

## Brian Woodbury and His Popular Music Group

Release date: 4/17/92

Style: quirky pop

*Brian Woodbury and His Popular Music Group* is what happens when impressionable minds are exposed to [Van Dyke Parks'](#) *Song Cycle* at an early age. Woodbury, whose '80s band the [Some Philharmonic](#) actually performed with [Parks](#), has a similar desire to cram every bar of music and line of lyrics with witty references and ear-catching surprises. Unlike [Parks](#), however, he is also a consummate writer of instantly memorable pop tunes, and so all 19 songs on this 55-minute album are suffused with the kind of pure pop hooks that fans of [XTC](#) or [Guided by Voices](#) will immediately love. (Fans attuned to the pop underground familiar with San Francisco's [K.C. Bowman](#) or Toronto's [John Southworth](#) will immediately recognize the New York-based Woodbury as a kindred spirit.) Woodbury's goofy-brainy persona and fondness for surreal wordplay will appeal to [They Might Be Giants](#) fans, but those who find that duo too precious will respond to the solid power pop hooks of songs like the faux-patriotic "Your Roots Are Phony" and [the Young Fresh Fellows](#) -like "I've Still Got My Balls."

**Stewart Mason, *All Music Guide***

Brian Woodbury is not to be trusted. Here's a very pleasant little package, bordered in pastel pink, iconic daisies and oranges all over the place, a photo (purposefully shaky) of a bunch that looks as though they're just out of a slightly hip Jesuit college and. the most deceitful stroke of all, a parcel of songs that from a distance sound like very infinitesimally demented pop art pieces. Like I said, Brian Woodbury is not to be trusted. Beneath this patina of seemingly normal niceness lies a veritable tank trap of lyrical ambushes. Take "Your Roots Are Phony," for instance. Bright and ebullient. it takes just two minutes and nine seconds to completely demolish the American dream and its false historical mystique. "Food Fight" sounds as though it might be fun until you realize that Woodbury B. is proposing a warrantable war (literally) against starvation, and almost relishing the prospect. "Dreamstate..." appears to give California a two thumbs up review, but hidden beneath a possible love song, splashed with fragments of quotes from '60s hippie hits, lies a sneer and a smirk ("You always let your subconscious be your guide") that indicates that Mr. W. might not be all that enamored by the Left Coast after all. And the falsehoods go on, through nineteen wistful works, packed with twinkling tunes and more clever lyrics than you can find in a decade's worth of other releases. Brian Woodbury is not to be trusted. But he sure as damnit deserves your attention, and be definitely warrants his own epitaph on the musical map. He came, he saw, and he conned us; and we all loved him for it. Brian Woodbury, on this showing alone, can definitely be trusted – to make a great record, again and again and again.

**Andy Dunkley, *Rockpool*.**

Fans of [They Might Be Giants](#), here's another oddball New Yorker who creates hook-laden pop tunes that simply won't behave themselves. Woodbury and his musicians perform ditties like "Your Roots Are Phony" and "I've Still Got My Balls" with an innate avant-rock sensibility. The eclecticism of [Sparks](#) and [Zappa](#) is – crossbred with the melodic sheen of [NRBQ](#). The coolest thing is, I'll bet Woodbury doesn't like any of those guys. Only a man with a firm grip on his cajones could write a tune like “I Bum the Flag” (a brilliant ode to sexual passion) or the [Donovan](#)-meets [Gentle Giant](#) “Dreamstate of California” (“... where you always let your subconscious be your guide.”) ...18 demented gems.

### **Dino DiMuro, Option**

‘Wither’ Brian

Woodbury’s a charming melodist, more toward the Broadway tradition than top 40 radio. But he has clearly studied [Brian Wilson](#)’s notions of harmony and arrangement and you’d swear [Todd Rundgren](#) was involved in some of the more guitar-crazed scores. (He does have a tendency to liven up standard changes by dropping beats.) Lyrically, he aspires to Cole Porter's complex internal rhymes, homonyms, and puns. He’s also witheringly sarcastic. Often he has a political axe to grind: “Food Fight” discusses the likelihood of armed uprising from a Third World tired of starving, and “Your Roots are Phony” skewers patriotic icons; on the other hand, “I Burn the Flag” is a love song that improbably quotes “Some Enchanted Evening.” Sometimes he just grabs his metaphor and runs with it: one tune’s called “The Oranges,” as the inverse of the blues, and it’s an absurdly jolly patter song. And the chorus of his catchiest love song goes, “Flavor packet, you’re my flavor packet, you taste so good you make everything else taste worse!”

### **Michael Bloom, Boston Rock**