

“Oh, I’ve Got Reservations / About So Many Things”

The best and worst of Wilco, according to Jeff Tweedy.

BY BRADY GERBER



AND **O** JEFF TWEEDY IS aware that some fans think he made his best album 20 years ago, but he’s most proud of whatever he’s working on now. He’s especially proud of *Ode to Joy*, Wilco’s upcoming 11th album. It’s the first Wilco album in over a decade that has teeth. Baby teeth, but still: Listening to these aching, minimalist songs is like revisiting a growing pain you thought you took care of long ago that has come back in a new and frightening way. In honor of the old and new, here’s Tweedy engaging with some of the most and least and best and worst of Wilco.

Best Wilco Song

→ As far as evaluating older songs and songs that I’ve already written, I’m not the best at it. [But off the new album] I’ll say “Quiet Amplifier,” because I think it’s a really successful experiment. That song became the overall template for the record in terms of a cohesive sonic landscape. I think everything else is kind of contained in that song. The drum sound and melodic sensibility—there’s a restraint to it, but it also seems sort of violent in some weird way.

Worst Wilco Song

→ That’s a lot easier. A few years ago, we played all of the songs we had ever recorded and released in a series of shows in Chicago. There were only a couple that I really felt bad about playing. I just thought the songs were total dog shit. And one of them was off the first record, “I Thought I Held You.” I introduced it as being the most dog-shit song of the whole batch, and people were like, “Aww,” and I

realized that some people really liked that song. And then I felt bad. I’ve probably written worse songs.

Favorite to Play Live

→ Right now, it’s probably “Reservations” off *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. The arrangement we’ve been playing lately is so precarious feeling. It seems so unsettlingly naked that even a loud audience kind of gets quiet. I enjoy that sensation.

Least Favorite to Play Live

→ “California Stars” is a bit of a slog sometimes, just because it’s the same two verses as four verses, but you just repeat the first two verses.

Song You Wished More People Requested You Play Live

→ Maybe “Magnetized” off *Star Wars* or “Happiness” off *Schmilco*. Something off the last two records. I don’t want to say they were underappreciated, but they were maybe undersold?

Song That Sounds the Most Like Your Hometown

→ “Via Chicago” sounds like an obvious choice, but there was an effort to try and re-create the sensation of walking underneath the el tracks. Basically, trying to have a conversation with someone you’re walking with and having it be completely destroyed or undermined by this brutal noise. I don’t think we did a good job of it, actually. I think we got better at doing it live.

Favorite Lyrics

→ I don’t think there are any that I don’t wish I could change or make better. I always want to get better. I thought the song “Common Sense” on the last record had some pretty powerful lyrics that were maybe undermined a little by some of the quirkiness of that recording.

Least Favorite Lyrics

→ It’s not a Wilco song, but in “The Ruling Class,” by [my side project] Loose Fur, I sing, “You better turn your frown upside down / Christ is on his way across town.” That’s just terrible.

Favorite Song off the New Album

→ My favorite songs are generally the songs that I feel like someone else could have written or someone else could sing. “White Wooden Cross” to me is one of those types of songs where I can hear a lot of different people singing it. A lot of different people might have been able to write it, if they had been in the right circumstance. Your requirements aren’t as personalized.

Favorite Guitar Moment

→ The moment where all three guitars start harmonizing during the end of the solo of “Impossible Germany.” It’s still something you look forward to every night because it just feels so good. It sounds so good to my ears still, and there’s a visceral reaction in the audience almost every night.

Song You’re Most Proud of Writing

→ The thing I would be most proud of writing is whatever song seems to mean the most to other people. For me, as a songwriter, it’s not just Wilco. It’s having written “You Are Not Alone” for Mavis Staples to sing. That means a lot to me because it means a lot to her, and it seems to mean a lot to other people. The other one would be “California Stars,” because I got to contribute to Woody Guthrie’s presence in the world.