## Mp3 Cathal Coughlan - The Sky's Awful Blue



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Dense, deep, and lyrical music from the man John Peel once said could sing the phone book and make it compelling. 12 MP3 Songs ROCK: Modern Rock, ROCK: Acoustic Details: Cathal Coughlan has been writing songs since his youth and singing them in public since 1980. The intervening years have seen him write and perform in various musical styles, and in contexts ranging from semi-conventional 'rock' album recording and touring, through spoken word performance, film soundtracks and musical theatre. Coughlan began his career with the band Microdisney, a collaboration with Sean O'Hagan (now of High Llamas) that lasted until 1988. The duo produced five albums, all of them characterized by mellifluous melodies and arrangements (which were at sharp variance with what was expected on the margins of UK music at that time, drawing as they did upon influences including 70's country rock, 50's lounge music and the more unfashionable music of the their own era), and splenetic lyrical observations and emphatic delivery (which also grated with the many who preferred their satirical and dissenting voices to adopt a more cultured and detached tone). In 1989, after the demise of Microdisney, Coughlan, having caught sight of the possibility of leaving behind the entryism-obsessed attitude of self-apology which had informed most non-commercial music in the departing decade, gathered a more raucous group of musicians to him, in the shape of the Fatima Mansions. In the new context, it became as regular an occurrence for Coughlan to sing a subtly-dissonant Kurt Weill ballad as to scream his head off over the white noise of guitars, and as feasible for the Mansions to disfigure a pop-rock 'classic' of the day over an emetically churning breakbeat as it was for them to bait 'real' rock bands' audiences with lengthy, fuzz-toned tributes to Johnny Ray which, along the way, insulted figures such as James Jesus Angleton, Lord Mountbatten, and the Pope. The band left four albums in its wake and even managed a Top-10 hit with its cover of Bryan Adams' "Everything I Do" in 1992. 1996 saw the release of Coughlan's first solo

album, Grand Necropolitan, and this set the scene for much that has followed since. The bloody-mindedness and anarchy of the Mansions were still present, albeit in smaller quantities, but slower, delicately-arranged songs indicated that here was a more weatherbeaten and less reactive figure than had been presented to the world in the latter stages of the Mansions' existence. Continuing legal problems meant that Coughlan's second solo album, Black River Falls, did not appear until 2000. Warmer in tone than its predecessor, though no more compromising, its lyrical concerns ranged from senile dementia to the nature of small-time war profiteering. 2001 saw Coughlan providing music for the Irish feature film Mapmaker and making his theatrical debut by way of a singing role in French composer Francis Ribac's contemporary opera Qui Est Fou?, which continued to play at various venues throughout France in early 2002. "My hope for 2003," says Coughlan, "is to achieve greater mobility, taking the songs to anywhere that seems worth the trip, and to shake off the last of the hangover from the unaffordable 'rock band' method of doing things which created that black hole in my output in the 1990's."

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