

## **Steve Kilbey Live and Untitled #23 by The Church**

A great deal of people over the years have said that Bob Dylan deserves the nobel prize in litterature. Dylan-fans quite often tend to be pretty obsessive and even Dylan seems to have had a pretty strong inclination of escaping from it all over the years. If Dylan is going to be nominated for any nobel prize he's in for very hard competition. There are quite a few extremely talented songwriters in modern music and one that, in my opinion, definitely stands out is Steve Kilbey, main songwriter, singer and bass player of The Church.

Having seen the DVD titled "Steve Kilbey Live" from 2007, one thing that strikes me about his appearance is his wonderful sense of humour including a nice way of distancing him from himself which would be a property of a truly great artist. The concert includes 19 songs including the extra numbers, and it's acoustic; thus low kee. The opening song is Providence; a song he seems to perform live quite often and rightfully so I think. The second, Buffalo, is from the 1998 Church album "Hologram of Baal" introducing Tim Powles on drums and also as producer. The album in question signifies a turn into a new artistic period as far as I can tell, heading for what is sometimes referred to as "space rock", although I wouldn't use that term. Almost with you has been described by Steve Kilbey as the ultimate Church song and I don't really understand why; there are so many. Yet he keeps on playing it and I don't mind. The theme is good and the song is good too, but there are others, in my opinion, from "The Blurred Crusade" only that I think are equally good.

Electric Lash seems to be an obvious choice from the “Seance” album being a single at the time but it would be interesting to hear a song like Fly from the same album. Somewhat surprisingly, a Lou Reed cover appears, and it’s not just any song. Being a fan of the velvets and as far as post-velvet is concerned firmly parked in the John Cale camp, I appreciate the “Berlin” album. One strength that Lou Reed has is a tendency to write lyrics delivering the message in a very efficient way. Caroline Says II is one of his finer moments in my book and Steve Kilbey does it justice although the acoustic version he presents does not have the hollowness of the track on Berlin.

Steve Kilbey’s wit and sense of self-distance is on display in the presentation of Tristesse from the cult Church album “Heyday”. As far as Under the Milky Way is concerned, it could be a crowd pleaser being, I assume, the commercially most successful Church-song. His introduction is very witty on the verge to absurdity and he makes these weird comments adding up to making sense as he performs the song. I suppose Hotel Womb from the same album as a cult song might pass as a crowd pleaser too and of course the singer can’t keep himself from making funny remarks.

As far as the extra numbers are concerned, I would say that Comedown is a good choice and I’m quite impressed by the medley Invisible/Medley. All of a sudden the velvets pop up again. Just for you ends the set making “The Blurred Crusade” well represented (three songs if I’m not mistaken).

I suppose these are busy times for Steve Kilbey. He has his solo career and side projects and apart from that the band where he tends to be the main singer, i.e. The Church, has released a new album a little earlier this year. The title of it is “Untitled #23”, and having finished a successful tour in north America they’re supposed to tour Euroasia. Why not Europe? We miss them. The album has been well received by the press and as far as I’m concerned I must say that I’m impressed. The new Church album may be the most homogeneous album I’ve heard from them, with the possible addition of the world cult album “Heyday” (1985) and “Priest=Aura” (1992). The Church almost never put covers on albums with the exception of the cover album “A Box of Birds”. I think this is good since they don’t really have to do covers, with such an impressive song catalogue of their own and a tendency to be very productive.

“Desert wind in a telephone box”; the opening line of the first song “Cobalt Blue” grabs the listener not unlike “Aujourd’hui mamam est morte” in “L’Etranger” by Camus. The 1998 album “Hologram of Baal” was the first album featuring Tim Powles on drums and also producing the album. The “Hologram of Baal” album is brilliant and somehow marked a shift in the music of the band, turning more towards what some tend to call space rock, often associated with the progressive band Pink Floyd. Not being a friend of the expression, at the time I was however quite taken by the new sound and the albums have, since then, been in the same vein as far as sound is concerned, with the exception of the two (?) acoustic albums they’ve released in recent years. From

listeninmg to “Untitled #23” it seems obvious that they’re not looking for a hit. Well known for emphasising artistic quality rather than being on the charts, the lack of an obvious single or radio track is not a drawback; it’s rather a strength. There is no “Song in Space” or “Numbers” on this one and the sound is a little more moderated than on an album like “Uninvited Like the Clouds” featuring a strong opening with “Block”. Nor is there any song like the atmospherical “First Woman on the Moon”, the opening track on “Parallell Universe”. All band members have credits for the songs on the new album and considering Steve Kilbey’s ability to write loads of lyrics I’m not sure if he’s the only lyricist. It does sound that way but one never knows. In an interview sometime in the eighties, Steve Kilbey said that he would have the words and some general idea of what a song would be. After that it was teamwork. This may or may not be the case even these days. After 1998 all band members are listed as producers, if I’m not mistaken, but the sound, assumingly brought in by Tim Powles, does have qualities that somehow reminds me of canadian producer/musician Daniel Lanois, having produced artists like U2 and Bob Dylan, only to mention two.

The overall impression of the album would be that the band continues on the path they started in 98 but moderating it to some extent. Looking for flaws on the album might be a critic’s favourite thing to do but in this case it seems pointless, for the simple reason that there aren’t any. No song stands out, neither in a positive nor negative way and if you want an album that’s total art in the sense that it’s just as good from start to

end then “Untitled #23” is an obvious choice. The Church’s not looking for new territory in music, they ARE new territory in music having evolved a great deal since “The Unguarded Moment”. This is not to say they have influences; all bands/artists tend to have that. No man is an island as the saying goes but The Church comes on with a style and substance that they’ve made their own in a way. I suppose that bands like The Cure should have thanked The Church in the eighties. As far as I know The Cure’s still around, but not having heard them I wouldn’t be able to make any comparisons.

Fredrik Zander, October 2009

[www.zanderette.com](http://www.zanderette.com)