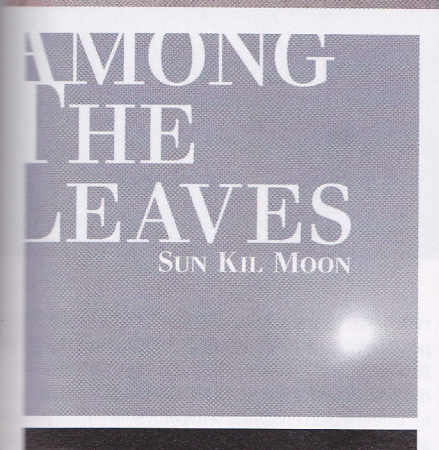


OUR NEW SCORING SYSTEM:

10 Masterpiece 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good but uneven
5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor

THIS MONTH: GASLIGHT ANTHEM | TY SEGALL | DIRTY PROJECTORS



TRACKLIST

Disc One:

- 1 I Know It's Pathetic But That Was The Greatest Night Of My Life
- 2 Sunshine In Chicago
- 3 The Moderately Talented Yet Attractive Young Woman vs. The Exceptionally Talented Yet Not So Attractive Middle Aged Man
- 4 That Bird Has A Broken Wing
- 5 Elaine
- 6 The Winery
- 7 Young Love
- 8 Song For Richard Collopy
- 9 Among The Leaves
- 10 Red Poison
- 11 Track Number 8
- 12 Not Much Rhymes With Everything's Awesome At All Times
- 13 King Fish
- 14 Lonely Mountain
- 15 UK Blues
- 16 UK Blues 2
- 17 Black Kite

Disc 2 (Limited Edition):

- 1 Among The Leaves (alt version)
- 2 The Moderately Talented Young Woman (alt version)
- 3 That Bird Has A Broken Wing (live)
- 4 UK Blues (live)
- 5 Black Kite (live)



GABRIEL SHEPARD

SUN KIL MOON

Among The Leaves

CALDO VERDE

The loneliness of the long distance singer-songwriter...
A sadcore potentate lightens up. *By John Mulvey*

8/10

TWENTY YEARS OF touring and recording, of inspiration and graft for moderate acclaim, and it comes down to this. Mark Kozelek, the pivot of first Red House Painters and now Sun Kil Moon, is engaged in one more slog around Europe. It is not going well.

In Helsinki (spoilers alert), he foists a bunch of new songs on an audience who want him to play early '90s perennials, flirts unsuccessfully with a local girl, and ends up back in his hotel room weeping for a dead cat. In London, a city Kozelek plainly despises, he is

given a lunchtime festival slot only to be drowned out by a "retro '80s band" (scrutiny of the lineup and site map for Field Day 2011 suggests he may be referring to Connan Mockasin). There are "fucking shuttle buses", poorly attended gigs on boats, nights of "horseshit" in pubs, further thwarted seductions and, finally, a show in Belfast where Kozelek performs to a "half-empty room full of clowns". "When I was done," he sings, "some drunk Irish man said, 'Worst night I've had since Bill Callahan.'"

At which point does a singer-songwriter stop romanticising his misery and, to some degree,

New Albums

start making a joke out of it? For Mark Kozelek, the penny seems to have dropped in time for his 12th studio album, *Among The Leaves*. The European tour yarns are drawn not from a weary interview, but from "UK Blues" and "UK Blues 2", two songs near the end of this long, engrossing and unexpectedly droll record. Homesickness has been a recurring theme in Kozelek's work; from the Red House Painters' "Over My Head" (1995), to Sun Kil Moon's "Third And Seneca" (2010). But where once it would be presented as a numinous poetic condition, now it is played for laughs as much as for pity; as if Kozelek has finally completed the transition from a protracted sensitive adolescence to a self-aware, albeit somewhat grouchy, maturity.

In many ways, though, *Among The Leaves* is entirely consistent with the rest of Kozelek's fine catalogue: a familiar tragic history, repeated as comedy. His songs unravel slowly and delicately, freighted but not overwhelmed by the work of Nick Drake, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon and Andrés Segovia. Mostly, they consist solely of Kozelek's voice – a voice that cannot help but sound dolorous, it seems – and his exquisite playing of a nylon-stringed classical guitar. There are songs about women he has loved, tried to love and wanted to love; songs about his hometown of San Francisco, and how he feels when he's away from it; numerous allusions to boxers and cats.

The difference this time is that a fair number of the 17 tracks sound more spontaneous than usual – more like sketches, or documentary clips, than finely wrought reveries. The opening "I Know It's Pathetic But That Was The Greatest Night Of My Life" tells of another failed pick-up at a gig, this time in Moscow, and feels like an extract from a Sun Kil Moon song rather than a complete one; at 1:47, it's roughly a third of Kozelek's default length. But as *Among The Leaves* progresses, the fragments begin to flow gracefully into one, thanks to the sustained tone (sceptics would doubtless conclude that Kozelek's songs all sound the same) and his artful knitting together of themes.

For a while, the songs dwell on promiscuity and deeply flawed old relationships. One lover is a crackhead who has run away from hospital ("Elaine"). Another leaves Kozelek for a substantially richer man ("The Winery"): she dines "at French Laundry, burning through money"; he's "eatin' pistachio nuts over by the taco truck". Money

Kozelek: "My career has been a rollercoaster"



SLEEVE NOTES

Recorded at: Hyde Street Studios, San Francisco
 Produced by: Mark Kozelek
 Personnel: Mark Kozelek (vocals, guitars, additional instruments), Michi Aceret (viola), Mike Stevens (drums), Dave Muench (drums on "UK Blues"), Eric Embry (banjo, additional vocals on "Young Love")

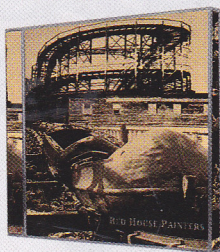
remains an intermittent concern, though Kozelek's management of his own label Caldo Verde, with its frequent live albums, rarities comps and special editions, should provide a model for minimalist singer-songwriters looking to earn a living out of their cult status.

If those loyal fans fetishise Kozelek as a doomed romantic victim, he is keen to put them right on *Among The Leaves*, and in some cases ridicule them. "My band played here a lot in the '90s when we had lots of female fans and fuck they all were cute," he

reflects in "Sunshine In Chicago", "now I just sign posters for guys in tennis shoes." "That Bird Has A Broken Wing", meanwhile, suggests that Kozelek's old penchant for covering AC/DC songs was due to an unexpected empathy with Bon Scott's lusty sensibilities. "I'm half man, other half alleycat," he claims, after complaining of a burning that turns out to be an STD picked up on tour ("Cipro" – presumably the antibiotic Ciprofloxacin – is cited as useful in these circumstances).

In the 2002 introduction to his book of lyrics, *Nights Of Passed Over*, Kozelek says of his formative

HOW TO BUY... MARK KOZELEK The best of Red House Painters and Sun Kil Moon on CD



RED HOUSE PAINTERS
Red House Painters
[aka Rollercoaster]

4AD, 1993
 After the demos released as *Down Colorful Hill*, Kozelek obsesses in the studio over this 2CD magnum opus. A defining record in the early '90s sadcore scene.

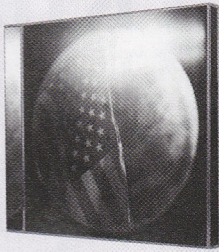
9/10



RED HOUSE PAINTERS
Ocean Beach 4AD, 1995

The fourth RHP album is mellow, less neurotic, with unaffected love songs like "Summer Dress". Folky by disposition, Kozelek's voice is improving, even if the songs don't quite match the 1993 glut.

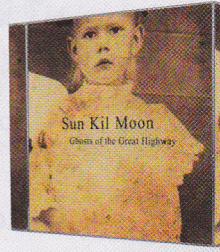
8/10



RED HOUSE PAINTERS
Old Ramon SUB POP, 2001

Delayed for three years, Kozelek's farewell to the RHP brand showcased the two distinct sides of his developing sound: fragile acoustic songs; and heavy jams, of which "Cruiser" remains one of his best.

8/10



SUN KIL MOON
Ghosts Of The Great Highway JETSET, 2003

Kozelek enters his second decade with a new DIY ethos, a pragmatic sideline as a solo artist and a new trade name for his main project. *Ghosts*, however, refines the formula of *Old Ramon*. A career highpoint.

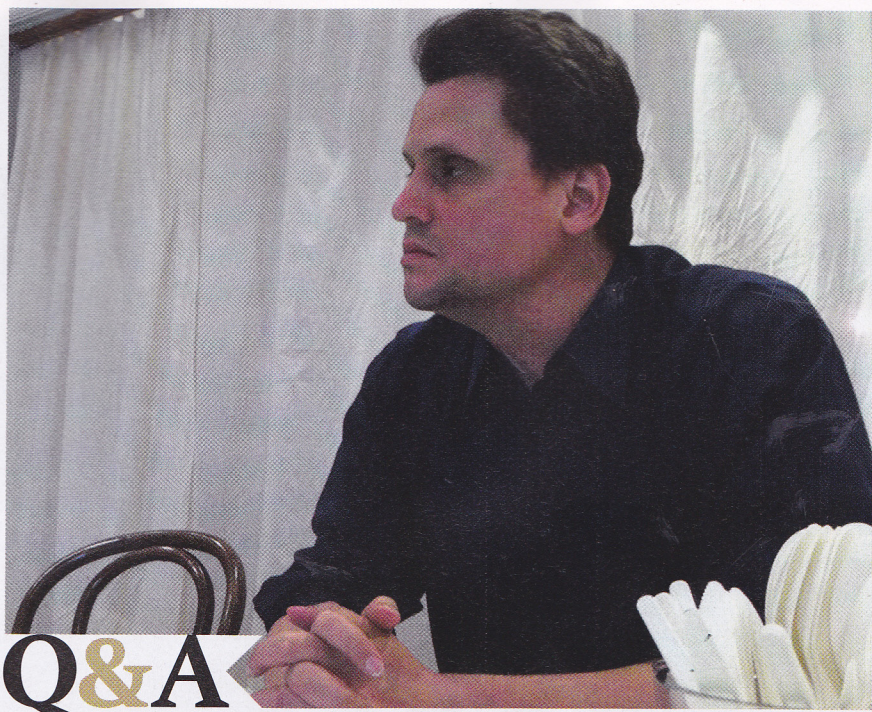
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SUN KIL MOON
Admiral Fell Promises CALDO VERDE, 2010

The last SKM album tackles many of the same themes as *Among The Leaves*, albeit in a more reflective fashion. An entirely solo recording, focused on Kozelek's latest infatuation, the classical guitar.

8/10



Q&A

Mark Kozelek talks us through his highs and lows...

A *MONG THE LEAVES* feels like a departure: more spontaneous, more conversational, funnier. Was that a conscious decision?

My old approach sort of died, at least for the time being. I was working on a song and realised I'd already written it 100 times. I've done the romantic approach to death and wanted to have a laugh this time. You tend to get a little sick of yourself after 20 years, unless you're My Bloody Valentine! They seem to quite enjoy their early work, or is it their only work?

Is "UK Blues" more about your homesickness than your dislike of the places in the song? Or do you really hate London, Bristol and Manchester?

I'm homesick everywhere I go, but England has a negative effect on my spirit to a profound degree. That trip from Heathrow into London is worse than the flight over there. It's just so grey, and the traffic in London gives me a heart attack. It's not a comforting place on any level, to me.

There are also points where you describe the creative process as a "chore"; "Songwriting hurts, a relentless itch..." Is being a songwriter a kind of curse?

Absolutely. Songwriting isn't a choice: you're called upon to bear the burden, or you're not. It's not all fun and games. Read any autobiography about any successful songwriter, and you'll see a lot of drug abuse, divorce, lawsuits, friends who died along the way. I'm off to Australia, Poland, Japan, Korea and China in the next two months – you think my girlfriend is happy about that? If you're a working musician, there's always tension in your life.

A lot of people who haven't listened to your songs closely might be surprised by the wit and the promiscuity. Do you think you've been misunderstood over the years?

The promiscuity shouldn't come as a big surprise. I've been open about that in my writing for years – I had a song called "Mistress" 20 years ago. Anyone who has been following me for a while knows I'm a human being. I'm pretty relaxed onstage, make jokes, whatever. I was pretty guarded in those early years, stood there like a cardboard cut-out, and there's a stigma that still hangs around a little. But the wit and the other stuff, it was always there, you've just gotta listen close. I do all the things other musicians do, sign autographs, pose for photos. I'm a pretty nice guy, not hard to approach.

I remember a lot of guys in tennis shoes at the shows 20 years ago, in London at least...

Oh fuck yes. I make cracks about it at every show. How can I not? I can't count the amount of shows that the entire front row consists of lonely-looking middle-aged dudes and maybe a woman who looks like one! Fucking depressing! I'm like, 'Don't any of you have girlfriends?' They sit there holding their phone like it's their only card in life.

I mean, I'm glad they paid for the ticket, but it's a very uninspiring front row to look at, honestly.

Over those 20 years, which record are you most proud of?

Admiral Fell Promises, hands down. Bury me with that one. That's me at my best, my most focused. It's cohesive, beautiful and my

playing was inspired by Andrés Segovia.

Are you pleased with the way things have turned out, on the whole?

Yes. I did an interview for a book on 4AD recently, and it took me back 20 years. That *Rollercoaster* album cover was very prophetic in its own way. My career has been a rollercoaster of highs and lows. But I'm looking at the Golden Gate Bridge as we speak, meeting my absolutely beautiful girlfriend for lunch in an hour, and I got a little money in the bank! Life could be worse. *INTERVIEW: JOHN MULVEY*

records, "My younger, higher pitched voice had me cringeing. And fused with some melodramatic lines and cliché rhymes, I felt embarrassed." Treasured as those Red House Painters albums may be, it is easy to see his point when comparing these wry narratives with some of the less nuanced angst on *Down Colorful Hill*, his 1992 debut. Nevertheless, a couple of outstanding group performances here do explicitly recall Kozelek's earlier work: the title track, with its nimble, brushed beat, would have sat neatly on *Ocean Beach* (1995); while the electric churn of "King Fish" harks back to the stunned Crazy Horse jams that proliferated between *Songs For A Blue Guitar* (1996) and *April* (2008). Kozelek guested with old bandmates in similar settings on their Desertshore album earlier this year ("UK Blues" is a co-write with them), but it would be nice to see him grapple with that sound more extensively once again.

Perhaps a full band project is financially impractical as well as aesthetically undesirable. If *Among The Leaves* is an accumulation of anecdotes from the past two decades, "Track Number 8" reveals where Mark Kozelek actually finds himself in 2012. The title is unnecessarily self-effacing – "I wrote this one and I know it ain't great/Will probably sequence it track number eight" – and the subject matter is songwriting itself. The itch that was an STD earlier in the album is now the creative impulse, which Kozelek describes as something of a curse, namechecking contemporaries – Elliott Smith, Mark Linkous, Acetone's Richie Lee, Blind Melon's Shannon Hoon – who he implies fell victim to it.

In the same song, though, he remembers as a child dreaming "of a life close to what I'm livin'." He loves his neighbourhood, the local stray cats, and his girlfriend. "Sure there were others, but nothin' this nice," he sings artlessly of her, and one last shocking revelation about Mark Kozelek comes slowly into focus: at 45, for all the grumbling and snarky jokes, he might just have found contentment.