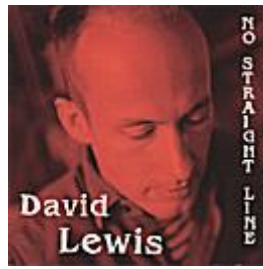


Mp3 David Lewis - No Straight Line



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gentle acoustic folk, thoughtful lyrics 12 MP3 Songs FOLK: Gentle, FOLK: Folk Pop Details: David Lewis

British singer-songwriter David Lewis's 1995 debut, the acoustic-oriented *No Straight Line* (Dejadisc DJD-3215) was released in 1995, and followed by a second album, *For Now* (Applesseed APR CD 1057) in 2001. Growing up in a musical family in Bath in the west of England, many of David's teenaged years in the mid-'70s were spent listening to bands and musicians in the contemporary British and American folk traditions - he praises the "timeless, mystical quality" of the Strawbs' *Grave New World* album and "the way Al Stewart wrote such entertaining and compelling songs around quite elaborate social and historical themes" on his *Past, Present and Future* record. Later influences included American singer-songwriters such as Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan and Neil Young and the subsequent sturm-und-drang of punk musicians Patti Smith, The Clash and Elvis Costello. In college, where he studied anthropology, Lewis's tastes expanded to include the likes of Curtis Mayfield, Al Green, and Lou Reed, and David started playing synthesizer in a local band, Zero Option. During graduate studies at Cambridge, David met fellow student Wes Stace (later to be known as John Wesley Harding), and the two became part of a busking band playing blues and folk songs mostly discovered on old Ry Cooder records. While carrying on field research in Bangladesh in the late '80s for his PhD (David currently teaches at the London School of Economics), Lewis started writing and performing songs and collaborating with Harding on compositions via tapes and faxes. Three of those songs - "Red Rose and the Briar," "Ordinary Weekend," and "Cupid and Psycho" wound up on various Harding CDs. With Harding and fellow musician Scott Matthews as co-producers, Lewis recorded his first album, *No Straight Line*, at Matthews' San Francisco studio. Harding, Matthews, Robert Lloyd (a frequent Harding accompanist) and guests like REM's Peter Buck on mandolin created an acoustic-based recording that also featured "unexplained 'atmospherics'...setting up

some interesting spooky textures," according to Sing Out! No Straight Line was awarded a four-star rating in the All Music Guide, a handful of perceptive and positive reviews (see below), and a quick trip to the cutout bins when his American record label, the Austin-based Dejadisc, went out of business the next year... [*** But from October 2005 you can now buy No Straight Line as a download from CDBaby ***] ...

Undeterred, Lewis and his longtime friend, co-producer and sometime songwriting collaborator John Wesley Harding, worked on a follow-up album sporadically over the next few years. Their efforts culminated in *For Now*, which alternates a restrained folk approach and more fleshed-out full-band backing on ten new songs, including three Harding co-writes and a cover of the late British songwriting Nick Drake's "Northern Sky." "We didn't want to make the same record all over again, so we thought it would be interesting to work on some band arrangements," explains Lewis. Enlisting such notable Harding friends and musical associates as co-producer/musician/solo artist Chris von Sneider and multi-instrumentalist Robert Lloyd, and adding in special guests Chuck Prophet (guitars; a writer/player/singer with his own career), and seminal Lewis influence Al Stewart (second vocal on "You Don't Know"), Lewis succeeded in creating a unified collection of songs that reflects his talents and inspirations. The release of *For Now* coincided with a U.S. tour in November and December 2001 by David Lewis and John Wesley Harding, each playing a separate set with some accompaniment by Robert Lloyd (mandolin, accordion) before all three musicians united for the show's final segment. Lewis and Harding started working on *For Now* soon after the first album was released, this time convening in von Sneider's studio in San Francisco with Prophet and other musicians. After an hour or two of rehearsals, Lewis and his ad hoc band recorded the rollicking "The Rain Stops Everything" (driven by David's gusty harmonica), the sensuous "Ramadan Moon" (featuring Richard Thompson-like guitar from Chuck Prophet), and valedictory "Weary Traveller," with regret-filled solos and fills from Prophet and accordionist Robert Lloyd, all songs cut virtually live on the second or third take. Record company woes and personal logistics (Lewis lives in England, Harding in the U.S.) caused a break in the recordings. A year went by before the next sessions, then more time elapsed before the last songs were finished. A particular treat for Lewis was the participation of Al Stewart on "You Don't Know," a song co-written by David and Harding. "Al was cajoled one night into joining us for a meal and, of course, an excellent bottle of wine," recounts Lewis. "It was a great moment for me because I've long admired Al's work. Anyway, it must have been the wine, because Al then agreed to come into the studio and do some vocals!" Although Lewis's

globe-trotting experiences inspired and inform some of his material, the various aspects of love - accepted, imploded, frustrated, postponed, denied - dominate the majority of the songs, including "Almost a Stranger," "You Don't Know," "Your Kind of Madness," "Let the Sunlight Dry Your Tears" and "Too Much Love." While Lewis is an accomplished guitarist, it is the contrast between his boyish voice and the depth of experience in his lyrics that sets up an engaging and mysterious invitation to listeners to get lost in his music. "I wanted the music to be completely detached from any trend or fashion, like it sounds as if it could have been recorded any time in the last thirty years," explains Lewis. Lewis is currently working on a third CD, *Ghost Rhymes (Fever Dreams)*, due for release - somewhere, somehow - in early 2006. You can currently find David Lewis in late 2005 supporting Bob Collum at various shows around the UK...

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID ABOUT 'No Straight Line'... (1995) (Now available for purchase in download form from CDBaby!) "David Lewis has written songs with John Wesley Harding such as 'The Red Rose and the Briar' and 'Ordinary Weekend'. Now comes his first recording as a solo artist, produced by Harding and Scott Mathews, who laid down rich acoustic beds of strings, percussion and pump organ, wisely choosing the less-is-more approach in the arrangements. Robert Lloyd - an especially creative musician who tours with Harding, Carlene Carter, Steve Wynn and others - provides mandolin, violins, accordion and unexplained 'atmospherics' on several of the tracks. How these atmospherics were created is unclear, but they are effective, setting up some interesting spooky textures under songs like 'Calm Before the Storm' and 'Under the Same Moon'. Lewis, who has a gentle voice that falls somewhere between a young Mick Jagger and Peter Noone of Herman's Hermits, explained his choice of album title by saying these songs '...are about the lines drawn by human hands, lines which link cities on the great maps ... Sometimes we pass each other with barely a wave of acknowledgement, other times we hit strange chords in combination." (Sing Out! - The Folk Song Magazine) "Very folksy singer-songwriter co-produced by John Wesley Harding and Scott Mathews - a team that provides a quirky aspect to the overall product. Lewis's songs are often of the jingle-jangle nature, sung in a very pleasant voice, with just enough rough edges scattered here and there to make it stick in the mental jukebox. Personable folk, with the caveat that the pleasant melodies may override the lyrical content at times -- which means repeated and serious listening is required." (All Music Guide) "Singer and songwriter David Lewis continues the fine English tradition of delivering an arresting set of traditional and contemporary folk on debut 'No Straight Line'. Co-produced by John Wesley Harding and Scott Mathews, this 12-song, 47 minute collection offers

a vaguely psychedelic folk sunset with standards like opener 'Due South', the Celtic charm of 'Open Smile', enhanced by Mathews' light bongo and Robert Lloyd's violin, the dreamy 'Out with the Tide', the spare George Harrison sound of 'The End of Something', featuring a vocal duet with Harding, and the exotic 'Calm Before the Storm'. Adding further credibility to this new artist's resume is the appearance of R.E.M.'s Peter Buck, who plays the mandolin on the traditional Gaelic folk of 'Slowly Fading Evening Sky'. There's also a cut 'Under Same Moon', which has Harding playing gut string guitar, and the enchanting richness of 'Jealousy's Antiques'. Lewis is truly an artist to keep an eye on." (The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas) "David Lewis is a teacher at the London School of Economics who, with the help of his friend John Wesley Harding, has released a first album for a label that has, up this time, been known for its commitment to artists from Austin, Texas. Harding plays on the album and also co-produces with Scott Mathews. Lewis is not an especially compelling singer but his delicate, moody songs are quite effective and evocative in portraying vulnerable people in a world of sharp contrasts and transitions. The instrumentation is kept basic but there are many pleasant flourishes by the producers and by a few guests, such as Peter Buck adding mandolin on one song. This is very much in the early 70s folk genre and Lewis follows in the footsteps of such singers as Robin Williamson, Keith Christmas and Al Stewart." (Dirty Linen) "Peter Buck plays mandolin on a track called 'Slowly Fading Evening Sky' on David Lewis's debut album No Straight Line. David, a singer-songwriter from England, has previously worked and written songs with John Wesley Harding. Of No Straight Line, Peter comments: 'I really recommend it. It's a modern folk record in the vein of Nick Drake'." (REM News) "Here are two ways an album can become my favorite. Either it has something tremendously worthwhile to say or it is very pleasant to live with. This one has both qualities. Enjoy it as an intellectual experience or as pleasant background. Either way, it'll be one you'll play many more times than once." (Folk Acoustic Music Exchange) WHAT THE CRITICS SAID ABOUT 'For Now' (2001) "Five years have passed since the release of British singer-songwriter David Lewis' critically-hailed, now out-of-print debut album, but the material accumulated during the intervening years has at last been assembled on For Now. Fellow British folk cult hero and longtime Lewis friend John Wesley Harding joins for such notable duets as the pleasantly sunny "Old Dreams Fade Away", as well as "Your Kind Of Madness" and "Almost A Stranger," which add a modern-day sensibility to traditionally-based folk melodies. (The album's sole cover is a duo version of Nick Drake's poignantly wrought "Northern Sky", flavorfully accented by Harding, on twittering mandolin and droning

pump organ.) Martial-styled percussion underscores the dramatic folk-pop melody "Let The Sunlight Dry Your Tears", while soft guitar sounds and Robert Lloyd's warm accordion frame the serene, acoustic melody of "You Don't Have To Lose." Lewis' vocal resemblance to Scottish pop veteran Al Stewart emerges on such songs as "Ramadan Moon," which is adorned with wiry electric blues licks from Chuck Prophet, and also on "The Rain Stops Everything", an expertly-crafted folk-rocking number that makes clever use of backing vocals and Prophet's steely tones. And none other than Al Stewart himself adds harmony vocals on "You Don't Know," a glowing, yearning melody set amid pleasantly chiming acoustic guitars. Those who appreciate David Lewis' smart song craft can be assured that the excellence of his work is equal to the anticipation that awaited it. This new album -- from an artist whose releases come rather sporadically -- should tide over David Lewis fans, at least For Now." (CD Now, 21 December 2001, Drew Wheeler, CDNOW Senior Editor, Folk) "David Lewis waited five years to follow up 1996's much-praised No Straight Line with For Now. Like the former, John Wesley Harding lends a hand by playing guitar and adding harmony. While acoustic instruments infused the earlier album, Lewis takes a more eclectic route this time around. A number of tracks - "You Don't Have to Lose" and "Almost a Stranger" - feature little more than guitar and background organ. Others - like "Ramadan Moon" and "The Rain Stops Everything" - utilize full band arrangements. While both styles work well, it is a bit jarring when a noisier track follows a quieter one (though this can be overcome by programming the track sequence differently). Lewis' pleasing vocals remind one of Al Stewart, which makes it appropriate that Stewart joins him for some fine harmony on "You Don't Know." Mandolin and accordion player Robert Lloyd adds a number of nice flourishes, while Chuck Prophet throws in a bit of energetic electric guitar. Perhaps the most effective track on the album is "Let the Sunlight Dry Your Tears," a lovely song that uses a fuller arrangement without electric instruments. The big sound, with Spanish guitar and trumpet, offers atmosphere to spare, much like the acoustic folk-rock of late-'60s groups like Pentangle. A listener also wouldn't want to miss a good version of Nick Drake's "Northern Sky." For Now finds Lewis growing into new forms, offering fans a broader brand of folk than his first outing." (Ronnie D. Lankford, Jr., AMG EXPERT REVIEW) 'Co-produced by John Wesley Harding, this is a gentle sounding album. Lewis, though, has a hardy and tough spirit. In his ten songs, images of journeys and nature abound. The one cover is a lovely go at Nick Drake's "Northern Sky". His voice reminiscent of Al Stewart, David Lewis is a writer and singer worth getting to know.' (Michael Tearson, Sing Out, Spring 2002) 'Shut away in his 60s

folk bubble, surrounded by his Ralph McTell and Al Stewart records, David Lewis needs to get out more. In fact he went all the way to San Francisco to record this album with John Wesley Harding. Unfortunately, Harding is equally enamoured with the bubble, and recreates a West Coast version for Lewis to crawl back into. Only Green On Red renegade Chuck Prophet is prepared to prick the bubble with some acerbic electric guitar, but ultimately he sounds more like a novelty amid the pristinely plucked acoustic guitars and Lewis's rather fey vocals. Mind you, if quiet really is the new loud (or was that last week?), then Lewis could be the new folk hero. After all he has the substance to go with the style - unlike all those Scandinavian wannabes. His cover of Nick Drake's "Northern Sky" proves that his understanding of the style runs deep, and several of his own songs - "Ramadan Moon", "Your Kind of Madness", "Too Much Love" - stand comparison with the bygone classics. Al Stewart even shows up on "You Don't Know". (Hugh Fielder, *Classic Rock*, April 2002) From the beginning of "For Now" David Lewis' lightness of touch on acoustic guitar sprightly, light voice speak of very English 60's and 70's songwriters. The engaging frailty and slightly fey timbre of Lewis' voice is reminiscent of Al Stewart (who provides backing vocals on "You Don't Know"). Without being derivative he nods to Stewart elsewhere, notably in the Spanish feel and trumpet of "Let the Sunlight Dry Your Tears", reminiscent of "On the Border". There is a brave cover of Nick Drake's "Northern Sky" on which Lewis manages to stamp his own character and it is a testament to the quality of his song-writing that this does not seem out of place. Elsewhere there are hints of English folksong and the late 60's London scene playing of Bert Jansch et al. Lyrically there is a directness and an almost naive simplicity without cliché. Words are clearly important to Lewis but pretension or complex wordplay are shunned in favour of effective communication. Three songs are co-penned with long-time collaborator John Wesley Harding who also provides vocals, guitar, organ and mandolin. The other significant voice is former Green on Red member Chuck Prophet who contributes a variety of tasteful chiming, shimmering bowed electric guitar textures. The album has a good variety of feels resulting largely from a mix of simple and full arrangements. The original plan was to build gradually from voice to full band as the album progressed. From the relatively spartan acoustic guitar, lightly dressed with minimal backing vocals and piano in "Your Kind of Madness" to the lively full band "The Rain Stops Everything" or the "People get Ready" style vamp of "Weary Traveller" the production by Harding Scott Matthews retains an open, nicely unpolished feel. Somehow the overall package gives the feeling of a 'old friend', an album rediscovered after languishing in the depths of the record collection for a number

of years. (James Hibbins, Net Rhythms April 2002) Boasting a musical back-line of west coast luminaries including Chuck Prophet and Chris Von Sneider, this second disc from London academic Lewis is straight out of 1969. It is wrapped in a late sixties, early seventies Al Stewart/Cat Stevens ambience that slightly detracts on first listen from the obvious songwriting strengths. With titles like Ramadan Moon and Too Much Love you'd be forgiven for thinking that Mr Lewis had been at the patchouli oil and incense sticks a bit too much. However, a closer listen reveals some genuine affection not just for that era but for a certain gentle aspect of the British folk scene, hence the gloriously mellow take on Nick Drake's Northern Sky. At times the mellowness becomes a bit cloying in a Donovan-like way - all flowers and moons rather than Universal Soldier - but the backing is strong and moves with his gentle voice, showcasing its charm. Chuck Prophet adds masterful guitar throughout and long-time friend John Wesley Harding is a sympathetic backing singer. Indeed, Lewis already has credits for a couple of strong songs on JWH discs. It may be that it's Lewis's friendship/influence that led to the outstanding Trad. Arr. Jones disc from Harding recently. Your Kind of Madness is lovely - a Lewis/Harding duet that sounds like an Elektra Records out-take. Best track is The Rain Stops Everything, which strays into pop group The Go-betweens territory. All in all a fine effort if not quite a groundbreaking release and if - as the fashion pundits claim - this is the third Summer of Love then this is the perfect soundtrack. (Shaun Belcher - June 2002, BBC Radio 2 website) After a five-year hiatus, David Lewis has released For Now, a followup to his critically acclaimed No Straight Line. As with his debut, John Wesley Harding co-produces and joins in on a variety of instruments. While both are former Cambridge University classmates, Lewis continues to work in academia, lecturing at the London School of Economics. That and Harding's own career are the main reasons for the gap between albums. Along with Harding, former Green on Red leader and guitarist Chuck Prophet adds the odd electric flourish to the relatively acoustic For Now. Vocally "soft" sounding, somewhat like Leon Rosselson and not unlike Nick Drake's work, Lewis also pays homage to the late Drake with his rendition of "Northern Sky." A tasteful and satisfying album. For those who appreciate British folk-rock, Lewis' For Now should find a happy home in their music library. (Dirty Linen #104 Feb/Mar 2003, Pieter Hofmann)

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