

## The Zombies – Live at Metropolis Studio, London

### Conveyor (N America)/Salvo (Europe)



In 1987 I was trying my damndest to reject the hateful and morally-bankrupt Thatcherite dream which seemed to be crushing everything in its path like some ghastly metal steamroller with Keith Joseph laughing behind the wheel, and instead recreate the psychedelic summer of twenty years before in Buckinghamshire's green and pleasant pastures.

And, with plenty of sunshine that year, the release schedules of Bam Caruso and Edsel to be worked through, my first Purple Om and the Alice in Wonderland/Planet Alice nexus to take me on magical mystery tours (to dazzling, psychedelic Lowestoft!) and sell me ludicrous crushed velvet shirts, I considered that I was doing a halfway decent job of it. Barbara, who ran the local Student Union bar, even christened me 'Kid Parrott' in reference to my hero du jour, the legendary Roger Keith Barratt himself, and I knew, instinctively, that he would have approved. The odd thing was missing sure – where was the Home Counties Anita Pallenberg that fate was supposed to hook me up with? And why wasn't Ira Cohen on the phone to make arrangements to take a trippy Mylar photograph of me? But with all the optimism of youth, I figured that such details would surely resolve themselves in due course. It was only a matter of time.

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The soundtracks to such lysergic dreams were many and various, from the thunderous Freakbeat of Wimple Winch to the raging psych rock of The Open Mind ("Take a drink from my magic potion, tell me do you still feel fine...") and the phased wooziness of July – as long as there were backwards guitar solos, Mellotrons and the beautiful *jawari* hum of sitars, I was happy. And that's not even to mention The Dukes of Stratosphere. Ah, The Dukes...

That summer saw me purchase a copy of The Zombies' *Odessey and Oracle*, whose heavyweight reputation and swirling, colourful sleeve led me to believe that a dimension of the most intense, enriched-uranium Psyche, previously accessible only via George Harrison's "Within You, Without You" or The Pretties' "Defecting Grey," now had a potential new stargate. Man, this was, as they say, going to blow my mind. Then I played it. I can still remember the palpable sense of disappointed that flooded through me on first listening – where were the fuzzboxes and wah wah, the long delay loops and the wild stereo panning? All I could hear was straight ahead Sixties pop, nice enough, but definitely not cutting it, with or without the aid of a dosed sugarcube.

A quarter of a century later (sheesh!), and though it still makes me smile to occasionally listen to Freakbeat and to lose myself from time to time in pop sike pipe dreams, I could quite seriously listen to *Odessey and Oracle* almost every day. I never noticed the join, but over the years there came a point when I stopped hearing an absence, a lack of a coating of psychedelic sugar dust, and heard instead the presence of a dozen beautifully-crafted masterpieces, each one hand-tooled to perfection like the mechanics of the finest pocket watch, all tiny, delicate cogs and jewelled movements. Kid Parrott was too young and too callow to appreciate it at the time, but *Odessey and Oracle* is, in many ways, an autumnal album, and songs like "Hung Up on A Dream" and "Beechwood Park" make the heart ache a little more with every passing year and every new grey hair that I can see in the mirror.

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At the time of the album's release in April 1968, things had gone badly wrong for The Zombies; they had already disbanded, and with poor sales, the album only got a US release at all because Al Kooper (to his huge credit) badgered CBS/Columbia into it. Thankfully, during the decades that

followed, The Zombies' reputation was gradually rehabilitated and by the Noughties Odessey and Oracle was regularly appearing in virtually every list of '100 Greatest Albums Ever Made': Rolling Stone rated it number 80 in its Best 500 Albums list. Sporadically The Zombies, like their namesakes, have risen from the dead and Jorge Grau-like rampaged through the occasional gig venue, although thankfully Colin Blunstone has not, as far as I know, attacked anyone and tried to eat their brains.

In January last year (2011), the band performed an intimate gig at London's Metropolis Studios in Chiswick to an audience of around 120 people, captured on this release in both CD and DVD formats, and including the material from the Odessey and Oracle album, alongside other cast-iron Zombie favourites such as "She's Not There" and "Summertime," and a smattering of Blunstone and Argent solo post-band numbers.

Though time has, inevitably, taken its toll around the edges, this is nevertheless primo Zombies, a catalogue of the most exquisite songs, sung with evident love, produced in sumptuous hi-fidelity and received by an audience of serious Zombie nuts – one woman on the DVD reveals that she has flown all the way from California for the show. Seems reasonable to me.

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Highlights include "Care of Cell 44" (surely the jauntiest pop song about imminent prison release ever written), Rod Argent going utterly berserk during several of the organ solos, the "duh duh duh, aaahhh, duh, duh, duh aaahhh" that underpins the epic rendition of "Time of the Season," and best of all, the generally (and genuinely) blissed-out look on Colin Blunstone's face through the whole proceeding. He looks, in fact, not unlike a Colin Blunstone lookalike who has been scooped up to sing for The Zombies and he can't believe his good fortune at actually being there.

Given that personality conflicts played their part in the band's frustrating lack of commercial breakthrough and premature disintegration, the obvious affection for each other displayed during and after the show are both a joy to see and a reflection of the intense musical bond between them. As with great figures like Ron Asheton, who never received their dues at the time, it is a pleasure to see the band take their curtain call in the full knowledge that their precise, melancholy melodies, their elegant chord sequences, their soaring string arrangements and their subtle, graceful resolutions are appreciated now in a way that they never were in the Sixties.

Next time The Zombies do a show like this, I'm going to go to California just so that I can fly all the way in to see it.

-David Solomons-

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