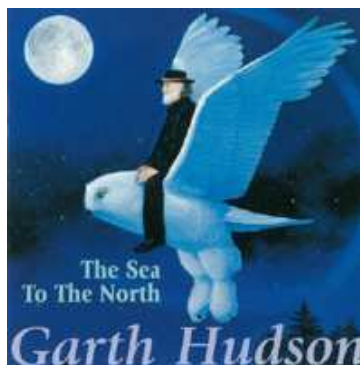


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## The Sea To The North

### Garth Hudson



I can say, "Wow! But I'm not really surprised." **The Sea To The North** is a Garth Hudson solo album from 2001, so it should evoke a wow, even a holy shi...definitely a, "Why doesn't the ex-Band keyboardist put out solo albums every six months?!" This six-song gem features as many musical tastes as can be heard in Hudson's playing and is as near perfect an album as one could ever wish for.

Robbie Robertson said he and his other Band members used to actually pay Garth for lessons when they were backing Dylan, Ronnie Hawkins and the like back in the early days. Hudson is the consummate musician, able to play a wide array of instruments within the context of a wide variety of musical styles basking in his storehouse of musical knowledge. His musicianship and eclectic taste are at the fore on *The Sea To The North*. The CD reads like an instrumental hodgepodge of every possible type of music you could name, but the songs don't suffer — in fact, they thrive in the diversity.

"The Saga of Cyrus and Mulgrew" features amazingly lush orchestrated lines over some heavy jazz breaks, setting up for the mayhem that follows for almost 12 minutes. Special note goes to drummer Gary Burke, all those amazing horns Hudson plays and the electric sitar of Jim Eppard and Mike DeMicco (aka Woodstock's own The Crowmatix). Just when you think things are gonna break apart, Hudson brings it all back together again, out of seemingly freeform meanderings into the main staccato phrase. The end of the song is pure delight as everything mashes, twirls and pulsates. They say Hudson is a man of few words with a very dry wit, and this shows in this fun jazzy tune.

Could Larry Packer's violin get any more poignant as it does at the beginning of the title track? Packer actually played in the orchestra behind The Band during the famous the Last Waltz concert). Opening with this short violin snippet (and never hearing the instrument or the sad phrasing again), Hudson quickly gets us into some low pulsating organs and horn playing. This is indeed an eight-minute-plus ride on an undulant sea as Hudson plays his usual array of instruments — organ, bass saxophone, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, accordion, melodica, and tarogato. Somewhere, mid-song, the tempo picks up; but it's soft and subtle, almost as if the listener can't be sure what he/she is hearing as a soft shuffling almost India-infused beat comes in. More sea shanty than jazz instrumental, this track rides along with Hudson's tight organ playing pushing things to the end.

We are into Hudson's inspirational phase by the third song, "The Breakers." Really, can this guy get any better on sax or piano? My old faves, Michael Been and Scoot Musick from underrated 80s band The Call make an appearance (Hudson played on their first release. You might remember him swaying in the background of the band's video, "When The Walls Come Down"). Hudson's wife, Maud, also contributes a nice spoken vocal part. Really, can Hudson be any more proficient? He wails on piano, tenor sax and accordion on this number alone.

"Third Order" has a cool Middle Eastern type beat with Hudson's accordion over the top. This is song of pure percussion madness and not surprisingly Band mate drummer Levon Helm gets in a few kicks. The Grateful Dead's "Dark Star" is probably the most 'commercial' sounding piece here, a lot of light jazz fun with the full compliment of Aaron "Professor Louie" Hurwitz and The Crowmatix taking center stage. "Little Island," is just Hudson on piano. I can't think of a better way to end this beautiful collection and tasty solo effort from one of the main architects of one of the most famous rock bands in history. Do what you must, but get **The Sea To The North** in your hot little hands as fast as you can!

~ Ralph Greco, Jr.

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