

# Folk album fails to utilize lyrics, rhythm

Folk singer Dar Williams' new release, 'The Beauty of the Rain,' combines restrained melodies with general, subtle imagery

## CD review

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Pulse Reporter

As winter fades away and spring reaches full bloom, the rain still has not disappeared. This makes "The Beauty of the Rain," Dar Williams' latest album, appropriate for the season.

This album is her fifth official studio recording, although the folk singer has numerous other EPs and limited-release recordings dating back to her pre-record label days. "The Beauty of the Rain," sounds lavish and fuller than any of her previous releases, yet somehow, the sum is not quite equal to its parts.

Razor & Tie released "The Beauty of the Rain" in February, and Williams will appear in Eugene on Saturday.

The music on the album seems restrained and the melodies are similar. There are guest stars aplenty — John Popper of Blues Traveler on harmonica and Michael Kang of The String Cheese Incident on violin, among others. But even with the appearance of Bela Fleck on banjo, this album isn't exciting. Note that "exciting" need not be equated with "rocking." Williams is a folk singer, after all. However, nothing stands out, and the sound blends together.

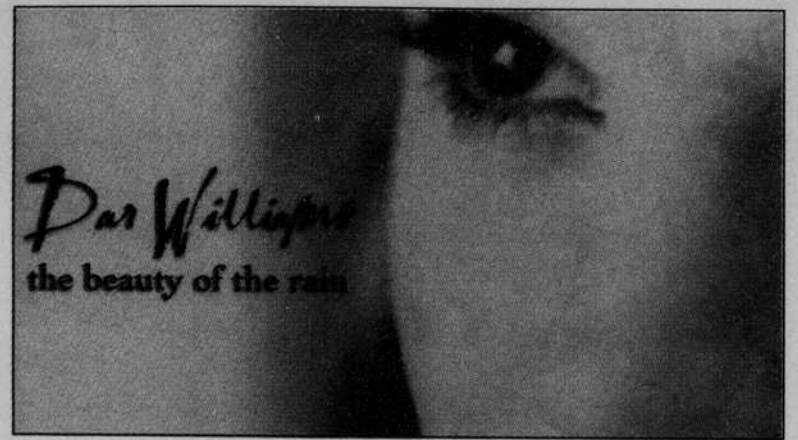
The drum and rhythm section suffers and never goes beyond the role it's so commonly regulated to in western music — that is, of being the metronome, or tracking device for the rest of the song. It's pretty much 4/4 all the way through.

Then, there are the lyrics themselves. Rather than make overtly specific statements in her songs, Williams' words tend toward the po-

etic and subtle. Reading the lyrics in the liner notes further drives this point home — the line breaks and verses read like many poems. However, the problem is that her vocabulary of imagery is often stuck in generality — the world, beauty, rain, mountains, life, sea, etc. These words fall short of their potential because, on their own, they are inert and not often elaborated on.

Of course, in all fairness to Williams, it is not important what she says but rather how she says it. Her voice is joyfully sensuous and breathy, which lends power to the delivery of even the simpler lyrics, such as when she sings "The beauty of the rain is how it falls, how it falls, how it falls" in the title track.

While I may have issues with this particular album, there is no denying Williams' artistry on the whole. She plays at the McDonald Theatre, located at 1010 Willamette St., on Saturday, bringing a full band with



Courtesy

Dar Williams brings her folk melodies to the McDonald Theatre on Saturday.

her. The group includes Julie Wolf, who has previously played with Ani DiFranco. Williams' tour will bring attention to the Solar Electric Light Fund, a nonprofit organization for renewable energy sources. Tickets

are \$18 in advance and \$20 on the day of the show. The doors open at 8 p.m., and show time is at 9 p.m.

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## Today's crossword solution

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## Hip-hop

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The artist said he prides himself on the positive message of his music, which has often possessed a decidedly political slant.

For instance, on the track "Earthrusher," Lif paints a vivid portrait of the destructive consequences of nuclear proliferation.

Lif's single, "Home of the Brave" exemplifies how the artist blends his political views into his music. However, Lif said politics are just one aspect of his work.

"After 'Home of the Brave,' people wanted to lump me into an easy category," Lif said. "But my mission has always been about everything from social commentary to looking back on my youthful stumblings to the educational system and family."

He added that it is difficult to avoid politics when the systems of government shape all our lives. But now more than ever, Lif said he is striving to distance himself from the suffocating label of a politically active performer.

"After (Sept. 11, 2001), I had a lot to say in my music about the propaganda Bush was throwing at us about the U.S. as an innocent victim," Lif said. "I wanted to offer an alternative view. But with Operation Iraqi Freedom, I felt a lot of people were looking to me, assuming I would play a bigger role. But I

just felt like everything had been said. So many people spoke out — I mean, the Beastie Boys, the Dixie Chicks. I just didn't feel a need to."

Publicist Teal Garreles said Lif's politics don't detract from his raw talents as a performer.

"He has a great stage presence and he has a talent for getting crowds hyped," Garreles said.

Lif's show will be executed in the spirit of his latest album, and he characterized it as much more than a concert.

"People can expect an all-out production," Lif said. "I Phantom" is meant to play out as a story and the show reflects that. We have sets, props, cast members. The music is played in sequence like the album."

Lif's WOW Hall appearance will be the final show of his current tour. The show begins at 9 p.m., and tickets are \$8 in advance or \$10 at the door.

This summer, Lif will begin work on another solo album as well as a collaboration with The Perceptionists. And in July, Lif will make his way across the European festival circuit. He said Germany is a favorite stop.

"They like that rough shit," Lif said.

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