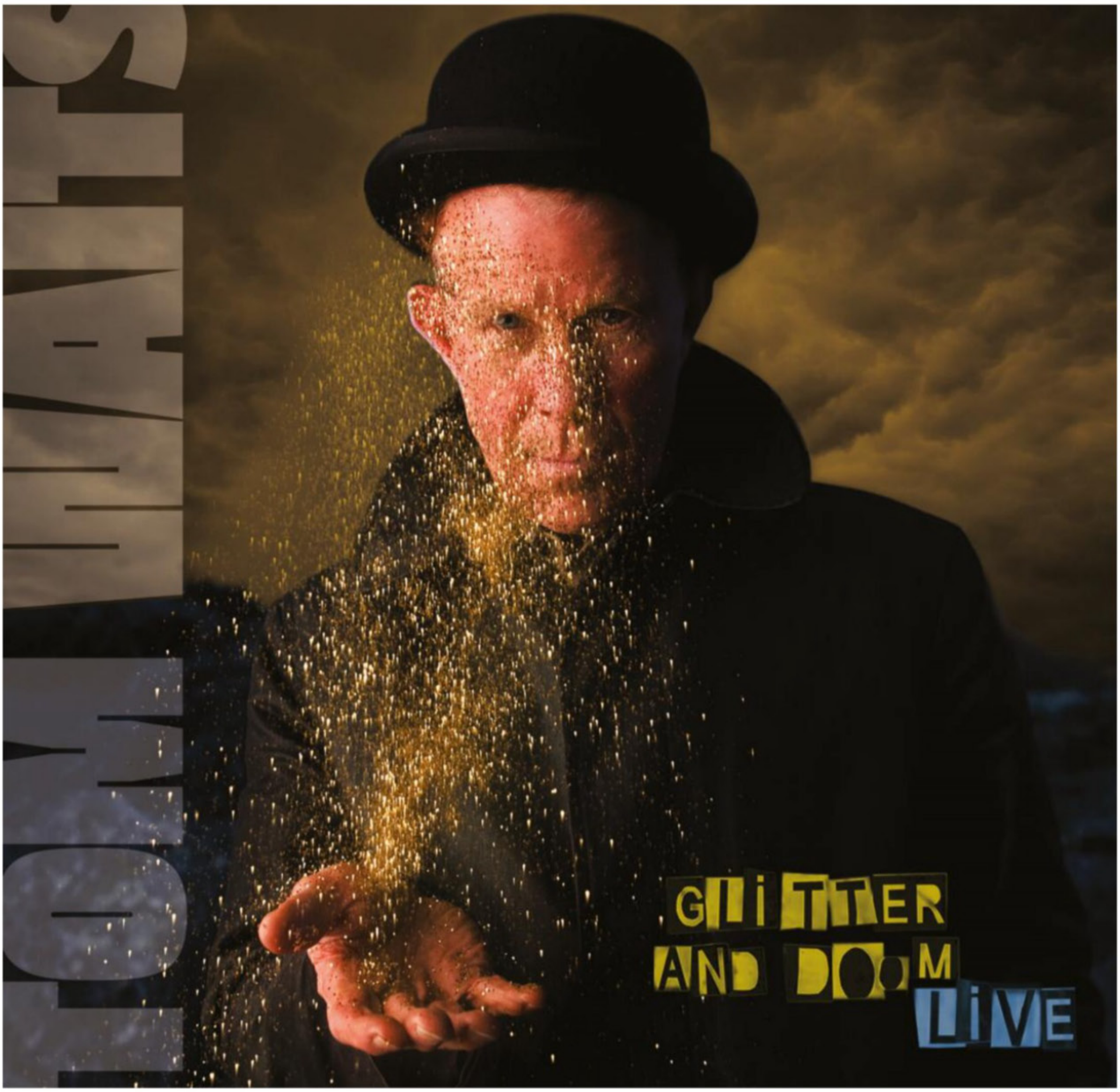

TOM WAITS
GLITTER
AND DOOM
LIVE

TOM WAITS ALBUMS

different styles ranging far and wide, as capable of providing songs for Rod Stewart as interpreting avant-garde opera. With albums as diverse as the musical *Alice* and the crowd-pleasing *Mule Variations*, a new live album was therefore called for to acknowledge this millennial Waits, and so in 2009 we got ***Glitter And Doom Live*** ★★★, a pure recording of the tour of the same name. Beginning with a thunderous "Lucinda" and ending with a gorgeous "Lucky Day", *Glitter And Doom* is devoid of anything from Waits' distant past, and any concessions to sweetness are confined to the appearance of "Picture In A Frame" (on the collection's second disc, in a medley of anecdotes called "Tom's Tales".) The oldest song here is probably "Singapore" from *Rain Dogs*, while live-music nerds will note the recurrence of "Falling Down", a song that lives only on Waits' live albums.

Glitter And Doom is beefier than *Big Time*, a fact reflected in a hefty new version of "Singapore", which has long drifted past its original moorings and transmuted from a hoarse whisper to a *basso profondo* belch of a song. But this is the modern world, and an album on which Waits tells a story about eBay, which sounds like a fracture in time, but still manages to root his anecdote to Waitsworld. Many listeners will prefer the subtler sounds of the studio versions of these songs, but the weirdest aspect of this album is that, owing to the fact it was recorded in a variety of venues around the world (apparently of different sizes), audience reaction is clearly different in each section. So if you don't mind an album where one song receives polite Parisian applause and the next is greeted by American whooping apoplexy, this is the one for you. Still, it does at least demonstrate the breadth of Waits' appeal, albeit without much subtlety.

One does at times wish for a Waits live recording, or anthology, which properly reflects his music; the often slapdash nature of *Big Time* and *Glitter And Doom* is a strongish argument against the idea of live albums as pure document (although there are rumours that *Big Time* was "beefed up" with tape effects and funny noises). It would be nice to have, perhaps, a club recording of Waits' later work, which would mirror the intimacy he achieved with his earlier live recordings. Or maybe just a massive great sexy box of live recordings covering all aspects of his career.

Doubtless there are bootlegs of such things (or, as we say nowadays, "YouTube recordings"). But for fans of his Asylum-era work, the combination of expired copyright and high-quality American FM radio recordings means that his 1970s work, at least, is now quite well served in terms of live albums. So apart from the official recordings, ones sanctioned by Waits' various record companies, over the years one or two concerts have surfaced that were once bootlegs and are now perfectly fine so far as we know. The most notable of these stem from Waits' 1970s career, which either suggests he was getting more gigs back in those days, or that these are the rare treasures now made available. Possibly the most famous of these recordings is ***Round Midnight: The Minneapolis Broadcast*** ★★★★, recorded in 1975 but not released until 2012. Taped by KQRS Minneapolis in front of a live audience, and featuring some outrageous career claims, *Round Midnight* is Waits in *Nighthawks* territory, with arguably greater intimacy and less playing to the gallery. ***A Small Affair In Ohio (Live)*** ★★★ was recorded by WMMS FM in Cleveland in 1977 and features a wide selection of Waits' finest moments, particularly an excellent "I Never Talk To Strangers". And finally in our historic roundup, there's ***The Dime Store Novels Vol. 1 (Live At Ebbets Field 1974)*** ★★★, which takes its name from "Strangers" and isn't part of any series I ever heard of. A beautiful "I Hope That I Don't Fall In Love With You" displays Waits' interesting way with an acoustic guitar and there's a wonderful, low-key "Martha" to end with.

And now we come to the wonderful world of the compilation album. These collections usually exist for two reasons: either the enormous success of the artist in question means that new fans are in so much of a hurry to buy all their stuff that said artist hasn't time to make albums quickly enough, and so a greatest hits album is most necessary; or the artist has now left his or her record company for a new one and – out of sheer spite or, more likely, the need to recoup some of the money the label spent on the artist and never got back – the label finds itself compelled to release a grab-bag of older songs to cash in on what it hopes will be that artist's future success.

Tom Waits' lack of commercial whammy in the 1970s accounts for the lack of compilations of his work in that decade; certainly it took his departure to Island Records from Asylum in 1981 to make that label release its first anthology of his work. ***Bounced Checks*** ★★★ is an odd, almost absent-minded collection of songs; there are alternate takes of "Jersey Girl" and "Whistlin' Past The Graveyard", while "Mr Henry" was previously unreleased. It's a very tentative, if interesting, collection, and not much use to the novice Waits buyer.

The first serious attempt to provide that service came in 1984, perhaps when Asylum had noticed that Waits' new direction was proving popular. ***Anthology Of Tom Waits*** ★★★ is a predictable but useful compilation of 13 tracks, very few of which will cause the listener to leap from their chair shouting, "Oh my God! What the hell *is* this?" Only "A Sight For Sore Eyes" takes us out of the realm of the easily guessable. The game was slightly upped a couple of years later when Asylum returned to the tracklisting of *Anthology*, dropped a couple of songs, added two or three more and gave the world ***Asylum Years*** ★★★★, which at least covers most bases and did provide newcomers with a decent way in to Waits' music.

And that was it for the 1980s. In 1991 and 1993, ***The Early Years: Volumes One And Two*** ★★★ were released, collections of recordings made before Waits' official recording debut. "Martha" here features in an acoustic version of unusual delicacy, while there's a gorgeously countrified "Looks Like I'm Up Shit Creek Again", indicating one of the sadly less-explored directions of Waits' songwriting. At one point he is inches away from a yodel. The demoey quality of these recordings only adds to their effectiveness, and takes them a happy mile or two further away from some of their later final resting places on Eagles records.

Waits would then remain happily uncompiled for some time, until his final departure from Island Records caused that label to bow to the inevitable release of 1998's ***Beautiful Maladies – The Island Years*** ★★★★. Five years after *The Black Rider* had set the charts alight, *Beautiful Maladies* was a thorough, if slightly odd, collection, avoiding ballady material like "Time" and "In The Neighborhood" for Waits' more, well, Island-sounding material. *The Black Rider* gets two songs, and "Good Old World (Waltz)" turns up from Waits' *Night On Earth* soundtrack. It's a useful introduction to Tom Waits in the fourth quarter of the 20th Century, if nothing else.

And finally, last but not much else, there's 2001's ***Used Songs 1973–1980*** ★★★, which, as its name gently hints, is supposed to be a collection of Waits' best songs for Asylum, but in actuality features very little music from before 1975. It's pretty good, though. ♦

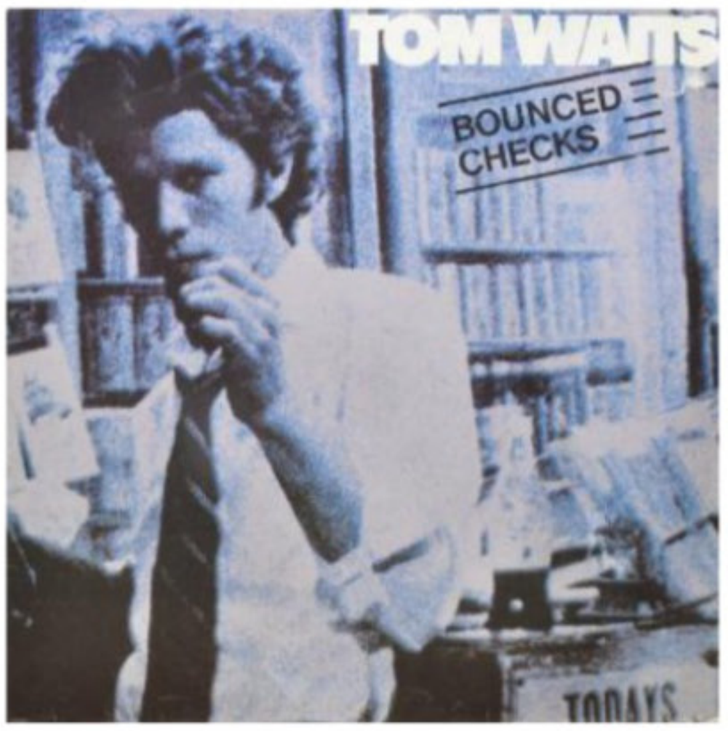
THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The title is a bit of a slap round the chops to the buyer and a fair summation of the contents. Cruelly a must for the Waits aficionado by the inclusion of the previously unreleased 'Mr Henry'... A good place to become acquainted with the width of his preoccupations and depth of his visions."
GAVIN MARTIN ON BOUNCED CHEQUES, NME, 14/11/1981

"Unlike Talking Heads' joyous, clean-sounding OST [to *Stop Making Sense*], *Big Time* often does Waits great disservice by burying his lyrics in the mix... An unnecessary experiment, hardly a companion to the movie and pretty insubstantial..."
LEN BROWN ON BIG TIME, NME, 01/10/1988

"When was the last time an LP hit the nerve like The Who's *Live At Leeds* or The Allman Bros' *At Fillmore East*?... Pieced together from shows as far apart as Tulsa and Milan, *Glitter And Doom Live* is for the most part a thrilling document of Waits' onstage artistry."
BARNEY HOSKYNS ON GLITTER AND DOOM, UNCUT, JANUARY 2010


TOM
WAITS
The Early Years
Vol. 2


TOM WAITS
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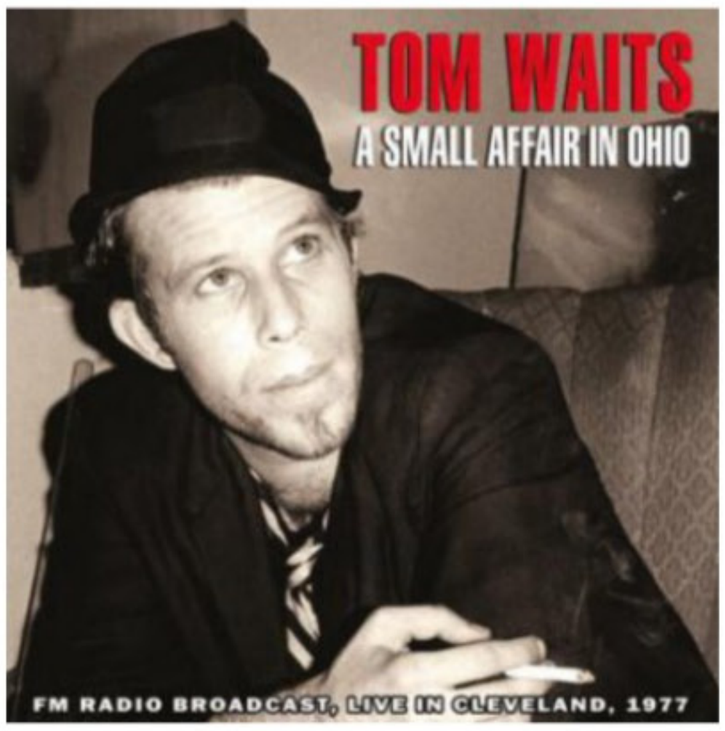
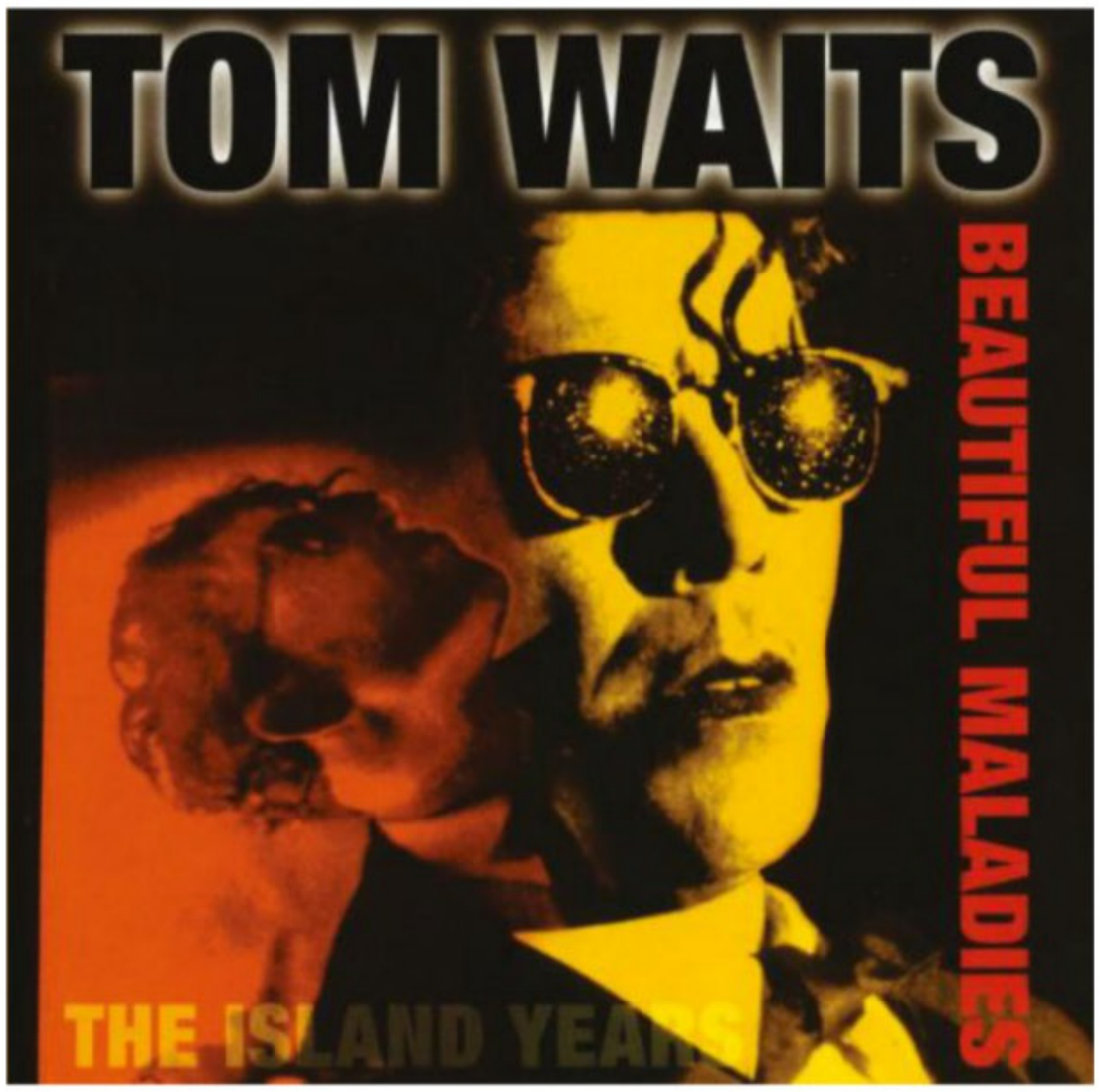
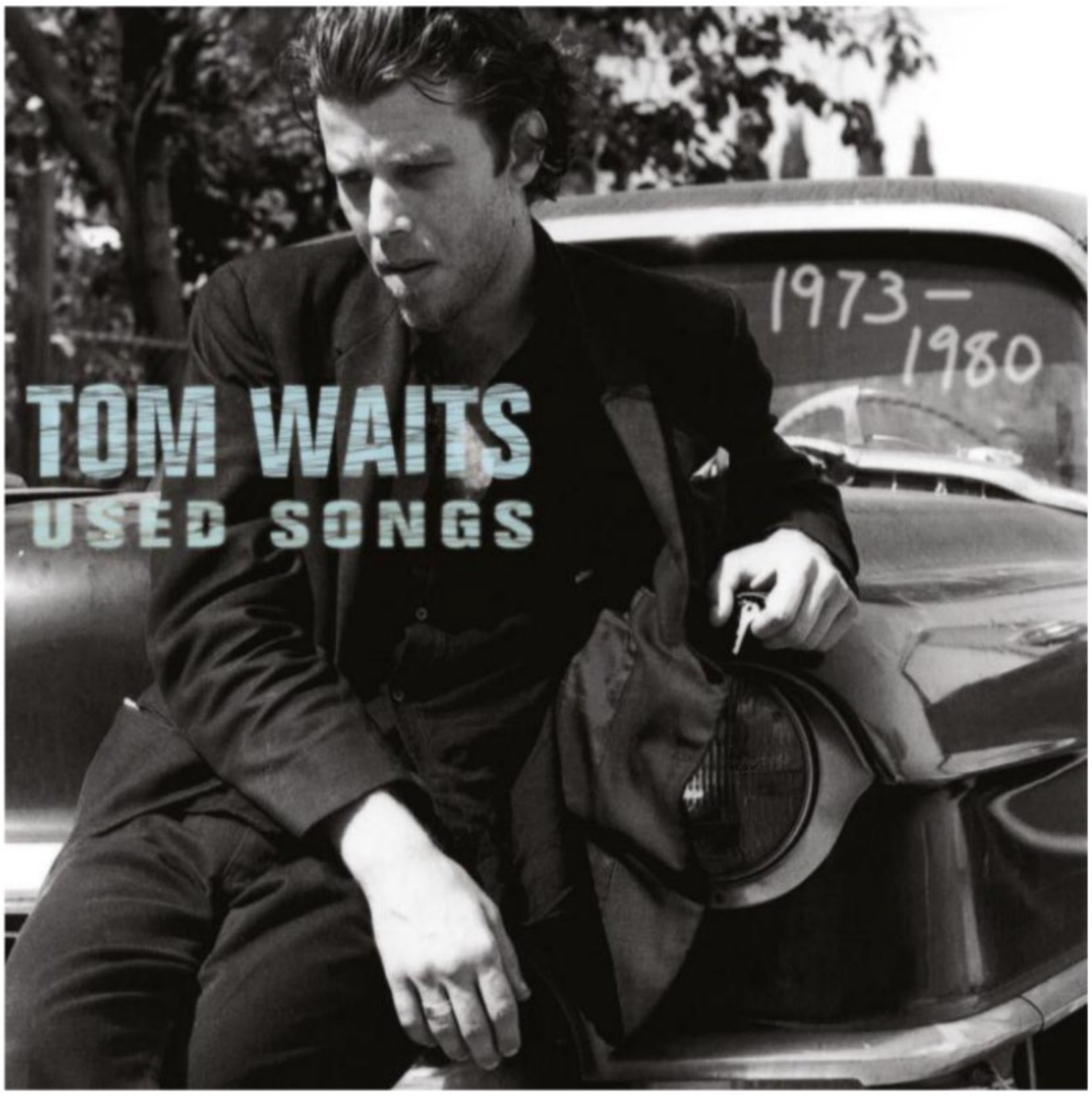

TOM WAITS
A SMALL AFFAIR IN OHIO
FM RADIO BROADCAST, LIVE IN CLEVELAND, 1977


TOM
WAITS
Round Midnight
THE MINNEAPOLIS BROADCAST 1975


TOM WAITS
BEAUTIFUL MALADIES


ANTHOLOGY
TOM WAITS


1973—
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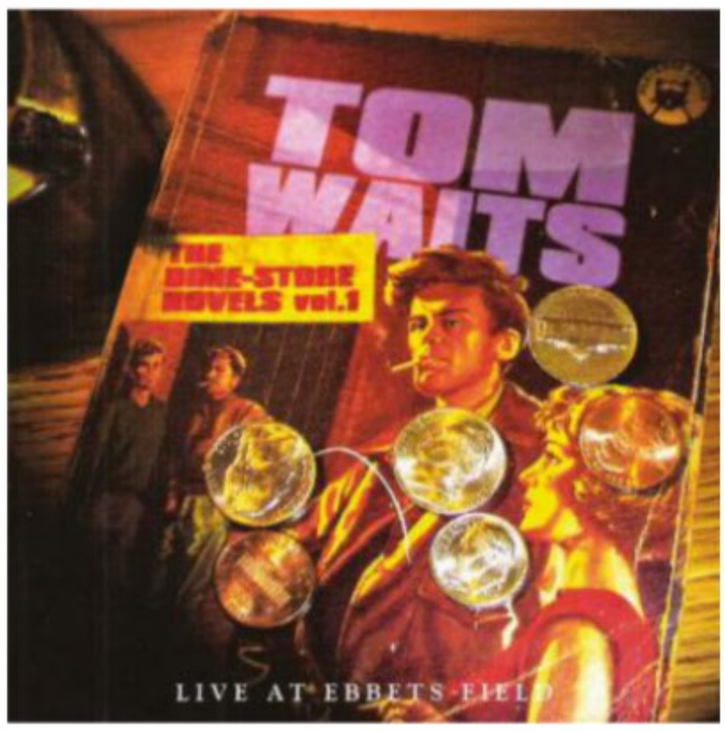
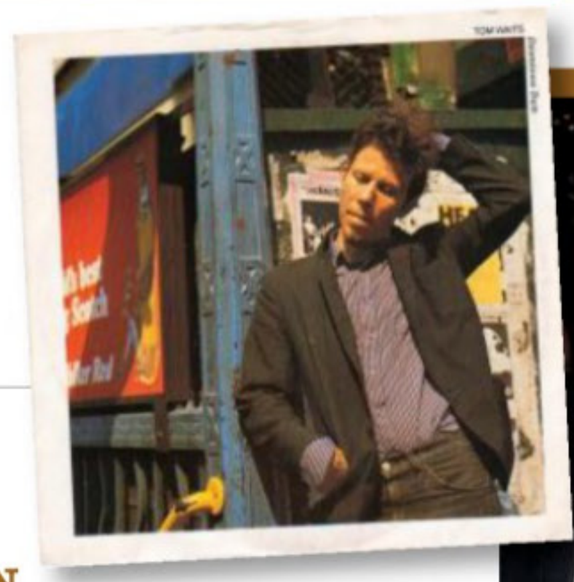
TOM WAITS
USED SONGS


TOM
WAITS
THE
DIME-STORE
NOVELS Vol.1
LIVE AT EBBETS FIELD

SPARE PARTS

US and UK singles...

TOM WAITS IS not, and has never been, a singles artist. Many of his US and UK singles were actually issued after their albums' release dates; hardly a strategy for chart dominance. Hits? Nah. Nothing in a 40-year career. Artists from the Eagles ("Ol' '55") to Rod Stewart ("Downtown Train") have covered and charted his songs, but the closest Tom has come to the popular hit parade is in France, in 2011, where "Bad As Me" made No 50. That said, the following list of his US and UK 7", CD and download singles makes for a rather neat, and inevitably entertaining, chronology of his career, from ballads to boneshakers and back... ***Mark Bentley***



Partners in rhyme: Waits and Kathleen Brennan in 1996

OL' '55/ MIDNIGHT LULLABY
Elektra, May 1973 (US only)

DIAMONDS ON MY WINDSHIELD/SAN DIEGO SERENADE
Elektra, March 1974 (US only)

NEW COAT OF PAINT/ BLUE SKIES
Elektra, March 1974 (US only)
The B-side would turn up on *The Early Years Vol 2*.

(LOOKING FOR) THE HEART OF SATURDAY NIGHT/DIAMONDS ON MY WINDSHIELD
Elektra, October 1974 (US only)

STEP RIGHT UP/THE PIANO HAS BEEN DRINKING (NOT ME)
Elektra, October 1974 (US only)

SOMEWHERE/RED SHOES BY THE DRUGSTORE
Elektra/Asylum, April 1979
The first UK single issue, from *Blue Valentine*.

JERSEY GIRL/HEARTATTACK AND VINE
Elektra, December 1980

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD/ FRANK'S WILD YEARS
Island, October 1983

DOWNTOWN TRAIN/TANGO TILL THEY'RE SORE
Island, November 1985

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD/ SINGAPORE
Island, February 1986
The UK double-pack 7" added live cuts "Tango Till They're Sore" and "Rain Dogs", while a 12" also featured "Jockey Full Of Bourbon" and "16 Shells From A Thirty-Ought-Six".

16 SHELLS FROM A THIRTY-OUGHT-SIX (LIVE)/BIG BLACK MARIAH (LIVE)
Island, September 1988

GOIN' OUT WEST/A LITTLE RAIN
Island, August 1992

The sole release from *Bone Machine* and his first ever CD single in the UK; "Back In The Good Old World (Gypsy)" from *Night On Earth* made the 10" vinyl issue.

HOLD ON/ BIG IN JAPAN/ BUZZ FLEDDERJOHN
Epitaph, Jun 1999
The first Anti-/Epitaph label release.

LIE TO ME [PROMO ONLY]
Anti-, 2006

BAD AS ME [DOWNLOAD ONLY]
Anti-, 2011

BACK IN THE CROWD [DOWNLOAD]
The final Waits single issue to date; it made No 73 in the Belgian Flanders Ultratop chart. (We think that counts as a hit!)

"I didn't just marry a beautiful woman, I married a record collection"

KATHLEEN BRENNAN: muse, mentor and Waits' key collaborator

BLUES? JAZZ? BUKOWSKI? Brecht? The Beatniks? There's a clear argument that the most important influence on Waits' life and music is actually his wife. Waits met playwright Kathleen Patricia Brennan on the set of *One From The Heart*, where she was working as a script editor. They married in August 1980, and she is credited – not least by Waits in his occasional interviews – for opening his ears to a wide range of music and art, driving him into the sounds and styles that defined his experimental 1980s and beyond. She certainly was instrumental, literally, in Waits' horse-changing direction on *Swordfishtrombones*. "*Look here in my wallet, that's her*", Waits sings on "Johnsburg, Illinois" – she's the girl, his "*only true love*", and the song is named after her birthplace. Her media profile is non-existent, but from *Rain Dogs*' "Hang Down Your Head" onwards, she has been a regular co-writer and occasional instrumentalist, and that's her artwork right there on *The Black Rider*.

"I'm in a stroller waiting to be pushed out into traffic," Waits has said. "And she's the one that'll do it!"

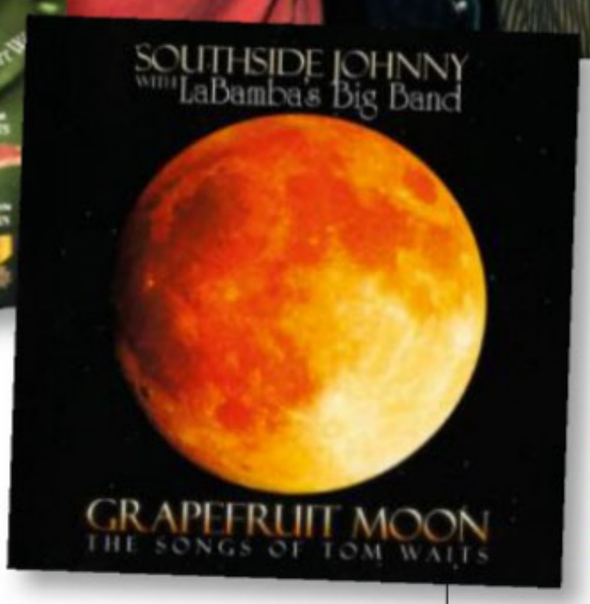
RON GALELLA/WIREIMAGE

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

Selected collaborations, contributions and guest appearances

Bonnie Raitt *Homeplate*
Piano and backing vocals on "Your Sweet And Shiney Eyes" (1975)
Richie Cole *Hollywood Madness*
Appears on "Waitin' For Waits" (1979)
Various Artists *Lost In The Stars: The Music Of Kurt Weill*
Performs "What Keeps Mankind Alive?" (1985)
The Rolling Stones *Dirty Work*
Backing vocals on "Harlem Shuffle" (1986)
V/A *Smack My Crack*
Giorno Poetry Systems compilation, includes Waits' monologue "The Pontiac" (1987)
V/A *Stay Awake: Various Interpretations Of Music From Vintage Disney Films*
Performs "Heigh Ho (The Dwarfs' Marching Song)" (1988)
V/A *Sea Of Love OST*
Performs "Sea Of Love" (1989)
V/A charity album *SOS United*
Performs "Silent Night" (1989)
V/A charity album *Red Hot + Blue*
Performs Cole Porter's "It's All Right With Me" (1990)
Primus *Sailing The Seas Of Cheese*
Character vocals on "Tommy The Cat" (1990)
Ken Nordine *Devout Catalyst*
Appears on "Thousand Bing Bangs" and "The Movie" (1990)
Teddy Edwards *Mississippi Lad*
Appears on "Little Man" and "I'm Not Your Fool Anymore" (1991)
Thelonious Monster *Beautiful Mess*
Duets on "Adios Lounge" (1992)
Gavin Bryars *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*
Guest vocals (1993)
V/A *Born To Choose*
Features early version of "Filipino Box Spring Hog" (1993)
V/A *Dead Man Walking OST*
Original compositions "Fall Of Troy" and "Walk Away" (1996)
The Replacements *All For Nothing/ Nothing For All*
Guest vocals on "Date To Church" (1997)
John Lurie *Fishing With John*
Field recordings on "River Of Men" and "World Of Adventure" (1998)
Chuck E Weiss *Extremely Cool*
Guest vocals and guitar; co-producer, co-writes "Do You Know What I Idi Amin?" and "It Rains On Me" (1999)
Primus *Antipop*
Production, backing vocals and Mellotron on "Coattails Of A Deadman" (1999)
V/A *More Oar: A Tribute To The Skip Spence Album*
Covers "Books Of Moses" (1999)
Jack Kerouac *Jack Kerouac Reads 'On The Road'* "On The Road", with Primus (1999)
Tin Hat Trio *Helium*
Guest vocals on "Helium Reprise" (2000)
V/A *Free The West Memphis 3*
"Rains On Me" (2000)
Dan Hicks And His Hot Licks *Beatin' The Heat*
Performs on "I'll Tell Why That Is"
Sparklehorse *It's A Wonderful Life*
Vocals on "Dog Door" (2001)
V/A *Big Bad Love OST*
"Long Way Home" and "Jayne's Blue Wish" (2001)
Muse *Hullabaloo Soundtrack*
"What's He Building In There", spoken-word hidden track (2002)
V/A *For The Kids*
"Bend Down The Branches" (2002)
V/A *We're A Happy Family: A Tribute To Ramones*
Covers "The Return Of Jackie And Judy" (2003)
The Blind Boys Of Alabama *Go Tell It On The Mountain*
Features Waits on title track (2003)
Los Lobos *The Ride*
Vocals on "Kitate" (2004)
V/A *The Late Great Daniel Johnston: Discovered Covered*
Covers "King Kong" (2004)
Eels *Blinking Lights And Other Revelations*
Vocals on "Going Fetal" (2005)
Sparklehorse *Dreamt For Light Years In The Belly Of A Mountain*
Piano on "Morning Hollow" (2006)
V/A *Healing The Divide: A Concert For Peace And Reconciliation*
"Way Down In The Hole", "God's Away On Business", "Lost In The Harbor" and "Diamond In Your Mind", with The Kronos Quartet (2007)
The Book Of Knots *Traineater*
Lyrics, vocals, guitar, and percussion on "Pray" (2007)
Atmosphere *When Life Gives You Lemons, You Paint That Shit Gold*
Beatboxing on "Waitress" (2008)
Southside Johnny with LaBamba's Big Band *Grapefruit Moon: The Songs Of Tom Waits*
Duet vocals on "Walk Away" (2008)
NASA *The Spirit Of Apollo*
Vocals on "Spacious Thoughts" (2009)
Hank Williams III *Ghost To A Ghost/Gutter Town*
Vocals on "Ghost To A Ghost", "Fadin' Moon" (2011)

Glimmer of hope: with Keith Richards at the Wiltern Theatre, LA, November 2002

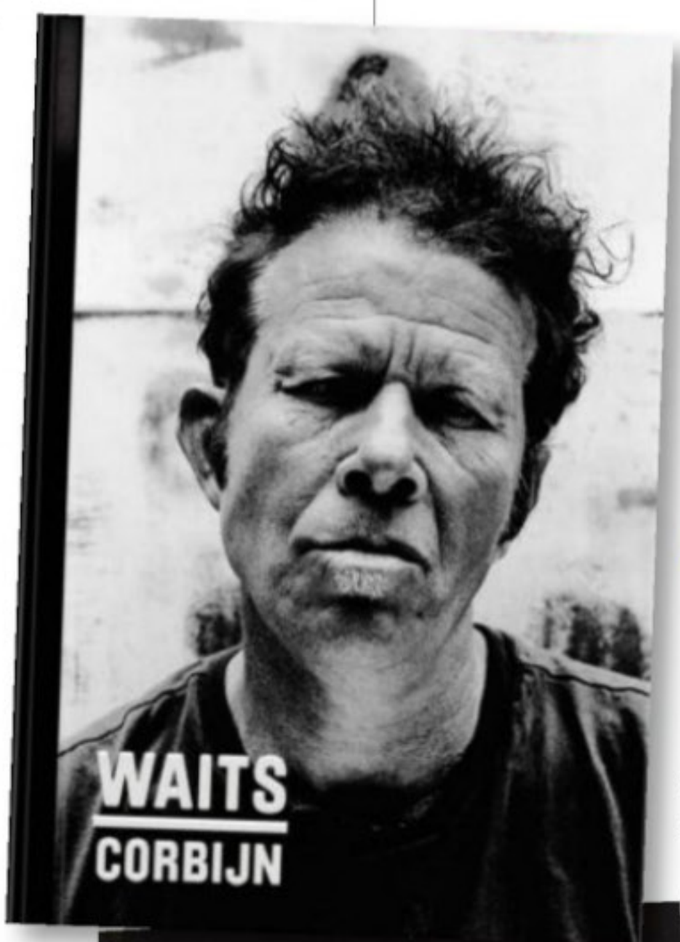


REX/ALEX BERLINER / BEI

'TIL THE MONEY RUNS OUT...

A beginners' guide to Tom Waits memorabilia

YOU GOTTA LOVE Tom Waits' official website. Where other artists offer an online marketplace of licensed product – books, badges, T-shirts, whatever – the UK version of tomwaits.com offers a handful of albums on vinyl and CD (some out of stock), a beautiful book of Anton Corbijn photographs (***Waits-Corbijn 77-11***, also out of stock), and the 7" of **"Lie To Me"**, from 2006's *Orphans* box. And pretty much nothing else.



While you can't help feeling the marketing dudes have missed an opportunity somewhere – a reproduction Christmas Card from a hooker in Minneapolis, maybe, priced at $29 – it's entirely appropriate that Waits' official output should be mostly about the music, and not about the merch. And that is mirrored in his collectables.

The usual rule with record collecting is that earlier releases are the most valuable. But with Waits, who was cast as an anachronism in 1973 but an innovator two decades later, it's the other way around. Later-period issues are often more desirable. UK original vinyl issues of, say ***Closing Time*** or ***Nighthawks*** are pretty sought after – upwards of £50, for copies in mint or near-mint condition. Really spanking examples might make three figures, but first issues of the later Asylum albums are worth far less, with copies starting at £15 or more.

Swordfishtrombones and ***Rain Dogs*** LPs, for so long second-hand-shop staples, are now in demand: £20+ should still get you a really beautiful copy. 1983's interview disc ***A Conversation With Tom Waits*** is worth maybe £30+. Remember, though, if you have a selection of Waits on vinyl, that his work was reissued throughout the mid-1980s on mid-price – for obvious reasons, these are less desirable.

It's all small change when compared to latter-day rarities such as the 7LP ***Orphans*** boxset, released in 2009, with its six tracks unavailable elsewhere. Spanking copies are currently holding values of £300+; one sealed issue made €400 when auctioned online in May 2014. First pressings of ***The Black Rider*** on vinyl have sold for more than £200, and the LP version of 1992's ***Bone Machine*** has long been a collectable, arriving as it did when the market for vinyl was on its knees. Elsewhere, the 2009 limited Record Store Day **"Glitter And Doom"** 7" fetches in excess of £30 – which is not much less than the scarce 1973 mono promo edition of Waits' debut US single, **"Ol' '55"**.

(We're not really allowed to talk about it, but bootlegs hold appeal, too. Unofficial live releases are popular among collectors, with the odd rare bit such as ***The Crooked And The Faded***, a concert from November 1987, fetching £250 a few years back.)

As with many major artists, it's the items with a unique or personal connection that get collectors sweaty. An original 15' x 25' photo proof image, which was cropped and used on the *Nighthawks* album, sold for nearly $600 in 2010. Autographed albums are noted for their rarity. Tom doesn't hand out his John Hancock to anyone, and so it is that a signed, verified ***Mule Variations*** sold for more than $500 in 2011, and an autographed ***Real Gone*** made £265 nearly a decade back. It will surely be worth much more today.

Finally, and from four years back, just about the most perfect collectable you will ever see. Waits travelled to New Orleans to record two songs (Mardi Gras chants **"Tootie Ma Is A Big Fine Thing"** and **"Corrine Died On The Battlefield"**) with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. A super-limited release was issued to raise money for the Preservation Hall venue and its outreach programme: 504 hand-numbered, 78rpm vinyl records, with the first 100 accompanied with a custom-made phonograph (that's a record deck to you and me). 78s? In 2010? If that isn't the spirit of Tom Waits in one rather wonderful item, then you can call me Martha. ***Mark Bentley***

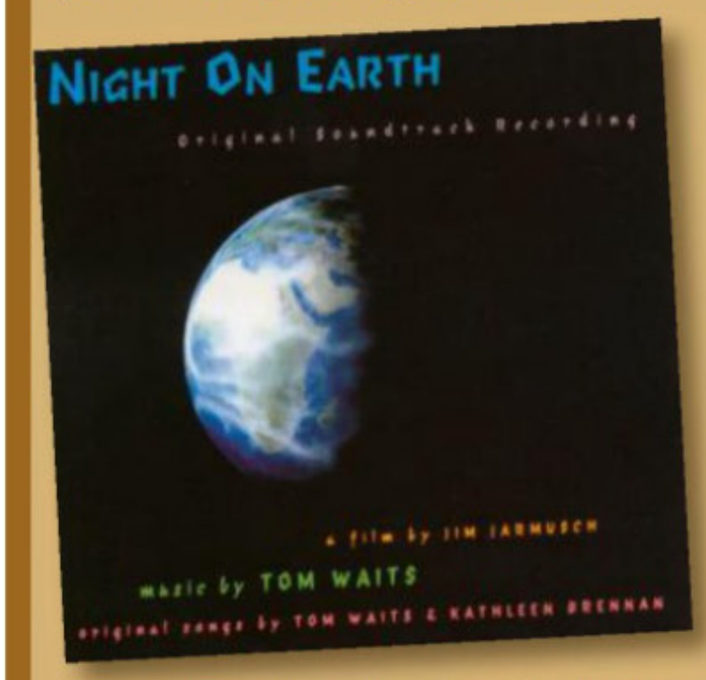
Earth-lings: Gena Rowlands and Winona Ryder

A trip to the movies

NIGHT ON EARTH soundtrack

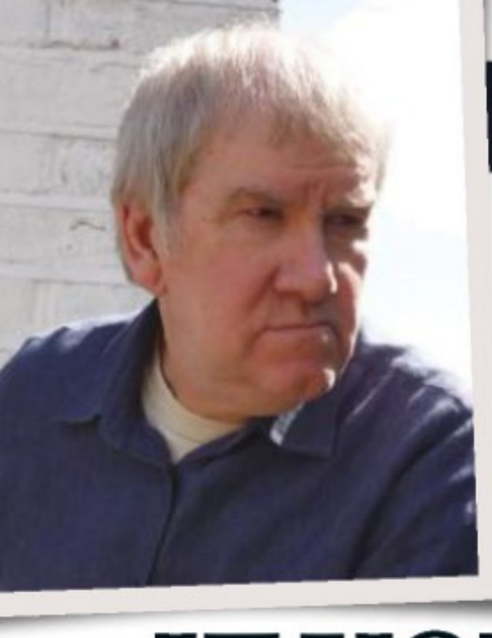
"THERE'S A BLUE-eyed girl with a red bow tie and a string of pearls with one good eye..." The spooked, cinematic quality of Waits' music has often lent itself to a certain Waitsian type of movie – think "Earth Died Screaming" in *12 Monkeys*, or sundry contributions to the soundtracks of *Fight Club*, *Hell Boy*, *Basquiat* or *Smoke*, as well as the theme for *The Wire*, "Way Down In The Hole". Waits' presence – both as actor and musician – dominates Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law*, of course, and he's contributed the odd song to some odd movies (see The Ones That Got Away).

But his only standalone commissioned soundtrack (excluding *One From The Heart*) is for another Jarmusch movie: portmanteau piece *Night On Earth*. This



five-act opus examining the relationship between cabbie and fare across five cities stars Winona Ryder, Gena Rowlands and Roberto Benigni. Waits' music is a perfect complement to the abstract, fundamentally reflective nature of the film. Largely instrumental, it's sonically where you'd expect to find Waits in the early 1990s, mixing screes of pump organ, perverse gypsy folk, antique jazz and the occasional lachrymose waltz – a mellower companion to the same year's *Bone Machine*. Three ear-grabbing vocal cuts – "Back In The Good Old World", "On The Other Side Of The World" and "Good Old World" – are co-writes with Kathleen Brennan. ♦

FINE LINE/EVERETT/REX



STOP ME

IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE

MAY 1976: MICK HOUGHTON INTRODUCES A NEW KID IN TOWN TO THE FREAKY MANNEQUINS OF ISLINGTON. "JUST CALL ME IRRESPONSIBLE..."

I'M NURSING A pint in the Island Queen pub, tucked behind the Angel in Islington. Three weeks into May and it's a humid afternoon at the beginning of the long hot summer of 1976. Tom Waits is almost an hour late when he eventually shuffles in. He looks around the spacious room with high ceilings, huge windows and ornate Victorian mirrors, the antithesis of the dingy bar-rooms he legendarily frequents. He peers up inquisitively at the scantily clad female mannequins hanging from the ceiling. "I might just have to climb up there and cut them down," he growls.

Waits is in London ahead of a two-week stint at Ronnie Scott's, supporting popular Caribbean-influenced pianist Monty Alexander. He orders a Guinness and we make our way to a table at the back where he sits chain-smoking, rocking forwards and backwards to the sound of Animals, Them and old Chess 45s on the jukebox. He's wearing the same crumpled suit, striped tie and grubby beat cap that he wears on the cover of *Nighthawks At The Diner*. He removes the cap, his bushy hair slicked back with sweat. But for a goatee, he looks almost boyish and fresh-faced.

This is Waits' first interview in the UK. I'm a little wary, having read a handful of cuttings where he peppers interviews with the same carefully rehearsed quips. He duly obliges: "I was born at a very young age in the back seat of a yellow cab in Murphy Hospital parking lot. I had to pay a buck 85 on the meter." Playing to an audience of one, he's regaling me with one-liners from his act: "I'm a rumour in my own mind, a legend in my own time," he snarls. Even the odd WC Fields chestnut creeps into his repertoire. "I played in Philadelphia for two weeks one weekend," he mutters in the style of the hard-drinking pessimist. "I don't trust anybody who doesn't have a drink problem. My problem is that I can't always get a drink."

Later, he demonstrates how his necktie comes in handy if you've got the shakes. He pushes up the right sleeve of his jacket, tying the thin end of the necktie around an exaggeratedly quivering wrist. He then drapes the necktie over the back of his neck, grasps a shot glass off the table and manoeuvres it to his mouth by pulling the tie with his left hand.

JOE STEVENS

Waits and a warm beer, summer 1976: "What I do is what I am..."

Waits is as fond of pouring out a litany of names in conversation as he does the streams of images that lace his songs: "I have a lot of very incongruous influences, George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Johnny Mercer, Irving Berlin, Clarence 'Frogman' Henry, James Brown, Martha And The Vandellas, Rev Gary Davis. Everything influences me – conversations, expressions, jokes, bus drivers, desk clerks, even the maid who made my bed this morning at seven while I was in it and emptied my ashtray before I had time to put a cigarette out. I'm an imagist, or a curator. I collect nocturnal emissions and inebriated travelogues."

"I'M A CURATOR... I COLLECT NOCTURNAL EMISSIONS AND INEBRIATED TRAVELOGUES"
TOM WAITS

He harrumphs at the suggestion he's the latest cab off the rank among singer songwriters signed to David Geffen's Elektra/Asylum. I ask what he thinks of his peers. "I try not to think about them at all," he snaps back, "and they don't give me the time of day." Nor does he care for people covering his songs. Does anybody get his seal of approval? He gives the question careful consideration: "Bing Crosby, maybe."

Deriding the "pomp and circumcision" of the music business, he says his label is uncomfortable with his dishevelled bohemian persona. "The music business is too insulating," he explains. "They shoot you full of confidence by telling you you're the biggest thing since the invention of the indoor toilet, but what I'm concerned about is not compromising my integrity, and keeping one foot in the streets.

"They keep me on the road to stop me lowering the tone of their neighbourhood." He has a good word for Bonnie Raitt but scoffs at regularly opening for Frank Zappa. "I might as well have been there to tune the piano, but you give as good as you get if the audience turns ugly."

However much Waits relishes the role of bohemian outsider, he is amiable and engaging and an hour in his company races by. By now we're yakking about life, music, movies and the inconsistencies of the English language. I feel I'm now sitting opposite the real Tom Waits; smart, funny and perhaps just a little shy. "Right now," he says, "what I'm doing is no longer what I do. It's what I am."

Would he rather be called a poet than a singer-songwriter? He looks down at his feet before countering with another genial, raucous chortle: "Just call me irresponsible." There's a hint of pleasure at the fresh ad-lib. Soon after, his taxi arrives and Waits toddles off; he pauses at the door, looks mischievously at the oversize puppets above the bar, shrugs and leaves.

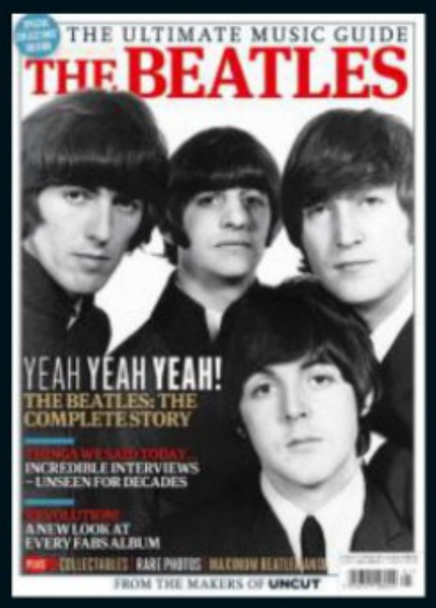
Mick Houghton

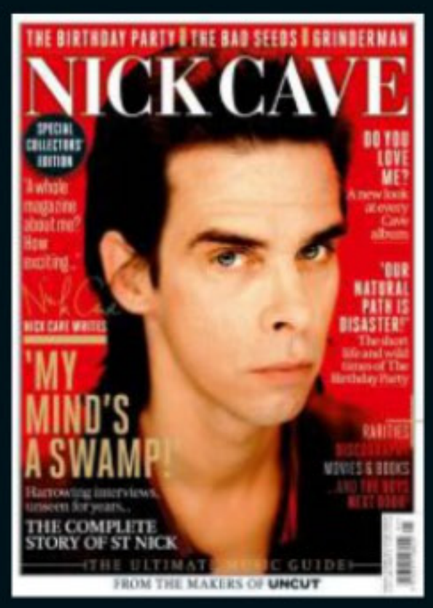
SAVE THE MALE

UNCUT

ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE: THE COLLECTION

Essential guides to the most inspirational artists of our time





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