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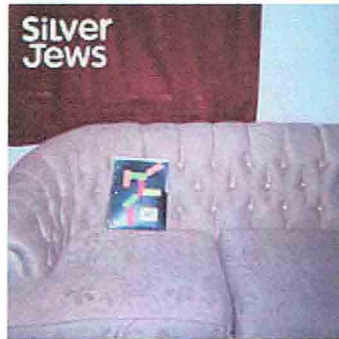
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Silver Jews

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Track List:

1. Slow Education
2. Room Games And Diamond Rain
3. Time Will Break The World
4. I Remember Me
5. Horseleg Swastikas
6. Transylvania Blues
7. Let's Not And Say We Did
8. Tennessee
9. Friday Night Fever
10. Death Of An Heir Of Sorrows

Silver Jews - *Bright Flight* (Drag City)

Dave Berman, wandering poet of wounded non sequitur, has settled down. Gone are Virginia, Texas, and the nation's back alleys—all icons of the Silver Jews catalogue; instead, we're given winding river valleys and shady Tennessee afternoons. Berman's always wanted to be a little bit country, so it's no surprise he now roots his spirit in the storied soil of Nashville. In fact, *Bright Flight* feels like the fulfillment of a honky-tonk promise from long ago. The real revelation here is the album's beautifully beating heart. It's called "Tennessee," and if it's hard to tell whether Berman's more in love with the state or the girl, well, that's kind of the point. Listen to it a couple times through, however, and one thing comes into focus: Dave Berman's gone and written one of the sweetest love songs you're ever going to hear.

Like all Jews albums, *Bright Flight* is a measured combination of gloom and glory. Berman mines the raw emotional material of everyday life, filtering it through his idiosyncratic observational style. His lyrics are so clever they sparkle yet so honest they resonate long afterward like an ache in the bones. When he sings, "I wanna be like water if I can/'Cause water doesn't give a damn," it doesn't sound like much, really, save the kind of weary truth most people never find words to express. Berman is that rare thing: a first-rate writer whose musical instincts rival his literary prowess. Here he surrounds himself with skilled players from the Nashville scene and veterans from 1998's *American Water* release. They create a rich tapestry to encompass Berman, one that allows the unmitigated joy of a moog freak-out ("Let's Not And Say We Did") without forgetting the resigned mournfulness of the pedal guitar ("Death Of An Heir Of Sorrows"). Absent is sometimes-collaborator Steven Malkmus, but *Bright Flight* doesn't suffer for it. Berman knows how to go it alone; plus, he's also got a secret weapon named Cassie Marrett. Her voice, sweet as Kentucky bluegrass, surfaces throughout, notably in opener "Slow Education" and centerpiece "Tennessee."

Underneath the casual monotone with which Berman begins that song, one senses the real salvation offered to man and woman by a Nashville union. "Marry me, leave Kentucky, and come to Tennessee/'Cause you're the only ten I see," he implores, turning the words inside out even as he invests them with potent emotion. Marrett answers the only answer we could hope for, expressed in that Silver Jews way: "I've looked through offices and honky-tonks/ for a man man enough to be/Mr. Mrs. Tennessee." It's a peculiar triumph, but the good feeling only crescendos as the song develops. "Goodbye users and suckers and steady bad luckers!" Berman exclaims, and the confluence of love and relocation will make hearts swell.

The idiosyncratic and joyful "Tennessee" sparks the entirety of *Bright Flight*. As a result, the album is a quiet kind of spectacular.

by Andrew Blossom