

Review: Damien Rice's 'My Favourite Faded Fantasy' Rice is an opera singer trapped in a songwriter's body.

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The ghost of Jeff Buckley haunts parts of Damien Rice's *My Favourite Faded Fantasy*. The opening notes of the album's title track glimmer from Rice's electric guitar as his falsetto, barely more than a whisper, reminds you why Rice is one of music's most dramatic artists. Eight years since his last new album, Rice shows us why there are few peers who can match his cynicism-free blend of folk, rock 'n roll and drama.

Like Buckley, though he's got the style of a modern singer/songwriter, he's got the soul of an opera performer.

It's hard to listen to the latest effort from Rice, releasing more than a decade after his debut masterpiece *O* and eight years since his last effort *9*, and not think of Buckley. Like the late phenom (whose opus *Grace* dropped in 1993), Rice occupies an era of pop music more often concerned with irony or sonic indulgence than unguarded sincerity.

But with orchestration, Rick Rubin production, masterful guitar work and dreamscape slow builds, Rice has never fit easily into a specific pop music era. He's his own genre.



Also like Buckley, Rice isn't overly concerned with the pop music form. Though it's just eight songs, *My Favourite Faded Fantasy* contains 50 minutes of music, with every song but one clocking in at over five minutes. These aren't radio singles. These are slowly developing, swooning poems that find themselves as they come to life.

My Favourite Faded Fantasy's first three tracks seem to relish in watching a song being born, grow and come to life with quiet intros, slow builds and dramatic crescendos.

The album hits its stride at "I Don't Want to Change You," abandoning some of the first tracks' electric ambition. It's a soulful, folky tune with one of the record's most catchy choruses: Oh and I don't want to change you / I don't want to change you / I don't want to change your mind / I just came across an angel / Out among the danger / Somewhere in a strangers' eyes.

Similarly to the album's closer, "Long Long Way," "Colour Me In" follows the O and 9 formula with similarly compelling results: The songs starts slowly with just whispering vocals and an acoustic guitar until droning strings turn the line Come let me love you into a swaying sort of anthem.

"The Box" revisits the beginning of the album's anxious energy, but it gives way to the breezy "Trusty and True," probably the most accessible track on the album.

Though the record as a whole—like much of Rice's catalogue (and Buckley's *Grace*)—finds its beauty in melancholy, songs like "Trusty and True" are a reminder of the threads of hope that string his albums together. Instead of a string-fueled climax, "Trusty and True" breaks into a full fledged sing-along: Come / Come alone / Come with friends / Come with foes / Come however you are / Just Come / Come alone / Come with me and let go / Come however you are / Just come / Come alone / Come so carefully close / Come however you are / Just come

It turns out to be pretty great advice.