



JAY BENNETT
THE MAGNIFICENT DEFEAT
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I began work on what would ultimately become *The Magnificent Defeat* over three years ago. In retrospect, I realize that the primary catalyst was a sequence of unfortunate events in my life. At the time, I was still living in Chicago, had owned my own studio for about a year, was busy producing other artists, and was two-years-healed from any sort of post-partum Wilco thing.

The sequence of events - four close relatives passing away in the span of one year, major illness in my immediate family, going through a divorce - brought me to a low point in my life. I stopped playing live, stopped recording other people, and basically retreated into my studio. I became kind of a musical hermit in both some healthy and unhealthy ways. But it kicked off a creative flurry of songwriting and recording of close to 70 songs. I needed to deal with all these events in my life, and the only positive way I could work through them was by writing and recording music.

The silver lining of this was that for the first time in my life, I wasn't in a studio with any kind of time restriction, nor was I there to specifically make a record. I wasn't producing a Blues Traveler record on deadline for a label; I didn't have to write "one last song" for a Wilco album; come up with some music for a Woody Guthrie lyric; nor satisfy any other obligations, regardless of how rewarding they were. I could actually experiment in any fashion whatsoever, and could take whatever time I needed to work on one song, or even several at the same time. For example, it literally took two weeks to mix the first song on the record, "Slow Beautifully Seconds Faster." I was able to be experimental, not just for the sake of being experimental, but for the sake of getting exactly what was in my head recorded. It all came together pretty haphazardly, with me playing all the parts - keyboards, guitars, bass, drums, you name it - exactly the way I wanted them played, which was imperfectly and emotionally. I had songs everywhere, with source material in different places and formats, and I didn't bother organizing anything - I just wanted to capture the songs in the moment. In essence, it was my ultimate creative period, and I was in the perfect playground.

Like most studio obsessives, I have the requisite arsenal of vintage guitars, both acoustic and electric, and a lot of keyboards, but these aren't even necessarily my preferences. In fact, I don't even frequent vintage music stores. No, I'm "Master of the garage/yard sale." And over the years, I have put together "The Land of Misfit Instruments"



(to borrow a blast from the past), which includes beat-to-crap home organs, musical toys, and miscellaneous half-broken instruments. Indeed, some of my favorite sounds that I used on the record come from the toys. My favorite tambourine? A purple Playskool Tambourine. My favorite sounding bells? The bells on a pull-around Dog Toy. It's all because I love an "instrument" when I don't know what it's going to sound like on any given day, or even at any given time. In fact, people thought I had finally gone completely mad when, at one point, I sawzalled one of my Farfisa organs to get to the oscillators. I only did that because the way they were made, you couldn't tune them, or in my case, "manipulate" them to be in tune, or beautifully out of tune. But when you can get in there and do that to the oscillators, you get the most amazing sounds out of them. I found a cheap, old, upright Kay bass, and taught myself how to play it with a bow as to mimic a cello. I used all seven of my Hammond organs, most of them weird home models. I played some parts on a toy organ called an Optigan. I made a drum kit out of sheet metal ductwork. This all became cathartic for me, because I started to let the interaction between all these weird noises and the songs guide me.

So towards the end of this flurry of writing and recording, I found myself gravitating towards a core set of songs. To some extent, the 70-song output had become almost a burden, but by listening to this particular group of songs as music, instead of the entire outpouring, I began to hear "an album." More importantly, I began to realize what an amazingly therapeutic experience this had all been, and that I had really worked through my low points. I had healed myself.

I didn't do it all alone though - I need to make special mention of a new studio partner at that time, David Vandervelde. David was in the room next door, also in the middle of a creative flurry. Some of these songs would have gone half-finished had it not been for David's encouragement and enthusiasm to see them through to fruition. And this partnership continued all the way to the completion of the record.

But to complete this, I had to emerge from my shell. So I threw all the songs I had in a big cardboard box, whether they were 2" tapes, ADATs, 8-track cassettes, hard drives, or 1/2" tapes, and went down to Private Studios in Urbana, IL, owned by my good friend, Jonathan Pines. I had worked with Jonathan a lot in the past (some Wilco records, some Titanic Love Affair albums, a few Tommy Keene records), and I knew if I had to go somewhere to "clean all this up," that was the place. As the songs were all created spontaneously, we all - David, Jonathan, some other hand-picked and trusted Urbana folks and I - spent a majority of time at the beginning of the session, just organizing the songs/tracks that would go on the record, and getting them into one format. The album still remained this core group of songs, but "by committee" we chose which of the 70 would complete it. We did some editing, added in some background vocals as well as some new drum parts, and put some "icing on the cake." We even wrote and recorded one new track, "Out



All Night." This culminated with the daunting task of actually having to mix the whole record, which we managed to accomplish as well.

I'm in a great place now after this whole experience, and am as proud of this record - if not more than - as anything else I've done to date. I sincerely hope people enjoy *The Magnificent Defeat*.

Jay Bennett
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P.S. - For anyone who was wondering, here's my "official party line" on Wilco: As I reflect back on my seven or so years in Wilco, I'm extremely proud of the music we created and what I brought to the band, both in the studio and live. I still listen to the records and love the music we made together. It was only till close to the very, very end that I had any negative memories - that's the honest-to-god truth - and it would be a shame to have three months of intra-band conflict tarnish what was an enriching experience for me. Those three months basically weren't fun, and when it stopped being as fun and amazing as it had been musically and socially, on the road and in the studio, it didn't make sense to be in Wilco anymore. For the guys still in the band that I really know, which is just John Stirratt at this point, I'm still on good terms with him, and I'm a fan of his work. As for Jeff Tweedy, periodically I attempt to get in touch with him. So far, he has chosen not to respond. Though I wish this weren't the case, I respect his decision.