

Donovan - Beat Cafe (2004)

Written by bluelover

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1. *Donovan - Love Floats (4:18)*
2. *Donovan - Poorman's Sunshine (4:02)*
3. *Donovan - Beat Cafe (4:14)*
4. *Donovan - Yin My Yang (3:35)*
5. *Donovan - Whirlwind (4:46)*
6. *Donovan - Two Lovers (3:42)* [play](#)
7. *Donovan - Question (3:06)* [play](#)
8. *Donovan - Lord of the Universe (4:47)*
9. *Donovan - Lover O Lover (4:56)*
10. *Donovan - Cuckoo (3:49)*
11. *Donovan - Do Not Go Gentle (4:27)*
12. *Donovan - Shambala (5:29)*

Double Bass – Danny Thompson Drums, Percussion – Jim Keltner Keyboards, Producer – John Chelew Vocals, Guitar – Donovan Leitch

Beat Cafe is Donovan's first record in nine years. His last, the Rick Rubin-produced *Sutras* was issued in 1993 and was hopelessly misunderstood -- especially coming as it did on the heels of Rubin's first collaboration with Johnny Cash. This side, produced by the rootsy yet eclectic John Chelew who has worked with everyone from Richard Thompson to the Blind Boys of Alabama and John Hiatt goes right to the heart of Donovan's particular musical aesthetic.

The title on this set is significant. The instrumentation is spare, with drums by Jim Keltner, acoustic , upright bass by the legendary Danny Thompson, and keyboards by Chelew. Donovan handled the guitar chores. In other words, small combo, cafe style. . . Atmosphere is everything in these songs; they are intimate, rhythm-conscious, tuneful, and lyrically savvy. In addition, they're inspired by that eternally present, romantically eulogized generation of poets, dope fiends, midnight travelers, and coffeehouse sages, the Beats. The set features 12 new songs;

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ten of them are Donovan Leitch originals. The covers include a compelling read of the mysterious and traditional "The Cuckoo," and a jazzy spoken word take on Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle." There are some flashes of the hippy mystic of old here, but mostly, this is a fingerpopping set by Donovan the enigma as well as Donovan the songwriter. Chelew and band do a wonderful job of illustrating this juxtaposition. With this band tight, deeply in the groove at all times, the tunes open up and out as if the group were on the barroom stage, and extended the dancefloor jumping and jiving into the street on a delirious, humid moonlit night of uncontrollable joy. "Poorman's Sunshine," with its skittering brushed snare drums and a B3 tracking the melody with Thompson's bass pushing the rhythm, jumps out at the listener, as does the title track with Thompson driving the whole engine. "Yin My Yang" may have a seemingly ridiculous title, but it's not in the context of what this album tries to achieve. Donovan is celebrating the self-referential, "anything-is-possible" revelation that fuelled the language and spirit of his heroes of yore, and propelled his own romantic, "everything-is-love" aesthetic. The shimmering, dark, Eastern minor-key psychedelic spoken word/sung ditty of "Two Lovers" is one of those poems that makes Donovan so unique (think, "Atlantis" here). The organic jazzed-up funk of "The Question" is one of those crazy moments that makes the whole world open and the body twitch in time. The album ends with the whispering "Shambala," a tender, blissful dirge that is utterly moving and hauntingly beautiful in its optimism and hope. If anything, if albums are "needed" anymore, the spirit in this one is. Donovan reminds listeners that possibility and hope are not passé, but as full of chance and wild grace as ever. Welcome back, Donovan; you've been missed.

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