

Seattle 1919. The Fuse. 2 record set with jacket and booklet. \$7.50 from FUSE music, 1230 1/2 Garden Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101.

reviewed by:
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This is a rare and precious creation. Twenty-one songs, in a variety of rock-related genres, tell the story of the Seattle general strike of 1919. A virtual rock cantata of the strike, it makes many aspects of social and labor history available in an entirely new way (a contemporary equivalent to Woody Guthrie's classic ballads of the Okie migration and the Ludlow massacre) while impressively expanding the ability of rock music to deal with complex themes in a sustained way.

Seattle 1919 captures the experience of the strike with accuracy and a strong historical sense. (Rob Rosenthal, who wrote most of the songs, is also author of a thesis on the effects of the strike.) Each song expresses the viewpoint of one or another participant; the lyrics tell in sequence the history of the strike, but more importantly they convey in poetically concentrated form the feelings and attitudes

of different individuals and groups. A patter song, "Push," portrays a worker's cynicism about the employers:

"They say it's for the war
 but I think it's for the money
 You say say it's for us all
 Well, I think that's pretty funny
 Getting rich is easy when you
 Hide behind your country
 Wave the flag
 Collect the bounty."

But a slow ballad portrays an older worker's cynicism toward the idea of progress through class struggle:

"I've seen 'em striking in Pullman
 Seen it spread on down the line
 But when they called out the troops
 I lost a ^{pass}~~pass~~ of mine
 And when Debs got too big for his britches
 They locked him up in jail
 He dreams big dreams
 But he was born to fail."

The opportunities for disaster in this kind of musical experiment are ever-present. Fortunately, the rhythms and tunes are varied; the band never drowns out the words; parallels to the present are evident from the material but are never forced.

Seattle 1919 maintains a bittersweet balance between the potentials for apocalyptic hope and for crushing despair

the events themselves evoke. An old-timer recalls how growing up:

"I heard the miners talking
about a new world that was coming
I believe I see that new world coming today.

They said, "Boy, you listen closely,
There's a secret that we know.
They won't teach you this in the schoolhouse,
They won't tell you but it's so.
Without our muscles, without our brains,
nothing would ever go.
We run it all.

Nothing moves in the city, without our say-so
Let the bosses curse, let the papers cry
This morning I saw it happen
with these ancient eyes of mine
Without our say-so
nothing moves but the tide."

After the defeats that followed the strike, a participant sings:

"I joined the IWW for a principle
and the AF of L for a job
Now I'm caught in the middle.

Back home I've got a family
I can't clothe them in truth
or feed them dignity.

Fight for it all
or live off the crumbs
And what if the future
don't never come?"

But another concludes elegiacally:

"The high tide's come and gone
Driftwood on the beach
Shows how high this tide can climb
How far it can reach

"Sometimes you stand and fight them
and sometimes you have to bend
But hold on to your sweet dreams
'till the high tide comes again."