Mp3 Thaddaeus Quince And The New Originals - The Wrest

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Featuring occasional extended solos on guitar, sax and/or B-3, this lyric-oriented music is anchored in a blues aesthetic with tinges of folk, jazz, and rock and roll. 13 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk Blues, ROCK: Jam-band Details: The Wrest (from the liner notes) The missing eighteen minutes on "Tape 342" of Richard Nixon's Oval Office recordings serve as a paradigm for our age of self-erasure. Given the current construction of reality, the words of an "author" about her or his work don't mean much. This is especially true when the author in question writes pseudonymously in the hope of hiding (or seeking) identity. It was an altogether less convoluted matter for the melancholy Dane, Soren Kierkegaard, whose various aliases focused a series of examinations from particular angles of vision. But as Lou Reed--and later, Mott the Hoople and The Cowboy Junkies--remarked in somewhat related contexts: "Those were different times." Nevertheless, a certain responsibility for one's utterances perdures, even if cultural capital is measured in increments of "plausible deniability" and integrity extends back only as far as the most recent "born-again" experience. That which lingers (or does it malinger?) must be spoken into or out of existence again and again for memory's sake; otherwise we forget that we were slaves once in the land of Egypt and, perhaps more poignantly, slave-owners in the Promised Land and its self-proclaimed New World successor. Stephen Foster spoke for all Americans when he announced: "I come from Alabama." Although the current president cannot remember what he did when (or if) he was in that particular state, we, as a people, must never discount what has been done (t)here. We must be responsible for our history. "Oh, Susannah!" remains pertinent in this regard. A classic piece of Americana, one will not find its second verse repeated in late-20th century versions by the Byrds or James Taylor. And rightly so: certain notions ought to be laid to rest. Still we must continually wrestle with the subtexts that give texture and tension to

our common life. This conflict, this contradiction between recollection and self-im(or, hom)age, this "struggle"--as Karl Marx might say--lies at the heart of THE WREST: the notes on this page and the notes that shape the referenced songs. For THE WREST is more about unrest than it is about resting. That lone individual on the CD booklet's cover rests, perchance dreams, on a public monument in San Francisco--purportedly the nation's most progressive city. That he is sentenced to perpetual homelessness in this land of plenty is a matter we should not take lying down. In other words, we all live (not apart from, but rather) in the midst of parable, paradox, and pretension. Photographs from that prison in "liberated" Iraq portray more powerfully than the words amassed to explain them (away) ever could the danger that lurks beneath the double-entendre "freedom fighter." After this knowledge the only response worthy of utterance is confession. But maybe I digress. "Sail Kite" begins THE WREST windborne and longing: a tired sea song (you think you've heard this one before). "All futures" have been left behind. All other options have been closed. A particular present is being pursued into the unknown. Still, there are ties to what remains back there: the sail kite's invisible cords connect back to "her eyes"; the song's chords lament and make present through singing what was past; and, combining these two, the invisible umbilical (or, since the topic is tunes and tones, ombilical) c(h)ord reaches all the way back to that primordial departure out of Eden. An epic "reaching" reappears in the next song, "From This Distance." This time, however, the perspective is reversed. The departer is now the departed from. Instant karma, it seems, does get you. The moment of pain and liberation, the moment of release, is never far from view--as most of this album's songs proceed to demonstrate. John Anthony's "Paycheck" becomes the focus and the symbol of a dastardly betrayal. "You Might as well be in Egypt," words overheard in the lobby of the Teheran InterContinental Hotel before the Revolution, make into anthem a love turned anathema. And not without irony. For while the protagonist embraces abstinence, his Easter-framed rebirth places him among the devotees of Saint Anthony. But this monastic exile is inextricably linked with the deserts of Egypt. And so our hero's retreat locates him, psychologically at least, in perverse proximity to the lover who has scorned him and whom he, in song, has scorned. "It Takes Time" appears mid-album as the centerpiece of life's restless series of comings and goings. Again we return to ships, but whether they are Mayflowers bearing volunteer pilgrims forth in a courageous act of communal will or Amistads bearing captives away against their will remains an open question (one that will be taken up in the song "By Ivory's Shore" on the next album). In any case, this song moves from past to present to

future in the traverse of its first three verses. The chorus, meanwhile, literally takes additional time as the time signature shifts from 3/4 to 4/4 in the one measure that arrests the title's enunciation. Is this ritualized departure, framed in fire, an act of destruction or purification? The conundrum reasserts itself among "maybes" in the last sung song, "Aloha"--a paradoxical word that means both "hello" and "good-bye." Overwhelming the sense of contradiction and embracing it is "love": another note in the triad of "aloha's" possible meanings. If regret and sometimes joy accompany departure, fear and its more benign twin, anticipation, accompany new adventure. The existential dilemma of the troubadour was to be in, but not of, the court and, therefore, to lead a life of uncertain arrivals and inevitable departures. Only in song, as the lyrics from the Provencal and l'angue d'Oc testify, was a consistent status, a place, a home, reached. Following that medieval tradition, "Wishful Thinking" turns the song into a "reality" of romance--though it takes many verses and intimations of Archie Bell and the Drells and Chicago Transit Authority to do so. In "Michigan Lady," the other John Anthony song on the album, fire now becomes the symbol of a life-sustaining desire and the vagaries of a tense present (or the present tense) are overcome through communion. As a direct response to the resistances leveled in the chorus of "It Takes Time," this song ends in an eternity of (be)longing: "hold me, Michigan Lady, 'til the end of time." "This Heart," meanwhile, celebrates a liberation that can be attained only through its own renunciation. To be held hostage is, after all, to be held; and the convergence of two hearts beating as one establishes the tempo of transcendence beyond the transient dance of days. There is something of the mystical, of the sacramental, in all music-making. And indeed, qualities bordering on the religious hide inside some of these songs. Sent forth by "wind" with its biblical overtones of spirit, the adventurers in "Sail Kite" embark upon a quest for the sun. This may be simply a recapitulation of the West's conquests; but it might also represent a pilgrimage to the "Son" through son(g). The "mast mid-ship," from this point of view, turns to "mass" and invites the question: "Who was that massed man?" In its third chorus, "Wishful Thinking" transforms what had been acknowledged as "fantasy" into "reality." This leap of faith is accomplished by abandoning the strategy of "trying to survive" (for, as the Jedi master intoned: "there is no try") and moving into the realm of hope. But dreams based in hope are still subject to suffering. "Dreamer" reminds that perfection itself cannot escape "nails driven through the hands." This mentality (or soteriology) carries over into "This Heart," with its telltale rhyming of "success" and "crucifix." But then, the whole song is addressed to one worthy of religious devotion and to the community that is constituted in relation to the beloved. Grace, but

not "cheap grace," breaks into contradiction and paradox offering the sacramental glue that holds together the universe of cruel oppositions contained in a word like "cleave." "Aloha," toward the end of the pilgrimage, allows that the world ought to be viewed with resurrection eyes. Such vision might empower one to look back (without going backwards), listen again, or overhear what has gone before. This is why "The Echo" leaves words behind in a celebration of improvisation over familiar chords. (In fact, "Sail Kite," "Aloha," and "The Echo"--though each is propelled by the beat of a different drummer--make up a trilogy of songs that can be programmed to play in sequence at a remove from the intervening nine tracks). As antidote (or anecdote) for this age of self-erasure, one last song should be considered. "The Ballad of Duke and Dr. V" can only be approached in an ironic mode (those aren't their real names, after all); but irony is preferable to cynicism--even if (or precisely because) you can't rule the world with it. The Duke and the Doctor pursue a curious quest for notoriety, one that reenacts this nation's westward expansion. (Rehearsing the saga with no apparent irony in 1893, Katharine Lee Bates declared: "O beautiful for pilgrim feet, whose stern impassioned stress/A thoroughfare for freedom beat across the wilderness.") They write themselves into a song and then sing it to the captivated audiences they have subdued by means of "high volume disco"--among the least lethal weapons of mass destruction the U.S. has exported during the last half century. . . . In a final act of good will (or hubris), Duke and Dr. V return seized possessions to their owners whom they then invite to (or, upon whom they then impose) a free concert. The mention of a "free concert" calls to mind a different time--a time when some of the members of The New Originals might have gathered to hear groups like SRC, Teegarden and VanWinkle, The Frost, Asmolee Songster, The Amboy Dukes, Savage Grace, The Bob Seger System, Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen, The New Heavenly Blue, and inevitably the MC5, jamming for the people in, say, Gallup Park by the Huron River, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Many of the musicians who play on this album picked up instruments in those days and found in music's various genres an alternative to the collective misery brought on by the draft, race riots, a toxic "natural" environment, and the inescapable realities of late adolescence. As improvisers then, and now (on THE WREST), The New Originals live deep inside (while shaping the quality of the moments between) the beats. That's what jamming is all about. But jamming is also a matter of "kicking out the jams"; about letting go; about undoing the corruptions of the soul that might otherwise overwhelm the heart and lead to acts of real brutality. In their selfless dedication to craft, in their acts of creation, The New Originals are true "freedom fighters" who offer a way out of the

jam we're in today as a community and as a nation. For wrestling with these songs, for wresting them from obscurity and (which would be much worse) self-possession, I can only confess my deepest gratitude. Against the annihilation the age demands, then, brothers and sisters, we give you a testimonial.

Thaddaeus Quince Tuscaloosa, Alabama August, 2004