

= Cheap at Half the Price =

Cheap at Half the Price is a 1983 solo album by English guitarist , composer and improviser Fred Frith . It was Frith 's fifth solo album , and was originally released in the United States on LP record on The Residents ' Ralph record label . It was the third of three solo albums Frith made for the label .

Cheap at Half the Price was recorded by Frith at his home in New York City on a 4 @-@ track machine . He played all the instruments himself , with the exception of bass guitar on two tracks , and drums , for which he used tapes and samples previously recorded by other drummers . The record differed from Frith 's previous experimental albums in that it consisted largely of pop @-@ like songs , and he sang for the first time .

The LP 's release in 1983 caused a stir in progressive circles because of its " apparent simplicity " and its departure from the experimental music Frith had become known for . But a remastered version of the album released on CD in 2004 was better received by critics , who admitted that they had overlooked what Frith had been doing at the time .

= = Background and recording = =

Cheap at Half the Price was the third of a series of three solo albums Frith made for The Residents 's record label Ralph Records , the first being Gravity ( 1980 ) , an avant @-@ garde " dance " record that drew on rhythm and dance from folk music across the world , and the second being Speechless ( 1981 ) , a mixture of folk music , free improvisation , avant @-@ rock and noise . He had recorded with The Residents in the late 1970s and early 1980s , and appeared on several of their albums . Both Gravity and Speechless were well received by critics .

Frith recorded Cheap at Half the Price at his home in New York City on a 4 @-@ track machine . Unlike his two previous albums for Ralph Records , where he used backing bands , on this album Frith played all the instruments himself , with the exception of bass guitar on two tracks , and drums . Bill Laswell from Frith 's band Massacre played bass on " Same Old Me " , and Tina Curran played bass on " Too Much , Too Little " . For the drumming Frith used samples that had been previously recorded of drummers he had worked with , namely Frank Wuyts of Aksak Maboul , Fred Maher from Massacre , Paul Sears of The Muffins , and Hans Bruniussen from Samla Mammas Manna .

= = Composition = =

Cheap at Half the Price differed from Frith 's previous experimental albums in that it featured a collection of short songs and instrumentals in a " tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek pop vein " . He also played a " cheap " Casio @-@ 101 on all the tracks and sang for the first time . AllMusic described Frith 's singing on the album as " strange [ ly ] high @-@ pitched " , and the songs as " pop @-@ like ditties " with a " simple and repetitive " structure . Leonardo Digital Reviews said most of the tracks had a " happy @-@ go @-@ lucky " feel to them .

The lyrics on Cheap at Half the Price are politically oriented , set during US President Ronald Reagan 's first term of office , with socialist commentaries on , amongst other things , dogs and insects . Despite Frith 's apparent departure from his previous progressive albums , some the tracks on this album have ties to his earlier work . " Some Clouds Do " has a similar " driving rhythm " to Paul Sears ' drumming on " What a Dilemma " on Gravity . " Absent Friends " , a traditional Swedish melody arranged by Frith , has the same " fun and dance " feel that occurs at the end of " Don 't Cry for Me " , also on Gravity . " Absent Friends " is also the only track on Cheap at Half the Price that departs from the album 's " pop vein " .

In contrast to the high @-@ pitched singing on most of the songs , " Same Old Me " , one of the few " dark " tracks on the album , is a " gloomily introspective " song featuring some " rough lyrics " that have been slowed to a drawl over " angry riffing " and " relentless bass and percussion " . Leonardo Digital Reviews said that this and many of the other songs on the album had a complex structure beneath the apparent " carefree and beaming surface " .

= = Reception and influence = =

Followers of Fred Frith 's music generally had trouble coming to terms with Cheap at Half the Price . To them Frith was " progressive , genre @-@ bending music 's last great hope " , and on this album he appeared to have abandoned this role . When the album was released on LP in 1983 , Recommended Records , founded and run by Chris Cutler ( Frith 's band @-@ mate from Henry Cow ) , elected not to stock it because Cutler felt it was not " terribly good " . Trouser Press said that the quality of the record suffered from the lo @-@ fi experiment of recording " at home on a 4 @-@ track " .

In 1985 Michael Bloom of The Boston Phoenix wrote that Cheap at Half the Price " will never get the hearing it deserves " . He said that Frith was trying to shake off this " progressive " mould he had been cast in , and believed that the songs on the album should be judged on their own merit and not as " rarefied art rock " . One 1984 reviewer found the album " a very enjoyable recording " , and stated that Frith 's music " is changing the way many musicians look at the sounds that they take so seriously " . The New Gibraltar Encyclopedia of Progressive Rock described Cheap at Half the Price as Frith 's response to punk , a low @-@ tech approach to performing songs . It called the album a " twisted pop " record , saying that it is " as uncompromising as everything else Frith recorded " . François Couture in a review of Frith 's 2002 album , Prints called Cheap at Half the Price " the best tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek take at the New Wave " .

Despite the criticism the LP received at the time of its release , the remastered CD issued 21 years later was generally well received . In the 2004 Recommended Records catalogue , Cutler wrote that the album had " raised eyebrows at the time ( from , as Fred calls them ' progressive music snobs ' ? of which I guess I was one ) for its apparent simplicity and departure from what was then thought of as Fred Style . " René van Peer of Leonardo Digital Reviews admitted in 2005 that he was " one of those snobs " and wrote " I am astonished and embarrassed to find how little I grasped back then of what Frith had put into it . " Looking at Frith 's projects after Cheap at Half the Price made it clear that what he did on the album was not a departure from his musical experiments , as people saw it at the time , but rather a part of it . Van Peer said ( in retrospect ) that Cheap at Half the Price " bursts with inventiveness , and radiates [ sic ] the irrepressible joy of playful creativity " .

Frith 's exploration of song forms on this album was later developed further with Tom Cora in Skeleton Crew , where Frith and Cora played " deceptively simple catchy songs " , often using melodies derived from Scandinavian and Eastern European traditional music . Songs from Cheap at Half the Price appeared in several of Frith 's later projects . Step Across the Border ( 1990 ) , a film on Frith , and its accompanying soundtrack , featured three such songs , " Same Old Me " , " Evolution " and " Too Much Too Little " . Keep the Dog , a 1989 ? 1991 Fred Frith review band , played a number of arrangements of songs from this album , including " Walking Song " , " Some Clouds Do " and " Instant Party " .

= = Track listing = =

All tracks by Fred Frith , except where noted .

= = = Original 1983 release = = =

= = = 1991 CD release = = =

= = Personnel = =

Fred Frith ? guitar , 6 @-@ string bass , Casio @-@ 101 , violin , xylophone , homemade instruments , voice

Frank Wuyts ? drums  
Fred Maher ? drums  
Paul Sears ? drums  
Hans Bruniussen ? drum samples  
Tina Curran ? bass guitar ( " Too Much , Too Little " )  
Bill Laswell ? bass guitar ( " Same Old Me " )  
Aksak Maboul ? clapping ( " Absent Friends " )  
Sheena Dupuis ? voice ( " True Love " )  
George Cartwright ? alto saxophone ( " Person To Person " )

= = = Recording and production = = =

Recorded in August 1983 at Fred Frith 's home in New York City by Frith on a 4 @-@ track recorder , except for " True Love " ( recorded at Noise in New York City ) and " Person To Person " ( recorded at BC Studio in New York City ) .

Fred Frith ? engineer , producer ( except " True Love " , " Person To Person " )  
Kramer ? engineer ( " True Love " )  
Martin Bisi ? engineer ( " Person To Person " )  
Paul Zinman ? digital mastering  
Peter Bäder ? album cover layout  
Busag , Zürich ? album cover lithography  
Tina Curran ? album cover photography

= = = CD reissues = = =

In 1991 East Side Digital and RecRec Music re @-@ issued Cheap at Half the Price on CD with two additional tracks by Frith : " True Love " , from The 20th Anniversary of the Summer of Love ( 1987 ) by various artists ; and " Person to Person " , from North America ( 1985 ) by Curlew . In 2004 Fred Records , Frith 's own record label and an imprint of Recommended Records , issued a remastered version on CD of the original Cheap at Half the Price LP with no extra tracks .

= = = Cited works = = =

Milkowski , Bill ( 1983 ) . " The Frith Factor : Exploration in Sound " . Down Beat ( Maher Publications ) 50 ( 1 ) : 22 ? 25 , 61 .