

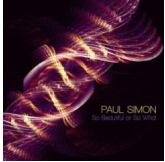
## Paul Simon - So Beautiful or So What (2011)

Written by bluelover

Wednesday, 20 April 2011 18:31 - Last Updated Monday, 22 May 2017 12:27

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## Paul Simon - So Beautiful or So What (2011)



- 1 - *Getting Ready for Christmas Day*
- 2 - *The Afterlife*
- 3 - *Dazzling Blue*
- 4 - *Rewrite*
- 5 - *Love and Hard Times*
- 6 - *Love Is Eternal Sacred Light*
- 7 - *Amulet* [play](#)
- 8 - *Questions for the Angels*
- 9 - *Love & Blessings*
- 10 - *So Beautiful or So What* [play](#)

Touted as Paul Simon's return to traditional songwriting -- Simon writing alone with a guitar and a pen instead of constructing songs around rhythmic loops the way he's done since Graceland -- *So Beautiful or So What* doesn't feel like a return to the '70s. From the moment the record kicks in with the heavy blues stomp and samples of "Getting Ready for Christmas Day," it's evident that while Simon may have changed his style of composing, he's not abandoning his method of record-making, which is distinctly engaged with the present. When Bob Dylan sings about Alicia Keys he does so with an old-fashioned swing, but when Simon writes a verse about Jay-Z he does it within the context of an album anchored in polyrhythms, chattering guitars, and digital loops, where the handful of delicate acoustic numbers function as a counterpoint to the clean bustle of the rest of the record. Certainly, *So Beautiful or So What* isn't as reliant on soundscapes as its Brian Eno-produced predecessor, but it is no rejection of texture, just as it is in no way a repudiation of the musical sensibility of Graceland, whose rhythms are as firmly felt here as on any record he's made since. Rather, *So Beautiful* elegantly touches upon each of Simon's solo signatures within a compact 38 minutes, its brevity indicating the precision of Simon's focus. There are no wasted sounds or words here, and if he offers some of his simplest, prettiest tunes in years ("Love & Hard Times," "Amulet") and spends a considerable chunk of the record dwelling on spiritual matters, the album is neither steeped in nostalgia nor

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haunted by death. Paul Simon is remarkably clear-eyed in assessing the modern world and his place in it, not shying away from contemporary sounds -- if anything, the production is occasionally a tad too brittle, like so many digital-age recordings -- but not chasing after youth either. He's merely living in his time and reporting, returning with an album that's vivid, vibrant, and current in a way none of his peers have managed to achieve. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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