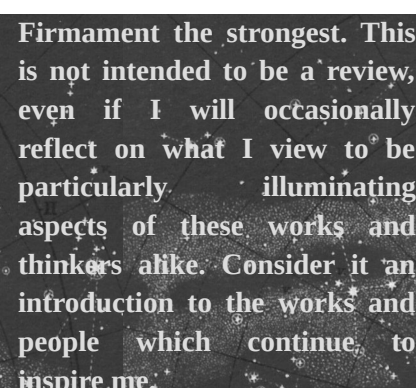
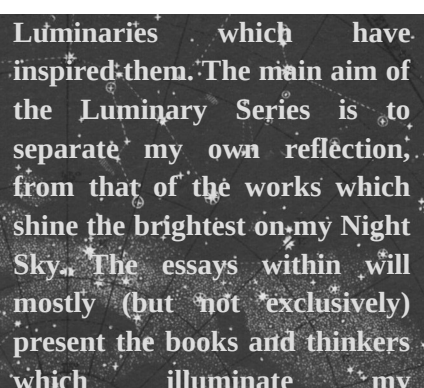
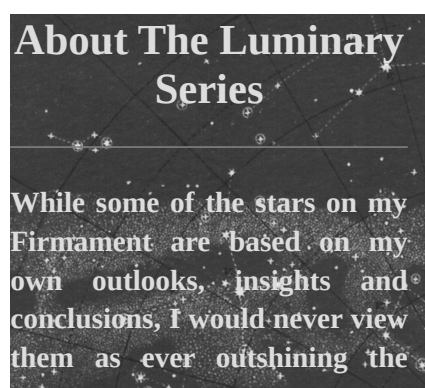


# Don't Count The Feathers, Just Count The Wings

Dan Mangan – Oh Fortune (2011)

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A couple of years ago I awoke in the middle of the night hearing a very vivid musical motif in my head. This was during the Covid-19 pandemic and the state of the world, along with impending exams must've kept me restless that particular winter night. I had recently moved out, and lived in the family's cabin that year so I had the house for myself.

Suddenly awake, I couldn't resist picking up my bass to try to actualize whatever music that had made me so restless, and suddenly, I played a bassline I had wanted to learn for years. What emerged was the quiet waltz that is the song "About as Helpful as you could be without being no help at all" by Dan Mangan, opening with the ever thought provoking lines:

*"Both feet together,  
slowly progressing.  
Always in time,  
Don't count the Feathers,  
Just Count the Wings"*

It was the opening track to his 2011 album, "Oh Fortune". This is my review of that album, an album which has lived alongside me for almost a decade.

## Polaroids, Postcards and Daydreams<sup>1</sup>

I discovered Dan Mangan on a train a few years prior to the events in that summer house. *Oh Fortune* came into a fragile and sensitive, yet

<sup>1</sup> *Postcards and Daydreams* is funnily enough the title of Mangan's 2005 debut album, a record I funnily enough have yet to listen to.

magical time of my life. I was nineteen and completely absorbed into a new found love for art and music. Oh Fortune introduced itself to me at the same time as that Polaroid camera I still use occasionally, and in this aspect these two are in many ways intertwined.

Both these things share a dreamy quality which has been the greatest source of inspiration to what I am compelled to create almost a decade later, and despite there's much that happens between the ages of 19 and 27, both these things are never too far away.

Oh Fortune is a beautiful, but not necessarily happy record. It largely consists of a the kind of sensitive ballads which Dan Mangan excels at. This over all slow record is heightened by the use of distorted elements, often looped and mixed in with swelling orchestral arrangements to complement the core of Mangan's voice and acoustic guitar.

I tend to listen to it mostly during the blooming of spring. It adds an interesting contrast to the emerging fragile beauty of spring, with its largely anxious and mortal focal points. *Oh Fortune* is overtly talking about death in a way that might make it more suitable as an autumn record, but somehow it is the most impactful to me during springtime. I like to attribute my inclination to experience this record during spring is due to the passing of a relative as well as a dear friend in the time of bloom, and how listening to Oh Fortune during that time of year is a way of healing, as the album opens up a for me uniquely effective space for both contemplation and grief.

I'd say the record peaks just before its titular track *Oh Fortune*, where a lingering suite, masterfully composed with additions of

distorted loops and orchestral arrangements belong to some of Mangan's most impactful work, at least for me. I think the reason why I think the record really reaches a climax right before this track, is because find myself always exhausted by the very engaging intensity of the preceding suite between the tracks '*If I am Dead*' and '*Stats With Them, Ends With Us*'. To me, it is impossible not to get immersed in Mangan's masterful songwriting in this particular part of the album and the exhaustion on my part is by no means a criticism, rather a shortcoming on my end for leaning in 110% in this first half of the album.

When I'm able, I listen to this album through, and most times when I really lean in, I only find my footing again around the closing track '*Jeopardy*', which neatly ties together the experience with a somewhat more harmonious and joyful arrangement, providing much needed closure to the journey you've embarked on in Mangan's beautiful musical world, where the overt sorrow, doubt and grief grants you permission to lean in and feel the same.

As I've grown, this album still feels as potent. I think that as I've aged, the lyrical and musical contents of this album have provided canvases for the various sorrows, doubts and grief I've experienced throughout my own life. The passages that really tug at my heartstrings keep conveying new meanings as the years pass, and provide anchors for those feelings which are sometimes hard to access as you go about your everyday life. To reiterate a previous point, this is not a happy record, but that still doesn't stop it from fully conveying Mangan's own joie de vivre. To me, this is by far the most impactful of Mangan's albums, and i would even go as far as claiming it is one of my favourite records, full stop.

Paradoxically, I find this emotionally taxing experience quite soothing when applicable, much like that one book you read when the mood is right. I think it is much because it provides a space to feel the things I might otherwise find difficult to bring forth all by myself, and I think that is a reason why this album has had such a lasting presence in my life. Not necessarily because I've listened to it all the time (though to be fair, I find myself singing passages from "*About As Helpful As Being No Help At All*" and "*Jeopardy*" every now and then), but it nonetheless sticks.

The ground that this album covers provides, at least for me, something akin to the warm embrace of a hug where I am able to cry to the feelings which sometimes might be hard directly to access. I haven't cried much to this particular album, but it definitely opens a door to that realm for a little while. At this point I maybe listen to this album a few times a year, but it always feels like coming home to an old friend, as I am so acquainted with the album's

dramaturgical flow, that I can fully commit to the experience at hand.

Thus, this record really brings you on for a ride and sometimes, it might feel a little gloomy. For this reason, find it preferable to be able to enjoy the entire experience in one sitting, not to leave the conclusion hanging, as it masterfully strikes resonant chords on your heartstrings, yet holds your hand the entire way. To me this album is the closest to a literary experience in music form, and much like a really great novel, this album's various moments really add up to something greater than the sum of its parts. But much like that novel you love, experiencing *Oh Fortune* should be done only when the time feels right, as it might not reach in deep if you aren't willing to commit to the journey you're taken on. And what a journey it is

Stockholm, Sweden  
May 3rd, 2025

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## ***Further Listening***<sup>2</sup>

Dan Mangan, *Oh Fortune*, Arts & Crafts, 2011 (url: <https://shop.arts-crafts.ca/products/danmangan-ohfortune?variant=14389862465636>)

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<sup>2</sup> Last time I checked, the album was available on streaming services such as Spotify