

Puluche Album Review Rubric ©

Artist: <u>Elton John</u>		Album Title: <i>Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy (1975) - MCA</i>			
Categories	Criteria				Rating
	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Underdeveloped	
<u>Compositions</u>	Every song is quality and has a distinctive appeal of its own. Tracks have a perfect flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	Many quality songs with distinctive appeal. Tracks have a good flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	Some quality songs with distinctive appeal but not sustained. Track flow and continuity have little effect on album's overall appeal.	Few to no quality songs lacking any distinctive appeal. Track flow and continuity have little/poor effect on album's overall appeal.	20
<u>Breaking Ground</u>	Has impressive elements of high creativity and is experimentally innovative. Developing own signature sound. Shows extreme growth and/or potential as a substantial and influential artist.	Features elements of creativity and uniqueness. Shows growth and/or potential as a developing and influential artist.	Has very few moments of creativity and uniqueness. Shows little growth and/or some potential as a developing artist. Displays some stagnation or notable regression as an established artist.	Has no creativity and uniqueness. Shows no growth and/or little potential as a developing or established artist.	15
<u>Engagement</u>	Music has a transcending quality with numerous songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Many songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	Music has transcending qualities with some songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Some songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	Music has some transcending qualities with few songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels, as well as having any addictive or memorable qualities.	Music has minimal transcending qualities and few to no songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels. No positive memorable qualities.	15
<u>Lyrical Voice</u>	Has a strong lyrical voice with multiple thought-provoking messages with clear and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has notable lyrical voice with some thought-provoking messages and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has limited lyrical voice with few-to-no thought-provoking messages, meanings and depth.	Has a weak lyrical voice with no thought-provoking messages or meanings and seriously lacks any depth.	20
<u>Production</u>	Masterful sound quality with noticeable studio techniques employed that demand headphone inquiry. Vision flawlessly executed. Overall packaging and artwork effectively compliments and enhances album enjoyment.	Very good sound quality with some noticeable studio techniques that demand headphone inquiry. Vision is acceptable. Overall packaging and artwork compliments album enjoyment.	Inconsistent sound quality with questionable studio techniques employed. Vision is questionable. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	Questionable to poor sound quality. Lacks vision. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	20

Comments

Elton John's ninth studio album, *Captain Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy*, was the first album ever to debut at No. 1 on the *Billboard 200* chart when it was released in May 1975. This album is different than many because it's a concept album based on a single story line and all the tracks are lyrically connected. *Captain Fantastic...* also stands out because the tracks follow the chronological, real life journey of Elton John and Bernie Taupin, his writing partner of many years, as their career was taking off in London from 1967 until 1969.

The album begins with the title track, "Captain Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy." The acoustic introduction is suggestive of the softness and naiveté with which young people enter into the harsh, adult world. And it's also a great introductory track; the tempo changes about halfway through as Elton makes the announcement to the world that he and Bernie have arrived with a gusto they can't be swayed from accomplishing their dream.

However, being in a harsh environment such as the music industry can really beat a person down, especially someone as sensitive and temperamental as an artist. On "Bitter Fingers" Elton John lends his voice and ethereal instrumentals to some pretty gentle, shove it up your ass lyrics. This track is a plea for help in landing that one break-through song, catchy enough to earn airtime on the radio. Taupin's lyrics here are essentially poking fun at the record label who wants a hit that will bring in money so they can exploit many other artists for their own monetary benefit.

"Someone Saved My Life Tonight" - the only single released off *Captain Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy* - is the beautiful telling of how "sugar bear" saved Elton from a marriage he sincerely didn't want to be part of. In fact, Elton was so worried about the pending nuptials that at that time in his life he contemplated suicide. Ironically the lyrics describe Elton's fiancé as a "dominating queen."

Essentially, his friend said the words out loud that gave strength to the young pianist to be free not only from his horrid fiancé, but looking back now, also a freedom to embrace his true sexuality. The hopefulness delivered through vocals and supported by electric piano and riveting percussion courtesy of Nigel Olsson on the drums and Ray Cooper on the tambourine and cymbals, make it the perfect ending of the album's first side.

"(Gotta Get A) Meal Ticket" is an upbeat track, smartly placed as the opening track on the back half of the album. It has a rock and roll sound courtesy of Davey Johnstone's electric guitar matching Elton's clavinet. This track opens the beginning of a series of songs that focus on Elton and Bernie pounding the pavement, feeling personally successful and putting in work to finish their first record.

The daily to-dos of writers and composers are discussed on "Writing." Bongos were added to give this track a totally different backing sound than most others off the album, courtesy of Ray Cooper. At this point, quality sounds are flowing for the up-and-coming duo. Thoughts of writers around the world are echoed when Elton sings, "Will the things we wrote today/Sound as good tomorrow?"

Finishing out the album is "Curtains," a track that utilizes the synthesizer to send listeners and artists alike out of this world and onto the planet of success. Taupin has written about his former farm boy self who has morphed into an artist, cultivating fresh flowers, or words, for audiences everywhere. "I once wrote such childish words for you," Elton sings. And his voice matches the tranquility of the song as he gives the final

	send off.	
<u>Commendations</u>	<p>While this album is beautiful and is a perfect homage to the beginning of both Elton John and Bernie Tauperin’s careers, it is not an album that will stay with listeners forever. However, a few areas of the album should be commended for their artistry.</p> <p>In particular, “Better Off Dead” is a standout track from the album. The sound of this track is on point with music trends of the time. For example, it reminds listeners of a tune they’ve heard before. And this reviewer has pegged it as the rock portion of Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody” and their track from 1974, “Killer Queen.” The staccato pounding of the drums is also very interesting. Additionally, the electric instruments and tambourine on “Tell Me When The Whistle Blows” have a bluesy, disco feel that generously compliments Elton’s voice.</p> <p>In interviews Elton John has said he “thought that <i>Captain Fantastic</i> was probably my finest album because it wasn't commercial in any way.” For not trying too hard to appease his record label and telling a genuine, relatable story he should be highly applauded.</p>	
<u>Next Steps</u>	<p>About one month before <i>Captain Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy</i> debuted at No. 1, Elton John fired his drummer, Nigel Olsson, and bassist, Dee Murray. However, they did rejoin him in 1983 for <i>Too Low For Zero</i>. Elton John and his new band recorded and released <i>Rock of the Westies</i> later in 1975, which many consider the end of classic Elton John records.</p> <p>The 1980s were a decade of major change for Elton John as well. In the mid ‘80s while touring Australia, Elton lost his voice and underwent surgery shortly after to remove several polyps from his vocal cords. After the operation his voice was changed forever. Throughout the decade he continued to tour the world, during which time he played five sold out shows at Madison Square Garden in New York City.</p> <p>The Elton John AIDS Foundation was founded in 1992 and has raised over \$200 million to fund research for the terminal disease. Since then Elton John has released many albums and continued to tour. In 1994 he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2013, T-Bone Burnett produced John’s 31st studio album, <i>The Diving Board</i>.</p>	
<u>Reviewer</u>	Alayna Chabot	<u>IRC:</u> Lucy Patton