

Fiona Apple □ – The Idler Wheel ... (2012)

Written by bluelover (Bogdan Marszałkowski)
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1 *Every Single Night* 3:33 2 *Daredevil* 3:28 3 *Valentine* 3:32 4 *Jonathan* 5:03 5 *Left Alone* 4:50 6 *Werewolf* 3:12 7 *Periphery* 4:58 8 *Regret* 5:16 9 *Anything We Want* 4:40 10 *Hot Knife* 4:02 Acoustic Bass, Guitar [Harmony] – Sebastian Steinberg Kora [Cora], Autoharp, Other [Truck Stomper, Dance Partner, Pillow, Feedy's Brother], Percussion, Guitar [Guichar], Bouzouki, Marimba, Drums [Drum Set], Strings [Voice Strings], Voice [Voice Of Pain], Baritone Vocals, Harp [String], Guitar [Teisco], Producer – Seedy Loops [Loop Makerperformer], Other [Truck Stomper, Dance Partner], Percussion, Piano, Celesta, Strings [Voice Strings], Vocals [Singer], Keyboards [Bass Keyboard], Producer – Feedy Words By, Music By – Fiona Apple

So much of the drama surrounding Fiona Apple's third album, *Extraordinary Machine*, focused on its recording and release -- how the original Jon Brion productions were scrapped in favor of new versions helmed by Mike Elizondo, all fueling fan panic and an Internet protest pleading for a free Fiona -- that ultimately all the clamor obscured Apple herself, both her songs and performances. She runs no such risk on *The Idler Wheel Is Wiser Than the Driver of the Screw and Whipping Cords Will Serve You More Than Ropes Will Ever Do*, her fourth album, arriving some seven years after *Extraordinary Machine*. Alone with her voice, piano, and percussionist Charley Drayton, Apple has nowhere to hide, nor does she give any indication she'd prefer to run. These spare but not skeletal arrangements -- each cut is subtly colored with harmonies, slight effects, overlapping rhythms, and additional keyboards -- never shift focus away from Fiona's magnetic vocals, the human element pulling us into these songs. Some hooks are stronger than others -- "Periphery" cuts to the quick, whereas "Every Single Night" surges -- but what was rumored about *Extraordinary Machine* is actually true about *The Idler Wheel*: there are no singles here, nothing concise and concentrated to facilitate an easy sell. But that's not to say that *The Idler Wheel* is alienating. As elliptical as the melodies and words can be, the music is immediate and the songs unfold quickly, certain turns of phrase or thrilling runs swiftly seeping into the subconscious. Lacking either ornate production or a pop single, *The Idler Wheel* plays like Fiona Apple at her purest and that's plenty complicated: she takes no shortcuts or easy turns, her intent somewhat shrouded but never absent. Much of the charm of Apple's music isn't decoding what it all means but learning its internal clockwork, letting the songs take

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root, so the love songs ("Jonathan") seem sweeter, the braggadocio ("Hot Knife") funnier, the pathos ("Valentine," "Regret") and paranoia ("Werewolf") feeling fathomless. Once the startling Spartan surfaces of The Idler Wheel become familiar, similarities to her three previous albums are apparent -- she takes certain jazzy strides that hark back to Tidal, there's a rigorous dexterity reminiscent of When the Pawn -- but what's new is an unwavering determination and cohesion. Nothing is wasted, either in the composition or arrangement, and this lean confidence binds The Idler Wheel. Stripped of all her carnivalesque accouterments, Fiona Apple remains as rich and compelling as she ever was, perhaps even more so. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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