

= His Band and the Street Choir =

His Band and the Street Choir (also referred to as Street Choir) is the fourth studio album by Northern Irish singer @-@ songwriter Van Morrison . It was released on 15 November 1970 by Warner Bros. Records . Originally titled Virgo 's Fool , Street Choir was renamed by Warner Bros. without Morrison 's consent . Recording began in early 1970 with a demo session in a small church in Woodstock , New York . Morrison booked the A & R Studios on 46th Street in New York City in the second quarter of 1970 to produce two sessions of songs that were released on His Band and the Street Choir .

Reviewers praised the music of both sessions for its free , relaxed sound , but the lyrics were considered to be simple compared with those of his previous work . Morrison had intended to record the album a cappella with only vocal backing by a vocal group he called the Street Choir , but the songs released on the album that included the choir also featured a backing band . Morrison was dissatisfied with additional vocalists to the original quintet that made up the choir , and these changes and others have led him to regard Street Choir poorly in later years .

His Band and the Street Choir was as well received as Morrison 's previous album , Moondance , peaking at number 32 on the Billboard 200 and number 18 on the UK Album Chart . It owes its success mainly to the US Top Ten single " Domino " , which was released before the album and surpassed Morrison 's 1967 hit , " Brown Eyed Girl " . As of 2010 , " Domino " remains the most successful single of Morrison 's solo career . Two other singles were released from the album , " Blue Money " and " Call Me Up in Dreamland " ; although less successful , they still managed to reach the Billboard Hot 100 .

= = Production = =

= = = Recording = = =

Recording began with a demo session at a small church in Woodstock , which was not intended to produce any official releases . During its course Morrison worked on leftover material from his previous two albums (Astral Weeks and Moondance) , recorded songs that he had not performed in the studio before (" Crazy Face " and " Give Me a Kiss ") , as well as two instrumentals . Limited recording equipment was used , operated by drummer Dahaud Shaar , who was intending to open a recording studio in Woodstock at the time . Shaar remembered : " I found an old church and we would just load in . I 'd set up a pair of mikes and we would just run down some tracks with the tapes running . They became like a working thing for the album . "

For his new band Morrison brought back three musicians from the Moondance sessions : saxophonist Jack Schroer ; guitarist John Platania and bassist John Klingberg . The backing vocal trio of Emily Houston , Judy Clay and Jackie Verdell also returned to sing on " If I Ever Needed Someone " . Multi @-@ instrumentalist Dahaud Shaar joined for His Band and the Street Choir ; he was a veteran of the Moondance tour , though he had not played on the album . Keyboardist Alan Hand joined Morrison 's band in late April 1970 , replacing Jef Labes , who had left the band and moved to Israel before the end of the year . Keith Johnson completed the line @-@ up on trumpet and Hammond organ .

Between March and May 1970 Morrison began work on the album at the A & R recording studios in New York City . He intended to create a full a capella record , and with this in mind assembled a vocal group he called the Street Choir , consisting of his friends Dahaud Shaar , Larry Goldsmith , Andrew Robinson and then wife , Janet " Planet " Rigsbee , who all lived near Woodstock . He had wanted the choir to feature only four vocalists , but was persuaded to allow two additional members to join : the wives of Keith Johnson and Jack Schroer (Martha Velez and Ellen Schroer) . However , Morrison was later persuaded to abandon the use of a cappella : " I had a group of people in mind for the Street Choir ... I asked them if they wanted to sing ... then the old ladies got involved and it ruined the whole thing . " He was unhappy with the tracks recorded with the choir , as he wanted to

use the group for a different effect : " I wanted these certain guys to form an a cappella group so that I could cut a lot of songs with just maybe one guitar . But it didn 't turn out . " During this session Morrison recorded the same tracks used for the demo session in Woodstock , as well as " Gypsy Queen " and an additional instrumental , six of which were used on Street Choir . Elliot Scheiner was used as the engineer for this session , after he helped to produce Moondance . However , according to biographer Clinton Heylin , Scheiner and Morrison had a disagreement , so he was not used for the rest of the album .

Morrison returned to the A & R studios between June and August to record the remaining six tracks that featured on the album . For this second session Dahaud Shaar filled the role of engineer , though Shaar did not remember Morrison giving the job to him : " Elliot thought he was going to be the co @-@ producer , but then again I never saw him calling takes or asking people to change parts ... I didn 't consider myself co @-@ producer . Van would ask me questions and I would give him answers , but it was never a defined role . " Morrison felt unsatisfied with some of the final recordings , and notably reworked the song " Street Choir " shortly before studio work concluded .

= = = Composition = = =

Some songs featured on His Band and the Street Choir were first recorded for the albums Astral Weeks and Moondance . Morrison rewrote and rearranged them for release on Street Choir because the recordings for his new album featured different personnel and instrumentation . The songs on the album , which Rolling Stone reviewer Jon Landau believes have a free , relaxed sound to them , borrow from various music genres ; the simple lyrics lack the complexity popularly expected from Morrison 's work .

The first recording that would feature on His Band and the Street Choir was " I 've Been Working " , an out @-@ take from the Astral Weeks sessions in 1968 and the Moondance sessions in 1969 . The final version produced on His Band and the Street Choir is upbeat and shows the influence of James Brown . Morrison notably sings the line " Woman , woman , woman , you make me feel alright " in unison with the horn section , which Jon Landau describes as " breathtaking " .

" Domino " had been recorded many times before its release . The first was in sessions from September to November 1968 , just after Astral Weeks was recorded . Morrison rearranged " Domino " frequently from 1968 to 1970 , notably recording rap and harmony versions . For its release it was arranged in a moderate 4 / 4 tempo and features rhythm guitar . Horn overdubs were later added to the recording . Morrison ad libs between the end of the chorus and the start of the verses , when he shouts the words " Dig it ! " , as well as near the end with " And the band ... one more time ! " , which , according to biographer Peter Mills , helps bring out the theme of " liveliness " in both the song and the album as a whole . The song was considered by musicologist Brian Hinton as a tribute to pianist and singer @-@ songwriter , Fats Domino . As with " Domino " , Morrison first recorded " If I Ever Needed Someone " in late 1968 ; it is one of many blues @-@ influenced tracks on the album .

" Virgo Clowns " was first recorded at the start of 1969 as " (Sit Down) Funny Face " . Morrison next recorded it during the first Street Choir session , renaming it simply " Funny Face " . It was re @-@ recorded during the second session under the completely different title of " Virgo Clowns " . In its final form , Morrison and John Platania duet on acoustic guitars . As the song fades out laughter is heard performed by Dahaud Shaar and Larry Goldsmith .

" Crazy Face " evolved from " Going Around with Jesse James " , a song Morrison first recorded for Astral Weeks on 15 October 1968 . Both songs contain references to American outlaw Jesse James . Morrison arranged " Crazy Face " in the irregular time signature 8 / 4 ; the first , third and seventh beats of the bar are emphasised . It begins with a gentle piano introduction , and ends abruptly , which , in Peter Mills ' view , represents a shot from a gun , consistent with the American outlaw theme .

" Give Me a Kiss " and " Gypsy Queen " are the final songs recorded during the first recording session . Morrison wrote " Give me a Kiss " about either Planet or his newly born baby girl Shana . It is a twelve bar blues in the style of boogie rock , a music genre prominent in the 1960s , leading

reviewers to compare the song to the work of The Beatles and Elvis Presley . Reviewers believed the song " Gypsy Queen " was inspired by " Gypsy Woman " , first recorded by Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions . Johnny Rogan feels the song is " a failed attempt to recapture the spirit of ' Caravan ' " , another Morrison composition inspired by " Gypsy Woman " , released on the album Moondance . Morrison sings the song in falsetto , while keyboardist Alan Hand plays celeste , imitating a music box at both the beginning and end .

The second recording session yielded the remaining material . " Call Me Up in Dreamland " is a gospel @-@ style composition . The lyrics refer to life on the road , as Morrison was touring when he recorded the album . They also refer to Morrison and Janet Planet 's life at the time : " We were finally , really living in a dreamland ? believe it or not ? it was a magical time " , Planet recalled .

" I 'll Be Your Lover , Too " was inspired by Morrison and Planet 's marriage . This acoustic ballad has a moderate 4 / 4 tempo , with one 5 / 8 bar before the vocal comes in . " Blue Money " , a pun @-@ filled reference to Morrison 's financial situation , is about a model , perhaps his wife . (Planet worked in the industry before meeting Morrison .) " Sweet Jannie " is the second twelve @-@ bar blues on the album ; written about young love , the song is another that reviewers speculated was about Planet . The lyrics , " I 've been in love with you baby / Ever since you were in Sunday school " lead Clinton Heylin to believe it was written about memories from Morrison 's childhood when he attended Sunday school in Belfast ; Planet is a California @-@ raised Texan .

In the album closer , " Street Choir " , Morrison repeats the questions , " Why did you let me down / And now that things are better off / Why do you come around " . Because of these lyrics Heylin wrote that " such songs [as " Street Choir "] were spawned by an increasing awareness of just how badly ripped off he had been " . Ken Brooks has said that the lyric " Move On Up " is another reference on the album to a Curtis Mayfield song . The track prominently features Keith Johnson 's trumpet and Morrison 's harmonica . Writer Brian Hinton described the lyrics as perversely bitter , while Jon Landau wrote that " Street Choir " was one of the " two or three finest songs " of Morrison 's career because of its " musical and poetic energy " .

= = = Packaging = = =

Warner Bros. Records scheduled His Band and the Street Choir for rush @-@ release to sell over Christmas 1970 , leaving little time to plan the packaging . These pressured conditions led the company to mistitle the promotional releases as His Band and Street Choir and prepare an incorrectly ordered track listing . At the end of " I 'll Be Your Lover , Too " an unedited conversation is left on the finished record , which Peter Mills notes is an example of the album 's rough edges . Janet Planet designed the album cover and wrote the sleeve notes , which sound " a little desperate " , in the words of Brian Hinton , as she wrote , " This is the album that you must sing with , dance to , you must find a place for these songs somewhere in your life . "

David Gahr took the gatefold photos of Morrison surrounded by his musicians with their wives and children at a party for Planet 's son , Peter , born from a previous relationship . Morrison dismissed these photos as " rubbish " . However , Johnny Rogan commented that the front cover looks far worse ; it included a " hilarious " image of Morrison in a full @-@ length kaftan . Morrison complained about the stereotypical front cover as well : " people think you 're a hippie because of the long hair and beard I 'd bought the kaftan in Woodstock , and that 's what people were wearing . " Mills agrees that " Van Morrison was never a hippie , but this was as close as he came . "

= = Reception = =

= = = Release = = =

His Band and the Street Choir was first released on LP on 15 November 1970 and was Morrison 's third record to be produced for Warner Bros. It was re @-@ released by the record company on CD

in 1987 , 1990 and 2005 , and LP in 2008 with Rhino Records .

His Band and the Street Choir peaked at number 32 on the Billboard 200 , and at number 18 on the UK Album Chart . The album received a warm reception in North America ? as Moondance had done ? largely due to the success of " Domino " , a sampler single that peaked at number 9 on the Billboard Hot 100 . This single remains Morrison 's biggest US hit (as of 2010) , as it climbed one place higher than his 1967 hit " Brown Eyed Girl " , from the album Blowin ' Your Mind ! . " Domino " was also a hit in the Netherlands , reaching number 22 on the Dutch Top 40 . Jon Landau of Rolling Stone magazine attributed the success of " Domino " to the guitar figure at the beginning of the track , which he considered " not only a great way to start a single , but a fine way to begin the album " . " Blue Money " debuted as the second single , faltering outside the Top 20 at number 23 in the US . The final single , " Call Me Up in Dreamland " , managed only two weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 , while reaching number 95 ; biographer Ken Brooks believed it deserved better . John Platania recalled that Morrison " had designs " on securing radio airplay for Street Choir , and the success of its singles reflected a growing audience and commercial appeal for his music .

On October 30 , 2015 , along with Astral Weeks , the album was remastered and reissued by Warner Bros. Records with five session bonus tracks ; three alternate takes , and two alternate versions of " I 've Been Working " and " I 'll Be Your Lover , Too . "

= = = Critical response = = =

Reviewers generally praised Street Choir . Jon Landau compared it to Morrison 's previous work :

" His Band and the Street Choir is a free album . It was recorded with minimal over @-@ dubbing and was obviously intended to show the other side of Moondance . And if it has a flaw it is that , like Moondance , it is too much what it set out to be . A few more numbers with a gravity of ' Street Choir ' would have made this album as close to perfect as anyone could have stood . "

ZigZag magazine reviewer John Tobler felt , " even if it 's inferior to Moondance , it is still better than eighty per cent of the records you 've got in your collection . " Robert Christgau was more critical , calling it " a less compelling album than Moondance " containing " a few humdrum cuts and an occasional minor lapse of taste " . He nonetheless awarded the album an " A @-@ minus " , later upgraded to an " A " . Biographer Brian Hinton commented that His Band and the Street Choir is " vaguely reminiscent of Bob Dylan 's Nashville Skyline " . Singer @-@ songwriter Elvis Costello identified His Band and the Street Choir as one of his 500 essential albums and " Street Choir " as one of his favorite songs . In 2006 Johnny Rogan called the songs on the album " a severe disappointment when compared to the material on the previous two albums . "

= = Morrison and the musicians ' responses = =

Van Morrison regarded Street Choir poorly , as he told biographer Ritchie Yorke in 1973 : " Somewhere along the line I lost control of that album . I 'd rather not think about that album because it doesn 't mean much in terms of where I was at ... the album didn 't sell very well and I 'm glad . " Morrison first lost control of the album before its release , when it was retitled from Virgo 's Fool to His Band and the Street Choir :

" Somebody else got control of it and got the cover and all that shit while I was on the West Coast . I knew what was happening to it , but it was like I couldn 't stop it . I 'd given my business thing over to someone else and although I had final approval on things , they just went ahead and did the wrong thing . They told the record company it was one thing and it wasn 't . So the whole thing went wrong . "

Despite this , assistant producer and drummer Dahaud Shaar recalled that Morrison had positive feelings towards the album at the time of its release .

Janet Planet holds the view that " There is much to love about the songs on this album : ' Blue Money ' , ' Crazy Face ' , ' Call Me Up in Dreamland ' , ' Domino ' - these are just great songs in any era . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs written by Van Morrison .

= = = Side one = = =

" Domino " ? 3 : 06
" Crazy Face " ? 2 : 56
" Give Me a Kiss (Just One Sweet Kiss) " ? 2 : 30
" I 've Been Working " ? 3 : 25
" Call Me Up in Dreamland " ? 3 : 52
" I 'll Be Your Lover , Too " ? 3 : 57

= = = Side two = = =

" Blue Money " ? 3 : 40
" Virgo Clowns " ? 4 : 10
" Gypsy Queen " ? 3 : 16
" Sweet Jannie " ? 2 : 11
" If I Ever Needed Someone " ? 3 : 45
" Street Choir " ? 4 : 43

= = Personnel = =

Musicians

Van Morrison ? guitar , harmonica , tenor saxophone on " Crazy Face " and " Call Me Up in Dreamland " , vocals

Judy Clay ? backing vocals on " If I Ever Needed Someone "

Alan Hand ? piano , Hammond organ , celeste

Emily Houston ? backing vocals on " If I Ever Needed Someone "

Keith Johnson ? trumpet , Hammond organ

John Klingberg ? bass

John Platania ? electric and acoustic guitars , mandolin

Jack Schroer ? soprano , alto , and baritone saxophones , piano

Dahaud Shaar (David Shaw) ? drums , percussion , bass clarinet , backing vocals

Jackie Verdell ? backing vocals on " If I Ever Needed Someone "

The Street Choir

Larry Goldsmith

Janet Planet

Andrew Robinson

Ellen Schroer

Dahaud Shaar (David Shaw)

Martha Velez

Production

Van Morrison ? producer

Dahaud Shaar ? assistant producer

Elliot Scheiner ? production coordinator , engineer

Dixon Van Winkle , Ed Anderson , Mark Harman , Richard Lubash ? assisting engineers

David Gahr ? photography

Janet Planet ? album design

= = Charts = =

=== Album ===

=== Singles ===