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## Gramercy Arms: *The Seasons of Love*

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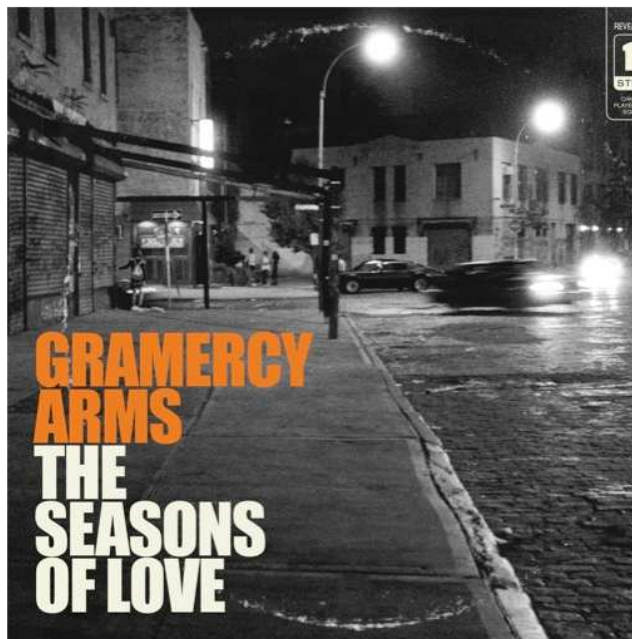
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Gramercy Arms is not stagnant. Rather, the band is a revolving New York-based collective of musicians and artists led by songwriter/producer Dave Derby. In addition to the inconsistent lineup of the group, guests from bands including Nada Surf, Sparklehorse, The Magnetic Fields, Guided By Voices, Joan As Police Woman, Throwing Muses and more all contributed to *The Seasons of Love*, which took an extensive five years to complete.

*The Seasons of Love* is Derby's second full-length record as the Arms' ringleader. Although not at all sonically akin to the similarly titled song from *Rent*, Gramercy Arms' sophomore release does share some New York City inspirations with the Tony award-winning musical. Derby has often described the city itself as one of the band members, and the sounds and successes of the 1970s and '80s run through the album's core.

And yet, *The Seasons of Love* channels the bright power pop evocative of the '90s—the kind of bouncy, horn-and-string-laden tunes that almost force you to feel happy listening to it. It's impossible to fight the catchiness, as opener "Always In Love" gets stuck in your head even when you don't want it to, and you can't help but clap along with the tambourine and marimba in "Winterlight." "The Night is Your Only Friend" is particularly Springsteen-esque, with Derby's uncanny vocal impression paired with lyrical storytelling and horn solos weaving in and out of lightly distorted guitar riffs.

Even though Side B mellows out, revealing a bit of melancholy in songs like "Playing With Fire" and "Yours Untruly," the simple rhymes and stories flow easily throughout *The Seasons of Love*. A perennially happy record, the most impressive element is that *The Seasons of Love* still sounds like a complete, unified record with all of its diverse influences and contributors.