

Mp3 Jonathan Coulton - Thing A Week Two



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Well-crafted geek pop from the incredible Thing a Week series. Unspoiled, piping hot goodness, fresh from the muse. 13 MP3 Songs POP: Folky Pop, POP: Quirky Details: Wintertime is Coultontime: parkas and moonboots and ice skating on the old pond; blackened extremities and the eating of human flesh to survive. Its the time that the ants enjoy the fruits of their long labors (technically not fruits, but pieces of grass and other ants) while the grasshopper, that fiddling, lazy bastard, starves. And in the winter of 1996, we were both grasshoppers, Coulton and I were starving. It was New York City, and it was the nineties. THE NINETIES! NO: I REQUIRE A LARGER FONT! THE NINETIES! When money flowed through the streets of Manhattan like liquid money, and lobster dinners walked right up and knocked on your door. There was no 9/11 yet. Just internet cafes and kozmo.com. Giuliani had single handedly cleaned the streets of crime and, when that was not enough, made ferrets illegal and personally swallowed the last 1000 subway tokens to make way for the new Metrocard and then, because it was the nineties, the Metrocard Gold and the Metrocard Obisidan. Coulton and I had moved there to drink bourbon and await the fizzy fame and fortune that we were sure the city bestowed upon all alcohol-loving college graduates, especially those who wrote little guitar songs. But apparently we had been misled: Manhattan apparently is more interested in rewarding people who make skyscrapers out of hedge funds, ambitious heiresses, and ants. And so on a bitter November, Coulton took me in. He was living in a couple of rooms on 50th Street, one of those vestigial residential neighborhoods east of the glass towers of midtown where young people move to be scorned, and he had largely put his guitar away and stopped writing or performing. I, meanwhile, was homeless, waiting for an apartment I was sub-sub-letting to open up on West 1 Millionth street. (When I first saw it, I had seen my future: two freelance writers living in a single room with only a card table, two sleeping bags, and one of those old laptops you powered with a

black market ferret and a spin wheel. Ah: the ink-stained life!) Coultons lady had just left him cold for the coast, and there we were, a couple of bachelors in a small room with a window offering a view of a brick wall, a neighboring window with ugly people having sex in it, and perpetual night. In his effort to make up for the homely comforts he had left behind, Coulton had stuffed that room full: gigantic couches, huge antique blanket chests, lasagna pans, and about four cats. Frankly, it was hard to tell how many cats were in there, it was so crowded and hopeless. So we would sit and eat macaroni and cheese muffins that Coulton had stolen from his job at Coopers Coffee. Coopers was one of the last remaining non-Starbucks coffee shops in New York, and maybe thats why those mac-and-cheese muffins tasted like doom. You can hear some of that winter in these songs. Coulton had recently quit his temp job at a record company, grew his hair long against the cold, and built his second, improved beard. And yet the corporate doublespeak he heard back in the office still echoes in Re: Your Brains. (Also, the company was largely staffed by zombies.) Some of the hard yearning for happy, untroubled dilettantism of those days comes out in A Talk With George as does the deep-space plea of Chiron Beta Prime: We need help on this lonely planet. Save me. But then, one night (or maybe day) Coulton put down the muffin and said he had had enough. The next day when he went to work, he wasnt going to serve coffee: he was going to sing. You are going to sing your songs in a coffeehouse? I said. Yes, he said. Im really going to do it. You have just made an already pathetic situation even more pathetic, I said. Now rewind HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER and lets watch that mickey-rickey again. But Coulton did it. After his shift was over he played a few songs, and over a period of weeks, he developed something of a following among the underemployed coffee drinkers of the Upper East Side. Sure, he left his old pal hungry for mac-and-cheese muffins, but it was all coming together for Coulton. Even I had to see that. Then Coopers Coffee got run out of business, and Coulton got a job at a small software company writing databases management programs for professional headhuters. What can I say? IT WAS THE NINETIES!!!! But though Coultons performing career was once again derailed, little did he know that while working at that software company, Coulton would learn about computers, the magical machines that would soon change his life forever! But more of that in Springtime.... John Hodgman, Winter 2005

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