Stevie Wonder – Fulfillingness First Finale (1974)

1. Smile Please 2. Heaven Is 10 Zillion Light Years Away 3. Too Shy To Say 4. Boogie On Reggae Woman 5. Creepin' 6. You Haven't Done Nothin' 7. It Ain't No Use 8. They Won't Go When I Go 9. Bird Of Beauty 10. Please Don't Go Stevie Wonder Audio Production, Various Instruments, Vocals Paul Anka Vocals (Background) Shirley Brewer Vocals (Background) Jim Gilstrap Vocals (Background) Lani Groves Vocals (Background) The Jackson 5 Vocals (Background) James Jamerson Bass Instrument Sneaky Pete Kleinow Pedal Steel Guitar Larry Latimer Vocals (Background) Reggie McBride Bass Instrument The Persuasions Vocals (Background) Bobbye Porter Bongos, Congas Minnie Riperton Vocals (Background) Michael Sembello Guitar Deniece Williams Vocals (Background) Syreeta Wright Vocals (Background)

After the righteous anger and occasional despair of the socially motivated Innervisions, Stevie Wonder returned with a relationship record: Fulfillingness' First Finale. The cover pictures his life as an enormous wheel, part of which he's looking ahead to and part of which he's already completed (the latter with accompanying images of Little Stevie, JFK and MLK, the Motor Town Revue bus, a child with balloons, his familiar Taurus logo, and multiple Grammy awards). The songs and arrangements are the warmest since Talking Book, and Stevie positively caresses his vocals on this set, encompassing the vagaries of love, from dreaming of it ("Creepin'") to being bashful of it ("Too Shy to Say") to knowing when it's over ("It Ain't No Use"). The two big singles are "Boogie on Reggae Woman," with a deep electronic groove balancing organic congas and gospel piano, and "You Haven't Done Nothin'," an acidic dismissal of President Nixon and the Watergate controversy (he'd already written "He's Misstra Know-It-All" on the same topic). As before, Fulfillingness' First Finale is mostly the work of a single man; Stevie invited over just a bare few musicians, and most of those were background vocalists (though of the finest caliber: Minnie Riperton, Paul Anka, Deniece Williams, and the Jackson 5). Also as before, the appearances are perfectly chosen; "Too Shy to Say" can only benefit from the acoustic bass of Motown institution James Jamerson and the heavenly steel guitar of Sneaky Pete Kleinow, while the Jackson 5 provide some righteous amens to Stevie's preaching on "You Haven't Done Nothin'." It's also very refreshing to hear more songs devoted to the many and varied stages of romance, among them "It Ain't No Use," "Too Shy to Say," "Please Don't Go."

The only element lacking here, in comparison to the rest of his string of brilliant early-'70s records, is a clear focus; Fulfillingness' First Finale is more a collection of excellent songs than an excellent album. ---John Bush, AllMusic Review

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