



Press Reaction

GLOBE AND MAIL DISC OF THE WEEK: POP
Haligonians take you where you want to go
ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN
January 13, 2009

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Paddington Green is to Brent Randall as San Jose was to Burt Bacharach and the Pointed Village was to Harry Nilsson. All those place names are synonyms for Not Here, which for some people is the best place to think about when trying to write a song.

Randall lives in Halifax, but can easily get almost anywhere in his hot-air balloon. His latest album of spacious pop songs makes it possible to travel even via moonbeams and sunlight. You don't need to hear the lyrics to know this. The music is like a great sail that responds to any movement of the imagination.

That's like dreaming, though it takes a lot of craft to make songs that feel as light and open to marvels as these. **Randall is an old-fashioned songwriter who has no time for the crippled tunelets that pass for songs on Top 40 radio these days.** "Don't be lazy, sing a song for me," he croons in the opening single, *Strange Love*. I haven't seen a lyric sheet, but I think the word "song" should be in italics.

Randall's melodies always have a strong shape, even when they're floating in air, and their structure is usually impeccable. In *This House*, for instance, the syncopated rhythm and simple pyramid shape of the verse melody is perfectly balanced against the square rhythm and more developed melody of the chorus.

Two dozen people play or sing on this record, and they all have a lot to do. Hearing these intricate arrangements is sometimes like sitting close to the movie screen: you're flooded with colours. *Daylight* is played on tack piano and thrumming marimba, while other songs combine harp and steel drums, or bass synthesizer, accordion and harp. But the arrangements, which also feature abundant strings, brass and percussion, are not just skin on the bones of the songs. For me, the emotional core of *Strange Love* is only revealed in the instrumental bridge, when the strings drape a poignant B-minor arpeggio figure over the rather complacent G-major bass line.

The album's search for the heart of dreamland reaches its apotheosis in *Slumberjack*, while the point of the next song, *In Our Red Balloon*, is to "carry me higher." But a bluesy inflection has crept into Jess Lewis's vocals, and the music is as close to a tramping rock number as Randall ever gets. The record's almost over, we're preparing to land, but the next flight leaves whenever you hit the replay button.

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Press Reaction

Band of the Day: Brent Randall and his Pinecones

National Post, Jan 16, 2009

by Mark Medley

"There's a lot to like on this record and a lot to digest; 26 different musicians appear on the album, and instruments range from glockenspiel to marimba to orchestral harp. **Highlights include the lazy, dream-like opener *Strange Love***; the joyous *Bluebirds, Flowers, and Other Things*; the playful grooves of *This House*; the gorgeous *Slumberjack*. There's lounge, Broadway, campfire sing-a-longs, lush pop, psychedelic folk, piano-driven rock.

I've been thinking about how to describe the band, and finally came up with **Paul McCartney meets Hawksley Workman**. He certainly has the theatrical flair of Workman. And I, just this second, read the press release that accompanied the CD, and they call him "reminiscent of peak era Paul McCartney and Harry Nilsson." So there you go, I'm not the only one who thinks this. And I doubt I'm the only one telling people to check Brent Randall's music out."

"It's immediately evident that **Randall is a master arranger**. It's also apparent he was going for something grand, and he succeeded in his task by hinting at Broadway aesthetics, big band music, movie musicals and even The Beatles. *Paddington Green* is at times reminiscent of the work of Henri Faberge And The Adorables, but it tends to be significantly more flowery than anything in Faberge's canon. **It should generally appeal to lovers of soft pop and, more specifically, to fans of Jim O'Rourke, The Magnetic Fields and Rufus Wainright.**" - 1/21/09, *Chartattack*, Scott Bryson

"We Were Strangers in Paddington Square is the much anticipated follow up to 2004's *Quite Precisely*, the EP that was Brett Randall's debut album with the Pinecones. **The album showcases Brett Randall's songwriting prowess, along with creativity and imagination that is akin to Tom Waits or fellow Canadian Rufus Wainwright.**

Randall's songs draw influences and inspiration from all over the place. The first track, 'Strange Love (Don't Be Lazy)' is a cabaret inspired pop song, while 'Bluebirds, Flowers and Other Things' is a happy, clappy, deliciously campy tune about love and sunny days. **'This House' sounds like it could have come off of The Beatles' Magical Mystery Tour.** " - Sarah Miller, *Anevibe.com*

"Brent Randall and his Pinecones' new disc, *We Were Strangers in Paddington Green*, is **a pretty delightful record...**Along with strong songwriting, Randall's voice is his strongest weapon on this record. **Try listening to opening track "Strange Love (Don't Be Lazy)."** **You won't be able to ignore the power in his voice.**

This is a pop record that directly references strong pop structures of the past. On track three, "Bluebirds, Flowers and Other Things," the man and his pinecones evoke the image of ELO's "Mr. Blue Sky". Track four, "Snowdrops", allows Randall to show off his soulful croon while the fifth tune, "The Nightingale and the Rose", sounds like Billy Joel after being abducted by a UFO. Randall even experiments with some jazzier textures on "Sweet Thames", which **recalls the late 1960s version of French singer Serge Gainsbourg's work.**" - Matt Ritchie, *Dalhousie Gazette*

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Press Reaction

AMERICANAUK

Grand orchestral pop from Canada

A lot of orchestral pop gets lost in the orchestration and neglects the songs. Randall isn't guilty of this, nor is he guilty of the other orchestral pop sin of over-indulgence - here any grand sweeping passages are in the service of the song. He doesn't neglect any part of the orchestra; brassy parps provides the mattress for 'Bluebirds, Flowers and Other Things' - they step politely backwards for the chorus that's announced with descending drum canons and repeating piano chords. **'Lions Valley' sounds a bit like Phil Spector and Van Dyke Parks competing for an architectural music prize**, though not everything swoons or overwhelms - smaller group pieces like 'Daylight' work just as well as the more complex arrangements.

If you close your eyes and listen to 'Slumberjack' the strings weave a cocoon around you that blocks out the world and makes you want to disappear into the music. The music for marionettes that 'This Absence of Mine' reinstates the real world with some dissonant clashes and a mechanical meter. 'In Our Red Balloon' further intrudes, Jess Lewis taking over on vocals but the insistent fairground organ grounds the song until a skirl of strings pushes it upwards. From the first few bars of 'Strange Love (Don't Be Lazy)' the record reveals its lush credentials and also with the clip clop percussion that it isn't doing to disappear in a miasma of strings, **Randall keeps it anchored to produce something rather grand.**

Date review added: Thursday, January 29, 2009

Reviewer: David Cowling

"In the liner notes of his debut album, *We Were Strangers in Paddington Green*, Brent Randall is depicted sporting a cheesecloth shirt and a goofy walrus mustache, looking strikingly like a Sgt. Pepper's-era John Lennon. Musically speaking, however, **Randall shares a lot more in common with Paul McCartney than John, as his theatrical cabaret pop leanings recall McCartney's mid-to-late '60s output** (think the chirpy horns of "Penny Lane"). And like Sir Paul, he doesn't shy away from schmaltz or camp, with ornate instrumental arrangements that feature strings, horns, and marimba, among many, many others. The liner notes list 25 backing musicians (yes, I counted).

It's a lushness that borders on gaudiness, but Randall has one major factor working in his favour: his voice. Unlike the gentle crooning of most cabaret pop singers, Randall possesses a tense quiver that sounds distinctly like Devendra Banhart. It's an oddball voice, and the perfect vehicle for Randall's piano pop songs. **Best of all is the opening track/lead single "Strange Love (Don't be Lazy)," a vaguely tropical-sounding groove with dreamy harmonies, sweeping strings and free-association lyrics that vividly evoke the surreality of the Hollywood lifestyle.** It's the ideal opener, leaving a warm afterglow that resonates throughout the entire album." - Alex Hudson, *Discorder*

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"Brent Randall's blissful melodies boomed out of my headphones. With the bouncing bass line, horns, sleigh bells, and playful electric noodle of "Bluebirds, Flowers, and Other Things" dancing around whimsically I started to smile uncontrollably. It was impossible not to get that extra pep in my step.

That actually holds true for all of Brent's new record, *We Were Strangers in Paddington Green*. He's a troubadour with a great sense of melody and an appreciation for complex arrangements. From the opening moments of *Strange Love (Don't be Lazy)*, **you can't help but be impressed by Randall's ability to manage instruments**. And while the songs may include lush arrangements and countless musical instruments, they aren't dependent on them. He's a commanding enough front man to draw you close with just his piano and voice.

People always talk about how same-sy the indie scene has become. For all those people, I challenge you to listen to Brent Randall. Here's a group of people trying something outside of most people's listening comfort zone and pulling it off easily. **It's sunshine filled bliss with the occasional rain cloud filled grey sky and it's well worth a listen.**" - *Herohill.com*

"As soon as I started listening to this album, I was hooked. Halifax's Brent Randall captured me with soft, romantic melodies and took me to another world. The songs are mellow and his voice has a Randy Newman-esque style to it. Part of me just wanted to sit and listen to every word, while the other part wanted to get up and groove to the cabaret pop tunes. (cont'd)

Starting off strong, "Strange Love (Don't Be Lazy)" sets the tone for *We Were Strangers in Paddington Green* – sentimental and epic. I couldn't help but think I was listening to The Beatles every once and awhile, which is always a good sign. Each song stands out from the rest yet connect together perfectly. "The Nightingale and the Rose", filled with percussions and keyboards, is beautiful and endearing. **When the album ended, I couldn't help but want more.**" - *Jennifer Kentfield, Soundproof Magazine.*

"The music on *We Were Strangers in Paddington Green* is lush and colourful, with grandiose arrangements and diverse instrumentation...The songwriting is clear and concise, reminiscent of peak Paul McCartney or Brian Wilson compositions. Those are not references that I throw around casually. To compare a relatively unknown Canadian composer to two iconic figures is testament to the impression Randall has made on me. ***We Were Strangers in Paddington Green* is one of the most beautiful albums I've heard in the past ten years.**

Strange Love opens the album with an ethereal bossa pop, shimmering with bells and pedal steel. Other highlights include the dreamy *Snowdrops*, the Revolver-esque *This House* with its catchy chorus, and *In Our Red Balloon*." - *Dave Reed, Belleville Intelligencer.*

"Old-fashioned pop that sounds like what Burt Bacharach and Paul McCartney might come up with if a fright-wigged Phil Spector herded them into a studio at gunpoint and refused to let them sleep, eat, or piss until they had a finished song." - *Georgia Straight*

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"This elegant chamber pop out of Halifax brings to mind an unlikely cross between the lushly orchestrated mischief perfected by Harry Nilsson circa *Son of Schmilsson* and the loping country and western of the *Sons of the Pioneers*' *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*." Given such incongruous source material, this takes a couple of listens to sink in, but sink in it certainly does. Thanks to Jay Ferguson for the tip." - *John Sakamoto, The Anti-Hit List (#7), The Toronto Star.*

"Taking his cue from iconic 60s and 70s songwriters like Harry Nilsson, Randy Newman, Brian Wilson and Ray Davies, Halifax's **Brent Randall crafts clearly realized pop tunes that are impeccably arranged**, with horns, strings, harp, steel drums and other grandiose instruments. No fewer than 25 musicians appear on *We Were Strangers*, five of whom are Randall's Pinecones, a talented group that includes Laura Peek, Jessica Lewis, Dave Ewenson, Brian O'Reilly and Joel Goguen. **If accomplished arrangements, un-fuzzy production, fantastical lyrics and glossy melody are your thing, best to snap up this sparkly bauble.**" - *Carla Gillis, Now Magazine*

"It's safe to say there isn't anything quite like this in Canadian music right now. With his enthusiasm for the overwrought gesture, Mr. Randall and his Halifax entourage make musical theatre for the indie set. The result is a distillation of the Ben Kweller, the Bee Gees and ELO, including full choir arrangements. A solid effort on a debut that quite precisely introduces an original voice." - *Helen Spitzer, Exclaim.ca*

"Brent Randall and his Pinecones' first full-length recording will have you screaming "Holy 1971" after the first track, "Strange Love." With Randall's soft vocals and flowing melodies, the album can be described as an exercise in neo-McCartneyism harking back to the heyday of Wings and The Beatles. **Tracks like "For in the Rainbow of a Moonbeam" and "This Absence of Mine" have the same knack for imagery that The Beatles demonstrated in *Yellow Submarine*.** *We Were Strangers* will have you floating 500 feet above the moors of England in a giant red hot-air balloon without much effort." - *Andrew Paul, See Magazine*

"Best known as Mark Bragg's bass player, Brent Randall steps out in a major way. **An ambitious and skillfully written effort**, *Quite Precisely* is driven by Randall's knack for melody and tasteful piano-playing. "Television and Treasure" conjures the spirit of Mott the Hoople while "In Horsedrawn Delight" marches and soars like classic Britpop. **Quite Precisely is still one of the best local debuts in recent memory.**" - *Chuck Teed, The Coast*

"Brent Randall and his Pinecones came on much later than I had anticipated but was well worth how tired I am this morning. Brent and the band are from Halifax as am I so I always try to get out and cover the East coast bands when they stop by my new home. The Pinecones are made up of stellar performers from other Halifax acts Laura Peek & The Winning Hearts and Their Majesties. Brent and his band had the crowd dancing, singing along and loving them. Brent's vocals are melodic and soothing. **A real fresh voice in this screaming loud marketplace we call music.**" - *John, BlogTO.com*

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