

MP3 Paul Kotheimer - Song About Everything -- Songs 1-50



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This virtual box set mp3CD contains over 5 hours of music. 100 songs. Twenty folking years of DiY poetical, personal, and political acoustic music from one of the finest songwriters you've never heard of. Download songs 1-50 here. 50 MP3 Songs FOLK: Alternative Folk, FOLK: Political Folk Details: A SERIOUS FOLKING DOCUMENT THE POETICS OF PAUL KOTHEIMER'S SONG ABOUT EVERYTHING by William Gillespie spinelessbooks.com Recently, Andy Partridge turned his back on a music industry that never truly embraced him, and self-published the eight-volume home demo archive Fuzzy Warbles, a majestic testament to a brilliant composer--a good life's work packaged artfully, playfully, exactly as Andy intended. And now Paul Kotheimer has released the first two decades of his own work on one MP3 CD. This is a serious folking document. This essay won't but touch on how Paul's self-produced albums made it possible for me to do what I do. It's funny how the same act of self-publishing might be a desperate bid for artists who cannot connect with the industry, but a bold and courageous statement to their fans who appreciate the work as much as they would a commercial product with a distant corporate backer, and admire even more that it came seemingly out the artist's sleeve. It might even be a point of shame for some writers, not vanity publishing but humility publishing. But art speaks louder than labels or it isn't art, its empty status. DIY or die; I'm just sayin'. I knew Paul when he wanted to be college radio, and Dont Call Me deserves every shred of attention Timbuk3 got, but fate freed him to make the music he was meant to. The MP3CD is my new favorite musical medium, because it allows the entire corpus of a favorite musician to coexist in one mammoth mix (a few, like Beethoven and Bowie, require more than one MP3CD). But it's too big a mix to arrange song by song, so I always fall back on the strategy of putting the songs in alphabetic order. This allows for the surprising,

revealing albumless juxtapositions of shuffle play, but creates a certain dramatic architecture that mirrors that of the alphabet, starting strong, climaxing in the Ts, and with everything that follows a quirky coda (X songs, for example, are usually weird). It seems that Paul has, independently, hit on the same technique. So the mix ends with one of my most cherished Kotheimers--the relentlessly subtle, uncatchy, chorusless, hookless, devastatingly poetic and melancholy "Your Easy Chair," a masterpiece I feel privileged to appreciate. Songs like "Your Easy Chair" are penciled in margins, enter and exit silently in the wings of recorded music and activism and art and sex and power players and loudmouths crashing symbols. There is an economy of lyric that doesn't rhyme, adhere to a consistent melody, or repeat a line, but is sung so you don't notice. Musical prose. These concise and quiet songs tell portraits. This disc spans Pauls protest music, but activism isn't all politics. It started with and might someday get back to people. When I hear some folksingers sing about the masters and victims of war, I can't shake the feeling they are singing about themselves, their concern, their chops, their courage, their gravelly voices. When Paul sings "Strange Days Richard" or "Ghost Town Youths," whoever he was has disappeared into a wisp of haze through which the wavering apparition of another person can be glimpsed. Through these spiral notebook pages we enter a world of a few lonely people nobody knows. This attracts me to my favorite novels--their authorlessness, how they commit unspeakable, audacious magic by spinning a universe around characters who are not at the center of anything, who would be hard to notice in person, who do not deserve books. Writers thus unclog arteries, hearts shooting sparks, in the self-immolation of sympathy. The millions killed or displaced can be a crown of exclamation points for the one who is alive and exhaling. But then theres Josie. There's something there that smarts, conspicuously enigmatic, that has to be acknowledged before it can even be dismissed. Art the heart beating behind professors, protest, politics, and policy. Worthy legislation and the victories of heroes of courtrooms, lives saved, have roots watered by sour tears in the basements of infested tenements, the rented rooms of student houses, the brownstone twoflats of patient moms. I have never heard Paul play most of these live, and many will never notice if they do, wont open their hearts to the monstrous capacity for tolerance they demand. These gems are dragged up from the dirty earth. Their performance, composition, and arrangement are indistinguishable. Uncalculated, true, neutral, they exist before and after, perfect, unconstructed. A fireant crawling in the armor of cool. The noble protest anthems empty out for me into hollow negotiations for power without that capacity for compassion, compassion precisely for nobody,

nobody who matters, those who aren't aggressors or victims, who demand no attention, whom history rolls over without even crushing, the mammals who peer from roots during the age of the big lizard, the meek. They take you, these songs, into the musty bedrooms, littered back seats of cars, the ashtrays and coffeepots of the lonely. What I mean to say here is if you need a rock star, and don't have time for Mitchell, Jack, John, Jesse, Josie, J.D., Franz, Joseph, Vladimir, Tom, Herman, Emily, Elisabeth, Susan, Johnny, Amelia, Therese, Jane, me and Dale and Sue, then this band isn't for you. I still own the original typewritten lyrics to "Dead Friend Short Story." It has grown on me almost as slowly as the movements of its nearly-static harmony and grammar. Hearing it here allows me to contextualize it among other story songs: In "The Girl Who Could Fly," did Josie commit suicide? Or did she literally fly away like Supergirl? This mystery is a rift as sweet and sad and terrible and mysterious as the effect of missing the first words of "Dog Heaven" and listening to a song that seems like an oddly warm personification of misery. There is a cornucopia of poetry upended in "Waltz," a rough and authentic dance of raw elegance and prole logos. Rich Krueger, as obscure as Paul, wrote that one and Sheila. The impossibly dense and clever words are a pile-up at the intersection of heartbreak and hysteria. "Everybody Smokes in Hell," recorded in the style of the golden era, with one take and a single old-timey microphone, the mix adjusted by literally rearranging the musicians around the piano, is charming, crafty, and clever. It should have been pressed to vinyl, but at least Dear Abby actually was. Paul has used vinyl, cassette, reel-to-reel, laptops, DAT, CD, and MP3, tracking two decades of changes in technology (and his oscillating finances), showing an earnest, opportunistic, tenacious, and always creative drive to make music. Stranded on a desert island, hed beat sticks together and record it with a sewing needle in a coconut shell. Given a budget, hed buy a Wurlitzer funmaker or have the frets removed from a left-handed guitar. The "Song About Everything" meant when it appeared and means again now. There is something Paul can do with his voice that could never be imparted through expensive lessons, tweaking from it a microvibrato, a mountainous range, a willingness to be quiet sometimes, plunging you to the depths of his naivete and relentless sweetness. Something that will always rub the local guitar guys the wrong way. The breathtaking disparity between presence of talent and absence of arrogance undermines the cock rock project, shaking it to its naked grumbling, drinking, smoking ruins. The voice, taut as a cellostring, is here, wringing from nothing a cut-out horizon of optimism too nontoxic to touch. There is an orchestra of vocal chords and guitar strings with *accelerando* and *pianissimo* as effortless as a perfect first take improvised on the spot. This MP3CD

is not a song about everything, it is everything about a song. No more "No More Songs," Paul, not you nor Phil Ochs. Just stagger on. I have become accustomed to mood swings. When you go to the ocean, whether you want to splash around, build sand castles, or swim out into the deep, it's going to be about the waves. Emotion draws you forward, drags you back, knocks you down, sucks you under. If you fight it, you lose; you can only accept and dance with it, and hope it will take you where you thought you were trying to go. Dear Paul, you don't know how lucky you are, and never will. I, a guy who has more songs in his living room than you do days in your life, thinks you are for real, so pure I won't even bullshit you, and I am prepared to bullshit any musician or friend or local artist just to be encouraging, because it's the right thing to do, to bullshit people, to nurture art in this kind of world, whatever form it takes. But you, you, have a gift. These songs go places nobody else can reach, and come at me from angles I am unprepared to defend myself against, puncture me in a spray of tears, and never, ever, for too long, get old. It never matters if you don't get played on college radio, if fuckers steal all your bass guitars, throw you out of their bands, don't pay you for the shit you did. You got a line on eternity, you are dialed in to the human soul. You got a thing compared to which none of this can matter, this puppet play we stage on the flimsy blacktop of this teetering world, with its brokers and buyers and jokers and liars. You are still my friend--your mind, your hands.

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