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DAVID BAERWALD

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BIOGRAPHY

TRIAGE, David Baerwald's second solo record for A&M, begins where the last record, **BEDTIME STORIES,** left off. Literally. The first track, *"A Secret Silken World,"* a tragicomic ballad of "sex and submission, of vodka and handcuffs and acts of contrition," was left of **BEDTIME STORIES** when a friend suggested that it was too dark and sordid.

Now, however, with the release of **TRIAGE**, it is clear that nothing is too dark for David Baerwald's compassionate but uncompromising songwriters eye. **TRIAGE** is a schizophrenic journey to the center of the squalid and the sublime, a record where Baerwald extends his musical reach to include chaotic funk and addled existential blues as well as heartrending folk ballads and soulful pop songs. All are well within his grasp. If **BEDTIME STORIES** was a series of Raymond Carver sketches of Raymond Chandler scenes, then **TRIAGE** suggests the voluptous poetry of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's magical realism, occasionally filtered through Hunter S. Thompson hallucinations.

Produced by Bill Bottrell (who was behind the board for Wire Train's NO SOUL NO STRAIN and has produced records by Madonna and Michael Jackson), and co-produced by Baerwald who plays most of the instruments as well (though Herb Alpert blows his anguished horn on *"A Secret Silken World"*) **TRIAGE** lays David Baerwald's musical identity completely bare. Loose and noisy without skimpting on songcraft, it is something of a departure from Baerwald's previous collaborations: the Larry Klein-produced **BEDTIME STORIES**, recently mentioned by Bruce Springsteen as one of his favorite records, and the partnership with David Ricketts that resulted in the now- classic **BOOMTOWN.** Past comparisons to people like Randy Newman, Warren Zevon, Joni Mitchell and the Band are still accurate, but bluesy garage bands, Captain Beefheart and Consoli- dated are also evoked here.

"Basically, it reached the point where I was fed up with the professionalism," Baerwald explains. "I needed to learn about order and structure and all that stuff and I did, so now I can throw it away. Professionalism seems like a manipulation, it seems dishonest and irrelevant to what I'm writing about."

What he is writing about is the impoverished and horrifying modern world, a world where power leads to immortality and criminality. The poor and powerless are oppressed at every turn, there is gunfire on every street corner, and,if you believe in conspiracy theories, problems like AIDS, drugs and violence are condoned and perhaps even caused by those in power.

The album's title refers to the idea that "you keep what you can afford to keep and throw away what you can't, emotionally or financially," Baerwald says. Originally a medical term, the world is now being used in reference to United States policy on Africa, Central America and our own inner cities. "It's an important word, a word that not enough people get the meaning of, although it's certainly very common in the State Department."

"You start thinking about all this stuff and you go 'oh my God,' and you start looking at the world around you and there are choppers over your head and people shooting all the time and there's

so much rage and fear and suffering everywhere," Baerwald continues. "You just end up questioning the foundation, there's a hole in you because you're surrounded by all this rah-rah boyscout bullshit, yet you feel that there's something not being said in all this. So you start looking around and try to deprogram yourself and get the real story, if for no other reason than your own sanity."

"The Got No Shotgun Hydrahead Octopus Blues" makes allusions to the government's cozy relationship with drug dealers, while *"The Postman"* contrasts the tranquility of a lullaby with the realities that keep one awake at night, hanging on to its lovely calm as a jumble of samples and sound effects, including the voices of Jim Jones, George Bush and Leo Ryan aid Joe Holzinger's 1979 testimony before Congress that, "Jonestown was a CIA mind-control experiment" to take over the mix. "The first thing you hear is Jones, and then Bush in Congress, when they were celebrating the victory in the Gulf and they sounded like a bloodthirsty cult," Baerwald says. *Even the new world order cannot guarantee an era of perpetual peace ,* President Bush informs us.

"Nobody," a first-person account of a policeman struggling to survive his terrifying urban beat, sets Baerwald's laconic *vox noir* amid a dischordant symphony of molten rhythms, machine gun guitar and cop-radio static. "What I didn't expect was seeing children lying dead...and everywhere I goI hear somebody say these drugs are brought in by the CIA. So who am I working for?" Baerwald growls. The song was written when Baerwald, not a man with an inherent trust of authority figures, spent some time with al LAPD gang squad and got a taste of their fearful best intentions.

For all the pain and corruption that **TRIAGE** portrays, there is also levity. *"AIDS and Armageddon"* is Baerwald's self-mocking paean to his obsessions, while *"The Waiter"* best described as an "identity crisis of the absurd," is **TRIAGE**'s wildest track, a perfect example of the musical chances Baerwald takes with this album. "I've never been able to tell the difference between music forms anyway, so the idea was not to be doctrinaire about it," Baerwald says. "You just let things be what they were going to be, and if you're mixing hip-op with Mozart or Captain Beefheart with James Taylor, it's okay, as long as nothing gets in the way of the physical sensation of the music, something that makes your hands sweat or the hair on the back of your neck stand up."

To capture the manic personal of the song's title character Baerwald and Bottrell went crazy in the studio. They recorded with a Cal-Tech designed laboratory microphone originally intended for measuring rhe resonant frequency of the earth and used an assortment of power tools as a rhythm track to which Baerwald added a tango-style acoustic guitar and a processed sample of late 19th century composer (and obscure relative) Franz Baerwald's symphony in A-minor. The moment of peace Baerwald finds on *"China Lake"* – "here it's only quiet, no hurricanes or riots"-suggests the beautiful poetry of Baerwald's voice is reason enough to survive these "strange uncertain days." And **TRIAGE**'s closing number, *"Born For Love ,"* offers up the best reason of all.

"There's certain inevitable things, like death, and you fill the time between birth and death as best you can," Baerwald says. "I can't think of a better thing to fill that time with than love."

And making music, of course. **TRIAGE** is both compassionate and outraged, conscientious and also stream-of-consciousness. It's Baerwald's way of fighting the good fight. "Conscience, duty, responsibility, these are all things that are out of fashion, we have somehow come to believe that we are about compassion," he says, "and I think that's one of the problems. You have to try to do what you can. And fight like hell."

"Oddly enough, I actually have a pretty nice life," Baerwald admits. "I'm madly in love, I like my job and blah, blah, blah. But I've been really curious my whole life, I find myself walking in a lot of dark alleys with a lot of strange people, and curiosity can kill the cat. But it's okay...I wouldn't have it any other way."