

Compilation of the month



David Shrigley/Various, **Worried Noodles**

4 stars A cartoonist's poems set to music: just the job if you like intriguing experiments of the darkly funny persuasion, writes Stephanie Merritt

Stephanie Merritt

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This is the ultimate indie-kid's collectors' item: the poetry of cult artist and Guardian cartoonist David Shrigley given musical substance by eclectic leftfield bands (including TV On The Radio, Hot Chip, Franz Ferdinand, Lord Cut-Glass, Aidan Moffat and David Byrne), all packaged in a little hard-backed book of Shrigley's sprawling line drawings. The original *Worried Noodles* was made by Shrigley in 2006 and released as a 12-inch LP, except that it didn't have any music, because Shrigley, in his own words, 'couldn't be bothered to make a record'.

This small deficiency has now been remedied, and on the resulting 39-track double album the musicians have constructed songs of all varieties around Shrigley's spare lyrics. There are seemingly shapeless dance tracks ('A Clash of Heads' by Tussle, which features Shrigley reading in a monotone) and gently melodic folk (**James Chadwick's 'The Wooden Floor'**), Celtic rock (Lord Cut-Glass, 'Maybe') and blues/gospel (Hank, 'Baby's Bible').

Shrigley's poems, like his drawings, cover a tonal spectrum from silly and surreal through ironic to downright disturbing, and listening to them transformed into songs only highlights the meaninglessness of so many pop lyrics. Grizzly Bear's version of 'Blackcurrant Jam', with its beautiful, mournful arrangements, sounds at first like a haunting lament, until you realise that they are in fact singing 'blackcurrant jam is the nicest jam'. The sweet simplicity of **Chadwick's** acoustic guitar backing to '**The Wooden Floor**', is belied by the fact that he is singing about having cut off his friend's head and hidden it under the floorboards for having scuffed up his wooden floor. Perhaps the loveliest marriage of music and lyrical content is No Kids' version of 'Another Song', a plea to angels, fairies and ghosts not to dance on the roof, which ends 'ghost, please come out, we need to install some damp-proofing', in which each line is echoed by a jaunty synthesiser riff reminiscent of a jazz clarinet. Islands' rendition of 'Joy' begins 'there is joy to be had, when you're crazy mental mad' and celebrates the fun side of mental illness, capturing a spirit of manic energy as the tempo gradually speeds up and more and more instruments are added.

A number of these tracks are more interesting than memorable; perhaps the most successful is David Byrne's 'For You', which is also the most conventional in structure. But above all, they are gloriously, darkly funny and wonderfully incongruous. Casiotone for the Painfully Alone chooses 'The Pretty Girl', in which the narrator announces his intention to marry the pretty girl, kill her, bury her in the woods and 'try to resist the temptation to dig her up and fuck her'. That probably won't get played on Radio 1, but then this intriguing anthology is not aimed at Radio 1 listeners.

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