

Fleet Foxes' Gorgeous Bummers

Seattle band conjures classic Laurel Canyon beauty on anxiety-ridden second album

Fleet Foxes ★★★★★

Helplessness Blues *Sub Pop*



The beauty is skin-deep on the second album by the Pacific Northwest band Fleet Foxes. With its gleaming acoustic guitars, acid-folk brush strokes (harmonium, hammered dulcimer) and warming choral harmonies, *Helplessness Blues* is vocalist-songwriter Robin Pecknold's dazzling evocation of early-Seventies rock Eden: the *Sunflower*-era Beach Boys and the spaced-cowboy romance of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, dosed with the Indo-Celtic exotica of the Incredible String Band. Underneath, you find trouble – songs loaded with blown chances, battered ideals and impending mortality. “I wonder if I’ll see/Any faces above me/Or just cracks in the ceiling,” Pecknold sings in “Montezuma,” imagining his deathbed. He does it in a chirpy, disarming voice, like a young Graham Nash. Yet there is a fighter’s spirit in there and in the period-perfect glow of the music: a stubborn faith in the peace and healing embodied by records like *Déjà Vu*. “If I had an orchard, I’d work till I’m raw . . . and you would wait tables and soon run the store,” he sings in the gorgeously appointed title song. It’s like Nash’s “Our House,” rewritten for an age of reduced expectation but rendered with a true seeker’s gusto. Too young to have experienced the era he holds so dear, Pecknold has found refuge and inspiration in the echoes.

Key Tracks:
“Montezuma,”
“Helplessness Blues”

DAVID FRICKE

IN HARMONY
Fleet Foxes, with Pecknold, third from left

