

## PREFORMER MAG

### **Beat Circus - *Dreamland* Produced by Martin Bisi and Brian Carpenter**

With a dark but childish joy, Brian Carpenter's Beat Circus takes us through the aisles of Coney Island's *Dreamland* carnival, which burned down in a mysterious fire in 1911. Full of menacing strings, marching percussion and eerie voices, this album draws listeners along, past rides and freak shows and carnie criers through a twisted Americana landscape. And like the New York of the time, this music becomes a melting pot of styles.

Eastern European and Gypsy melodies, waltzes, and the sounds of the old West all get their turns, alongside homemade American folk music. Beautiful instrumental tracks dominate, such as the traditional "Dark Eyes" and Carpenter's cinematic "The Rough Riders." Todd Robbins's piano on "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland," accompanied only by the sound of waves and laughing children, serves as an eerie but moving ending before "March of the Freaks" bursts in as a rowdy epilogue.

Brandon Seabrook on banjo and Alec Redfearn on accordion and jawharp certainly stand out for the unique colors that they add, but this is above all a group effort. The players add exclamations to the songs, but rarely solo. The writing highlights the ensemble by bringing out the uniqueness of each voice. Theremin, electric zither and toy piano, for instance, each add distinct touches to the music.

The voices are more like the dialogue of actors than singers. Their appearance takes the listener from scene to scene, from the freak show ringleader to the saloon-side prostitute. Always there is the sense of a story being told, though the players and the lessons are unclear.

With each cinematic piece melting into the next, Beat Circus has managed the rare trick of making a real album that defies genre and expectation. With the backdrop of *Dreamland*, Carpenter pulls together all the styles that interest him into a cohesive whole. The result is sinister yet affectionate, comic yet morbid. It's an album for certain weird kinds of listener, but those listeners will find considerable rewards silhouetted within the carnival lights. (Cuneiform Records)

[www.myspace.com/beatcircus](http://www.myspace.com/beatcircus)

-Warren Allen