

Album Review: Manic Street Preachers – Rewind the Film

Strikingly nostalgic and hauntingly meditative; [Katrina Northern](#) reviews Manic Street Preachers' new gem

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The Manic Street Preachers are part of a dying breed – a band with something to say about politics. In many of the songs on their eleventh studio album, *Rewind the Film*, there is a sense of disappointment that their music failed to mobilise a generation – they have no obvious heirs. They admit a sort of defeat, unable to carry the mantle on their own anymore. It's a serious and tragic statement. This a reminder that there are things that need to be talked about, sung about, spoken out loud – there are still things that should make people angry and things that they should fight to change. They didn't need to shout it; in fact, this quiet(er), predominantly acoustic, meditation is much more haunting.

For any fan of the Manic Street Preachers, listening to *Rewind the Film* will certainly be an emotional experience. It opens with 'This Sullen Welsh Heart' (lead singer James Dean Bradfield duets with Lucy Rose), the lyrics of which evoke that sense of not being able to fight the 'war anymore' – it is 'time to move on'. It is a solemn start to the album but Rose's breezy vocal lifts the tone, dragging it away from despair. 'This Sullen Welsh Heart' is followed by 'Show me the Wonder' which explodes in a paroxysm of brass-fuelled joy. Reminiscent of some of their big numbers, it celebrates that wonder which eludes explanation through science and religion. Richard Hawley lends his voice to title track 'Rewind the Film', a loving tribute to the band's childhoods (I want to feel small / lying in my mother's arms'), while Cate Le Bon takes the lead on '4 Lonely Roads'.

But perhaps the most emotional song for those versed in Manics history is 'As Holy As the Soil (That Buries Your Skin)'. With elements of gospel, it is a heart-rending call to lost band mate Richey Edwards ('I love

you so, would you please come home?'). Founding member, lyricist and rhythm guitarist Richey Edwards was a talismanic figure in the Manics' early days before he went missing in 1995. He has never been truly absent from a single album the Manics have made since. In writing 'As Holy as the Soil', bass guitarist and chief lyricist Nicky Wire has spoken about how he did not want to 'dance around' the subject and does not think the band will ever accept that Richey has been declared dead (presumed so, in 2008). 'As Holy as the Soil' is primarily for Richey, but it is also more broadly about all of the people the band have lost. Nicky Wire appropriately takes the lead vocal on this, his voice having an honest, steady and desperate passion. In 'Builder of Routines', the lyric 'I'm sick and I'm tired of being 4real' refers to the band's early days, when they were asked if they were 'for real'. Richey responded by carving '4real' into his arm.

The personal themes abound as the album is also about the band's home of Wales. 'Manorbier' is a loving instrumental picture of the village in Pembrokeshire. Wire has described it as the 'calm before the storm' of final track '30 Year War', which is a chance for Wire to unleash his venom at the governments of the last thirty years. He rages against the 'endless parade of old Etonian scum' who 'line the front benches' before going on to quote Lenin: 'I ask you again, what is to be done?'. His targets are Thatcherism and all the scandals, mistruths and hypocrisy since. In interviews Wire has been equally scathing about opposition leader Ed Miliband, describing him 'pitiful'.

With a 'Krautrock' album coming next year, *Rewind the Film* is a space for breathing and processing, a mid-life moment of calm which nevertheless retains the band's intensity and even gains something in the way of subtlety.



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