

Rufus Wainwright – *Want One*

Review by Alan Bennett Ilagan

As one of the most innovative and uncompromising of singer-songwriters in our generation, Rufus Wainwright has also been one of the most unappreciated. With his whimsically eclectic musical styling and unique voice, he's never been a pop darling, though his latest album, *Want One*, is one of the year's most tuneful and melodious.

Teetering precariously on the precipice between self-love and self-loathing, Wainwright finds fertile ground both musically and lyrically. From the fanciful cover art to the wry dedication (to himself), the album is most singularly the work of Rufus alone, and while some artists would flounder under such autonomy, Wainwright reveals and revels in the solitude.

A sly sense of humor pervades the proceedings ~ the winking *Bolero* references of the opening track and the shimmering lure of *Vibrate* and its precious couplet "I tried to dance to Britney Spears/ I guess I'm getting on in years" induce smiles, while the plaintive lament of *Pretty Things* indulges, but not overly, the yearning ache of beauty. Wainwright can also stir the senses with the deceptively simple mastering of a pop song ~ from the clever hooks and funky horns of *14<sup>th</sup> Street* to the glorious bombast of strings that build and builds in *I Don't Know What It Is* and brings it all to a thrilling climax. It is during the quieter moments, however, that the album truly soars. The sweet softness of *Natasha* is at once affecting and despondent, and the elegantly elegiac *Dinner At Eight* miraculously melds the hopeful with the forlorn.

A dark, haunting beauty is at work here ~ the stuff of nocturnal enchantment and lonely longing. Joy and witty exuberance are tempered with melancholy, and all of it is bound together by Wainwright's exquisite musical abilities. No one is writing songs like this anymore, and as one of the few artists who has been openly gay from the start of his career no one can fault his courage and bravery. He is our singing-knight-in-shining-armor ~ a Don Quixote figure set to take on the world of musical mediocrity and breathe new life into the pop realm, grasping and pulling forth Excalibur as our chosen hero.