

Woods

"The distance between 2007's *At Rear House* and 2010's *At Echo Lake* may at first seem only semantic, but it more properly represents a move from a kind of informal back porch jam ethos to a fully-committed vision of the infinite possibilities of group playing.

"Over the past few years, Woods has established themselves as an anomaly in a world of freaks. They were an odd proposition even in the outre company of vocalist / guitarist / label owner Jeremy Earl's Woodsist roster, perpetually out of time, committed to songsmanship in an age of noise, drone and improvisation, to extended soloing, oblique instrumentals and the usurping use of tapes and F/X in an age of dead-end singer-songwriters. Recent live shows have seen them best confuse the two, playing beautifully constructed songs torn apart by fuzztone jams and odd electronics.

"*At Echo Lake* feels like a diamond-sharp distillation of the turbulent power of their live shows, in much the same way that The Grateful Dead's "Dark Star" single amplified and engulfed the planetary aspect of their improvised takes. Some of the material here--the opening "Blood Dries Darker," the euphoric "Mornin' Time"--is so lush that lesser brains would've succumbed to the appeal of strings and horns, but *At Echo Lake* is more Fifth Dimension than Notorious Byrd Brothers, nowhere more so than on "From the Horn," a track as beautiful in its assault on form as "Eight Miles High" or Swell Maps' "Midget Submarines." But despite the instrumental innovation the album heralds--G. Lucas Cranes' psychedelic tape work on "Suffering Season," guest musician Matthew Valentine's harmonica and modified banjo / sitar on "Time Fading Lines"--*At Echo Lake* is all about the vocals. Woods' secret weapon is the quality of Earl's voice, absorbing the naive style of Jad Fair, Jonathan Richman and Neil Young while rethinking it as a discipline and a tradition. Here he is singing at the peak of his powers, in a high soulful style bolstered by heavenly arrangements of backing vocals.

"*At Echo Lake* feels like the transmission point for teenage garage from the past to the future. Deformed by contemporary experiments, bolstered by magical traditions, it's the sound of now, right here, *At Echo Lake*."

--David Keenan, Glasgow, March 2010