

= Astral Weeks =

Astral Weeks is the second studio album by Northern Irish singer @-@ songwriter Van Morrison . It was recorded at Century Sound Studios in New York City during three sessions in September and October 1968 , although most participants and biographers agree that the eight songs were culled from the first and last early evening sessions . Except for John Payne , Morrison and the assembled jazz musicians had not played together before and the recordings commenced without rehearsals or lead sheets handed out .

The cover art , music and lyrics of the album portray the symbolism equating earthly love and heaven that would often feature in Morrison 's work . When Astral Weeks was released by Warner Bros. Records in November 1968 , it did not receive promotion from the label and was not an immediate success with consumers or critics . Blending folk , blues , jazz , and classical music , the album 's songs signaled a radical departure from the sound of his previous pop hits , such as " Brown Eyed Girl " ( 1967 ) .

Astral Weeks ' critical standing eventually improved greatly , however , and it has since been viewed as one of rock music 's greatest and most important records ( a reputation Morrison himself has dismissed ) . Sometimes referred to as a song cycle or concept album , critics laud the album 's arrangements and songwriting ; Morrison 's lyrics are often described as impressionistic , hypnotic , and modernist . It was placed on numerous widely circulated lists of the best albums of all time and had an enduring impact on both listeners and musicians . Forty years after the album 's release , Morrison performed all eight of its songs live for the first time during two Hollywood Bowl concerts in November 2008 .

= = Background = =

At the beginning of 1968 , Van Morrison became involved in a contract dispute with Bang Records that kept him away from any recording activity . This occurred after the sudden death of the label 's founder Bert Berns . Born with a congenital heart defect , Berns had a fatal heart attack and was discovered dead in a New York hotel room on 30 December 1967 . Prior to Berns ' death , he and Morrison had experienced some creative difficulties . Berns had been pushing Morrison towards a more pop @-@ oriented direction , while Morrison wanted to explore newer musical terrain . As a result , Berns ' widow , Ilene Berns , held Morrison and this conflict responsible for her husband 's death . Years later she would downplay this scenario but Morrison 's ex @-@ wife Janet ( Planet ) Rigsbee Minto has gone on record describing her initial subsequent vindictiveness towards Morrison .

Upon Bert Berns ' death , Ilene Berns inherited the contracts of Bang Records . Morrison 's annual option on his recording contract was also due less than a week after Berns ' funeral . Legally bound to Bang Records , Morrison was not only kept out of the studio , but he also found himself unable to find performing work in New York as most clubs refrained from booking him , fearing reprisals . Ilene Berns then discovered that her late husband had previously been remiss in filing all the appropriate paperwork to keep Morrison ( still a British citizen ) in New York . She contacted Immigration and Naturalization Service and attempted to have Morrison deported . However , Morrison managed to stay in the U.S. when his then @-@ girlfriend Janet ( Planet ) Rigsbee Minto agreed to marry him . Once married , Morrison and his wife moved to Cambridge , Massachusetts , where he found work performing in local clubs . Morrison began performing with a small electric combo doing blues numbers , songs from Blowin ' Your Mind ! and from Morrison 's Them band days . Two of the musicians soon left but Morrison retained the bassist , Tom Kielbania , a student at the Berklee School of Music . At that juncture , Morrison decided to try an acoustic sound , and he and Kielbania began performing shows in coffee houses in the Boston area as an acoustic duo with Morrison playing guitar and Kielbania on upright bass . Before this , Morrison had primarily recorded and performed with electric musicians . The acoustic medium would provide him " greater vocal improvisation and a freer , folkier feel " .

Later , Kielbania heard jazz @-@ trained flautist John Payne for the first time while sitting in on a

jam session . He invited Payne to the club where he played with Morrison , hoping Morrison would invite him to join them . After allowing Payne to sit in on one performance , Morrison extended an invitation which Payne accepted . The trio of Payne , Kielbania , and Morrison continued performing for four months . In the weeks they played at the Catacombs , they began to develop the template for Astral Weeks . It was around this time that Warner Bros. Records approached Morrison , hoping to sign him to their roster . Presumably their interest focused on his prior success with " Brown @-@ Eyed Girl " , not on Morrison 's current acoustic work . Regardless , their interest allowed Morrison to return to the recording studio .

At the time , Warner Bros. had a deal with Inherit Productions , the production arm of Schwaid @-@ Merenstein which was founded by manager Bob Schwaid ( who worked for Warners Publishing ) and producer Lewis Merenstein . Merenstein received a call from Warner Bros. to go see Morrison in Boston and related how eight or nine producers had gone to hear Morrison thinking they were going to hear " Brown Eyed Girl " and " it was another person with the same voice " . Merenstein first heard Morrison play at Ace Recording studio and recalled that when Morrison played the song " Astral Weeks " for him , " I started crying . It just vibrated in my soul , and I knew that I wanted to work with that sound . " While Merenstein had been to see Morrison , Schwaid had set to work on resolving Morrison 's contractual troubles .

Still legally bound to Bang Records , Morrison would yet have more issues with them in the future . For the time being , Schwaid managed to free him from those obligations , under several conditions . First , Morrison had to write and submit to Web IV Music ( Bert Berns 's publishing company ) three original compositions per month over the course of one year . Morrison fulfilled that obligation by recording thirty @-@ six nonsense songs in a single session . Such action risked legal reprisals , but ultimately none transpired . Morrison then had to assign Web IV one half of the copyright to any musical composition written and recorded by Morrison and released as a single within one year from 12 September 1968 . That demand became a moot point when Warner Bros. refrained from releasing any single during that time frame , as no single was released from Astral Weeks . Finally , Morrison had to include two original compositions controlled by Web IV on his next album . Morrison fulfilled that demand with two of his own compositions , " Madame George " and " Beside You " , although the versions subsequently released were vastly different musically from the original versions recorded with Bang .

= = Recording sessions = =

With his legal matters resolved , Morrison now had the freedom to proceed with recording his Warner Bros. debut album , with the recording sessions taking place at the Century Sound Studios in New York on 25 September , 1 and 15 October 1968 .

Recording adjacent to Van Morrison 's studio , musician John Cale reported , " Morrison couldn 't work with anybody , so finally they just shut him in the studio by himself . He did all the songs with just an acoustic guitar , and later they overdubbed the rest of it around his tapes . " This is , in fact , completely untrue ? the live tracks for the sessions were performed by Morrison on vocals and acoustic guitar in a separate vocal booth with the other musicians playing together on upright bass , lead acoustic guitar , vibes , flute , and drums . The strings and horns constituted the only instruments added subsequently to the initial recording sessions .

Producer Lewis Merenstein had a background in jazz , and according to Merenstein , Morrison " was not an aficionado of jazz when I met him . R & B and soul , yes ; but jazz , no . For the Astral Weeks recording sessions , Merenstein first contacted veteran bassist Richard Davis . Perhaps best known for his work with Eric Dolphy , Davis essentially served as the session leader , and it was through Davis that Merenstein recruited guitarist Jay Berliner , percussionist Warren Smith , Jr . , and drummer Connie Kay . All of these musicians had strong backgrounds in jazz ; Berliner had worked closely with Charles Mingus and Kay was part of the Modern Jazz Quartet . Morrison was still working with Kielbania and Payne , but for these sessions , they were essentially replaced . According to Kielbania , " I got to show all the bass lines to Richard Davis . He embellished a lot of them , but I gave him the feeling . "

Davis proved , perhaps , to be the most pivotal instrumentalist during these sessions . " If you listen to the album , every tune is led by Richard and everybody followed Richard and Van 's voice , " says Merenstein . " I knew if I brought Richard in , he would put the bottom on to support what Van wanted to do vocally , or acoustically . Then you get Jay playing those beautiful counter @-@ lines to Van . " Davis was not impressed by Morrison , but not out of disdain or any preconceived notions , but rather because Morrison 's professional comportment generally did not meet Davis 's expectations . " No prep , no meeting , " recalls Davis . " He was remote from us , ' cause he came in and went into a booth ... And that 's where he stayed , isolated in a booth . I don 't think he ever introduced himself to us , nor we to him ... And he seemed very shy ... " Drummer Connie Kay later told Rolling Stone that he approached Morrison and asked " what he wanted me to play , and he said to play whatever I felt like playing . We more or less sat there and jammed . " Morrison 's impression of the sessions was " The songs came together very well in the studio . Some of the tracks were first takes . [ But ] the musicians were really together . Those type of guys play what you 're gonna do before you do it , that 's how good they are . " He told Ritchie Yorke that only two tracks recorded during the sessions did not make it to the album . " One was about Jesse James and the other about trains . They were both just basic blues numbers . That 's why they didn 't fit in with the album . "

For the Astral Weeks sessions , apparently they did not employ any lead sheets , or at least none were distributed to the musicians . " What stood out in my mind was the fact that he allowed us to stretch out , " recalls Berliner . " We were used to playing to charts , but Van just played us the songs on his guitar and then told us to go ahead and play exactly what we felt . " Berliner actually had great appreciation for the freedom given to him and the band ; something few , if any , of them were used to . " I played a lot of classical guitar on those sessions and it was very unusual to play classical guitar in that context , " says Berliner .

The first session , held in the evening on 25 September 1968 , produced four recordings that made it to the album . Only three had initially been intended for inclusion : " Cyprus Avenue " , " Madame George " , and " Beside You " . Although not scheduled to play , Payne still attended the first session and listened as another flautist played his parts . To this day , nobody recalls the name of this flautist , nor has he been identified on any of the surviving documentation ; he does play flute on the released takes of " Beside You " and " Cyprus Avenue " but is not included in the album credits . When Morrison tried to squeeze in one last tune during the end of that first session , Payne spoke up and pleaded to Merenstein to permit him to participate . Payne was then allowed to play on what became the title track of the album ? " Astral Weeks " ? the fourth song produced from this initial session . For the remainder of the sessions , John Payne played on every song .

The next session , according to John Payne , occurred early in the morning , but it did not work and nothing from this session worked for the final album . " It just didn 't happen " says Payne . " It was the wrong time of day for jazz musicians to create . I think that by the end of that session we all knew that nothing was going to be used . They just said , let 's forget it . " Jay Berliner was not available , so Barry Kornfeld was recruited to play lead guitar in his place . According to Merenstein , there was tension at this second session and it was stopped after about three hours . Morrison was quoted by Ritchie Yorke as saying the album was recorded in " two eight @-@ hour sessions , plus two overdub sessions . That was the whole album . " In his biography , Clinton Heylin gives the date for the second session as 1 October and states that " Only ' As Young Lovers Do ' from this session would make the album " contending that this is the reason for the different " lounge @-@ jazz sound " on this track . Other biographers have primarily noted that the early morning first of October session was abandoned without producing any of the songs on the album .

The third and final session , in the evening on 15 October , produced four more recordings that completed the album ? " The Way Young Lovers Do " " Sweet Thing " , " Ballerina " and " Slim Slow Slider " . Davis expressed to Rolling Stone that there was a " certain feel about a seven @-@ to @-@ ten o ' clock session " and that " the ambience of that time of day was all through everything we played " . Both " Sweet Thing " and " Ballerina " were originally scheduled for the session , but the search for a ' closer ' consumed a considerable amount of time . They attempted ( and rejected ) a number of songs until Morrison suggested " Slim Slow Slider " . " I don 't think we 'd ever done [ it ]

live , " recalls Payne . " [ Morrison ] had a book full of songs ... I don 't know why he decided to do it ... And we were first doing it with the drums , with Richard Davis and Connie Kay and the guitar player and the vibe player and me and Van ? all of us were playing . Then I started playing soprano sax on the thing , and Lew said , ' OK , I wanna try it again . Start again . And I want just the bass , the soprano sax , and Van . ' " It was a successful take , but it also came with a very long coda , prompting Merenstein to make a large cut during the editing process . Many of the tracks on Astral Weeks would be subjected to edits ( mainly to tighten the performances ) , but the one on " Slim Slow Slider " was easily the most substantial . " I would estimate three , five minutes of instrumental stuff , " says Payne . " We went through stages [ until ] we got to be avant @-@ garde kind of weird , which is what you hear after the splice ? all that weird stuff we 're playing ? but there was a whole progression to that . " According to Merenstein , before he cut it , the coda " was a long , long ending that went nowhere , that just carried on from minute to minute ... If it had [ some ] relativity to the tune itself , I would have left it there . "

The recording engineer for the album , Brooks Arthur , remembered the sessions in 2009 : " A cloud came along , and it was called the Van Morrison sessions . We all hopped upon that cloud , and the cloud took us away for awhile [ sic ] , and we made this album , and we landed when it was done . " In a Rolling Stone interview in 1972 , Morrison told John Grissim , Jr . : " I was really pretty happy with the album . The only complaint I had was that it was rather rushed . But I thought it was closer to the type of music I wanted to put out . And still is , actually . "

= = Composition = =

Astral Weeks has stream of consciousness and poetic lyrics that evoke emotions and images instead of coherent , intellectual ideas and narratives . According to Guy Raz from NPR , it is a folk rock album , " perhaps the seminal album of the folk @-@ rock genre " , while the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame online biography of Morrison said its music is trance @-@ like folk jazz set to " impressionistic , free @-@ flowing " lyrics . AllMusic 's William Ruhlmann , on the other hand , viewed the music as an amalgam of folk , blues , jazz , and classical music that is unlike rock .

Although usually described as a song cycle rather than a concept album , the songs do , when considered in their totality , seem to link together as one long song , forming an " intangible narrative of unreachable worlds " and delivered with what one writer calls " a masterpiece of virtuoso singing " . According to Charlie Gillett , the album has meditative songs that combine themes of nostalgia , drama , and Morrison 's personal mysticism and are performed in a blue @-@ eyed soul style .

The album embraces a form of symbolism that would eventually become a staple of Morrison 's songs , equating earthly love and heaven , or as close as a living being can approach it . Morrison and Davis 's upright bass can be interpreted as the earth opposing Kay 's percussion and the string arrangement representing heaven and with Berliner 's lead acoustic guitar residing on a plane in between .

Van Morrison told Ritchie Yorke , one of his biographers , he wrote both of the songs " Madame George " and " Cyprus Avenue " in stream of consciousness : " [ ' Madame George ' ] just came right out ... The song is just a stream of consciousness thing , as is ' Cyprus Avenue ' ... I didn 't even think about what I was writing . "

In an interview with Paste in 2009 , Morrison said the songs on Astral Weeks were written " prior to 1968 over a period of five years " . In an NPR review he comments : " It 's not about me . It 's totally fictional . It 's put together of composites , of conversations I heard ? you know , things I saw in movies , newspapers , books , whatever . It comes out as stories . That 's it . There 's no more . "

= = Songs = =

Side One ? In The Beginning

" Astral Weeks "

The song " Astral Weeks " opens the album with the lines " If I ventured in the slipstream , between the viaducts of your dream / Where immobile steel rims crack , and the ditch in the back roads stop "

, which according to Erik Hage shows Morrison had " once and for all pulled neck and neck with Dylan as a lyricist " . Morrison described it as " one of those songs where you can see the light at the end of the tunnel ... I don 't think I can elaborate on it any more than that . " The words in the song : " Talkin ' to Huddie Ledbetter / Showin ' pictures on the wall " appear to be based on Morrison 's real life custom of carrying around a poster of Lead Belly and hanging it on the wall wherever he lived . ( This was revealed in a Rolling Stone interview in 1978 . )

" Beside You "

" Beside You " , the second song on the album , has been described as " expressionistic poetry and a scattershot collection of images and scenarios " . It begins with the classical guitar of Jay Berliner and Morrison 's voice circling each other . Morrison described it as " the kind of song that you 'd sing to a kid or somebody that you love . It 's basically a love song . It 's just a song about being spiritually beside somebody . " It was originally recorded for Bang Records in December 1967 . That first recording shows the pop music intentions of Bert Berns which give it a different sound from the Astral Weeks recording .

" Sweet Thing "

" Sweet Thing " is the only song on the album to look forward instead of backward . In the words of The AllMusic reviewer : " Over the endlessly descending , circular progression , Morrison sings positive lyrics about nature and a romantic partner , seemingly beginning in the middle of a thought : ' And I will stroll the merry way . ' " Paul Du Noyer wrote , " Sweet Thing puts the singer in a hazy , pastoral paradise where he wanders in ' gardens wet with rain ' , or counts the stars in his lover 's eyes , and vows to ' never grow so old again ' or ' read between the lines ' . He pleads with his mind to keep quiet , so his heart can hear itself think . He yearns to obliterate experience and rediscover innocence . " It has been a more popular cover song than any of the others on the album and is the only Astral Weeks song that has been included in any of Morrison 's compilation albums .

" Cyprus Avenue "

The song " Cyprus Avenue " is a three chord blues composition and served for many years as the closing song for most of Morrison 's live shows . Along with " Madame George " , it is the centerpiece of the album and both songs are Belfast related and highly impressionistic . The song is told from the point of view of an outsider watching from inside an automobile and getting tongue @-@ tied as the refined school girl he fantasizes about appears and he imagines her a fine lady with " rainbow ribbons in her hair " in a carriage drawn by six white horses and " returning from a fair " . Van Morrison described Cyprus Avenue as " a street in Belfast , a place where there 's a lot of wealth . It wasn 't far from where I was brought up and it was a very different scene . To me it was a very mystical place . It was a whole avenue lined with trees and I found it a place where I could think . "

Side Two ? Afterwards

" The Way Young Lovers Do "

" The Way Young Lovers Do " is described by Clinton Heylin as a " lounge @-@ jazz " sound that " still sticks out like Spumante at a champagne buffet " . In his review for Rolling Stone , Greil Marcus also spoke of the song as a " poor jazz @-@ flavored cut that , is uncomfortably out of place on this record " . Brian Hinton describes it as there being " a Sinatra strut to Van 's voice , a blues knowingness with Stax brass , and a string section which swirls where previously it drifted . " He describes it as " about growing up , an adolescent first kiss ... "

" Madame George "

Called the other album masterpiece ( along with Cyprus Avenue ) , " Madame George " is almost ten minutes long and tells of the mysterious madame " in a corner playing dominoes in drag " , among other things . It also has a setting of Cyprus Avenue in Belfast with impressionistic lyrics that give stream @-@ of @-@ conscious details that are seemingly unrelated . Erik Hage describes the effect of the sensory experience of the lyrics , the instrumentation and Morrison 's impassioned vocals on the listener and the album as being " like some kind of twilight state between sleeping and wakefulness " , engaging the listener to project themselves into the spell of the song . Rolling Stone 's album reviewer wrote : " The crowning touch is ' Madame George ' , a cryptic character study that may or may not be about an aging transvestite but that is certainly as heartbreaking a reverie as you

will find in pop music . " Morrison has denied that the song is about a transvestite , as others , including Lester Bangs , have believed . The original title of the song is " Madame Joy " and Morrison later changed the title although he actually sings the words " Madame Joy " in the song . An earlier recording for Bang Records with slightly altered lyrics , backing singers , a much swifter tempo and a " bizarrely inappropriate party atmosphere " changes the tone considerably from the Astral Weeks recording .

#### " Ballerina "

The oldest composition on Astral Weeks is " Ballerina " , which Morrison composed in 1966 while still a member of Them . About the same time he first met his future wife , Janet . Inspired by " a flash about an actress in an opera house appearing in a ballet " ( according to Morrison ) , former Them guitarist Jim Armstrong recalls the band working on the song between engagements . " [ Morrison ] had all these words " , Armstrong says , " we sort of formalized it , ' cause there was no structure to it " . Them performed the song one night in Hawaii , but it was not recorded until Astral Weeks . On the full @-@ length version of " Ballerina " which first appeared on the 2015 expanded edition , the left and right audio channels are opposite to those on the originally released edited version .

#### " Slim Slow Slider "

" Slim Slow Slider " is the only song on the album to not have string overdubs and according to John Payne , Morrison had not played it live before . Like in the song " T.B. Sheets " , the singer tells of watching a young girl die , but in " Slim Slow Slider " the girl seems bent on her own self @-@ destruction : " I know you 're dying , baby / I know you know it too . " The song ends abruptly with the words , " Every time I see you , I just don 't know what to do . " It has been said to be about a junkie but Morrison has only said that it 's about someone " who is caught up in a big city like London or maybe is on dope , I 'm not sure . "

#### = = Release and reception = =

When Astral Weeks was first released , it sold poorly . In the United States , the album became a somewhat popular cult import , while it was largely overlooked by critics in the United Kingdom . The British magazine Beat Instrumental published a negative review , finding Morrison 's songs monotonous and unoriginal , while Nick Logan from NME called it a pale imitation of guitarist José Feliciano 's 1968 album Feliciano ! , one of the year 's best @-@ selling records . With the exception of the title track , he felt the compositions were indistinguishable and " suffer from being stuck in the same groove throughout " . In the American magazine Stereo Review , editor Peter Reilly panned Astral Weeks as a " free @-@ verse mind bender of an album " plagued by nonsensical lyrics and incoherent singing from Morrison , especially on " Madame George " . Greil Marcus , on the other hand , argued in Rolling Stone that his lyrics are thoughtful and deeply intellectual " in terms of the myths and metaphors that exist within the world of rock and roll " . Marcus believed both his music and lyrics captured the spirit of Bob Dylan 's 1967 album John Wesley Harding , calling Astral Weeks a " unique and timeless " record . The magazine later named it the album of the year . Melody Maker also called it one of the year 's best records , featuring Morrison 's " small harsh voice " backed by an attractive musical combo that " verges on genius " during " Madame George " . When Morrison 's third album Moondance was released in 1970 , Warner Bros. ran full @-@ page advertisements remarking on the unavailability of Astral Weeks in record stores , calling it a " damn shame " that it " ended up as what you might call a critically acclaimed but obscure album ... If you want it and can 't find it , yell at the store 's record buyer . Loud , because you 're the customer and you 're always right . Undo the veils of potential obscurity . "

Astral Weeks ' critical standing improved greatly over time , becoming viewed as one of rock 's greatest records and a culturally significant work . A number of factors afforded the record its canonical reputation in rock criticism : its backstory as a commercial underachiever and highly personal work for Morrison , its distinction from the rest of his discography , his artistic autonomy , the music 's song cycle composition , enigmatic lyrics , and the quality of seriousness and originality as perceived by mature rock audiences and writers . According to Rob Sheffield , it was Morrison 's "

most beautiful and intense album ", the foundation for his " legend ", and a work that continues to captivate musicians and listeners . Lester Bangs said its anguished feeling resonated with him on first listen , calling it " the rock record with the most significance in my life so far ... a record about people stunned by life , completely overwhelmed , stalled in their skins , their ages and selves , paralyzed by the enormity of what in one moment of vision they can comprehend . " Irish musician Glen Hansard said it made him think about life with a greater depth of feeling , " with a greater sense of fear and horror and desire than you ever imagined . " Colin Larkin credited Morrison for fully realizing his ambition to " create without pop 's constraints " on Astral Weeks , while AllMusic 's William Ruhlmann said its reputation among critics was justified because " unlike any record before or since , " it " encompasses the passion and tenderness that have always mixed in the best postwar popular music " .

The critical recognition and renown of Astral Weeks came to overshadow Morrison 's subsequent work , as well as Morrison himself . According to biographer Johnny Rogan , his recording career was " all too often crystallized in a single moment . Like the Beach Boys ' Pet Sounds , Astral Weeks was perceived as a one @-@ off whose critical standing allowed little discussion for other equally fascinating musical forays that followed . " Morrison felt annoyed by the retrospective acclaim and claims about the record 's significance . In agreement with Logan 's original criticism , he later said he should have " changed the arrangements because the arrangements are too samey ... four or five other songs should have had a change of mood . " Merenstein , on the other hand , still admires the album : " To this day it gives me pain to hear it . Pain is the wrong word ? I 'm so moved by it . " In 2001 , the album was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America , having shipped 500 @, @ 000 copies in the US . Music historian Andrew Ford said the album 's commercial performance , much like its musical aesthetic , is similar to classical music : " Neither instant nor evanescent : Astral Weeks will sell as many copies this year as it did in 1968 and has every year in between " .

Astral Weeks has appeared in all @-@ time best album polls worldwide , and according to Acclaimed Music , it is the 15th most ranked record in critics ' all @-@ time lists . In 1978 , it was voted the 22nd best album of all time in Paul Gambaccini 's poll of 50 prominent American and English rock critics . It was also ranked second greatest by Mojo in 1995 , 19th by Rolling Stone in 2003 , and 3rd by The Times . In 1998 , it was voted the 9th greatest album of all time in a " Music of the Millennium " poll conducted by HMV , Channel 4 and The Guardian . In 2000 , Q placed the record at number 6 on its list of the 100 Greatest British Albums Ever . Time included Astral Weeks in its 2006 list of the " All @-@ TIME 100 Albums " . When Astral Weeks was voted the best Irish album of all time in 2009 , Niall Stokes wrote in Hot Press , " It 's an extraordinary work , packed with marvelously evocative songs that are rooted in Belfast but which deliver a powerful and lasting universal poetic resonance . "

= = Legacy and influence = =

Astral Weeks had an impact on future releases of other musicians such as Bono and Bruce Springsteen . Mike Ragogna with The Huffington Post wrote that Astral Weeks influenced Springsteen 's 1973 first album Greetings from Asbury Park , N.J. and two of the songs from his second . Steven Van Zandt , from Springsteen 's E Street Band , has said : " Astral Weeks was like a religion to us . " According to writer Steve Turner , the album also became popular with travelers of the hippie trail , " from Europe through to Kathmandu and there were even reports of vans painted in psychedelic colours being renamed ' the Van Morrison ' . " In his 1975 book , Ritchie Yorke wrote " It was almost as if Van Morrison , elusive at any time , had deliberately created an album of music which would indefinitely withstand the vulgarity of music industry image @-@ making . Later they might say that other albums were reminiscent of Astral Weeks , but they could never claim that Astral Weeks was like anything else . "

According to Greil Marcus , Martin Scorsese said that the first fifteen minutes of his 1976 film Taxi Driver was based on Astral Weeks . Marcus referred to the impact of the album , calling it a " common language " and relates that : " I was so shocked when I was teaching a seminar at

Princeton just a couple years ago , and out of 16 students , four of them said their favorite album was Astral Weeks . " Marcus goes on to say , " Now , how did it enter their lives ? We 're talking about an album that was recorded well before they were born , and yet it spoke to them . They understood its language as soon as they heard it . " Elvis Costello described Astral Weeks as " still the most adventurous record made in the rock medium , and there hasn 't been a record with that amount of daring made since " . Johnny Depp , in a Rolling Stone interview in 2008 , recalled how when he was a preteen his older brother ( by ten years ) tiring of Johnny 's favourite music of the time said , " ' Try this . ' And he put on Van Morrison 's Astral Weeks . And it stirred me . I 'd never heard anything like it . " Joan Armatrading has said that Astral Weeks was the first album she purchased as a teenager and that it opened her up musically . In August 2010 , director and choreographer , Jessica Wallenfels , staged a production in Portland , Oregon of a rock opera / story ballet of Astral Weeks called " Find me Beside You " .

= = Packaging = =

According to Steve Turner , one of Van Morrison 's biographers , Irish painter Cecil McCartney influenced the titling of Astral Weeks . Morrison related how " A friend of mine had drawings in his flat of astral projection . I was at his house when I was working on a song which began , ' If I venture down the slipstream ' and that 's why I called it ' Astral Weeks ' . " " It was a painting , " McCartney corrects . " There were several paintings in the studio at the time . Van looked at the painting and it suggested astral travelling to him . " The album cover photograph of Van Morrison was taken by Joel Brodsky , best known for his " Young Lions " photoshoot with Jim Morrison . The squared circle in the cover photo is described as portraying " the mystic symbol of the union of opposites ; the sacred marriage of heaven and earth " .

= = Astral Weeks revisited = =

In November 2008 , Van Morrison performed two concerts at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles , California playing the entire Astral Weeks album . The band featured Jay Berliner who played on the original album . Morrison toured performing the album live throughout most of 2009 , with Rolling Stone calling these concerts " some of the most inspired performances of his whole career " .

A live album entitled Astral Weeks Live at the Hollywood Bowl was released by Morrison 's record label , Listen to the Lion , on 24 February 2009 . It was also issued as a double vinyl LP album released the same date . A DVD featuring the Hollywood Bowl performances and entitled Astral Weeks Live at the Hollywood Bowl : The Concert Film was released on 19 May 2009 .

When asked by Rolling Stone editor , David Wild why he was performing the album again live after forty years , Morrison replied : " It received no promotion , from Warner Bros. ? that 's why I never got to play the songs live . I had always wanted to play the record live and fully orchestrated ? that is what this is all about . I always like live recording and I like listening to live records too . I 'm not too fond of being in a studio ? it 's too contrived and too confining . I like the freedom of live , in @-@ the @-@ moment sound . "

As for the songs on the original album , Morrison told Los Angeles Times columnist Randy Lewis : " The songs are poetic stories , so the meaning is the same as always ? timeless and unchanging . The songs are works of fiction that will inherently have a different meaning for different people . People take from it whatever their disposition to take from it is . "

On October 30 , 2015 , the album remastered was reissued by Warner Bros. Records with four session bonus tracks , including the full @-@ length versions of both " Ballerina " and " Slim Slow Slider . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Van Morrison .



= = Personnel = =

= = = Musicians = = =

Van Morrison ? vocals , acoustic guitar

John Payne ? flute ; soprano saxophone on " Slim Slow Slider "

Jay Berliner ? classical and steel @-@ string acoustic guitars

Richard Davis ? double bass

Warren Smith , Jr . ? percussion , vibraphone

Connie Kay ? drums

Larry Fallon ? string arrangements and conductor ; harpsichord on " Cyprus Avenue "

Barry Kornfeld ? acoustic guitar on " The Way Young Lovers Do "

= = = Production = = =

Lewis Merenstein ? producer

Brooks Arthur ? engineer

Ed Thrasher ? art director

Joel Brodsky ? photography

Steve Woolard ? reissue production

Kevin Gray ? reissue remastering