

# INSIDE TRACKS



Poetic Champions Compose  
Van Morrison

Why bother? After more than two decades on the musical scene, Van Morrison is a known quantity. If you're already a fan, this quietly passionate -- albeit minor -- album certainly won't change your mind. If you're not a fan, nothing short of a miracle (i.e. a hit single) would convince you to take a chance.

But that's OK. There's a certain bond between an artist like Van Morrison and his small but loyal group of fans; a bond that other important artists like Bruce Springsteen and Prince can't offer. That bond is intimacy.

Van Morrison is *ours*. His music is rarely played on the radio, he doesn't make the cover of *Rolling Stone* and it's doubtful that little kids will be walking down the street humming the tune to "Alan Watts Blues" or "Give Me My Rapture." Critics sing his praises, but their words fall on deaf ears.

In a way, that makes us happy. It may be selfish, but his music is all the sweeter because we are the only ones who hear it. Like the lucky few granted an audience with the king, we feel privileged. The fact that anyone can attend is beside the point -- we are the only ones smart enough to search him out.

This intimacy, this bond, is strengthened by the thoughtful meditations on *Poetic Champions Compose*. As usual, he is trying to make spiritual -- and earthly -- connections. But Van Morrison seems more content -- less wracked with doubt and confusion than before.

Always a few steps ahead of his musical contemporaries, he now seems at peace; still asking questions, but confident he's learned some of the answers. It's as if Van Morrison has come back down the path to tell us about the wonderful things just around the corner.

On "The Mystery" he sings, "You've got to open up your arms / To the sun / You know you've got so many charms / It's just begun / Trust what I say and do what you're told / And surely all your dirt will turn into gold."

After some moments of happiness ("Queen of the Slipstream") and painful asides ("Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child"), he tells us again in "Did Ye Get Healed?": "When I begin to realize / It manifest in my life / In Oh so many ways / Every day I wanna talk about it / And walk about it / Every day I wanna be closer."

This is a straightforward, uncomplicated record; a simple moment of calm in a frequently brilliant career. Though there are tinges of reggae and soul, the album takes comfort and strength from the fluid jazz settings that predominate -- especially the marvelous and haunting instrumentals that frame it.

On *Poetic Champions Compose*, Van Morrison is singing about faith, singing about love, singing about life. And he is singing to me.

By Michael Giltz