

The Wallflowers - A biography

Jakob Dylan – Guitar & Vocals

Fred Eltringham – Drums

Rami Jaffee – Keyboards

Greg Richling – Bass

Rebel, Sweetheart -- the fifth album from The Wallflowers and their first with producer Brendan O'Brien (Pearl Jam, Bruce Springsteen) -- is the welcome re-introduction to a rock & roll band with a renewed sense of purpose.

"The bright light had been removed from us for a little while, and somehow the music felt pure again," says Jakob Dylan. "We're not exactly a new band anymore, but there's definitely a feeling that we've been reinvigorated by so many factors - the new music, first and foremost - and we've unburdened ourselves of any outside expectations of what this band is supposed to be.

Expectations are something Jakob Dylan has lived with from the start, and against long odds, The Wallflowers have by any reasonable standard more than lived up to them with a series of albums: 1992's *The Wallflowers* ("a bizarre snapshot of a twenty-one year old, which has its charms," says Dylan), 1996's commercial breakthrough *Bringing Down the Horse* which featured the hits "6th Avenue Heartache," the two-time Grammy winning "One Headlight", "Three Marlenas" and "The Difference." With the success of that album, the band toured the world for two years, establishing themselves as one of music's most important rock & roll bands. *Breach*, released in 2000, featured the radio and video channel mainstays, "Sleepwalker," and "Letters From The Wasteland." *Red Letter Days*, the band's most critically-lauded album to date, was released in November, 2003 and spawned the singles, "When You're On Top," "How Good It Can Get," and "Closer To You."

Despite several personnel changes and a glaring industry spotlight that would severely test its fortitude, the band played on. "Early on, people questioned my reasons for being in a rock & roll band and assumed that I must be hiding out" says Dylan. "A lot of people are surprised that we're still going. But the truth is I wasn't hiding out. I grew up listening to rock & roll bands and always wanted to be part of one that mattered."

The current incarnation of The Wallflowers -- with Dylan as songwriter, lead singer and guitarist, longtime keyboardist Rami Jaffee and bassist Greg Richling now joined by drummer Fred Eltringham, formerly of the Gigolo Aunts -- feels like the fulfillment of that youthful dream. "We've had a history of people sticking around the band longer than they probably should," Dylan admits. "Our intentions weren't always on the same page. But now with Rami in the band for these past fifteen years,

Greg around twelve and Fred, who I've known for six years and played with for the last two, everything finally just feels right."

For one thing, Dylan at long last realized the nature of Rami Jaffee's true role within The Wallflowers. "Every band has that stage right guy -- usually it's a guitar player, the guy to lean on, whether it's Mick Jones to Joe Strummer or Keith Richards to Mick Jagger. Great rock bands are supposed to have that, and it's always been frustrating not to have a permanent guitarist in The Wallflowers. But making this record, I realized that for this group, Rami is that guy. At the same time, I know a lot of bass players and there's no one in the world Greg Richling couldn't play with. And having now played with Fred for close to two years, I sincerely mean it when I say that I feel like we've been waiting for him the whole time. Recording this album, it occurred to me that it's been a hell of a long struggle to get here, but this is it and it's all been worth it. For these guys, being in a band with someone who writes and sings the songs -- especially someone with the heritage I have -- doesn't always always bring them the attention they deserve. Not that they complain about it, but it's a real shame cause I feel it should be obvious to everyone just how much they contribute."

The other key player on the Rebel, Sweetheart team is acclaimed producer Brendan O'Brien. Before the band recorded Rebel, Sweetheart at Atlanta's Southern Tracks Recording in the summer and fall of 2004, the producer took a road trip with The Wallflowers as a guest guitarist. "We were going out for three weeks last summer and we thought it'd be really beneficial to have him along, if he were willing. Brendan's a first-class musician, and that tour allowed us to get a jump start on the record we'd soon be recording."

That shared road experience proved invaluable once The Wallflowers and O'Brien commenced recording in Atlanta. "With Brendan in the band for a few weeks, we all knew a lot more about how we were going to approach things once we got to the studio," says Dylan. "For one thing, he refuses to waste time. Usually people like to camp out in a studio and don't plan on leaving for months. Brendan's attitude was, "We can do this in four weeks." It's not like he was impatient or had other things lined up, it's his belief - borne out by years of experience in making great records - that if you're thinking about things too much and making it complicated, than you're probably doing something wrong."

On Rebel, Sweetheart, The Wallflowers and O'Brien were clearly doing something right, and the result is the most focused and accomplished album of their career. "It was great for us because we've always worked in L.A., and I think that's why our records have dragged on," Dylan says. "Recording close to home means that we're all juggling our work and our personal lives. Of course, that's what most people have to do every day, but we found out that it's just not the best way to go about making a record. With Brendan, we worked at a pace that kept us on our toes, and that's exactly what we needed. I can't recall the usual tedious time sitting around the studio waiting for food and being bored. We used every minute we were there."

Appropriately, then, *Rebel, Sweetheart* is an album very much informed by time and its inevitable passage. This is an album full of songs written by a man and performed by a band that's already lived a little. Though the album is full of some of Dylan's wittiest lines, those sorts of more sober and serious concerns are all over *Rebel, Sweetheart*. The opening "Days of Wonder" for instance is not the sunny rock anthem the title might suggest. More revealing of the album's emotional complexities is that song's reference to "seven different shades of grey spreading out across the arc." Gradually, it dawns on the listener that 'wonder' is not meant as a sense of awe, it refers to being filled with doubt. "People looked at the title of the last album *Red Letter Days* and assumed it was upbeat too. I've always been drawn to that sort of contradiction."

Rebel, Sweetheart is full of such beautiful and powerful contradictions. As he told *USA Today* earlier this year, "Considering the chaotic times that we're living in, I found it unavoidable to write songs that weren't embedded with curiosity, panic and wonder." The album's first single "The Beautiful Side of Somewhere" is a powerful expression of hope and, at the same time, an acknowledgement of life's inherent difficulties. "It's about dealing with the realization that the answers you thought you'd eventually get may never actually come. Yet you strive to hold onto the belief that there must be something - a place, a feeling, a state of mind - that is actually better than where you are right now."

One of the album's most moving songs, "God Says Nothing Back" shares a similar sentiment with "The Beautiful Side Of Somewhere" and encompasses many of the themes that inhabit Dylan's work, namely God, time, love and death. As he explains, "It often seems that everything worth thinking about is somehow wrapped up in those four topics."

Another *Rebel* standout, "We're Already There" is rooted in related thoughts. "A lot of this record is trapped in time. For me, it's understanding that I'm not the same person I was when I first started this band; that time has certainly shifted my view on things - as it does to most of us - and that trying to hold onto old perspectives is just unwise."

In *Rebel, Sweetheart*, The Wallflowers have created an album that yearns for clarity while reflecting the world's complexity - a sometimes dark but somehow inspiring gem of an album that reflects a recommitment and fittingly ends with an uncharacteristically hopeful song called "All Things New Again." For Dylan, The Wallflowers feel in some ways new again. As he explains. "We've gone a lot farther and become a much better band than many thought we would. But it's not out of stubbornness or any misdirected sense of obligation that keeps us together. We just feel that we want to keep making the best records we can because we want there to be a Wallflowers legacy - not just a handful of records. That's how I always envisioned The Wallflowers from the very beginning: As a band that was going to matter for a long time."

The band members' musical chemistry and easy interaction is well displayed in the 30-minute film they made exclusively for inclusion on the Dual Disc version of Rebel Sweetheart. The Wallflowers let the cameras roll on a marathon recording session during which they dramatically rearranged and recorded new versions of their hits, "One Headlight," and "6th Avenue Heartache," as well as the fan favorites "Some Flowers Bloom Dead," "For The Life Of Me," and the previously unreleased "Halo" (which had only been played live several times and had piqued fan interest through bootlegs). The band also sat down for a not-so-serious interview with actor/comedian Jon Lovitz to discuss these songs and the band's creative process, as well as to shed light on some long-debated queries such as who would win if The Wallflowers got in a fight with Green Day.

One question does remain, though: What about that mysterious, evocative album title? "Well, other than saying that 'Rebel' is a verb, not a noun, I'm going to let it's meaning remain open to interpretation. Besides," Dylan says with a laugh, "the fans' ideas are often more interesting."