

Mp3 Peter Buffett - Staring At The Sun



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Modern alternative pop with male vocal harmonies reminiscent of Simon and Garfunkel or The Beatles. 13 MP3 Songs POP: Beatles-pop, POP: with Electronic Production Details: PETER BUFFETT A biography Staring At The Sun Peter Buffett has been making records since the mid-80s, but it wasn't until he began work on his 13th album, the playfully titled Gold Star (released in 2006), that the veteran artist placed a microphone in front of him, opened his mouth and sang into it. Having devoted his entire career to creating electronic-based music for compact disc, film and theater, and writing songs for others to sing, Buffett literally had no idea what to expect from his own natural instrument, and was surprised and thrilled to discover that the vocal sounds coming out of the studio monitors bore the distinct echoes of the artists he'd cut his teeth on, particularly Simon & Garfunkel, the Byrds and the Beatles. So he rolled with it, laying down two-part harmonies à la S&G on some tracks and doubling his vocal in the manner of John Lennon on others. Until Gold Star, all of the music he'd made had always supported something else, whether it told a story or was the foundation for a stage show, Buffett points out. It wasn't really until I went through my own huge level of personal growth and ups and downs, that I found I wanted to write from a more personal place, and I realized that I had to sing in order to do that. These songs aren't that different from my instrumental work, with the melodies and the vocals shaping themselves around the tracks, but people who have followed my career for a while seem to feel like the picture is finally complete. Now, there's some meat on the bone, and I've tried to go a little deeper than just holding hands, to quote the Beatles. After belatedly coming upon the missing link in his creative process, Buffett was naturally eager to go a little wider and deeper in all directions, as he puts it, and it was with newfound confidence and a fire stoked by serendipitous mid-career self-discovery that he began the process that would result in Staring at the Sun (coming Aug. 21 on the artist's own BeSide Records). In a larger sense, this project

would further another personal artistic leap that had occurred in 2005 with his most recent instrumental album, *Inside Looking Out*, the first project Buffett recorded completely on a Macintosh computer connected to a MIDI keyboard. In a sense, then, *Staring at the Sun* would be an opportunity to simultaneously advance what he'd learned from both of these experiments—one rooted in cutting-edge digital technology, the other in the warm and evocative sounds of the 1960s. Buffett has the advantage of having in-depth experience in these two radically different worlds, which is what makes *Staring at the Sun* at once an elegant piece of digitally designed aural architecture and deeply rooted, wholly organic personal expression. What's intriguing about the new album is the way its thirteen tracks seem to blossom from the same fertile territory that encompasses the atmospheric wing of left-of-center modern rock. These noticeable if unintended reference points encompass Royksopp (the languid yet percolating opener *Reminder*), Imogen Heap (the multitracked and treated vocal chorale of *Mattered To You*), Iron Wine (the yearning *Where You Are Right Now*, with its dusky vocal, gently plucked guitar and a string quartet that appears in mid-song like an apparition), the Kings of Convenience (the autumnal *Another Leaf*) and New Order (the punchy, polyrhythmic *Somewhere Else Today*). Additionally, *Anything* and *Staring At The Sun* turn on dynamic verse/chorus transitions that appear with the electrifying suddenness of a Great Plains thunderstorm, bringing to mind the work of Radiohead and Beck. As it turns out, Buffett comes by his contemporaneity quite naturally; indeed, he's stayed ahead of the curve throughout a career that spans nearly 30 years. Omaha-born and -bred, the youngster headed west when he was accepted to Stanford University, he left school in 1979 to move into an apartment in San Francisco. It was then that he had his musical epiphany. When I heard [Mike Oldfield's] *Tubular Bells*, it completely blew my mind, he recalls. Here was this guy sitting in Abbey Road Studios by himself using technology to create this sort of solo symphony. I decided right then what I wanted to do with my life. Buffett began teaching himself how to compose, record and produce instrumental music using then-new technology, unknowingly becoming a pioneer of the home recording revolution that would radically alter the musical landscape two decades thereafter. The fledgling composer/musician proved to be a quick study; as his skill level increased, he started picking up clients from the world of advertising, who found the sounds he was making in solitude with his keyboards and tape machine unprecedented; these early commercial gigs formed Buffett's work ethic, as he mastered discipline, focus and concision. In 1981, fatefully, he was hired to create 15-second pieces to accompany logos for the just-launched cable channel MTV. After signing with Narada Records

a few years later, Buffett returned to the Midwest, moving himself and his studio operation, Independent Sound, to Milwaukee, where the label was based. He recorded four albums for Narada, and it was during this time that he accomplished his next musical goal of composing for film, but only after having his mind blown once again. This time the trigger was literary: the historical novel *Son of the Morning Star*. It was about all of what happened in the last half of the 19th century to American Indians, something I knew nothing about, and I was stunned at the realization of what we may have lost in terms of collective wisdom that might help us now, Buffett recalls. It triggered this kind of feeling that I then put into my second album, *One by One*, and that's what Kevin Costner heard that led to the appearance of my little piece in his film *Dances With Wolves*. The impact of the novel went far beyond Buffett's subsequently burgeoning film scoring career, which included composing music for such movies as *The Scarlet Letter*; *Wisconsin: An American Portrait*, earning him a Best Soundtrack Emmy; *Triathlon: Through the Eyes of the Elite*; and *Ojibwe*, resulting in a second Emmy. The last-named score, along with his music for the Costner-produced eight-hour CBS mini-series *500 Nations*, manifested Buffett's fascination with and immersion in Native American culture. He took this passion to an ambitious extreme with the creation of *Spirit*, an elaborate musical theater event featuring Native American music and dance. The show began as a 1995 benefit concert for Robert and Jamie Redford in which Buffett combined his Native American-inspired music with live native dancing, powwow drummers and the singing of Chief Hawk Pope. The experience was so personally gratifying and universally well received that he decided to take the show on the road. After first being aired as a successful PBS Pledge Special, the *Spirit* show embarked on a four-month tour of the U.S. in 1999. The reworked, Buffett-produced *Spirit: The Seventh Fire* returned in 2004 as part of the national Lewis and Clark Bicentennial events across the U.S., as well as being staged for the opening of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. Buffett is still trying to put it all in perspective. The scene that I scored in *Dances With Wolves* was Kevin's character dancing around the fire and transforming himself, he notes. That was the beginning of a journey, centered around American Indian culture and sounds, which went on for almost 15 years. The *Spirit* show is the universal story of somebody reconnecting with himself, his life, his ancestry in order to move forward. While I was putting it together, the chief of the Shawnee Tribe, who appeared in it and is a great friend, kept saying, 'You know, Peter, this show is about you. I didn't see it at the time, but it turned out that he was right. The show was a huge undertaking, and it busted every circuit I

had to make it happen. My mom died during that time, and lots of other traumatic, emotional stuff happened during those years. Coming out of all of that, I found I'd tapped into a well that I hadn't even known was inside me, and it led directly to the music I'm making now. Buffett's musical involvement with the Native American people took on a philanthropic dimension as well. The closer I got to the culture, the more it began to influence the way I felt about the country and our place in it, he says. In 1999, Buffett formed the Spirit Foundation to support some of the causes he believed in. A year ago, the foundation's coffers expanded exponentially, as Buffett was given charge of \$1 billion to give away over the foundation's lifetime. The first move of the NoVo Foundation, as it is now known, was to pledge \$15 million over six years to support the International Rescue Committee's work in West Africa. It's been just about a year since I took on this new responsibility, says Buffett. It's a big one, obviously, and it's caused myself and my wife, were part of a small team running the foundation, to really step back and decide how we were going to work in the world; that's what we're in the midst of. We will definitely emphasize initiatives that support women; that's one of the key components, and it will occur in a variety of ways. The project we're doing in West Africa, for example, is focusing on returning refugees and getting them educated, with an emphasis on women and girls. Liberia has the first woman president in Africa, so it's also supporting her and her constituency. So the foundation is really looking at how we can build community and support women. The underlying issue is how do we engage what I would call feminist principles in a patriarchal world? How can we get away from top-down hierarchical thinking and plain-old male dominance? Because it just hasn't been working. At that, he emits a rueful laugh. So it is that Peter Buffett finds himself at this remarkable moment in his altogether singular lifemaking intensely personal music while also taking on the responsibility of overseeing a billion-dollar foundation intended to directly address the causes he cares most passionately about. His is a story worthy of a feature film one for which he has already composed the soundtrack.

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