

Q: Jeff?

JT: Yes?

Q: It's Marc Allan in Indianapolis.

How you doing?

JT: Pretty good, how are you?

Q: Good, good.

Having a busy day?

JT: Yeah, sorry.

Q: No, that's okay, it's not a problem.

I'm sitting here doing other things, so.

It's tough to be in demand, huh?

JT: All right.

(laughing)

Just I don't get over here
very often, to the office, so.

When I get over here,
there's lots of stuff to do.

Q: Yeah I guess like every
other critic in the world,

I'll tell you I really enjoy this record,

I think it's terrific.

JT: Oh thanks.

Q: And I was thinking that
the title is too short

and maybe that if you had a longer title,

you would've called it,

"Being There Would Be Infinitely
Preferable to Being Here."

(laughing)

JT: Sure.

Q: Yeah (laughs).

And that's sort of the message
of the record, isn't it?

JT: Um, I don't know if there's
a specific point or message.

I think we might of had one in mind,

when we were still thinking
about making it a single CD.

But it felt better to
have it kind of clouded up

by the whole double thing.

So I don't know.

Q: I want to ask you
about some of the songs

and then King Pin really struck me a lot

and especially the rhyme
of Dimetapp and spinal tap.

(laughing)

And I figured that's

another thing that's sort of prevalent.

That you're kind of
balancing the child thing

and the rockstar thing, aren't you?

JT: (laughs) Kind of, yeah.

It was a little easier making the record,

because we made it in Chicago.

But now that we're touring a lot,

it's a little harder, you know, but.

I feel bad I'm gone as much as I am now.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

How old's your little boy?

JT: He's just a little over a year now.

Q: Oh that's great.

Yeah, so just starting to walk
and all that and all that?

JT: Yep, he's starting to walk
and talk and getting his teeth

and it's hilarious.

Q: Yeah, that is a good age, yeah.

Are a lot of these songs, I mean,
were you thinking about your son
and the prospects of leaving him
when you were writing?

JT: I was thinking about
the prospect of being a dad,

actually, when I wrote a lot of materials

before he was born,

you know?

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: And then a little bit,
while the record was recorded

right after he was born.

So, yeah it was definitely
on my mind, you know,

how to spend a lot of
time, a lot of years,

thinking about one thing,
particularly, kind of

mono manically directing
all my energy towards music

and just wondering if that was gonna be

a really horrible thing for,

I'd be able to switch gears enough

to be a good dad, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

And have you?

JT: I think so.

I mean it's kind of ironic.

I felt good about it and
kind of came to terms with it

in a lot of ways, making
the record and now it's

I'm back in the middle of it again,

because I have no choice.

I'm like out on the road
and it's really hard

to just think about
anything else, you know?

Q: Yeah.

JT: I miss him terribly,

but it's like, you're so
immersed in it, you know,

I tend to stress out about
it the same way I used to,

you know, just like, I
like playing music a lot,

but where I stress out about it

is just wanting to get better

and you know, and things like that.

It's really unimportant.

Q: Yeah, are you so far,

the kind of dad you thought you'd be?

JT: Yeah, I think, you know, we're really,

I mean, when I'm home, I'm
home 24 hours a day, generally,

and we like, I think
we've bonded quite a bit,

compared to a lot of
dads in the first year.

Been kind of a house dad and did all

the feeding and changing
diapers and things like that,

that I know my dad never did, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative) (laughs).

Yeah.

Well dads are different these days.

JT: That's for sure.

Q: Yeah, also in King Pin, are you saying,

living in Pekin?

JT: Pekin, Illinois, yeah.

Q: Yeah, that's what I thought.

And I thought, "God that's
a strange thing to say."

(laughing)

Have you (laughs) have you been to Pekin?

JT: Uh no, I've never been to Pekin.

(laughing)

But I just kind of

pictured it you know,
just um, I don't know.

I think the idea was,
it'd be great to be like

a big fish in a small pond.

Q: Yeah, that's not the small
pond you wanna be in though.

I (laughs) think,
JT: No, probably not.

Q: I think that's a real
polluted gene pool there, myself.

I've lived and worked in
Springfield for a couple years

and have a good friend who lives in Peoria

and so I've been through
Pekin a few times.

JT: Yeah.

Q: And uh, yikes (laughs).

JTL Well, anyway, maybe
I should've gone there.

Q: (laughs) That's okay, it's like,

JT: I've never been to
New Madrid either, so.

Q: Yeah (laughs), right, okay.

On Out of Mind, how hard was,
that which has an obvious

Beach Boy sound, how hard
was it to create that sound?

Was it as complex as
everybody says that it was

for the Beach Boys?

JT: Well I don't think it sounds

as good as the Beach Boys, for one thing.

No, it wasn't.

It was a lot of fun, you
know, luckily we had access

to that real echo chambers

and we had access to several pianos.

So it's like, and I think
it's a lot easier for

to do that now, because,
you know 24 track recording

isn't really what they had to work with.

I know Phil Spector recorded
the Wall of Sound stuff,

which you know, obviously
is the main influence

on those Beach Boy recordings.

It was all of the
musicians like 20 of them,

in a single room and it was recording on

four track or eight track.

And that's why it sounds better, you know?

That's why it is the wall of sound.

We kind of made a partition of sound.

(laughing)

Q: How did you do it,
I mean was it routine,

or is it something different
or special that you did?

JT: Um, I mean, we just,
honestly most of the recording,

we were just having a good
time and we'd do a song a day

and that song took us a day to do.

We set up in the morning with,
tracked it with two pianos,

acoustic guitar and
drums for the basic track

and then we added two more pianos.

Then I think there's six piano tracks,

two clavinet tracks, two bass tracks,

kettle drums and then two sets of drums.

We just kept playing through
it with different set ups

and piling stuff on top
of the original take

and then we went and all sang
in the bathroom, you know?

(laughing)

I mean if you listen to
it, it's pretty loose.

It's a pretty loose
thing, you know, overall.

I mean we just thought
it was fun, you know,

it sounded fun, we were matching it up

against Be My Baby and every
time we put Be My Baby on,

we'd go, "Oh well we got
like 75% of it right, maybe."

(laughing)

You know, unfortunately, I
can't sing like Ronnie Spector,

you know?

Q: Right.

JT: That would've made
it probably a lot better.

Q: Yeah, probably you know
you say that about being loose

and the whole record feels loose, I mean,

the thing that I like about it so much is,

aside from changing styles,
it just has the kind of

we're gonna go in and make
the kind of record we want

and we're not gonna worry about

fashion, or what's popular,
or anything like that.

We'll just go in and
record the kind of songs

we want to record.

JT: Well, yeah I mean I think,

God, it's just so much easier that way.

It just shouldn't be so hard (laughs)

I don't think it should be so hard.

I mean it's really easy to think,

"Wow this is really important
record for us career wise,

"or you know all those things."

And I just, I can't take
that kind of pressure.

Like have a lot more
fun just thinking we're,

I mean looking at the
reality of it, you know?

We get to make a record,
might as well enjoy it

while it's happening and do things

that we've never gotten to do before,

or take advantage of the fact

that we have some money to
spend on the production of this.

So let's just go ahead and
rent the god damn congas

if we want them, you know?
(laughing)

Q: Yeah, but that, was
that always your attitude

toward recording and the business?

JT: No in the past, I've
always felt like it's best

to like just try and
collect moments on tape

and kind of overwhelmed
by the possibilities

that a studio presents to you.

So I always in the past, like
definitely always felt like

it should be loose and
like a kind of a document

of the time and place and the
songs you have at the time.

But, in the past, that whole like I think,

the methodology was more
to just play it live,

to eliminate all those possibilities

and hopefully get like a solid performance

that doesn't need anything else.

And very rarely, when we
do overdubs in the past,

just because we wanted to keep it pure.

This time around, it just,
certainly bored with doing that

and it's like, "Well, I don't
care how pretentious it is,

"or how stupid any of this stuff is,

"it's pretentious to make a record.

"It's pretentious to be in a rock band.

"You might as well revel in it, you know?"

(laughing)

Q: Did you think about
trying to re-create it live

and can you re-create it
live, or do you care to

re-create it live?

JT: No I don't care

to recreate it live.

I mean we play the songs live

and they hopefully come across,

but they come across in a
different way, you know.

If we went to make the record tomorrow,

with the same songs, I'm
sure that a lot of them

would be completely different.

I mean we tracked different versions

of a lot of those songs
that had nothing in common

with the way the ones, the
versions that are on the record.

Just like, I think the
idea is to get to a point,

as a musician, not like
really thinking about

being a virtuoso or anything,

but just where you're
comfortable like knowing

what the song is and then adapting

to how everybody feels at the time

and like what the environment's like,

or adapting to like an
audience is the same thing.

Certain songs will have more of an edge

than the record some nights.

Some nights, it might
just be kind of lethargic,

because of fatigue, but hopefully always

like just an honest representation
of what you're doing

and thinking about at the time, you know?

Q: Yeah, did you save the alternate takes

for the future box set?

JT: That's for the next record, actually,

(laughing)
is the box set.

Q: (laughs) okay (laughs) that'd be great.

JT: Box set of all of
original material, though.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

(laughs) Okay.

You know, there's so many comparisons made

between this and other records

and the one that I haven't read

that really jumps out to me I think,

is several of these songs
remind me of Muswell Hillbillies

by the Kinks.

Is that a record you know and?

JT: I love that record.

Q: Okay.

JT: That's like one of

my favorite records of all time.

Q: (laughs) Okay.

JT: Not very many people

know about that record,

because I mean when I think
of the Kinks they think,

you know, like the early 60s,

You Really Got Me and all that stuff.

But that's like my favorite
period of the Kinks,

like Everybody's A Star,
Muswell Hillbillies.

Q: Lola Versus ...

JT: What's that?

Q: The album, what is it,
Lola Versus the Power Man,

or whatever it's called.

JT: Right.

Q: Yeah.

JT: And like that period

when he was like kind of
getting into American styles,

but at the same time, writing
these really poncy lyrics.

(laughing)

You know, being a rockstar.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

JT: You know?

Q: Yeah, so.

JT: Like a, I'm sorry,
Sitting in My Hotel on a,

you know that song?

Q: Um.

JT: It's on Everybody's A Star.

Q: Haven't heard it in a long time.

JT: I haven't heard it in a while either,

but I did the other
day and I realized that

I probably ripped off the
idea behind that song.

(laughing)

And like maybe in 13 different instances

on my tracks.

(laughing)

Q: When you sing It's
the End of the Century,

just those words and on
Was I In Your Dreams,

you sound like Ray Davies
too, I think. You know?

JT: Well that's like the
ultimate flattery to me.

I think Ray Davies is a
pretty underappreciated

like songwriter and the Kinks

are a pretty underappreciated band

in the grand scheme of things, you know,

I don't think they've ever
really got their due, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yeah, oh I agree with you completely.

JT: Same with like Mott the Hoople too.

There's a lot of English bands that

since everybody seems
to focus on Gram Parsons

and Neil Young and all that stuff with us,

I always find it really weird that,

it just makes me think that

nobody has paid that much attention

to the bands that really are

probably more operative in
describing Wilco, you know?

Q: Yeah I would not have picked them up,

but I mean the Kinks, I just like thought

were pretty obvious, but then again,

you know, I've said that to people

and they're like, "I
don't know that record."

You grew up in Belleville, right?

JT: Yeah.

Q: I mean how do you know
that record?

Did it make, and it's
weird, that things like that

didn't seem to make a huge
impact in the midwest.

JT: Well I mean, it might
not be like every kid in the,

you know, I don't know.

Records aren't like they used to be.

As with the CD thing,
God, damn near the history

of recorded music is
available to anybody anywhere.

And it's just a matter of
being interested in it.

I've been interested
in it for a long time,

since like buying
ridiculous amounts of music,

to try and find stuff that
keeps me going, you know.

At some point and time,
I don't remember when,

the Kinks thing happened for me

and I'm not, I always feel
like I should try and find

everything that you can buy something that

really inspires you that way

and Muswell Hillbillies record

really jumped out at me, you know?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

No, that's great, because
like I grew up in New York

and have lived in
Indianapolis for nine years

and when I talk about
bands like the Kinks,

I get a lot of blank stares
from people, you know?

JT: Yeah.

Q: And living in

Springfield the same thing, you know,

just people come over and see my records

and I'd have all this stuff

that they've never seen
or heard of before.

JT: Uh-huh.

Q: Which is unusual, so.

JT: Well I mean you can't find it all, that's the best thing.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Red Eyed Blue, that song reminds me of something

and it's just not coming to me.

Is there a particular influence on there, I mean,

especially early on in that song, the verses?

JT: The chord progression initially, kind of

it sounds like an Eddie Money song.

Q: (laughs) No, that's not it (laughs).

I wasn't thinking of that.

JT: Oh.

No, not really.

I mean that was like one of the songs

we were just playing, you know?

Just trying to like, well we liked it really

with really sparse at the top like that

and so it was one of the kind of song,

where we really felt like

we could make it into

a full band kind of thing.

So, just kind of created
it's own little universe,

I don't know how, but I
wasn't really thinking of

anything specific.

On most of this stuff, really,
it was more like later,

recognizing that that sounds like this

or that sounds like that.

The only song to really set out

to make it sound like something,

was the second version of Out of Sight,

or Out of Mind.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

The two discs idea, I
just think that that was

an absolutely brilliant
idea, because you could like,

I think I've read where you said,

"Well we could've cut one song off of it,

"to fit this on one disc."

But it's impossible to listen to

JT: It's not good for you, no.

It's like, at some point
during a 70-minute listen,

you're gonna start thinking
about all the things

that you gotta be doing.

(laughing)

You know and that's what
was great about records,

you know, like 15, 20 minutes on a side

and then you either
listen to the other side,

or you get back to it in a couple days

and you know where you left off, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: With CDs, if you
listen to the first half,

you never really go to a
middle of a CD and start

like listening to the
second set, you know,

it's like you get to
make two sets out of it.

And with doing two CDs,
we kind of got to do that,

because it's more tolerable

to listen to 35 minutes

and then 40 minutes, in a sitting.

Q: Yeah.

Did the, how did that go
over, the record company

okay with that and does it cost a lot more

to do it that way?

JT: Well no, it doesn't
cost that much more.

CDs are really cheap to manufacture,

but we did a couple, I mean
that was the only thing

we really had to debate was
like how to make it cheap.

We like the cardboard
packaging, surprisingly enough,

was cheaper to do and we
did, we took a royalty cut,

so we could make it cheaper.

Q: Oh well that was nice of you.

JT: (laughs) Well it's
percentage and nothing,

so it's just like.

Q: (laughs) Oh really, you're that,

you're expecting that to do that well?

JT: Yeah (laughs).

Q: A percentage of nothing, that's great.

There's obviously a lot of
talk and a lot of things

have been written about this band

and alternative country
and did you deliberately

try to get away from that on this record?

JT: Um, I'd be lying to say
that we didn't talk about it

a little bit, but more than
trying to get away from it,

we were just, we never
really saw ourselves as that.

You know, we never really thought that,

that was the goal, or
the idea behind the band,

you know, was to be part
of a country rock thing.

You know, we felt like, we
just didn't wanna be afraid of,

I don't know how to put it.

We just wanted into it saying,
more than we really wanna

get away from this, we were just saying,

we really wanna like not think about that

and do things that we feel are honest

to what we really like, you know?

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yeah, because I mean alternative country

it sounds cool, but from what I can see,

it's not like, the hugest movement around.

Plus, you really don't sound very country,

or alternative really.

JT: Yeah I think it would
have really killed us

and killed like the whole
idea for us and like

and maybe it would've been
really easy for us in a way,

to go in and make a pretty
straightforward record,

that just had like those
kind of songs on it.

Like, Forget the Flowers and you know,

whatever had a country element to it.

I think we could've made a record,

even off just the stuff
on the double record,

we could've probably
put something together

that fit into whatever
idea they're trying to

proliferate as being a movement, you know?

Q: Yeah.

JT: But it wouldn't have been

very satisfying for us.

Q: Yeah, besides, being
part of a movement.

I don't think that pays off very well.

I mean I know that's not
what you're looking for,

but it's like, you know,
movements are nice,

but they die out and then
you gotta find your way back

into the kind of public
consciousness again.

JT: I've always just admired bands

that were bands, you know?

Q: Right.

JT: That, yeah.

I mean if, you know, on
a totally different level

than just making the record,

Wilco is definitely trying
to distance ourselves

from the whole notion

that we're poster kids

for some alternative country
rock movement, you know?

Q: (laughs) Yeah.

JT: That's ridiculous.

Who needs that?

Q: (laughs) Exactly.

Two other things if I
can and I'll let you go.

Do you have any relationship with
your ex-band mate in Son Volt?

JT: Mike?

(laughing)

Sure, I talk to Mike occasionally.

Q: (laughs) That wasn't
the person I meant,

but okay (laughs).

But not the other one, huh?

JT: I don't talk to Jay very often, no.

Q: Oh okay.

And finally, for another
story I've been doing,

I've been asking everybody I interview,

what's the strangest,
funniest, oddest encounter

that you've had with a fan?

JT: Oh, there's been
pretty many bizarre ones.

Um...

Ah, let me think.

I don't know (laughs).

Let's see.

Um...

I've had a lot of weird
ones that kind of relate

to Uncle Tupelo since
Wilco started, you know?

Q: Okay.

JT: I don't know how
interesting that would be

for your article.

Q: Oh, I don't know.

Go ahead and tell me one.

JT: I had this woman come
up to me after a show

and she had the Wilco CD
and she asked me to sign it

and I signed it and she asked me

if I could get everybody else to sign it.

Everybody after a show is
generally, all over the place,

you know, at the bar, you
know, in the van or the bus.

So I like, "Um, okay."

And I went and tracked everybody down

to sign this woman's CD.

This isn't very exciting.

Q: No, go ahead.

JT: Had it all signed up
and I brought it back to her

and I handed it to her and she goes,

"You know, I really liked Uncle Tupelo

"a lot better than Wilco."

(laughing)

And I said, "Fuck you, give me that back.

"I'm gonna give you one
that's not signed, you know?"

(laughing)

What's the point?

"I really liked what you
were wearing yesterday,

"a whole lot more than
whatever you're wearing today."

Q: I really liked you
before you opened your mouth (laughs).

Yeah (laughs).

I really liked you before
you said something so stupid.

JT: (laughs) Yeah.

Q: That's perfect.

That's just incredible.

That is just incredible.

JT: Oh and then there's some other people,

like fans came up after
that and I was like,

still flabbergasted.

So I told them the whole story.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: And one of them said,
"Oh you must get that a lot."

(laughing)

I said, "You know what?

"You can all go to hell.

"Leave me alone."

Q: Well, I'll tell you the exact opposite.

I like Wilco a hell of a lot better

than Uncle Tupelo, so (laughs).

JT: Me too, man, I don't understand it.

(laughing)

No, I'm like happy with Uncle Tupelo,

I'm happy people remember
it and all that stuff.

But you know, it's like,
you always wanna feel like

your best stuff is ahead of you,

or like, you know, it's
just and more in the moment

than worrying about that.

I had a similar experience
in Oslo recently.

We were playing and people get totally

out of their mind drunk
when you play in Norway.

There was just kind of,
sort of upwardly mobile

looking little middle aged man,

looked like he might have been
a rock critic, I don't know.

(laughing)

Standing there and we're playing

and he yelled for Sunken Treasure.

So we played it.

And he yelled for the
Lonely One and like, "Okay."

So we played it, you know,
we were doing a lot of songs

and then he yelled for
"Box Full of Letters"

and we did a waltz version of it,

which we've been doing a lot lately,

you know, like a slowed down,

kind of country version
of "Box Full of Letters,"

just to keep ourself interested, you know?

Then we went off and came back on

and before I could get on the stage,

he stopped me and wanted
me to sign his CD.

(laughing)

I said, "I'm going up to play right now,

"can you wait until we're done?"

And he's like, "No, no, sign now."

(laughing)

So I signed it and he's like, "No, to me.

"My name is,"

I don't know, whatever
his name was like Ven

or something you know?

(laughing)

But I was like, "No, I'm
sorry, I just signed my name,

"that's as good as it can get right now.

"We're like, everybody else
is on stage waiting for me."

So we go up and we start
playing some more songs

and we're in the middle of a song

and he walks up to the front of the stage,

it's just like a restaurant, really small,

really low stage and he
comes up and he goes,

"play Box Full of Letters."

And we're like, "We
played it for you, man.

"We played every one of your requests."

And he was like, "No you did not play it.

"I want an electric Box Full of Letters,

"because my box is only
half full of letters."

(laughing)

Q: Oh man!

JT: He was the most

demanding person I've ever

encountered in my life.

(laughing)

It's like, and most
people would be thrilled

to get like one song played
that they yelled out.

Q: That's for sure, yeah.

(laughing)

JT: So then I sang Will You
Still Love Me Tomorrow? to him,

after I gave him a bunch
of shit from the stage.

(laughing)

I told the whole story right after that,

after that song, on stage.

I'm like, "This guy here (laughs).

"Stand up, show everybody who you are.

"You know him, I mean
I'm sure you've seen him,

"he's been requesting songs all night.

"We've been accommodating
this man all evening.

"He's still not satisfied."

(laughing)

So I sang Will You Still

Love Me Tomorrow? to him

and sat on his lap.

(laughing)

Q: Oh man.

That's good.

JT: He was like, he wouldn't
talk to me afterwards.

(laughing)

which I felt like that
was the desired effect.

(laughing)

Q: That's just great.

(laughing)

Man after all you did for
that guy, that's funny.

That's funny.

Anyway, anything else, oh
there is one other thing

I forgot to ask you.

Your fiddle player left, right?

Do you have somebody else playing?

JT: We don't have a fiddle player,

but we have a guy that's traveling with us

that's playing pedal

steel and some national

and just some you know,
various string stuff,

to kind of create,
actually the pedal steel

helps a lot with the new material,

because it can kind of cover
some of the organ parts

and some of the more droney things

that are happening on the record.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: And Jay switches off
now, between guitar and piano

and organ, so we have
those things live now too.

Q: Uh-huh, okay and the new
guy's traveling with you.

Who is he?

JT: He's Bob, Bob Egan.

Q: Bob Egan.

JT: He used to play

in Freak Water.

Q: Okay, all right.

And anything else you
want me to tell people

that we haven't talked about?

JT: Um...

We wear a size 10 shoes
almost across the board,

if they wanna bring us some shoes.

Q: Okay (laughs).

Do people bring you shoes (laughs)?

JT: No.

Q: (laughs) Okay.

All right.

JT: But I like shoes a lot.

Q: Okay, any particular kind?

Bruno Mali, those?

JT: Yeah, Versace.

(laughing)

Slip ons.

Q: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: You know?

Naw, I'm just kidding.

I actually do have a lot of shoes, but.

No I can't think of anything.

Q: All right, that sounds great.

Listen, I appreciate your time

and I'm looking forward to seeing you,

see you next week.

JT: All right.

Q: Take care.

JT: Thank you, bye.

Q: Bye.