

The Caribbean

“William of Orange” EP

(Hometapes)



The Caribbean
William of Orange EP
[Hometapes; 2004]
Rating: 7.4

It's not terribly often that a band's website is good enough to make me want to recommend it along with their music, but The Caribbean's remarkably professional online domain is such a resoundingly brilliant sendup of a bland, mission statement-touting corporate website (replete with two generic employees mugging in the header and loads of meaningless business nothingspeak) that I initially thought I had the wrong URL. Given that I spend all week breathing a Fortune 500 company's recirculated air and cynically deconstructing the grammar and vocabulary of memos explaining to me why giving me less money is good for the company, I found this all quite hilarious. This kind of satire only works if you do it to the hilt, honing the vocabulary and patterning the entire site after the same concept, and to their credit, The Caribbean haven't missed a single detail.

And fortunately, The Caribbean are just as detail-oriented in their music. They've even brought some of their website into their packaging for this, their second EP, styling the recording credits after a W2 form. The sense of space between the airtight drums and the colder, more open sound of the remaining instruments is immense, and it frames their occasionally obtuse lyrics in a weird, urban texture that nicely echoes the slideshow of outdoor urban photographs by cover artist Sara Padgett included on the disc. Of course, you could always argue that couplets like, "The only way the teletype gets out is by the bounty of my merciful soul/ I'm the one who has the code," make a lot more sense than the average corporate memo.

Actually, Michael Kentoff's lyrics have grown significantly more focused since his stint in the mid-90s with D.C.'s Townies, and he delivers a couple of great narratives on *William of Orange*, the best being "The Druggist's", a tale of summer job ennui. Kentoff's Gibbardish tenor is doubled by a piano as he lays out a scenario in which he obtains his driver's license, and a job to go with it. The way he describes a

16-year-old's real (if petty) concerns is fantastically inventive, despite its very simplicity: "Delivering prescriptions posed a special problem with the manual transmission/ The druggist's car, a Rabbit, smelled like oil and coffee/ Had no radio or tape deck/ Begged my mom to let me drive our Chevy wagon."

The opening title track sets the mood nicely with Tony Dennison, late of Smart Went Crazy, laying down a busy yet relaxed drum part which the band coats in carefully placed electronic textures and rich, room-temperature acoustic guitars. Death Cab for Cutie and The Postal Service are apt comparison points, especially now that Kentoff has developed his knack for evocative imagery and inexact rhyme. The Caribbean do much to move themselves to the forefront of pop fit for late-night headphone sessions in wood-paneled dens on *William of Orange*, and if they can stretch this consistency over their next album, we have much to look forward to.

-Joe Tangari, May 27th, 2004

Uncommon Folk

William of Orange (**Hometapes**, 2004)

MP3: **Who's Hollywood Now?**

When I first heard a track off of The Caribbean's latest album on Tomlab I fell in love. The band's latest release comes courtesy of the great Hometapes imprint and is a short but sweet 5 song EP titled William of Orange. The Caribbean (D.C.-based and beyond) is songwriter Michael Kentoff, partner Matthew Byars and drummers Tony Dennison and Don Campbell (who also adds bass, guitar and vocals). Other Kentoff family members add vocals and Tom Morante plays accordion on one song. William of Orange will remind a lot of listeners of the great Sparklehorse though with massively different production. Instead of the Dave Fridman booming production, Chad Clark and Dallas Kentucky produce this album more in the Jim O'Rourke style, where subtlety brings out the intricate experimentation of the band. The Caribbean has a distinct country-folk foundation which on top is built great synth, electric guitar, tremolo sounds and "malfunctions." The mix is perfect, the production flawless and the songwriting catchy enough for lovers of good pop music. Kentoff's vocals are gorgeous, especially when accompanied by his fellow harmonists and background singers. Everything on this record is soft and unique. At times melding experimental sonic landscapes with pop folk structures. The drumming, no matter who is doing it, is also key. From break beats to perfectly placed and interesting drum fills, this record would sound astoundingly different without the percussion. In fact, The Caribbean do an amazing job on William of Orange of bringing together so many sounds, instrumentation and experimental noises to create a gorgeous piece of summertime nostalgia. And, of course, with any Hometapes release, William of Orange is impeccably photographed and designed by Sara Padgett (the CD comes

with a collection of her photographs viewable on one's computer) and Adam Heathcott (both he and Sara run Hometapes). Padgett's sense of color and shape make the outside of this glossy, triple gatefold package worth buying despite whatever sound may be inside, and Heathcott's mock-tax return design on the inside is one of the more smart, experimental but ultimately extremely functional designs I have come across in album packaging. The Caribbbean is a amazing band with a great back catalog but William of Orange may be the perfect introduction for those wanting to hear more and experience this extraordinary band's recorded sounds.

posted by J. Honn at 6/9/2005



Lost at Sea

By Dan Fi.lowitz

Rating: 8/10

I am the American consumer - I demand that you give me what I want, when I want it, because I want it. If you wish to be my supplier of listening pleasure, then you must be able to meet my demands - so say the laws of economics, which are infallible. Are you up to the challenge, new EP by The Caribbean, William of Orange?

First, I demand that you put time and thought into every aspect of your project. If you don't seem to care, then why should I? Fine choices in artwork and packaging prove this dedication to your work. You made a great choice, using digi-pack instead of a jewel case. That's a fine beginning in the quest to give me what I want. Also, the interior is really quite odd, and therefore wonderful - it looks like tax forms! The band web site is a corporate-website parody, and this fits that theme splendidly.

But I do not buy my EPs for interesting packaging and clever web sites alone. I want to know about the real product: the songs, the music. I demand an interesting sound, and given this is an EP, each track must be compelling in its own right. Since there are only five songs, the presence of quality has to overcome the relative lack of quantity.

Here, again, you've come through with flying colors. Each song on is indeed compelling and interesting. The band writes what would seem at first to be straight-ahead pop songs, but what strikes soon enough are unpredictable time signatures, the subtle use of samples and electronic manipulation, and clever and evocative lyrics. These are no ordinary, lazily written ditties - each song is a complex work of art.

William of Orange will remind one a bit of The Postal Service in terms of singing style and electronic influence. However, the lyrical content here is nothing at all like Ben Gibbard's sometimes cringe-worthy subjects-of-the-heart.

For example, in "Who's Hollywood Now?" the phrase that more or less serves as the chorus

goes "We've thrown a team together: Lawyers, two accountants and me who sort of more or less freelances." This is typical of the lyrics here – somewhat abstract, with not a lot of obvious rhyme schemes, but still able to allow the listener to paint a vivid mental picture.

William of Orange has met my demands; it is a fully realized EP with five high-quality songs that beg to be listened to repeatedly. The Caribbean has done a masterful job as a music supplier – they met the initial demand of the music consumer, but also created future demand. Because after hearing this EP, I am certainly going to demand to hear whatever it is they release next.



The Caribbean
William of Orange EP
[Home Tapes, 2004]

Being horrible at writing about music this straightforward, I have no option but to make this as simple as possible: This EP is amazing. Unabashed pop with post-rock production and hints at alt-country twang, the five tracks here all hit the perfect note at least once, some holding it for the song's length. With lyrics like "...a name I got from asthma attacks" and "All the shops had sympathetic shrugs" as icing, it's been in the heaviest of rotations since arriving at my doorstep. A perfect soundtrack for cooking, cleaning, making out, sleeping in, driving, sitting on your porch, counting stars, breathing, existing.

[Mike Shiflet]



William of Orange

RATING: (5 logos is max rating)

2004 - Hometapes - CD EP

The Caribbean's songs take a little time to settle, but when they do they stick. Until the *William of Orange* EP - the band's first release for Florida's Hometapes label - the Caribbean shied from straight-up pop hooks and intuitive melodies, indirectly creating the impression of both.

At least half of *William of Orange* trades the sideways, creaking chords of the last couple discs for simple, well-chosen repetition. There's still unsettling washes of ambient keyboards, electronic pops, and what sounds like a drooling child incessantly flipping a static switch, but lead

singer Michael Kentoff's vocals are a newly-focused laser beam compared to the diffused spotlight of previous albums. The title track opens with a loping drum machine beat, meandering vocals, crisp acoustic picking and about 100-odd subtle electronic details. "Actresses" finds a fuzzy orange couch and sinks into its cigarette-burned cushions, donning sunglasses and smoking a rolled bag of '70s cheer.

The standout of the EP, and perhaps one of the Caribbean's best overall, is "The Druggist's." Its simple piano-and-drum staircase allows Kentoff's vocals to tumble hastily down, somehow without breaking his ankles. "Who's Hollywood Now?" (another great, pseudo-confrontational title) employs an accordion and sundry backing vocals to drape the mellow drums and guitars in velvety melodies. "The Night Panel" ends it on a somber note, with downcast but vulnerable lyrics and a serpentine chorus. Imagine a hasty night exit from your favorite bar and a long walk home in the drizzle.

William of Orange feels more brisk than past efforts, but maybe because it's so tightly edited. Not since their self-titled EP has the Caribbean produced something so immediately enjoyable and endlessly rewarding.



There's nothing directly tropical about The Caribbean. If *Smile*-era Beach Boys belongs on the loudspeaker of a funky motorboat somewhere in Micronesia, then *William of Orange EP* ought to be playing overhead in a psychiatrist's waiting room, in which two or three magazines lay open to advertisements for six-day, seven-night cruise getaways and the fluorescent wonders of drugs like Claritin and Flonase.

In other words, this foursome get to their hooks, but not without first framing them in quirky meta-arrangements that either end up on the "wrong" chords or take glitchy, electronically enhanced detours, or veer off into lyrical territory populated by Grubbsian non sequiturs. Luckily, the songs themselves are never overburdened -- each is sketched simply with a deadpan drum beat and delicate acoustic guitar riff before spinning off into parallel dimensions. "William of Orange" might add, here and there, the sort of odd percussive clicks or otherworldly organ touches you might find on a Jim O'Rourke album, but underneath the production quirks, it's as laid back and melodic as they come -- a pretty head-nodder with a jazz-pop chorus. The band is at their best when they turn their oblique ear for melody into grounds for emotional attachment, as on "Actresses", an unexpectedly melancholy rumination on the life of (you guessed it)

actresses, or on "The Druggist's", a minimal but bouncy number about a first job.

In all, *William of Orange EP* is as deliberately postmodern as pop comes these days, but in spite of its constructive precision, it's still a pretty listen -- and, more than this, it ends up leaving an indelible, if quirky, emotional mark.

■ **Matt Pierce**

erasing clouds

The Caribbean, *William of Orange EP* (Hometapes)

The Caribbean's new EP *William of Orange* is release number 007 for the Florida-based label Hometapes, and damn if the title song doesn't sound like the story of an undercover agent, or at least somebody's who up to something suspect and doesn't want anyone to know. Other songs have secrets, too: missing files, people tailing other people, kidnappings, enigmatic statements. There's always been something a bit shady about this band the Caribbeean...the way they disguise themselves as a corporation, the way they effortlessly write beautiful pop songs that exist in their own universe, low-key strange. On *William of Orange* their sound is more cohesive than ever, which isn't to say monolithic, just consistent. All 5 songs have a hushed, jazzy cool to them, and a crisp, acoustic type of minimalism that makes their songs more mysterious while giving them an intimacy that heightens the impact. It's hard to explain the Caribbean - they exist in their own plane, one maybe even secret agents would have trouble finding. But it's a lovely, eccentric place, with sounds as smooth as James Bond himself, and twice as cool (he's getting old, after all). (Dave Heaton)

mundane sounds

The Caribbean *William Of Orange*

Home Tapes

posted September 27, 2004

Washington, D.C. quartet the Caribbean's latest EP *William of Orange* picks up where last year's *History's First Know It All* album left off, with five more gorgeously oblique songs that owe just as much to the acoustic balladry of Elliott Smith as they do to the glitch fetishes of your average IDM artist (it's no coincidence that Tomlab released their last album in Europe). Front man Michael Kentoff's breathy, nasal croon is at its most expressive on this EP, and his knack for extracting unexpected chord progressions from his acoustic guitar remains unabated.

The title track is delivered from the point of view of a man who has watched himself get meaner with age: "Through the years," Kentoff sings, "I began to disappear...an observable mutation: 'that guy's a fucking dick; he's going down'." "The Druggist's" is a hilarious piano-driven story about a teenage pharmacy employee who gets into an accident while driving the company car. Proper names appear in three of this EP's songs, but the lyrics are too terse to be read as any kind of biography. Enough details are added to let you know that Kentoff's singing about *something*, but just as many are left out

to keep you guessing as to what or who he's singing about.

The songs on *William of Orange* aren't as lush as those on the group's previous material; they get by on little more than drums, a couple of guitars and a couple of strategically placed sound effects. For instance, the title track is filled with clicks and cuts that make the CD sound as if it's skipping, and EP closer "The Night Panel" is bisected by an upwelling of flatulent off-key synthesizers. A full-length album of such quality would have definitely landed in my Top 20 of 2004; as it stands, though, *William of Orange* will just have to duke it out with Make Believe for the Best EP title.

--Sean Padilla