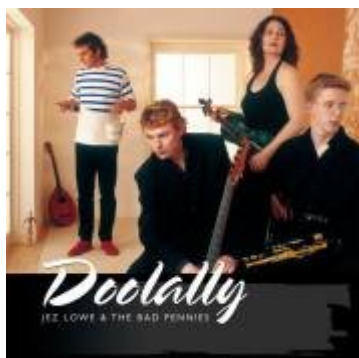


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Doolally

TTRCD105 Tantobie (2004)

He's not as well known as Bruce Springsteen, or as strident as Billy Bragg, but as a songwriter who's music reflects a heartfelt respect and appreciation for the working people who are ground beneath the wheels of corporate and governmental machinery, English musician Jez Lowe has few equals. Doolally, his latest CD- the title is old slang for eccentric or deranged- is his most consistently political one to date, full of populist social commentary in the form of vivid, credible narratives set to very singable and often bouncy melodies.

Lowe is joined once again by his band The Bad Pennies, consisting of fiddle player and singer Kate Bramley, multi-instrumentalist Andy May on pipes, piano, accordion and whistle, and newcomer Sean Taylor on bass and percussion. May's sweet pipes and Bramley's agile fiddling add a bright note to 'You and Your Golden Vanity', a song that invokes an old North-east England superstition to point out that average people have always envied the wealthy, that "a rich mans worries on a poor mans mind can do no harm". Class distinction is also the them of 'Hoi Polloi', another catchy song in which a working man mulls over the affectations of the rich. 'Doninni Doolally' quietly honours a young Italian immigrant who once lived in Jez's home town, a brave but foolhardy man who confidently enlisted to fight in WWII who wasn't as bulletproof as he thought.

In the pensive, minor key 'Sugar Water Sunday', after a slow pipe air as a lead in, a working man stubbornly keeps up his hopes in spite of a rough life. 'Bloodstained' combines terse of war and terrorism in the Middle East and Ireland and a lament for pervasive violence with an ironically upbeat music hall melody. In a less sombre mood 'Vikings' full of cheerful cittern and harmonica, shows that Lowe hasn't lost his sense of humour with a good natured recollection of the Norse invaders of England that suggests they'd be right at home in today's economically rapacious society.

The best topical music makes its point through a good story and a good tune. With Doolally, Lowe continues to demonstrate that he's a master of that genre.

Tom Nelligan (Waltham, MA)

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