



The Celestial Café

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Stuart Murdoch considers himself to be '26% a rock star'. He may be exaggerating. Few rock stars spend time compiling lists of their favourite mathematicians or buy extra-soft slippers so they don't disturb the neighbours living in the flat below. The Belle and Sebastian singer reveals more of these non-debauched tales of life on the road and back home in his native Glasgow. Murdoch, a born-writer, stares out from metaphorical celestial cafés throughout the world, presenting a unique and engaging take on herb tea, Felt, sunsets, church choirs, John Peel, acupuncture, and, of course, catastrophic waitresses. Throughout, he runs at life fast and true, reminding us all that an empty minute is a minute wasted.

The Celestial Café Details

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From Reader Review The Celestial Café for online ebook

James says

Very good. Probably only relevant to the very devoted B & S fan though. I couldn't get enough of Stuart's aimless ramblings. Would have been nice to read a bit more about the music and less about his football obsession but great anyway.

Jonathan Norton says

Edited collection of Stuart Murdoch's diary pieces from 2003-6, covering the creation and touring of the "Dear Catastrophe Waitress" and "Life Pursuit" albums. Lots of nice personal detail, and also the backdrop of the Iraq invasion and its impact on Scots politics.

Antonomasia says

[2.5] *Drab*: a friend captured in one word what I'd tried to say in 200 of surprisingly splenetic rant. It doesn't have to be anything to do with staying at home in your slippers, as the blurb implies; there are people who can do that and be wickedly funny about it. (At least the final 60-70 pages were more relaxed and fun and an improvement on the rest.)

Being good at other things, or being a nice person, doesn't necessarily make someone much cop at writing prose. Although the ratings for this book show that, as far as Belle & Sebastian frontman Murdoch is concerned, I'm in a minority on that point. Alongside 100+ mundane blog entries from 2003-06, there are a few poems and lyrics in here - most are pretty good. His thoughts are more interesting distilled; likewise, a reprinted Q&A from the *NME* has some pretty snappy answers.

What's woefully lacking are humour and passion. More than once he says he won't get into a topic too much because he doesn't want to bore us. Nope, by providing superficial summaries of recent activities in words of no flair - the sort of thing that's interesting from old friends but probably not what you pick up a book for - he bores me, for one. What I wanted was some proper trainspottery detail. He's obviously capable of it on football and music. There are a few playlists, but no extended commentary on the qualities of the songs with the insight you'd hope from a musician, nor (aside from one paragraph) real detail about his own recording and production. Whenever he mentioned something and I thought I might check it out one day, I realised it was because people I knew had also recommended it... His taste is good, but the way he talks about stuff drains it of vitality.

The humour: he's way too scared of offending people. (Okay, I'm not immune to that either, else I'd have given you the aforementioned splenetic rant in the style of someone who grew up wanting to write for the UK music press.) But if you're a fucking popstar you can describe Joy Division as *a nihilist moaning over a bass solo* without saying it's something you shouldn't say on the radio. (That was one of the few interesting bits that got past his self-censorship.) And it's good enough to be amusing even if you like 'em. (I bloody love the bass solos, though it varies re. the nihilism.) Still, I read Luke Haines' book straight afterwards, which more than made up for the lack of pointy-elbowed jibes.

Murdoch talks a bit about religion, and his charmingly quaint pillar-of-the-parish activities, but only to the extent he talks about other things he likes, and never in a proselytising way. If this book does have a use to me, it's as a public-sphere example when trying to explain to the angriest sort of atheist that not all religious people are right-wing fundamentalist arseholes. (Saying I know a few left-wing liberal, moderate Christians who are really nice and don't preach at people is all very well, but mentioning someone they've heard of is more useful.) Although a couple of said angry atheists I've known would, on the basis of this book, try to characterise him as a touch puritanical or sexually repressed; he spends a high ratio of time staring at random girls, described in a manner not unlike a shy, nerdy 17-year old boy, rather than pulling (he confesses he's never asked anyone out) as you might expect from a mid-thirties moderately successful popstar in good shape. It might be to do with religion. Or some other unrelated reason, he might be one of those people who's careful because they get involuntarily attached rather easily.

But how many damn times have I explained to someone or other that B&S aren't really twee, it's just an image that doesn't stand up to close examination; look at all the sleaze and sexiness and melancholy in their songs. I got into them through 'Stars of Track and Field' and 'Seeing Other People'...go figure ... that's their essence, to me. And then there's at least half the rest of *Sinister*, and the Carry-On/Confessions 'Step into My Office', and the weird *Tigermilk* cover, and the beautiful sad sharpness of early spring light that lives inside most of *The Life Pursuit*. (Interesting that several parallels are made in here between that and the first two albums - the three I love.) The twee-goody thing is kind of right after all. Thank fuck for Death of the Author.

Still, there were things to like in the [not very] Celestial Cafe:

- *It's getting light, a time when instead of going to bed, you'd rather hitch to Oxford, or the Midlands, following your nose, ending up in a strange person's spare bedroom. I once ended up in Amelia Fletcher's [of Tallulah Gosh] house.*

Murdoch seems too constrained by lurking tendrils of Calvinism to have that sense of wonder and adventure on most of these pages. I wanted to read more which did have, so a few days later I started Alex James' second book.

- *I guess I wanted it to be Don't Fear the Reaper, Make Me Smile, Virginia Plain and There Is A Light That Never Goes Out rolled into one. And it isn't going to happen.*

The exhilaration of those tracks! The taste! The confidence in the voice (too often lacking, though it could have done without that "I guess"). And the realism is charmingly easy to appreciate now I've finished the Luke Haines... I did play 'I'm a Cuckoo' on repeat quite a lot of times. But not near so many as the first three.

- Despite his religion, he despises Christian Rock.

...As well as things to grimace at:

- Worst of all, it turns out he's the sort of person to tell a cross stranger to Cheer Up! Yes, that works really well.

Despite everything, this was a fast read - perhaps because it was never exactly involving.

Bradley Lewis says

Stuart Murdoch is a god!

Miguel says

Muy ligero y divertido. A pesar de llevar una vida muy normal Stuart es todo un personaje y vive situaciones muy absurdas a ritmo de musical.

Lo único que he echado en falta es que hablase un poco más de cómo escribe las canciones, de él como creativo en general.

Francisca Pageo says

Stuart Murdoch, líder de Belle & Sebastian, se propuso escribir ante un nuevo ordenador una especie de diario que recogería todo aquello que le pasase por la cabeza, así como también en la vida; y es en este El café celestial, editado por Expediciones Polares, donde encontramos todo aquello que escribió, desde el 20 de octubre de 2002 hasta el 20 de agosto de 2006. De modo que estamos ante un diario cronológico lleno de pensamientos, reflexiones y hechos de su vida cotidiana, así como de las aventuras que el grupo, su grupo, Belle & Sebastian vivirían durante los años citados.

Murdoch nos habla de las películas que ve (de hecho, nos proporciona una inmensa lista con todas sus películas preferidas), la música que escucha y le toca íntimamente y todas esas referencias musicales que le van hipnotizando. Apasionado de la cultura, no sólo la muestra acudiendo a ella, sino también haciéndola. Estamos ante un diario no sólo personal, sino también grupal -cabe destacar que los demás miembros del grupo y algunos amigos de Murdoch también saldrán en este libro con sus diversas opiniones y creencias.

Para quien esto escribe, una persona que crecería en su (post)adolescencia con Belle & Sebastian, estas palabras confesionales reflejan esa alegría y entusiasmo que transmiten su líder y sus canciones. Murdoch no es cristiano, pero él va a la iglesia, toca en el coro y ayuda al prójimo. Estamos ante las palabras de una persona que quiere dar lo mejor de sí mismo no sólo en sus proyectos personales, sino también en su ámbito social y profesional. También descubriremos a un Stuart Murdoch apasionado por el deporte, a quien le encanta correr y no le dice que no a un partido de fútbol, pues lo adora. De este modo, estamos ante una persona que aboga por una vida plena. Stuart nos habla de su vida de una manera sencilla y describe todas aquellas cosas que le dan vida, como viajar en tren, enamorarse de las camareras guapas o ensayar con su grupo.

El autor habla sobre cómo le gustaría leer un libro sobre ciudades, cuando es él quien lo está haciendo. Murdoch escribe desde cada rincón que pisa de este planeta llamado Tierra; nos escribe desde California como desde Perth o Barcelona, aunque su residencia habitual sea Glasgow. Es un ferviente escocés que ama su tierra, pero también ama viajar y encontrarse por aquellos lugares a los que va de gira. Resulta muy divertido leer todas aquellas anécdotas por las que pasa y reírse no está de más en este libro, sino que se vuelve necesario.

En su aspecto más musical, quedan registradas las anotaciones sobre las giras del grupo y las grabaciones de sus discos. A todo aquel fan de Belle & Sebastian esta vertiente le encantará y le hará entrar en el mundo que nos presenta Stuart Murdoch. Unas confesiones llenas de vida, de amor por la música y el cine, por la cultura en general. Y una persona que, pese a haberlo pasado mal en la vida (antes de formar Belle & Sebastian sufriría de fatiga crónica), muestra una enorme adoración por vivir. A lo largo del libro, Murdoch no deja de hablarnos, y lo mínimo que podemos hacer nosotros es escucharle, tanto a su música como a su voz.

Quiet says

One of the very few books I read but didn't finish.

This isn't a novel, and it isn't a memoir.

This is a collection of very small blogs that Stuart Murdoch wrote over a period of years and published on the internet. This book is that collected, and this includes referencing to comments that happened on the page and what-not.

It's not interesting, and it's not exciting. It's all-together the vapid, unedited markings of a guy's journal, what you and I and everyone writes without thinking about much; and it's boring.

You'll also see the word "Indie" used a lot, and it rather quickly becomes a joke for everyone who doesn't take to that word as that of Gospel or religious nonsense.

Very dumb read, and unfortunately this is a rare book that I did spend the money on. I'll be trying to sell it, but I won't try and trick Goodreads; don't bother with this one, whether you're a fan of Murdoch's band or not.

Sarah Paulini says

It seemed that Murdoch, or Murdy, is my best friend and we talked about music, films and books and life in general. I loved this book so much!

Libros Prohibidos says

A los que os pueda interesar este libro, por ser fans de Belle & Sebastian, ya os lo habréis comprado y leído. Los demás no os perdéis mucho. Al menos yo no he encontrado mucho. Reseña completa:
<http://www.libros-prohibidos.com/stuaa...>

Melissa says

I loved this. In some ways, it was like living inside a Belle & Sebastian song in prose form for 334 pages. Stuart Murdoch is as gifted with prose as he is with lyrics, and these diary entries, originally a blog, are a pleasure to read (or re-read if you read them when they first appeared online). There is some fun insight into the band, but mostly reading this is like hanging out with a cool, articulate, and thoughtful friend in one of the cafes that are ubiquitous throughout. I was sorry when it was over. Topics range from God to tea, to music, to laundry, and everything else in between, but even the mundane is never dull. Recommended especially for B&S fans, but I don't think that's necessarily a requirement for enjoying this.

cris says

Lo he disfrutado mucho, pero supongo que solo se lo recomendaría a los que ya son fans.

Wil says

An interesting insight in to B&S, touring and the the indie scene - did lose some patience with his fey life tho'.

Estefania says

I

Javier Villaseñor says

Stuart Murdoch should put his songwriting skills aside (for a while) and start pursuing a writing career! This diary that spans between September 10, 2002, and August 20, 2006, is just as beautifully written and lingering as a B&S song.

I've read it and reread certain entries since; picked at random and just for the hell of it. It feels as if I'm sitting down in a small café, and Stuart is talking about him: his favourite music, books, and selfless, shallow thoughts that span lengths of any given subject. And, as well, a requiem for Glasgow and its rainy streets, its people and the daily life of a city of stone.

Each thought is as changing and moving as one book may be, written out by one bright mind within the heart of the superfluous and ever-changing indie scene.

Rue Kinsman says

maybe I've been reading too many pretentious European writers at the moment, but I think Murdoch should stick to songwriting. I've heard along the lines that this book was originally a series of blog posts and frankly it should have stayed that way. I was excited by the idea of a philosophical, slightly geeky and awkward insight into this talented musician's mind but the book was just drab and boring. I could barely finish. The author is vague and the wittiness advertised in the blurb on my copy is fairly non-existent. Overall disappointing seeing as I enjoyed the first section. I just don't really need to be reading about a personal opinion on Lou Reed's mullet.
