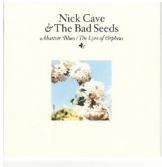
Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds – Abattoir Blues / The Lyre Of Orpheus (2004)



Abattoir Blues *1-1 Get Ready For Love 5:05 1-2 Cannibal's Hymn 4:54 1-3 Hiding All Away 6:31 1-4 Messiah Ward 5:14 1-5 There She Goes, My Beautiful World 5:17 1-6 Nature Boy 4:54 1-7 Abattoir Blues 3:58 1-8 Let The Bells Ring 4:26 1-9 Fable Of The Brown Ape 2:45* The Lyre Of Orpheus *2-1 The Lyre Of Orpheus 5:36 2-2 Breathless 3:13 2-3 Babe, You Turn Me On 4:21 2-4 Easy Money 6:43 2-5 Supernatura5 2-7 Carry Me 3:37 2-8 O Children 6:51*
Bass – Martyn P. Casey Drums, Percussion – Jim Sclavunos, Thomas Wydler Guitar [Guitars] – Mick Harvey Organ – James Johnston Piano – Conway Savage Violin, Mandolin, Bouzouki, Flute – Warren Ellis Vocals – Ase Bergstrom, Donovan Lawrence, Geo Onayomake, Lena Palmer, Stephanie Meade, Wendy Rose Vocals, Piano – Nick Cave

Enough time has passed to be straight without fear of fan retaliation: 2003's Nocturama was a misstep for Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. Though not a terrible record, it paled woefully when compared to what'd preceded it: several albums of nonpareil, damaged and daring rock music, a kind both emotion-stirring and crotch-clutching, from a band firmly contumacious to compromise.

Nocturama didn't wholly lose the plot, but certainly capitulated to cliché. Which made its successor, the double-disc, two-albums-in-one set of 2004's Abattoir Blues / The Lyre of Orpheus, all the more remarkable. Perhaps Cave and company knew what they had in wait; that it'd be special enough to surpass whatever preceded it; that putting out a weaker disc in advance would only increase its impact, heighten critical intrigue and benefit subsequent examinations. If so, bravo gentlemen – it worked a treat.

Rightfully feted by a plethora of publications upon its release, these 17 tracks found Cave in imperious form, creativity running clean while the summoning of traits that'd helped define his

career is treated with consideration for progression – there's little revivalism here, few nods to past glories. Instead, the albums spark with a vibrancy that'd soon carry into the Grinderman set-up, and ring with a classic melancholy-versus-malevolence vibe as timeless as any favourites previously released under the Bad Seeds banner.

Reduced to the very simplest exposition, Abattoir Blues is the fast and furious record, Lyre the slower, seductive offering; but neither really plays things straight, the latter's Supernaturally a sprightly saunter of a love song, the former's Let the Bells Ring a lugubrious laudation of a passing. Abattoir's opener, Get Ready for Love, crackles with an energy that'd be felt again four years later on 2008's Dig, Lazarus, Dig!!!. The title track shudders with a lyrical moroseness – "Everything's dissolving, babe" – but is lifted from a sullen repose by sweet, soulful backing vocals. Not that wallowing in Cave's misery is to be avoided. Lyre's titular opener, meanwhile, is a spectacle of storytelling which has one wondering how Cave's novel-writing endeavours have, to date, failed to emulate his music-world achievements.

Two great albums, then, and recorded both fast – in under two weeks – and without the previously pivotal Blixa Bargeld, whose departure could have foreshadowed failure. But under Cave's consistently accomplished marshalling, the Bad Seeds are always capable of overturning the odds, and this is the sweetest affirmation of that trait to date. ---Mike Diver, BBC Review

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