



## 69 Love Songs

*L.D. Beghtol, Ken Emerson (Introduction)*

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A fully illustrated oral history of the Magnetic Fields' 1999 triple album, *69 Love Songs* - an album that was afforded "classic" status by many almost as soon as it was released. LD Beghtol's book is chatty, incestuous, funny, dark, digressive, sexy, maddening, and delightful in equal measures. It documents a vital and influential scene from the inside, involving ukuleles and tears, citations and footnotes, analogue drum machines, and floods of cognac. Oh, and a crossword puzzle too.

The centre of the book is the secret history of these tuneful, acerbic, and sometimes heartbreaking songs of old love, new love, lost love, punk rock love, gay love, straight love, experimental music love, true love, blue love, and the utter lack of love that fill the album - as told by participants, fans, imitators, naysayers, and others.

Also included are a lexicon of words culled from the album's lyrics, recording details, performance notes from the full album shows in New York, Boston and London, plus rare and unpublished images, personal memorabilia, and much much more.

## 69 Love Songs Details

Date : Published November 3rd 2006 by Continuum

ISBN : 9780826419255

Author : L.D. Beghtol , Ken Emerson (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 157 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction, Culture, Pop Culture, Writing, Essays

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## From Reader Review 69 Love Songs for online ebook

### Katherine says

I think there's room for many different approaches in the 33 1/3 series, but I'm skittish of books being written by people directly involved with the album in question, like this one. It's fun to have SOME insider information, like the part giving a rundown of all 69 songs, but to have a whole book written that way? Some of it's just too silly for me (the "20 questions for Stephin Merritt" chapter), but I mostly enjoyed this, and hope to do the crossword puzzle someday.

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### Mark says

Having been let down by homeopathic remedies such as Valerian Root and Melatonin, I can, and will, recommend the first half of this book to anyone who suffers from insomnia. It's not even so much poorly worded as it is poorly edited and executed. Worse yet, and most insulting towards the reader, is that it is nowhere near as witty or clever as it fancies itself being.

The second half of the book is far more readable and entertaining for fans of this trio of albums, though nowhere near enough to redeem the trite intellectual masturbation forced upon them in the first half of the book. I would be hard pressed to give this book anything more than two stars even if the first half were lopped off entirely.

I've read a few other books from the 33&1/3 series, and this was, without question, the worst - ironic, being that the subject matter itself is the album (or albums) I like the most of any of the 33&1/3 series.

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### Hans says

This is really a book for *69 Love Songs* completists. I fall into this group since I have:

- purchased the box set
- given the box set as a gift (at least once)
- have made the requisite mix-cds & playlists
- gone to multiple TMF concerts, including a *69 Love Songs* era show at the Black Cat in DC ("Washington, DC" received the hearty home town reception) and sat in amazing unused press seats for the two-night *69 Love Songs* show at Lincoln Center.

Here's the rub: The first half is a dictionary. A humorous concept and in many ways fitting for a review of *69 Love songs*, but dictionaries are a writing structure for reference rather than to read straight through. I borrowed this book from the library, so only have 3-weeks to spend with it, so I did skim/read this part. Not a great reading experience.

The rub part 2: The oral history part of the book was much better and it was fun to hear from such a wide range of sources, but then at some point they started referencing the booklet that came with the box set. I pulled this off our shelf and revisited the box set booklet which features a very long interview/conversation with Stephin Merritt by Daniel Handler. Though the oral history has more voices and shares some recording

and performance anecdotes, this really covers the same ground as the entertaining conversation of Merritt and Handler.

The bottom line is that I enjoyed revisiting the full album again--too long have I been drawn by the iTunes shuffle--but people would be better served by tracking down the 69 Love Songs box set and spending time with the included booklet. The 69 Love Songs box set already included its own 33 1/3 style consideration of the making of the album.

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### **Niklas Pivic says**

This book makes me think of three things:

1. LD Beghtol is extremely pretentious, which isn't always a bad thing
2. This book could have used a strong editor
3. It contained a lot of nerdy Mag Fields facts

Now I know that Stephin Merritt instructed the rest of the band that "It's A Crime" was recorded with the phrase "Swedish reggae" constantly in mind, and that there's a staggering number of statistics web-sites available solely built because some listeners of "69 Love Songs" were...a little *too* interested.

End result: cool for music trivia trainspotters like myself, but extremely demanding considering Beghtol's pretentious style of writing and collating stats.

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### **Eliza says**

The only thing I don't like about this book is the format. There's a "dictionary" in the front and then he goes through all three CDs song-by-song. I think he should have left the dictionary out. All of that information could have been included with the corresponding song descriptions, and it would have been a lot easier to read. But the book did keep me very entertained on my Amtrak ride back into the city today... I listened to the entire album and followed along in the book, discovering things I'd never heard before and rediscovering the third disc, which I've been sadly neglecting.

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### **Robert says**

Definitely the most playful book in the series. Games, crossword puzzles and tons of trivia about the first ever triple indie pop concept album.

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### **Mister Mank says**

A substantial portion of this book is an encyclopedia of terms related to the album, and while it's incredible

in its own snarky and erudite way, it's still only marginally more entertaining to read as, well, an encyclopedia. However, I absolutely loved the song-by-song commentary at the end and look forward to re-reading it along with the album. As if I needed reminding, it's reminded me that 69 Love Songs is an unparalleled masterpiece.

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### **Gaspar Alvarez says**

Un libro hecho para los amigos del autor, por ende, no para nosotros. 69LS es un disco universal, y este libro es increíblemente local. Simplemente, no.

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### **María says**

Pretencioso, mal hecho y fome. Exactamente lo opuesto de lo que es el disco.

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### **Evan says**

The novelist Flannery O'Connor believed that most people write what they *can*, rather than merely *what they know*. Here, I've tried a bit of both. If to some folks it all seems too close to the "erased de Kooning" bone for their comfort, that's their pathology.

A cliché is a trite or overused expression, the lack of which would make conversation difficult and pop music impossible. The most familiar of these---such as "**I love you**"---are precious enough to be kept in vaults [1.14], from which they are occasionally dragged howling. Poet-adventurer Gerald Brenan (1894--1987) called the cliché "dead poetry." Perhaps, instead, it is undead.

American novelist Joseph Heller (1923--1999) observed that both "success and failure are difficult to endure," which leads one to concur with Freudians who believe that one's only options are intoxication (*see dancing, drinking and smoking*) or **death**.

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### **Mariel says**

*The book of love is long and boring  
No one can lift the damn thing  
It's full of charts and facts and figures  
And instructions for dancing  
But I, I love it when you read to me  
And you, you can read me anything - The Magnetic Fields 'The Book of Love'*

The Magnetic Fields are one of my favorite bands in the whole world. I haven't heard every band in the whole world. I'll never hear every band in the whole world. I've wished since I was pretty darned young that my favorites would find ME. I had a whole set up of heaven imagined that wasn't more detailed than me and every song that I would ever love being played in my head whenever I wanted. That would be something. If

the right song would find me at the right time when I needed it more than anything... Their 1999 album 69 Love Songs is unbelievable melodies, devastating lyrics, pathos, humor, tongue in cheek wishes... Nothing that means anything if you don't listen and hear the same things. All about love. Every line from "Love is like a bottle of gin" ("But a bottle of gin is not like love") says it all ("Grossly advertised"). Or it doesn't and there's another song that says it all. From "Grand Canyon": "If I were the Grand Canyon I'd echo every word you'd say. But I'm just me, I'm only me, and you used to love me that way. So you know how to love me that way". A plea like that one... You know, what you would just KNOW was probably recorded in 1962 and forgotten about in the back of some record shop behind twenty copies of Die Flippers. The song for you. Every genre in one three disc set. I can picture Stephin Merritt with all of these songs that did know exactly where to find him. Their songs, his songs. Just when you need it.

LD Beghtol's contribution to the 33 1/3 series depressed me. It probably isn't a bit rational to be depressed by a book about a favorite album. Ld Beghtol sings one of my favorite songs on the album "All My Little Words". This song kills me. Somehow reading him write about working on the album does not make me see the part where you need something. You can't ask for it because there's no words. It'd mean more if you didn't need to ask. There was no connecting between that voice and a man who professed to love an album that he was involved in. I don't know how to explain it unless you have ever read a review of something you really loved and the reviewer just didn't get it. This past summer a kid wrote a post on tumblr that I loved. It was railing against the pitchfork.com review of Aesop Rock's latest album "Skelethon". I personally took exception with the reviewer advising listeners to attempt to understand the lyrics at their own peril. The kid wanted to know why people couldn't write reviews as if we were all humans and in it together. I love that kid. He wasn't around when this book was written. I had the feeling reading this, like when Beghtol insists that there is no other peer (other than Stephen Sondheim) for Merritt, that there's no reason to pretend it's not like love. You need it. It will only feel like it'll kill you when you don't have it. You dream about getting it. It's all true and not true. It doesn't mean it'll never happen again if it doesn't work out. I love this album, I can't tell you how many times I've played it, and I don't want to pretend about this stuff. Drop the rock journalist shit! You sang "All My Little Words", Beghtol. I know you have it in you. Please, drop the we're in a college class to pretend that all of this stuff means anything other than we just want that RIGHT song to come on. I wasn't impressed with the genre names for all of the songs ("Afropop Worldwide Pastiche" or "Warholian Weepy"). John Lennon wrote "I Am the Walrus" because of this type of thing. I'm going to sound like an idiot now because memorizing trivia about The Beatles has long been one of my personal "staying sane" techniques. It doesn't beat listening to the song to know why he wrote it. Besides that, this book just isn't that good for this stuff. Is it because it's about love that all of the people (mostly connected to the album. My favorite wasn't, actually. Novelist Peter Straub is there because of his daughter) yammered about stories about their love lives? I didn't care about playing songs from the album at Chris Ewen's (from The 6ths) wedding. It is sort of amusing that one guy's boyfriend didn't believe "Come Back from San Francisco" was about him (this isn't in the book but it has long been insisted that the song is really about Daniel Handler aka Lemony Snicket. Handler plays accordion on the record). But not really.

I was depressed because it made me think about the 1990s. I don't have nostalgia for the '90s. This probably means that I shouldn't visit Portland any time soon. See, I am a hypocrite. I'm throwing in pop culture references (tv show Portlandia) there and avoiding why the album was good. I'm not saying that I could have done any better. Maybe that's why I'm bummed out. Some idealistic thing. Okay, writing about something that DID work out isn't idealistic. It still came out like ass-patting in some '90s smug way. That's how I viewed the '90s. Maybe it wasn't like that for other people. I probably sound insane. They probably did have all of these grand gestures to make when making 69 Love Songs. I don't care about the gesture. Did it work?

I do have '90s nostalgia for only one thing and it was this thing that introduced me to the music of The Magnetic Fields and Stephin Merritt in the first place. The kids tv show The Adventures of Pete & Pete. I

love that show. It wouldn't surprise me if many of us fans got into them when "Why I Cry" played when the angel of death buries Little Pete's beloved lizard Gary in her pet cemetery. I wish this book was like that tv show! It would be like the music of The Magnetic Fields. Whimsical, heart breaking and the best kind of happy because it isn't the kind that pretends that sad doesn't exist. Not a flip side of each other, but together. I talk a lot about the episode when Little Pete starts a band because he HAS to learn how to play this favorite song he heard by chance played in a neighborhood garage. He's going to forget it forever otherwise. His band gets requests to play everyone else's favorite songs. This was Big Pete's idea. It's no good, though, because Little Pete still doesn't have HIS song. The episode is called "A Hard Day's Pete". You should watch it. It's the most perfect sweet I've ever seen in my life. I think that's what it is like to have a favorite song that is just your own. It's how Little Pete feels when he happens on that song being played in that garage. He tries to capture it again in his head and the fear of not being able to remember how it goes is so bittersweet. It could almost ruin it, you know? I felt that way listening to The Magnetic Fields (Little Pete's song is by Polaris, though. They do the theme song "Hey Sandy". That song makes me so happy, even now) in the '90s on The Adventures of Pete & Pete. "Who is that band?!!!!"

(I'm a jerk now because I'm going to babble off trivia. The Gothic Archies tunes were credited as Stephin Merritt on the show because they were instrumentals and Handler/Snicket hadn't started writing his book series yet. The Gothic Archies were formed to do the music for The Series of Unfortunate Events audio books. He also did a song for the audio book for Neil Gaiman's Coraline. I don't need to point out that Merritt is one clever bastard. Just look at that name "The Gothic Archies".)

When Stephin Merritt sings "The book of love is long and boring and written very long ago. It's full of flowers and heart-shaped boxes and things we're all too young to know..." Damn. That line "Things we're all too young to know" makes me feel less lonely. If there was a book of love that's all I'd want it to say. It's the almost know and you don't know and you're going to forget it and you HOPE that it is going to work out anyway. He sounds almost cynical. So hopeful. Reading about it isn't the same as listening to it and feeling it. I read books about music and hope to feel like it's a shared feeling, though. This book depressed me.

I saw The Magnetic Fields live only one time, in October 2008. I'm going to digress a moment from what I wanted to say and I hope I don't forget what it was that I had wanted to say before I say it. Stephin Merritt is hard of hearing. He has said many times that it would be his last time touring. He puts his hands over his ears when the audience applauded. I found it sad that the audience didn't notice he was in pain. He's also a very shy man and he relied on his friend since high school and band mate Claudia Gonson to communicate with the audience. I found their connection in this way to be moving. I wish that I had a Claudia Gonson or a Stephin Merritt. Having seen this of them I liked that their parts of the book seemed to be the most true to the spirit of the band. Not the "We're going to do this concept album of 69 love songs all about love! In all music genres!" LD Beghtol was too hyper! He was! I feel weird liking them better for not tooting their own horns. They could toot the whole marching band and it'd sound good. It's not them to do that. They don't write songs from that place.

*I've always been madly, passionately in love with the song, and guarded it fiercely, hoping it would be a major alt country hit. It was a moment of real over-self-confidence that I requested to sing it. I think Shirley really would have aced it.*

No, Claudia! Sweet-Lovin' Man is one of my favorites. My twin sister doesn't like this song at all. I remember reading on the internet years and years ago that the last line "But keep your paws off mine" ruined the song. Merritt is known for hating his own voice.

I liked a lot how Peter Straub describes it in this book:

*Stephin's voice, which I've heard him denigrate, is a wonderful, expressive instrument, though tonally it may not offer much variation. But it is emotionally expressive. It conveys a kind of all-stops-out romanticism that*

*is framed almost ironically, but it is not felt ironically. When I heard him sing this at Lincoln center his voice seem to shatter, as though he were literally breaking something. It seemed to go lower than any human voice I've ever heard- down into the depths where sound couldn't sustain itself.*

That was probably my favorite part of the book. I like when Shirley says that she never heard the "Tusk" in "No One Will Ever Love You". Me either! I love that song. I don't love Fleetwood Mac. Forget what they were trying to do! If they were even trying to do that. So what if there's a bass line from Pet Shop Boys on "Long-forgotten Fairy Tale" or T-rex style hand claps elsewhere. Didn't they all want to do something?

The dictionary part was pitiful. "Bear" and "beer"? I feel let down that that was what he had to say when putting together a book about this album. I am aware that I have high standards when it comes to music books these days. Maybe it isn't enough for me anymore to read the happy chit chat. I want the part that is good enough to be a story in one of the songs.

Beghtol compiled then and now best and worst lists.  
I'm going to include my own top ten list just because.

My top ten favorite songs from 69 Love Songs (my third favorite of their albums):

Papa was a Rodeo  
Grand Canyon  
All My Little Words  
The Luckiest Guy on the Lower East Side  
The Book of Love  
You're My Only Home  
Asleep and Dreaming  
Queen of the Savages  
The Death of Ferdinand De Saussure  
When My Boy Walks Down the Street  
(My favorite live was "Yeah! Oh, Yeah!")

Stephin Merritt (the svengali behind The Magnetic Fields. You couldn't call him a sven jolly. He's adorable and glum) used to write music reviews, actually. He was an editor of some kind for Spin magazine. I never looked at anything he did for them. I do remember his articles for Time Out New York. He once made a best-of list for the 20th century that was pretty great. I know he listens to these songs and feels that way about them the way that I do when he sings "Well you may not be beautiful but it's not for me to judge. I don't know if you're beautiful because I love you too much." I kind of wish that Ld Beghtol had just quoted that line because that's how I feel. I love The Magnetic Fields.

(view spoiler)

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### **Eric Skillman says**

Enjoyed the *Double Nickels* book so much I immediately picked up a few more. This is a very different animal, as it's written by one of the singers on the album, L.D. Beghtol. For all Stephin Merritt's "boy genius" "one man show" reputation, this book paints a great portrait of an album created by a community of friends, who all seem to be as brilliant and ascerbic and funny and sweet as the album itself. Skip past the

overlong and not-quite-as-clever-as-it-wants-to-be "lexicon" (which is inexplicably front-loaded), and get to the meat of the thing, memories and reflections and stories from the people involved with the making of the album. Highly recommended.

(Also: reading this back to back with the Minutemen book really makes we want to make myself a semiotics mixtape, starting with "The Death of Ferdinand de Saussure" and "Do You Want New Wave or Do You Want the Truth?")

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### **susie says**

Probably should only be read by people who have listened to this record so much that they know every nuance and lyric by heart. I am one of those people. The intro (encyclopedia of terms used on the record) is funny at first and then becomes really exhausting to read. I love the song-by-song anecdote section of the book, although I hate the author's commentaries most. I feel like everything LD Beghtol has to say about the songs he sings on 69LS is so completely & disgustingly self-congratulatory, like for one of the songs how he talks about how his singing is so moving that he even made Stephin Merritt cry when they were playing a live show once. Oh come on.

Also the author repeatedly mentions his 'graphic design skills' and how he designed the cover for the book and the cover for 69LS, which I found irritating and self-promotional since it's a horrible book cover and a horrible record cover. More actual Magnetic Fields info, less LD Beghtol info please.

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### **Eric says**

A perfect companion for the ambitious album. Instead of giving a simple history of the making/impact of 69LS, LD Beghtol--occasional performer on the album--gives an annotated rundown of the masterpiece. This includes a dictionary as the words relate to particular songs and a track listing that includes both the technical aspects and a short oral history with each track. With these tidbits the reader pieces together the history and unlocks the mystery of 69LS. I listened along as I read about each track and have found a new respect for and discovered more hidden gems on the album that I hadn't noticed on previous listenings.

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### **Donna says**

Everyone should try listening to The Magnetic Fields, but this book about their 3-CD album is a disappointment.

I first heard them in the mid-90s, they were opening for some growly alternative act that I wasn't really interested in, so I'm not exactly sure why I was even at that show. We left after about three songs from the headliner, but my roommate and I went out and bought a couple of Magnetic Fields CDs the next day. They've been one of my favorite bands ever since.

I was hoping that this little book would be similar to *Night of the Living Dead*, a quick read that gives a lot of information on the production and social impact of that movie. I got both books together at a museum gift

shop, and I'd heard good things about the 33 1/3 series. A book about *69 Love Songs* is a great idea, but I'd preferred to have read one by someone who wasn't involved in the album's production.

I loved the idea of the lexicon, which could have been great if it restrained itself to explaining references from the song lyrics. Unfortunately, it was a rambling, tedious mess that jumped around between a bunch of barely related topics, complete with extraneous footnotes. The section of personal reminiscences about each song was better, although there were a lot of eye-roll inducing mentions of the author.

The book reads like it's full of in-jokes, and it brings up drama that it never explains. As someone who doesn't follow much in the way of music news or blogs, I wouldn't have understood one particular thing the author repeatedly references if I hadn't seen the *Strange Powers* documentary (which I'd recommend to Magnetic Fields/Stephin Merritt fans over this book). I learned few interesting new-to-me tidbits, but I was expecting a lot more.

To include something happy in this review, here are two of my current favorite Magnetic Fields songs:

You Must Be Out of Your Mind from *Realism*

Strange Powers from *69 Love Songs*

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