

David Gray - A biography

Foundling -- the stunning new effort by internationally acclaimed singer-songwriter David Gray -- begins with those evocative and somewhat mysterious words. What follows is an extraordinary song cycle of rare and timeless power that bears a rather fitting title. As people today may or may not remember, the word "foundling" is defined as "an infant found after its unknown parents have abandoned it." And as Gray puts it with a warm laugh, "Foundling sort of arrived at my door without my asking it to, so it felt very appropriate for this album."

In a sense, Foundling also marks another notable arrival -- the second coming of David Gray's own second coming -- and one that truly "sprung like a wild orchid" in its own right. By 2005, Gray had already enjoyed what has been a rather distinguished career as a singer-songwriter and recording artist, having sold more than 12 million albums, including his global left-field smash, 1998's *White Ladder*, which remains the single best selling album in Irish history. Gray had by this point already won two Ivor Novello Awards, a Q award, two Brit nominations and a GRAMMY nomination.

But not a man or artist content to ever rest on his laurels, Gray decided that the time has come to shake things up in a significant way. So in 2006, David Gray decided to disband his longtime backing group, and to attempt to reconnect with his music before recording his excellent 2009 album *Draw The Line* with a new group of players at his studio *The Church*. "Draw the Line was essentially about the band, and four people playing together in a room," says Gray. "But you can't just keep going for unlimited takes. So on days when I felt everyone was getting a bit worn down and frayed at the edges -- and that it might be good to give everyone a little space -- I'd go into the studio on my own or maybe with one other person. I'd either work on tracks we already recorded or try to record other songs with just me on piano or guitar. That's a lot of what eventually became *Foundling*."

In essence, *Foundling* became an alternate musical universe to *Draw The Line*. As Gray puts it, "Foundling was an album done in slices of time in between band recording sessions. Eventually, I had the thought of recording and then mixing two separate albums during the same time period, so I then went back and took a closer look at the tracks and recorded a few overdubs and attempted to add a few finishing touches so that they sounded more complete. That's how *Foundling* became like a tapestry that I hung on the other side of *The Church*. And I kept walking over and making little marks on it, and before you knew it, what started off as a side project was holding my attention as well as the main work."

In the end, *Foundling* looks like the most gorgeous and minimalist musical tapestry that David Gray has ever created -- one that alternately suggests the early work of *The Band*, Randy Newman and Tom Waits, but without sounding remotely like a piece of nostalgia. Like the recent productions of T-Bone Burnett, this is music that seems to exist almost outside of time, yet feels fantastically modern and stripped of

all unnecessary varnish.

"Because I've done so much recording lately, I think you eventually get braver," says Gray. "You think 'I can go even further with this -- I can do even less.' So there's definitely a sense here of reducing the songs to their absolute bare minimum. It's that core notion of getting to the gist of the song. On *Draw The Line* and in a different way here, I didn't concern myself with trying to use very current sounds that might date badly. I just focused on getting the song down by the simplest means possible."

Working this way was ultimately very emancipating for Gray. "We were very unfussy on this record," he says. "I felt like this was my private record. I didn't get too picky with the vocals, and I didn't have to think about things like potential airplay. So I threw all of that stuff out and it's actually a wonderfully liberating feeling. You think, 'This hasn't got a cat in hell's chance of getting on the radio, so let's make this the way we feel it ought to be made. We just made it the way we wanted to.'"

When it's pointed out that he was always a bit of a left-field success story, and that *Foundling* might find a home on the airwaves simply because it's so good, he laughs and adds, "I could see these songs doing well at the cinema or maybe on TV because there is a cinematic quality to some of the stuff. Maybe that could unlock the record in some way, but it's hard to imagine it getting on the radio as it stands. But who cares anyway? Fuck it, we love it."

"Frankly, I can't wait for this bloody thing to come out because I'm still tearing my hair out about what to leave in and not," Gray adds with a hearty laugh. "It's basically the record I've been wanting to make for a long time and it's as strong a statement as *White Ladder* in its own way. The album is like a stepping off point for what might happen next. It's like I'm really putting my money where my mouth is with this one."