



Prima Donna

Bless This Mess (2012)

Acetate Records

Reviewer Rating:

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STAFF

If anything, Prima Donna makes the argument for rock music. The intersections of different rock genres across *Bless This Mess*'s 12 quick tracks highlight why we shouldn't let Pro Tools win out just yet.

Although Prima Donna is an American band, its music seems to emulate the '70s U.K. groups that emulated the '50s U.S.A. groups. While the cover of *Bless This Mess* suggests glam rock, the disc is more rooted in Mott the Hoople than Warrant.

The title track features open chord, blues-based, clean riffs and slightly husky vocals, making it feel like it could have fit on Mott's most glam albums. But, just as Ian Hunter stretched back to the roots of rock, Prima Donna stretches back to the roots of self-aware rock. "Broken" features an almost twee section supported by a pinging piano that winks at the Beatles (or at least Electric Light Orchestra) with the line "*We really made the grade.*" Fascinatingly, in reaching back to the second golden era of rock, the band also indirectly paints how bands have been exploring the lines between Chuck Berry's strings for decades. Although "Broken" has a certain *Abby Road* texture to it, the soaring organ and drifting vocals could have also been placed on an Oasis album.

Luckily, the band does more than ape the tunes of the titans. Likely because all rock springs from Berry, and also was filtered through two or three particularly well known English groups, the band doesn't necessarily make a '50s track here or a '70s track there. Rather, elements of each decade are wrapped in the songs themselves, giving the tunes an organic and energetic feel. "Crimson Lust" snags the iconic single note pounding from the Stooges' "I Wanna Be Your Dog," the sloppy snarl from the New York Dolls and the menacing twisting from mid-period Alice Cooper. In doing so, the band creates a work with reference points, but a product that is unique in its assemblage of attributes.

The band becomes most interesting when it verges in slightly darker territory. Although for the most part the music is "good times" jams, every so often, the lyrics will suddenly steer sinister. "Feral Children" is about animalistic banging. "Crimson lust" might be about cold blooded killing, and well... "Put a, te amo" speaks for itself if you know Spanish.

While the tunes rock, it seems that the production is almost too clean in parts. What made Mott the Hoople, Electric Light Orchestra and their ilk so powerful was the basic understanding of soul in analogue, or at least in the combined power of instruments. Here, the instruments are so focused that they don't quite adhere to one another, making the songs energetic, but not quite wrenching.

Let's be frank. If you look on the billboard, rock is dying. That's a shame because in an overview of the genre as a whole, Prima Donna has picked some of the best parts, and put them together in a

reverent, but fresh fashion. *Bless This Mess* is a good start. I wouldn't be surprised if the band is able to jump start the ol' gal into one last wild ride.

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