

Gav's "Another" CD Review

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Our illustrious editor and SSA stalwart Gavin Fitzgerald has come out with *'Another'*. Another what? Another album, named, *'Another'*! *'Another'* follows on from his debut solo album *'Just'* of 2008, the album that broke away from many years of playing and recording with his band, Velvet Road.

'Just' and *'Another'* are in many ways a complementary pair of albums, not unlike the two Syd Barrett solo albums recorded after Barrett's absconion from Pink Floyd in the late 1960s. Compared to *'Just'*, *'Another'* is stylistically more varied, and introduces to the mix a wider variety of guest musicians. On *'Another'*, **James Englund** makes a special guest star appearance on saxophone for a couple of tracks. **Ross Bruzzese** plays bass on most of the 16 tracks, with **Marc Mittag** playing bass on four songs and Gav on one. Backing vocals were shared by **Megan Albany** and Ross, who also adds some ukulele to one track. **Peter Thompson** adds djembe to many of the songs, which may account for this album's distinctive percussiveness. **Stewart Havill** of **Dog Star Productions** recorded, mixed, and co-produced the album from his studio, and recorded all the drums and some of the keyboard tracks.

I wouldn't suggest that *'Another'* is a *better* album than *'Just'*; from a songwriting perspective they are on a par, although *'Just'* was recorded in a much shorter time-period than *'Another'* and so appears to be, arguably, the more cohesive record of the two. *'Another'* follows through with tighter production and more inventive arrangements. Gav's singing has also improved. What both albums do share is consistently good, to great, to excellent songwriting, and Gav's trademark facility with words and music. Here is a man who loves his songwriting & guitar playing, and it shows.

The sound quality on *'Another'* is enhanced by better mixing and mastering: Gav's vocals are now sitting more comfortably in the mix than ever before, and the sound is generally cleaner. *'Another'* was mastered by the legendary **Don Bartley**. Don has mastered the lion's share of iconic Australian albums over the past forty years, and the listener can hear his distinctive presence on *'Another'*. Bartley's trademark is his magic balance of crystallising the sound while retaining an elemental rock focus. *'Another'* is a rock album that delves into funk, boogie, country and reggae, and Don Bartley's mastering instinctively captures the ethos of Gavin's sound, albeit with the professionalism that is expected of good mastering.

Gavin is also an illustrator and artist (& photographer –the photos on the sleeve and cover are his). He has an instinctive flair for evocation and "feels". The album's opening track is one such example, *"West Wind"*. Written sometime in the late nineties, it evokes wide fields, wind-swept fields, looking onto the setting sun. Gavin overlays some fine rhythm and lead guitars with a discernible build up as the song progresses into the second verse. The Major 7th "jazzy" chordal pattern, Pete Thompson's djembe and Marc Mittag's funky bass all contribute to an excellent piece of music and song.

Just as the Church's *'Starfish'* (1988) started with *"Destination"* leading into *"Under the Milky Way"*, so does one of Gav's most enduring songs come in at track two on *'Another'*. *"The River"* is a crowd favourite and is performed extensively by Gav and formerly by Velvet Road. It's a classic country-rock track, featuring a gritty cod-funk bassline in the verses, underlying Gav's blues riff in E. The boogie-esque changes into the choruses are particularly enthralling "...but I won't cry..."; Gav's dominant 7th chords are particularly swampy. The arrangement allows more space for Gav's delicious lead work compared to Velvet Road's more muscular 3-piece arrangement. Megan Albany's backing vocal appears to conjure up the ghost of the girl whose life got taken away. And for those who know the Australian countryside well, you can almost taste the dust of the dirt roads and the whiff of irrigation canals as you hear this track. Every turn of phrase and chord change is emotionally and musically excellent. Turn it up loud.

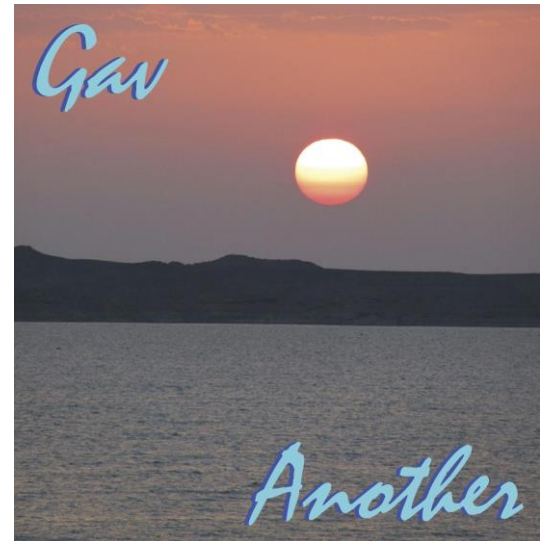
"I Don't Know" is a standout track, and one of Gavin's most intriguing songs to date.

It's one of these songs where the lyrical ambiguities convey much more than is reflected on paper. The music here complements the dreamy sentiments, starting with a soft chromatic guitar refrain redolent of Syd Barrett before going into a gutsier verse, and moving again into the softer sub-psychedelic "I don't know" chorus. The questioning, poetic, albeit inscrutable verse lyrics are juxtaposed by the middle eight where Gav bares his feelings quite candidly ("...how can you blame someone where emotions are involved..."). Like automated writing, or free-form painting, *"I Don't Know"* is starkly revealing in its ambiguity; uncertainty, apprehension, attraction, conflict, and perhaps a passionate neediness are some of the feelings that waft like the song's pulsating coda. Gav's creepy background lead guitar and Megan Albany's backing vocal enhance this mood. *"I Don't Know"* is a great song that captures the essence of what creativity, or art, is all about.

"Take Me As I Am (Everyday Man)" follows on a theme taken from Gav's iconic *"Imperfections"*. The themes are straightforward, and with a healthy dose of "Gav" humour and double entendre in the middle section: "...I might be ordinary, but when I'm holding you I feel a lot bigger...", along with Gav's talent with writing and rhyming where he quotes a list of

famous people before coming onto the aforementioned line. It's the sort of song that appeals to the 'everyday man', to quote from the song, and accounts for why Gav was so popular with the blokey crowd when he used to perform with Velvet Road.

"Practicality" is an appealing and excellently recorded song with a Police influence. It's distinctly reggae influenced, featuring stylishly layered guitars, a vibrant bassline, and a smattering of keyboard. The song is about the difficulties of mixing a 'straight' versus a 'creative' in a relationship setting; the singer here is definitely the 'creative' while the other is the "practical" one.



Gav's howling towards the ends of each of the choruses enhances the track's liveliness, and there's also a pleasing move into a jazzy middle-eight.

"*Just Like That*" is another live favourite from Gav's solo and Velvet Road sets. This is a song about losing your loved one(s) suddenly. The song has an overall country flavour to it, and the poignancy of the delivery is balanced by the sharp chorus "...just like **that**..." and the swinging bassline and drums. There's a good balance of major and minor chords here reminiscent of Neil Finn, again showcasing Gavin's craft as a very good songwriter.

"*Danny McCrocker*" is, yet again, another live Gav and Velvet Road favourite. This is Gav's one song that blatantly expounds his Irish roots. It captures the feel of Irish jig and town hall jive, all the way through to the Celtic style lead backed by marching drum beat and the bars being counted down in the background. The double choruses at the end are wild and rollicking. This is celebratory, party music, and you can virtually taste the Guinness that you hear Gavin call for at the beginning of the song (*Ed: Actually that's Ross!*). "*Danny McCrocker*" is great and quite original – no-one else in the local songwriting scene writes songs like

this, and very few songwriters capture this much *joie de vivre* in their work. They'd love this at Irish pubs!

"*Been So Long*" is a danceable track, starting off with an 80's style drum refrain not too dissimilar from Prince's style. Gav sings the verses in tandem with Megan Albany, being a song about coming back home to his lover, and both deliver a passionate & inspired performance, particularly as the song reaches its coda. The song maintains a contemporary sound while being quite influenced by 80s rock, in particular INXS, (note the saxophone) and even Go Betweens. The middle-eight here is inspired; the move into "...life can make decisions..." lyric is musically quite stirring, similar to many early Crowded House songs.

"*Acting Funny*" is another great pop/rock song with a classic Australian rock influence. There is a vague country flavour to it, again, similar to the Go Betweens, or Gang Gajang, and those repeating 12-string (or double-tracked) lead motifs that are heard throughout the song are also reminiscent of bands like The Church. Those dreamy refrains at the end of the each verse, too, are also

somewhat Church-like. "*Acting Funny*" is also infused with stylish and expert guitar lines, and is possibly the only song ever recorded with the word "petulant" in its lyric!

In "*I Don't Want You*", Gav tells the object of the song that he doesn't want them, but paradoxically "...wish[es] that telephone would ring...". Lyrically, "*I Don't Want You*" suggests an occasionally recurring theme recurring in Gav's songs, where the woman or object of his desire appears to be kept at a distance. But the music is so boppy and upbeat, you come away feeling that Gavin is possibly being tongue-in-cheek and humorous about it all. There's plenty of walking bass, and ukulele in the old-time music-hall style middle section. An excellent song, and very Gavin!

"*Mr Elevator Music Man*" is another reggae track, this time underpinned by a prominent walking jazz bass, tasty lead licks, and a decidedly impassioned lyric. This is something of a 'message' song, with Gav using his lyric to tell an unnamed second person what constitutes good music "...it's the passion that makes the music come alive..." – passion that Gav has in spades.

"*Baker's Town*" is one of the album's more rock-influenced tracks in the style of Hunters & Collectors, or Midnight Oil. This is a song about the need to escape from a country town. Gav creates a soundscape complementary to the lyric, and his own experience growing up in the country is what probably gives this song its unquestionable authenticity – a city-slicker could not have written this. And somehow, the female backing vocal appears to enhance the sense of desolation and desperation; perhaps this is what Gavin (or Stewart) had intended.

"*Penitentiary*" leaves Australian shores and plants itself firmly in America's southern hybrid of white country and zydeco. It's a wonderful track, one where the saxophone really shines, and which captures these musical influences so evocatively; you really feel you're in Louisiana, or Mississippi. Gav records the keyboards himself here, probably to ensure that the musical flavour remains true to his intentions. The middle-eight goes off into ¾ time before coming back into the dance grooves and a saxophone solo. This is a great dance track in the vintage musical style of southern-USA.

"*Sweet Little Angel*" similarly has its roots planted in southern USA. This is classic 50s style rock with that mix of rockabilly and blues within a rock'n'roll setting. "...I believe in my sweet little angel..." is a memorable lyrical refrain and hook – this song would've fit well back in the late-1950s, and yet sounds vital and fresh today. A fantastic final song to a fine record.

Gav includes two fine bonus tracks here (with no extra lead-time into them), "*My Alarm Clock*", and "*Fair Game*". These are both excellent rock tracks that fit in nicely at the end of the CD, which overall representing great listening value to the listener.

Gavin Fitzgerald has always maintained a very high standard of songwriting both as a performer and as a recording artist. But on '*Another*', his standards are lifted even higher, with very noticeable improvements in his singing, producing, mixing, musical adventurism, and - not least of all - his deft guitar playing.

Thus far, Gavin, either as a solo act, or in Velvet Road, has attracted a small but loyal following often comprising of other songwriters, friends, and friends-of-friends. He doesn't quite have the gravitas, or "pulling-power", of other songwriters local to the scene, and neither does he have the "cred" so easily attributed to many of those other writers, or performers. In my opinion though, Gavin is quite unique; his is a fruitful talent which often exudes – for his humour, his wit, his radiant liveliness - a twinkle of definable genius. Gavin must be considered as one of the most gifted unsigned songwriters in the local or national scene today, and we can only hope that '*Another*' brings this "everyday hardworking man" the notice and recognition he actually deserves.

