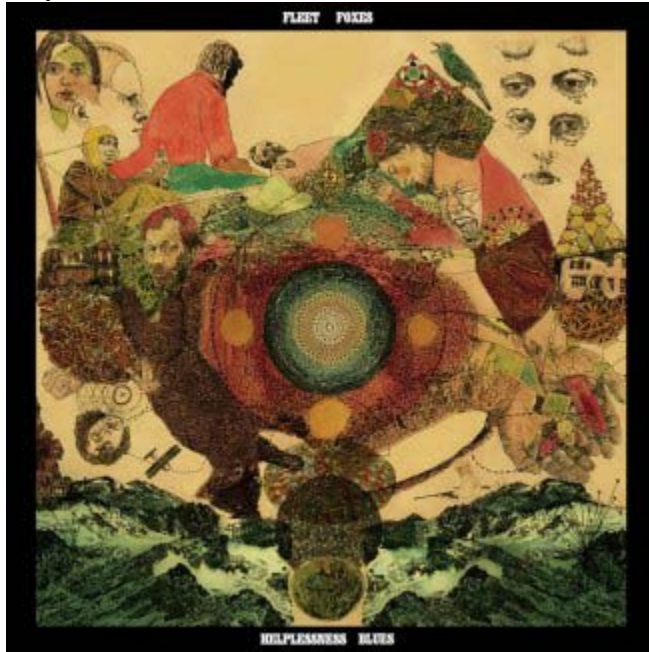


CD Review: Fleet Foxes — Helplessness Blues; Play The Tabernacle, May 14

May 2, 2011



[Fleet Foxes](#)
Helplessness Blues
[Sub Pop](#)

By [Al Kaufman](#)

Like Low Anthem, or their Rainy City compatriots, Cave Singers, Fleet Foxes create tiny bits of baroque, indie magic. Their songs shimmer, shine, and dance in the light. As on their 2008, self-titled, debut CD, the sextet harmonizes like the best Crosby, Stills and Nash songs, but the melodies on *Helplessness Blues* are more intricate, and a bit less accessible, forcing the listener to play the songs again and again, and find a small new joy with each turn.

While Fleet Foxes produce sunny melodies, they still hail from Seattle, and gloominess is prominent in the lyrics of vocalist Robin Pecknold. “So now I am older/Than my mother and father/When they had their daughter” are his opening lines on the first cut, “Montezuma.” After, he ruminates about his lost youth. It’s a theme that reappears on “Lorelai.” “So I guess I got old/I was like trash on the sidewalk,” he sings. And at the end of the song he remains as much, as he does in the following ballad, “Someone You’d Admire.” Pecknold’s life simply fails to live up to his expectations. It’s as depressing as anything Kurt Cobain put out in his day.

But the melodies. Oh, the melodies. Yes, there is that CS&N influence (“The Plains/Bitter Dancer” is the most obvious), and sometimes some Simon and Garfunkel is thrown in for good

measure (“[Battery Kinzie](#)“). But the overall feel of the CD has that same charming folksiness that has made Mumford and Sons so enthralling. The songs are deceptively complex, melodies and voices ebb and flow, soar and simmer. They even throw in the slightest of jigs on “[Bedouin Dress](#).” Yet the result is warm and immediate.

But the eight-minute epic suite “The Shrine/An Argument” is the centerpiece here. Beginning as a sort of chant, Josh Tillman’s drums swell until the song takes on a reverent quality, only to quickly give way to simple, beautiful vocal harmonies, before the song ultimately dissolves into a cacophony of harps and noise. All the while, Pecknold again releases his anguish over yet another love lost, yet still tries to reach for eventual happiness. Although the song covers a vast expanse of both music and the human psyche, like everything else on here, it feels intimate and honest. It feels good.

Fleet Foxes play the [Tabernacle](#) on May 14.