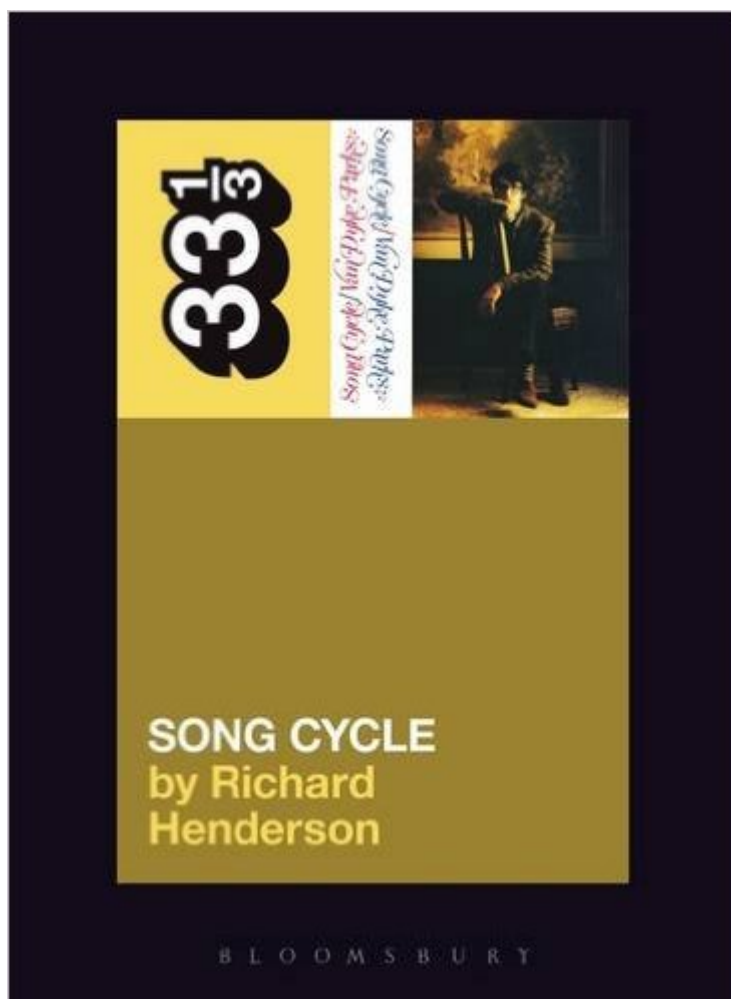


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Van Dyke Parks' Song Cycle (33 1/3)



Synopsis

Posing more riddles than the average sphinx, with its decipherable answers pointing somewhere dark, *Song Cycle* was anything but passive. I had already witnessed hippie bands playing with their backs to the hall, so the thought of late '60s musicians being interested in their audience struck me as a concept bordering on revolutionary. The debut album from songwriter and pianist Van Dyke Parks, *Song Cycle* first appeared in 1968 on Warner Brothers Records. Its twelve songs led listeners through Joycean wordplay and sound collages to reveal messages of dissent and personal loss, at odds with Parks' buoyant, riotously eclectic music. Monumentally ambitious and equally expensive, *Song Cycle* resembled a film - possibly *Citizen Kane* - more than the pop music of its day; like *Kane*, Parks' masterwork was adored by critics yet all but ignored by paying customers. In his efforts to plumb the mysteries of this quixotic record and its subsequent fate, Richard Henderson interviews several of the key figures involved with *Song Cycle*, notably Parks himself and producer Lenny Waronker.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is my second in this series of pocket-sized mini-books devoted to individual rock albums -- or in this case an album of unpopular "popular music." Henderson does an excellent job of setting the scene for the recording of Parks' first solo album, delivering many startling facts -- e.g., as a child actor, Parks performed in a movie with Grace Kelly. The following section, devoted to the album

itself and the circumstances of its recording, seems a little rushed in comparison -- there's so much we want to know -- but still delivers plenty of fascinating info. For instance, I was struck by the low-tech means employed to create some of the album's high-tech sounds, as in the "Farkle" used to create what the author describes as the "spooky, subaquatic atmosphere" of the opening of "The All Golden." The book's final section brings the reader up to date on Parks' subsequent career, right up to his wonderful recent work with Joanna Newsome and Inara George. As we wait patiently, 42 years later, for a sequel to Song Cycle -- which will of course never come -- it's a pleasure to deepen our understanding of this brilliant one-off achievement so that we can appreciate the album we do have in new ways.

The author provides so much excellent information about Van Dyke Parks, Song Cycle, and the people and events surrounding them, that I had to give it 5 stars in spite of the sometimes eye-roll-inducing showoff-iness of his language. (The kind of language the young Van Dyke of Song Cycle was known for.) Great book.

Ever wonder what happens to people when they drift away and off into the vast urban cosmos? Chronicling the accomplishments of heroes might be a good answer. So it is with Henderson's genuinely insightful treatise on Parks. Henderson, an old friend springs out of the abyss with this little tome and gets it all right. Thanks RB... How's Nell?

Very cleverly written this book really brings something new to VDP mythic album-A must read to the club of legendary gentlewomen & men who loves "Song cycle" -Highly recommended

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