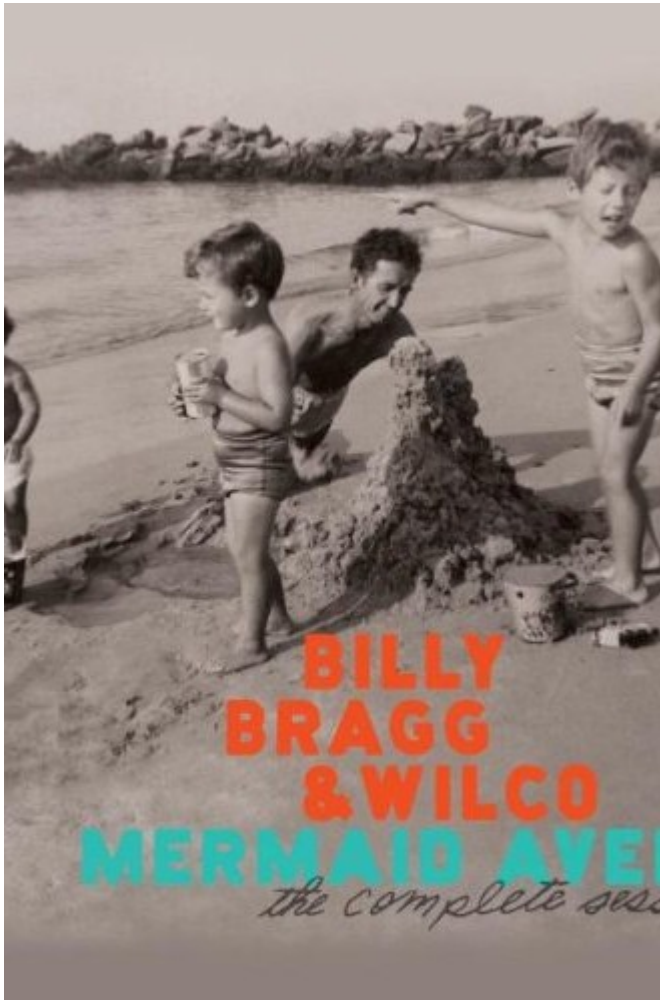


Mermaid Avenue: The Complete Sessions, by Billy Bragg and Wilco

reviewed by [Steve Thorngate](#) in the [May 15, 2013](#) issue

In Review



Mermaid Avenue

by Billy Bragg and Wilco
Nonesuch

On *Mermaid Avenue* (1998), Billy Bragg and Wilco wrote and recorded music for some of the 3,000 tuneless lyrics Woody Guthrie left behind. The stunning result was so much more than a reverent, Pete-Seeger-and-friends tribute album could ever be:

the great Guthrie expanded in our cultural imagination and introduced to a new generation.

Vol. II (2000) has a good song or two, but none at the level of the original's weakest—these are leftovers, not new material. So it's a pleasant surprise that *Mermaid Avenue Vol. III*—sold as a box set with the first two and a 1999 making-of documentary— isn't just the bottom of the barrel. Bragg's contributions are more deeply folk-rooted than on the first two volumes; on their strength, I'd call this the second best of the three:

And bluesman Corey Harris, a supporting player in the sessions, is put to better use here than before. If you haven't heard the original *Mermaid Avenue*, stop reading and go find it. If you already love it, this second sequel is worth a listen.