



SECRETLY  
CANADIAN

# DAMIEN JURADO MARAQOPA

Nothing Is The News  
Life Away From The Garden  
Maraqopa  
This Time Next Year  
Reel To Reel  
Working Titles  
Everyone A Star  
So On, Nevada  
Museum Of Flight  
Mountains Still Asleep

Welcome to *Maraqopa*, population 2. *Damien Jurado's* newest collaboration with producer **Richard Swift** drops us into a brutal and benevolent landscape. The bold strokes and new turns the pair made with 2010's *Saint Bartlett* are taken even further. He throws open the gate on his oft insular dirges and allows them do some real wilding out in the canyon. In *Maraqopa*, the vistas are miles-wide; the action is more dynamic; the close-ups sweaty and snarling. The strummed desert blues that begins "Nothing is the News" quickly bursts open into an **Eddie Hazel**-worthy supernova shred session, all of it swirling in tinny-psych and Echoplex'd howls. We've never heard anything like this from Jurado. Fifteen years into his remarkable career, and he continues to blossom. Jurado and Swift establish themselves not only as inventive, trusting collaborators, but as one another's spirit animals in American outsider songcraft —lone wolves in black sheep's clothing. Swift is the Ennio Morricone to Jurado's Sergio Leone.

At Swift's National Freedom studios, the live-to-tape ethos allowed these songs to expand and retract like a great beast's breath. Every in-the-moment bell and whistle here is hung with a natural, casual care. And from this, each song offers up its own unique gift: the enchanting children's choir that echoes each line of Jurado's lament for innocence lost on "Life Away from the Garden"; the breezy bossa nova that begins "This Time Next Year" and rises as effortless as a smoke cloud into high-noon showdown pop; "Reel to Reel"'s wobbly, Spector-symphony and its meta themes; the wonderful falsetto vocal work Jurado pulls from himself on "Museum of Flight." The Seattle Times recently called Jurado "Seattle's folk-boom godfather," a praising recognition to be sure. But also a title Jurado might not yet be ready to accept. That's a title for someone who has settled. With each visit to National Freedom, Jurado is exploring, taking risks. He's not only freeing his songs. The gate is opened wide to allow us all into his once-isolated musical universe. One gets the sense he's just now hitting his stride.

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# Praise for Damien Jurado's *Saint Bartlett*



"A fine, accomplished and emotional album that ranks among his very best."

**BBC**

"His strongest songwriting to date."

**Pitchfork**

"*Saint Bartlett* serves not just as an encapsulation of Jurado's career, but as a promising indicator of where he's headed."

**Tiny Mix Tapes**

"Well populated, teeming in its understated way with translucent textures of strings, piano, acoustic and electric guitar, and scratchy found sounds. It suggests and evokes rather than delineates."

**Dusted**

"*Saint Bartlett* succeeds both in its variety and in the warmth and vulnerability that we've come to rely on Jurado to share with us."

**Exclaim!**

"Haunting, unforgettable songs... *Saint Bartlett* is likely the album that will define Jurado as more than just a singer-songwriter. He's now an artist and a storyteller, too, who has found his true voice."

**Seattle Weekly**

"Throughout his body of work, he has remained one of the finest songwriters of our times, but, even by his own high standards, there's something going on here...[his] best album for quite some time."

**The Sunday Times**

"Mightily impressive."

**Q**





## Damien Jurado

Secretly Canadian; 2010  
By Larry Fitzmaurice; May 26, 2010

7.9

ARTISTS:  
Damien Jurado

It's hard to find an entrance point into Damien Jurado's discography. You could start from the beginning, 1997's *Waters Ave. S.*, but that record is filled with the sort of angsty, electric Pac NW indie-rock that is largely uncharacteristic of his catalogue as a whole. You could start with his first folk-leaning LP, 1999's *Rehearsals for Departure*, which has one of the best and most tender songs he's written, "Eyes For Windows", or 2002's comparatively upbeat *I Break Chairs*, but there's not much to make either stand out from the pack. If nothing else, Jurado has been oddly cursed by his own consistency.

Produced by the increasingly ubiquitous Richard Swift, *Saint Bartlett*, Jurado's ninth record is, finally, a striking departure. So much so that only the sound of his voice keeps you from thinking this could be the work of someone else. The change is noticeable right off the bat, announced by the lushly stringed baroque pop of "Cloudy Shoes", and it continues throughout, with meditations on 1950s girl-group balladry, thorny Neil Young-esque guitar rock, and cavernous chamber-pop.

Swift deserves a fair amount of credit for the reinvention that's on display here, and his ear for instrumentation does wonders for these songs. The woodblock percussion that backs "Arkansas" gives the tune a slight ramshackle bent, while Swift applies the perfect amount of guitar fuzz to turn "Wallingford" into a gentle stomper. Most impressively, the application of subtle space in "Kalama" lends a new gravitas to Jurado's voice, effectively making him bigger than his own sound.

Despite Swift's major contributions, *Saint Bartlett* is still very much a Damien Jurado album. His best work has always been marked with heartache and desolation, and it's a testament to his strengths that even on *Saint Bartlett*'s most upbeat songs, he manages to convey feelings of loneliness and loss. It helps here that he's still working within his lyrical wheelhouse. The mood on *Saint Bartlett* ranges from bitter to desperate and back again. Mostly, though, Jurado claims ownership of *Saint Bartlett*'s achievements simply by turning in his strongest songwriting to date. Even the straightforward folk cuts here have more potency, especially on haunting "Beacon Hill".

The songs on *Saint Bartlett* would be considered an achievement for any artist-- but the fact that they come 13 years into a career makes the album even more of a triumph. Maybe the record's accessibility and lushness could lead to a bigger audience for Jurado, but in any case, it's a welcome surprise from a journeyman so dependable he risked being forgotten.



## RECENTLY REVIEWED

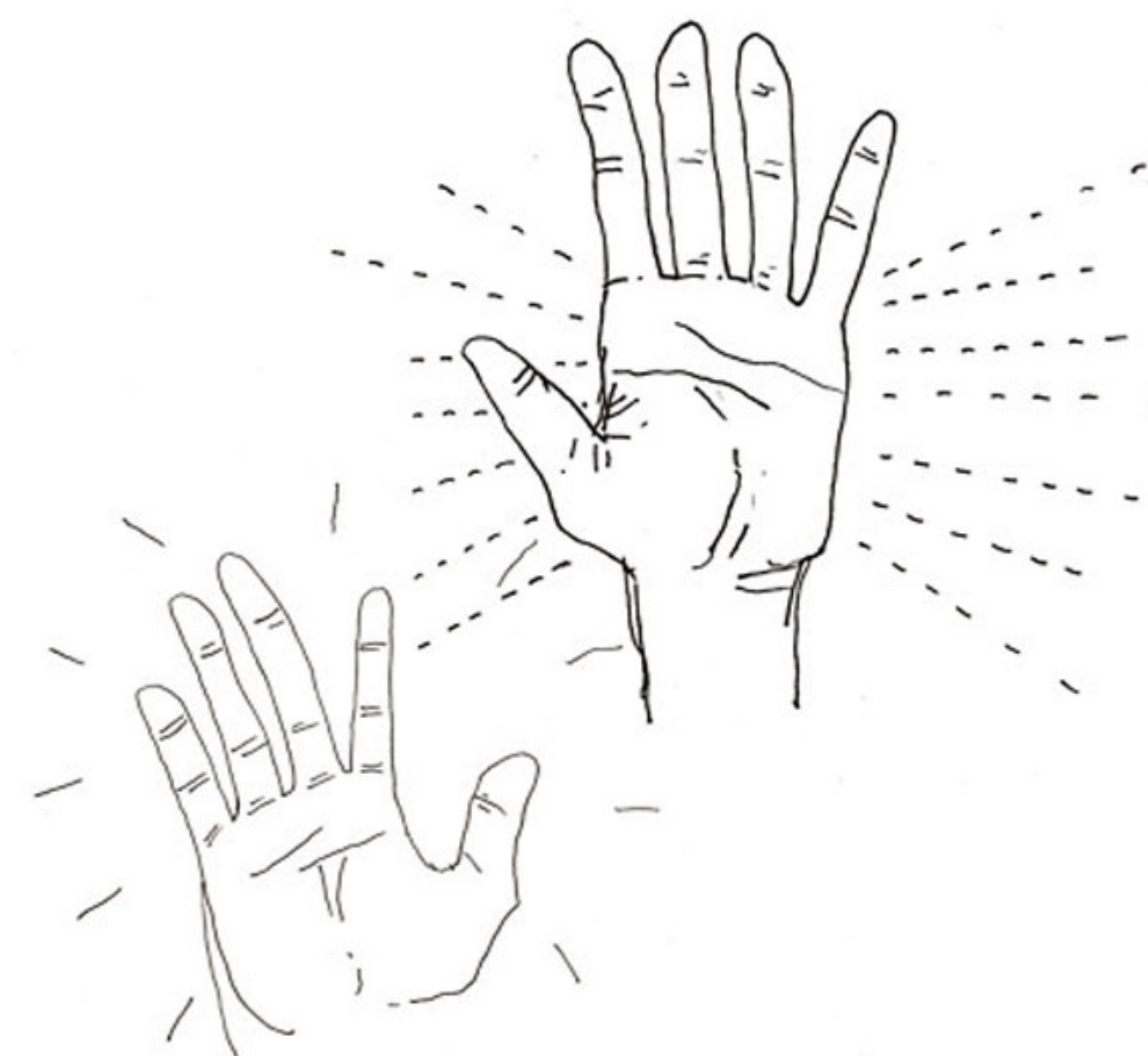
POP ROCKS

### Damien Jurado

#### Saint Bartlett

By Eric Hill

The absence of long-time partners in song Jenna Conrad and Eric Fisher might initially raise worry that the pinnacle of refinement achieved on 2008 release *Caught in the Trees* was a closed book. Luckily, on his ninth full-length, Damien Jurado has a new partner in Richard Swift, who both produces and provides all non-Jurado instrumentation, helping him open a new chapter. The familiar stalwart, openhearted narrative that has run through Jurado's songs is still front and centre. "Arkansas," the album teaser, hinted at a lighter, broader, '60s-influenced sound. But it isn't long before we're back in the stark, familiar glow of "Rachel & Cali." Subtle touches, like the field recordings that haunt the backgrounds of "Pear" and "Kansas City," or the subdued choir and bells of "Beacon Hill," pull the songs away from isolation into a real world. *Saint Bartlett* succeeds both in its variety and in the warmth and vulnerability that we've come to rely on Jurado to share with us. (Secretly Canadian)



Q JULY 2010

## DAMIEN JURADO

### Saint Bartlett

SECRETLY CANADIAN.

VINYL/CD/DOWNLOAD

OUT NOW

★★★★

*Downtempo triumph from Seattle indie journeyman.*



**The raw materials** of Damien Jurado's ninth album should be instantly familiar to anybody au fait

with 2008's *Caught In The Trees*: evocative yet mournful vocals complemented by an understated backing, making for a sound somewhere between Fleet Foxes and a cheerier Bonnie "Prince" Billy. What's changed this time around is the quality of his songwriting. Opener *Cloudy Shoes* is quietly majestic, the catchy *Arkansas* is even better, while *Wallingford* evokes an electric Neil Young. Jurado struggles to sustain such brilliance across the second half of the album, but this is still mightily impressive.

**PHIL MONGREDIEN**

**DOWNLOAD:** *Arkansas* // *Cloudy Shoes* // *Wallingford*

# B | B | C

**A fine, accomplished and emotional album that ranks among his very best.**

**Daniel Ross** 2010-05-21

With his 2008 effort, *Caught in the Trees*, Seattle singer/songwriter Damien Jurado truly expanded his craft. It became epic, dusted with bold musical statements. It was as much about the largeness of his emotional content as it was about the blistering folk-rock that accompanied it, but with *Saint Bartlett* Jurado has expanded in a different way. Here, instead of grand statements, he whispers to make himself heard. The textures may feature sweet organs and other augmentations, but they are thinner, subtler and more reliant on that strong emotional content that he has made his own.

*Saint Bartlett* begins on a much quirkier note, though, with a discernible Motown influence running through the first couple of tracks at least. *Cloudy Shoes* is irresistibly lazy in tempo and makes no fanfare of its super keyboard string arrangement – the whole thing is effortless and dashed off with wonderful ease. Absent-minded call and

response vocals add to the drift, completing the woozy atmosphere. Similarly, the almost honky-tonk piano of *Arkansas* is another stylistic affectation that, given this relaxed treatment, becomes a joy to experience.

Crucially, though, that emotional stuff is on hand to rear its head to balance the record, and balance it deftly does. Jurado's voice, capable of great power, is reduced to an absolute whimper on *Wallingford*, a breezy but ultimately doomy exertion of quiet power. Perhaps the moment of highest tension comes on yet another gloriously laid-back strum – *Kalama* contains several pearls of unfussy pleas, apparently to Jurado's mother, the most noteworthy being, "Mother, will you keep me as ashes on the mantle, or thrown out?" A man that asks his own mother such a question needs to do so with caution – Jurado proves a safe pair of hands.

Jurado's honesty is now unprotected by the comfort and volume of rock, and on *Saint Bartlett* it is starkly demonstrated with expert musical control. The chilling close of *With Lightning in Your Hands* (which interestingly contains a reference to the title of his previous record) is as mature as recordings come, the hymn-like chorus and sudden finish bringing proceedings to a suitably downbeat conclusion. Clearly, the reduction in volume and scale has led to fantastic musical growth – a fine, accomplished and emotional album that ranks among his very best.



# Damien Jurado, Saint Bartlett

Ryan Burleson

The consistently great singer-songwriter releases his most fully realized record to date.

On *And Now That I'm In Your Shadow*, Damien Jurado sang to a nameless force with an increased detachment, preferring to "hide behind ... or stand in [its] eclipse." On *Caught in the Trees*, he took the form of a kite, aware that he'd "never float too long," despite being "lucky enough to be in [its] trees." In the final lyrical refrain of *Saint Bartlett*, his newest and most fully realized record to-date, he asks nothing more of this enigma than to "return with a mighty storm." Characteristically plaintive and restless, Jurado nonetheless embraces his third decade in music with an effuse continuation of relational and spiritual conversations that have stricken and inspired humanity since the dawn of time.

The theme of returning to someone or someplace runs throughout the bulk of *Saint Bartlett*, much as doubt, love, murder, adultery and drug abuse—all set on a stage of America's most forgotten spaces—have been wrestled with before. Jurado also continues to make it impossible to discern what's fictional or real in his bleak tales, though herein lies Jurado's legitimacy among folk music's long-sustained voices. He's a storyteller as much as a songwriter, developing characters that address each other and God with confused and romantic intensity, often coming up with more questions than answers in their folly. Far from suggesting a life of perpetual disorientation is a virtue to behold, Jurado nevertheless takes honest snapshots of American desperation that embody the quiet hopes and fears which haunt us and always have.

On "Rachel & Cali," "Kansas City," "Beacon Hill" and "With Lightning in Your Hands," pleas and invitations to return are on display most prominently, backed by melancholy guitars, xylophone, a piano that sounds as worn as our weathered continent and Jurado's casual, solemn voice. For the first time in his long career, he's revealing a penchant for nuanced inflection that's always been just beneath the surface, using his ability to croon and command the dark themes of his songs in a single breath. In these cuts, we engage the money-driven motives of abandoning parents, the metaphorically daunting glare of a crowd and a close acknowledgment of unspeakable providence through characters that appear to be only sure of their pain. "Was I the ghost, or one of your voices, you hear in your head when you're out killing horses, who's taken my place, who's taking you home, I don't think it's safe ..." he sings delicately in "Beacon Hill," before telling his baby that "it's all right," perhaps trying to convince himself by speaking the words aloud.

Jurado's reliably evocative stories contrast nicely with his measured desire to experiment musically, as well. Since he began recording under his given name in the mid-1990s, Jurado's released gritty rock records (*I Break Chairs*), albums full of voice mails and other found sounds (*Postcards and Audio Letters*) and, more consistently, great American folk records. Even with regards to his more iconic, stripped catalog, he's managed to evolve and mature a sound that could very easily grow tired. On *Saint Bartlett*, Jurado and producer/friend Richard Swift (an accomplished songwriter in his own right) continue this growth, lending the record's 12 new stories a crisp swagger and musical intrigue unparalleled by his previous material. Everything sounds better—the guitars, his voice, the pianos, the strings—and nothing is dispensable.

Given that "Arkansas" was our first taste of *Saint Bartlett*, I couldn't help but assume the song's Spector-esque beat and use of reverb would presage some nod to the girl groups of the late-1950s or the best of the Motown years. While it's clear Jurado and Swift certainly embraced these eras in the record's production aesthetic, what's most striking overall is Jurado's compositional competence. *Saint Bartlett* is the sound of a man who has taken stock of his strengths and weaknesses—he's been around long enough to soberly evaluate these things—and chosen simply to keep pushing himself, adding another volume of poignant personal and spiritual narratives to a shelf that risked becoming encumbered with dust. Related to on corporate or deeply personal levels, *Saint Bartlett* is a record to believe in, a record I hope invites Jurado out of the shadows to introduce his American tales to a crestfallen music culture that increasingly feels starved for meaning.

Ryan Burleson is a Nashville-based music writer who also contributes to *Magnet*, *Performer* and *Slowblog*.



By Scott Gordon May 25, 2010

**Damien Jurado** lets the people in his songs tell their stories through an almost serene lens. That only brings their crises into more devastating focus. "Cloudy Shoes" begins *Saint Bartlett* with a combination of strings, piano, and echoing handclaps that would go nicely with a song of relief, and then Jurado sings, "Some days these hospital stays get the best of me." It'd come off as Tragic Irony 101, except that the matter-of-factness in his vocals makes it startlingly realistic. Another fine model of Jurado's frankness, "Rachel & Cali," pours tension and sympathy into a story of companionship, trust, and anxiety.

Tracks like "Throwing Your Voice" and "Wallingford" never entirely reach the crisp clarity of 2008's *Caught In The Trees*. "The Falling Snow" does, thanks to an ominously mounting piano figure and a vocal melody that pushes a little harder than the others on *Saint Bartlett*. The verses of "Kalama," in which the narrator asks his mother, "Will you keep me as ashes?", deserve better than just a respectably engaging gospel-waltz. "I know I should have been thrilled," Jurado sings on "Kansas City," and much of *Saint Bartlett* would be a thrill, were the melodies and arrangements as bold as the words. Some days, Jurado's gift for understatement gets the best of him.

## dusted

**Dusted Reviews**

**Artist:** Damien Jurado

**Album:** Saint Bartlett

**Label:** Secretly Canadian

**Review date:** May. 25, 2010



An unexpectedly lush set of tunes from a determined minimalist, this ninth full-length by Damien Jurado paints delicately the indeterminate outlines of remembered love, broken connections and imagined release. Recorded more or less in isolation at producer Richard Swift's Oregon studio, the album nonetheless is well populated, teeming in its understated way with translucent textures of strings, piano, acoustic and electric guitar, and scratchy found sounds. It suggests and evokes rather than delineates. From transcendental "Cloudy Shoes" on down, you are not always sure what is happening in a song, only that it is freighted with rumination, rue and fond remembrance. One gets the sense that the narrative — in story-ish songs like "Rachel and Cali" or album-stopping "Kansas City" — continues in the pauses, that what Jurado tells you is only a scrap or two of what he's seeing, thinking, recalling.

The disc begins with "Cloudy Shoes," dense and dramatic with Spectorish, wall-of-sound strings. Jurado's worn voice sounds more vulnerable than ever within this glossy arrangement, tremulous and cracking slightly. His voice doubled, intercutting with itself, sounds like a rambling internal monologue that gets stuck on certain phrases or images and can't quite let them go. This combination — of unexpected lavishness in the arrangements and starkly minimal singing — gives *Saint Bartlett* an eerie luminousness. It's an aura that extends to its most carefree and rock conventional moments — the piano rolling, tin-pot tapping "Arkansas," the electric Neil Young crunch and drone of "Wallingford."

But takes its strongest form on "Kansas City." This song, coming just past the halfway point, is the quiet climax of *Saint Bartlett*, its guitar patterns emerging with gentle reluctance out of a hiss of radio noise. Jurado sings with characteristic simplicity in the cut, almost breathing rather than singing its heart-sore lyrics. You can make out a story about a man whose father took off early, whose mother just died, making some sort of connection with the lost dad and finding it unsatisfactory. And yet, the ellipses yawn like canyons here, the meaning picks up and meanders off like errant tracks in the woods, maybe intentionally laid down, but maybe not. But even without knowing the contours of the story, you can absorb the mood, the atmosphere — almost the air and space. It's immersive and mysterious at the same time, perhaps more affecting because of its open-endedness.

It's in songs like "Kansas City" that the arrangements start to seem less of an externality than an essential element in the work; they establish mood in a diffuse, ambiguous sort of way that allows you to inhabit the songs without really knowing what they're saying. Jurado may not be as concrete or direct as he has been in the past, but his ability to conjure emotion is still very, very strong.

By Jennifer Kelly





Damien Jurado: Saint Bartlett

By Anthony Lombardi 27 May 2010



Sad Sack Troubadour Is Revitalized with the Help of a New Friend on His '60s Pop-Inspired New Offering.

For roughly the past decade, Damien Jurado has been a mainstay on the indie circuit, steadily refining his Raymond Carveresque penchant for lyrical detail while coupling his hard luck verses with a coffee house troubadour's knack for strummy, affecting melodies. At this point in the game, his growing discography is either viewed by onlookers as comfortable and reliable or bland and predictable, depending on his or her tastes. Enter Portland-based musician Richard Swift, who takes the production reins here, allowing for Jurado to retain his wispy, folkie intimacy while switching things up just enough to keep them from becoming stagnant.

Bringing a big, airy sense of endlessness to the soundscapes heard here ushers in a welcome and revitalizing force to Jurado's songs, adding new layers of depth and texture to their inherent fragility. While Swift's '60s pop-inspired production may seem like an odd match for the Seattle native's insular, Dust Bowl folk, the approach pushes Jurado to take slight but refreshing chances with his patented brand of sad sack singer-songwriterdom. Swift has a knack for enhancing the warmth burrowed away in his partners, and as with previous production duties—notably on the fantastic Mynabirds record from earlier this year—he brings a true sense of spirited unity to *Saint Bartlett*. Maybe not so much in the grievous themes surrounding the tunes, but certainly in the glowing, empathetic playing between these two.

While Jurado has always concerned himself with themes of redemption, infidelity, and desperation in his lyrical touch, here he's branched out, if just enough to avoid sounding tired of himself. A heavy-hearted sense of loss and recovery permeates the whispery words floating throughout the modest grandiosity enshrouding *Saint Bartlett*. They may occupy a similar sensibility in terms of general tone and atmosphere, but Jurado's nuanced delivery, married to Swift's nimble touch, keep these songs from ever sounding like retreads. Seamlessly, he moves from finger-picked, spectral hymns and swelling, heavenly-stringed mantras to hand-clapping, rousing (in his own, quiet way) anthems and swaying, horn-muted odes to emotional rebirth. When Jurado rises to a fever pitch, crying "still trying to fix my mind" on album opener "Cloudy Shoes"—managing to swerve away from over-emoting by grounding his crackling voice with a soft-spun intensity—it sounds like a call-to-arms rather than bleating, self-absorbed wound-licking.

Luckily, Jurado doesn't waste his new-found bearings, bringing to the table some of the best, most insistent songs of his career. "A friend is only a lover you're not committed to", he moans on the twilit, plinking "Rachel & Cali", a call and response as moving as anything in his catalog. On "Throwing Your Voice" and "Arkansas", the dry, cavernous backdrop provides an ample bed for some of the man's most anthemic arrangements, while on "The Falling Snow" he makes nice use of his expanded instrumental palette, finding new and intriguing ways to frame his skeletal melodies. With the risk baiting "Wallingford", he moves from gently rocking to spirited crooning on the spin of a dime, the crunchy electric guitars amplifying the jolting bedrock of a tune hiding behind the feedback shooting in and out of earshot. Best of all, with the penultimate and closing tracks—"Beacon Hill" and "With Lightning in Your Hands", respectively—Jurado brings the record to a quietly startling finale, returning to the brittle, forlorn ballads he's become renown for without retreating to the past. As beautiful a couplet of songs as he's ever penned, the subtly arranged, complementary pieces that send us off show a broken man who's somehow stronger for what he's faced. "I lost my voice / You lost your mind", Jurado sighs amid Swift's cooing backing vocals. It's a striking way to end the record.

*Saint Bartlett* won't change the opinion of anyone who's already had his or her mind made up on Damien Jurado, but for those awaiting a welcome fork in the road, the record more than satisfies. Much of the credit must be given to Richard Swift for focusing and reshaping Jurado, offering him a stimulating rejuvenation on his studied musical path. However, Jurado himself has written arguably the best front-to-back record of his career here, with a strong sense of purpose throughout and a sturdy, memorable set of songs. He may remain loyal to his melancholic, hangdog storytelling, but his newest outing offers a much needed balance with shining new production and some dust-kicking, infectious playing. "Fade out, this is where the credits roll". Self-help has never sounded so fun.

Rating:



Damien Jurado  
Saint Bartlett  
(Secretly Canadian; US: 25 May 2010;  
UK: 24 May 2010)

TINY MIX TAPES



Damien Jurado  
Saint Bartlett

[Secretly Canadian ; 2010]  
by JASON P. WOODBURY



STYLES: folk-pop, Americana  
OTHERS: Richard Swift, Mark Kozelek, J. Tillman

Over the course of his career, Damien Jurado has explored the minutia of American life through a distinctive lens, with characters forced to confront the ugly truths and missed chances in dirt towns, soundtracked by Jurado's plaintive, bare-bone folk sounds. His last record, 2008's *Caught in the Trees*, turned the camera inward, dealing with the messy aftermath of the singer/songwriter's divorce. It was a heavy album, fraught with aching drama, but also, for the first time in Jurado's career, a necessary and hard-earned sense of hope. When Jurado sang, "He's no bullshit talker," in the record's best song, one got the sense that he was bolstering himself up.

That no-bullshit line is important to keep in mind when listening to *Saint Bartlett*, Jurado's new album, recorded in Cottage Grove, Oregon with label-mate Richard Swift at the helm. The album finds Jurado exploring the subtleties of hope, but not abandoning the willingness to dwell in dark places, where he made his name. The record opens with "Cloudy Shoes," easily the most unguarded and bounding track Jurado has put to tape. His songs have always been tethered to the earth, with characters tied to their situations by cruel gravity; "Cloudy Shoes" breaks free from all of that, finding Jurado aimed celestially: "I wish that I could float up from the ground/ I will never know what that's like," he sings, but the swelling strings and lilting gospel piano give the impression of flight.

For someone who's made his name in the shadows, such joyfulness is inherently risky, but Jurado tempers the song with tentative optimism, stating, "Magic will do/ What magic does," and concluding, "I'm still trying to fix my mind." "Arkansas" follows, addressing the themes of trees and magic again. "I want to believe you," Jurado croons over Swift's signature girl-group stomp, a rickety saloon piano plinking away over beer-bottle percussion. The two songs stand apart in their playfulness from nearly everything in Jurado's catalog.

Swift's production quirks clearly inspired the adventurous nature of the record. "Kalama" benefits greatly from the open drums and strident guitar work that bolster one of Jurado's strongest vocal performances to date, as he belts out, "A house that is standing is no house at all." "The Falling Snow" is similarly exploratory; again, the reverberating drums are a focal point, the nasty crack of the snare a wink at Swift's own recordings. "Wellingford" serves as the record's obligatory Crazy Horse moment, with fuzz guitar and ripping feedback underscoring the tugging menace of the song.

Even when the record returns to classic Jurado-style tunes — "Rachel & Cali," "Pear," and "Harborview" — the songs are augmented with odd clicks, ambient noise, and tape effects, clear nods not only to Swift's production touches, but also to Jurado's own off-kilter work, the elements that separate "Ghost of David" and the works that preceded it from "Where Shall You Lead Me" and the works that followed it: the creeping, ominous noises that define Jurado's darkest work.

With its blend of classic Jurado themes and a new sonic palette, *Saint Bartlett* serves not just as an encapsulation of Jurado's career, but as a promising indicator of where he's headed. Closer "With Lightening In His Hands," with its explicit references to his past work, showcases Jurado's range, his uncanny knack for making plain words at once apocalyptic, beautiful, hopeful, tense, and forgiving. "Will you return/ With a mighty storm," Jurado sings over a choir of his own multi-tracked voice, leaving little doubt that the character in question will indeed return, but managing to invoke the way nature works, balancing destruction with rebirth. *Saint Bartlett* finds Jurado doing the very same.



## Album review: Damien Jurado's 'Saint Bartlett'

Friday, June 18, 2010

DAMIEN JURADO

"Saint Bartlett"

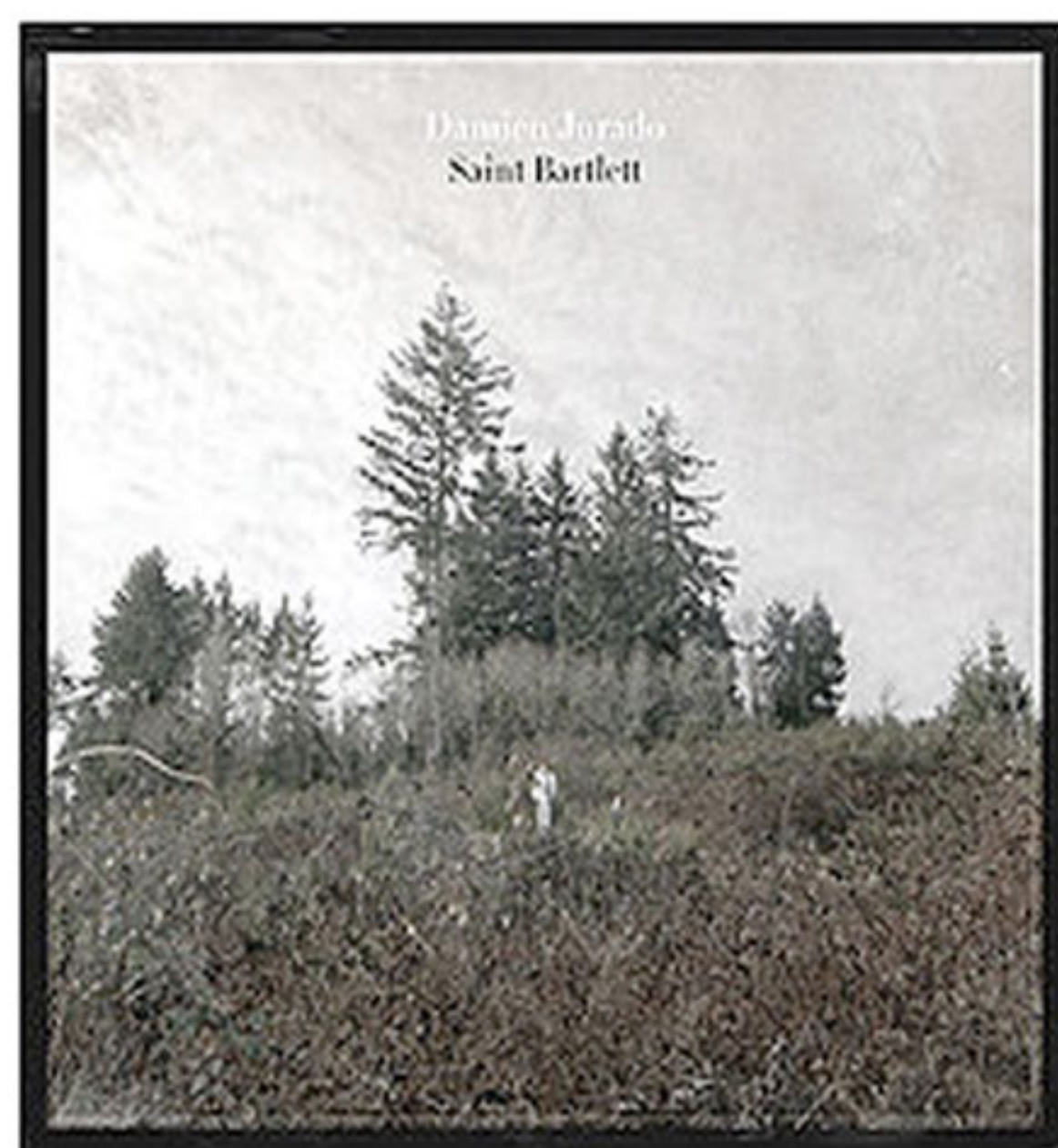
*Kindred spirits: Red House Painters, Smog, Will Oldham*

Indie singer-songwriter Damien Jurado has made a decade-plus career out of bleak, melancholy songs. But his latest album, "Saint Bartlett," is an engaging listen, even though it doesn't stray far from his reflective tradition.

Jurado's laid-back style often recalls the detached slacker-folk of Bill Callahan's *Smog*, without the gloomy monotone. Instead, Jurado's voice is wavering and understated; he channels the psychedelic pop of the Flaming Lips on the dreamy "Cloudy Shoes" and gives a hint of Americana on the desperate "Kalama." And backed only by a simply plucked guitar, his voice has a haunting air on the album-closing "With Lightning in Your Hands."

Above all else, though, Jurado has a knack for the dreary. On the sparse "Kansas City" he murmurs, "I know some day I will return" with a dejected air of resignation. His vocals are interspersed with snippets of what sound like radio static, making Jurado seem even more remote and inaccessible, and the static engulfs his voice as the song trails off. It's a bit of an abrupt ending, even for Jurado, but it does underscore the song's isolated tone.

-- Catherine P. Lewis



allmusic

### Review

by Ned Raggett

Recorded over the course of a week with only the help of producer/musician Richard Swift, Damien Jurado's 2010 album finds the singer/songwriter aiming all the more clearly for the stately, somewhere between the *Band* at its most formal and the later *Flaming Lips* at their most controlled. Starting with the keyboards and handclaps of "Cloudy Shoes," *Saint Bartlett* plays with any number of elements of rock and pop history -- not for nothing does a classic Phil Spector drumbeat appear on "Arkansas" -- but ultimately there's a sense of solitude in vast spaces (and especially vast American spaces) that dominates. At its most gently beatific, on numbers like the serene guitar-and-bells blend of "Rachel & Cali" and the steady piano-and-keyboard blend of "The Falling Snow," it seems like all will be well, even though the songs suggest darker shades in the music alone. Lyrically, Jurado's portraits of questioning souls and contemplation perhaps never get so intense as with the combination of yearning singing, acoustic guitar, and distant sonic sludge and disturbance on "Kansas City" (though "Kalama," in its tale of a dying soul speaking to his mother wondering about what happens next, comes close). Blasts of feedback and other dissonant elements crop up at points, but otherwise this is an album of focused calm in both singing and playing, a vision of concern and empathy amid unease.

# UNCUT

**DAMIEN JURADO**  
**Saint Bartlett**  
SECRETLY CANADIAN

★★★

**Seattle man goes Phil Spector. Kind of...**

Jurado is the kind of songwriter more used to recording alone, his songs lending themselves to spare settings. It's something of a surprise, then, to discover that cult US musician

Richard Swift, disciple of Harry Nilsson, is Jurado's collaborator and producer here. That said, it's a modest concession, Swift guiding him through the sub-Spectorisms of "Arkansas" and "Throwing Your Voice" with a sensitive touch. Jurado is on more well-trampled territory on "Pear" and "With Lightning In Your Hands," all acoustic guitars, Bonnie Billy-like whispers and soft incantations.

# SEATTLE WEEKLY

## Review: Damien Jurado Proves Less is Truly More on His Stunning New Album

By Paige Richmond Wed., May 26 2010 at 10:11 AM

Categories: CD review, Reviews

**Artist:** Damien Jurado

**Album:** *Saint Bartlett*

**Label:** Secretly Canadian

**Release Date:** Already released, on May 25

**Rating (Skip, Stream, or Buy):** Seriously, [go buy this](#)

**Download:** "Cloudy Shoes"

*Saint Bartlett* may be for Damien Jurado what *Nebraska* is for Bruce Springsteen. Intended as demos, Springsteen's 1982 album was sparsely-recorded on a 4-track; this bare bones approach--combined with Springsteen's story-telling lyrics about the hardships of everyday life--resulted in haunting, unforgettable songs.

Jurado's ninth full-length shares *Nebraska*'s most definitive qualities. *Saint Bartlett*, too, tells a story: Jurado wrote most of the tracks about friend who was experiencing personal struggles. Taken individually, many of *Saint Bartlett*'s songs--like the standout "Kalama," on which Jurado sings "Forgive my living/ keep me from breathing"--are embodiments of emotions, rich and inescapable. Like Springsteen's "Highway Patrolman," Jurado's songs are heartbreaking and bleak yet still inviting.

Where the albums mostly differ, however, is in the final production. *Saint Bartlett* was recorded quickly, with many first-takes making the final cut. While the Boss would have let those stripped-down recordings stand on *Nebraska*, Jurado and his producer, Richard Swift, added **artful yet simple instrumentation**. *Saint Bartlett* is analog but not lo-fi; it's not polished or clean either. It falls somewhere in between: with crinkling metal added to the mostly acoustic and echoing "Pear" and a broken piano backing "Kansas City," Jurado and Swift created music that amplifies the meanings of the lyrics while perfectly accompanies Jurado's gentle voice. To call this record a success would be a gross understatement: *Saint Bartlett* is likely the album that will define Jurado as more than just a singer-songwriter. He's now an artist and a storyteller, too, who has found his true voice.

