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THE HOUSE OF LOVE – She Paints Words In Red

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ONE OF THE IMMEDIATELY STRIKING THINGS ABOUT THE HOUSE OF LOVE'S SIXTH STUDIO ALBUM – SHE PAINTS WORDS IN RED (OUT THIS WEEK) – IS HOW LIGHT ON ITS FEET PARTS OF IT FEEL IN COMPARISON TO EARLIER WORKS.

It's still

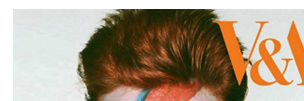


recognisable as the band of SHINE ON, NEVER and YOU DONT UNDERSTAND: angry or euphoric choruses offsetting anaemic, uptight or hemmed-in American acid-rock verses; skittering brushed drums and embering orange strobes of hashish-trance percussion tethering the occasional bursts of unpredictably flailing late 60s Beatles psychedelia; Terry Bickers' blistering blood red wine wall-of-spite guitars and that familiarly sublime autumnal evening sadness in Guy Chadwick's vocals.

But, as a complete entity, this record sounds much more measured and - dare we say it? - middle-aged in its melancholy... That's no bad thing. The heart cannot stand being



DAVID FORD



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completely destroyed again, and the knees will surely not take too many more CHRISTINES. Chadwick and Bickers are now 25 years advanced from the unsustainable brooding and amphetamine string-outs of the band's debut album – and all attendant debaucheries and devastations. They fell out, and now they've fallen back in.

Graciously, mercifully, SHE PAINTS WORDS IN RED acknowledges the weight of time and feels comfortable with any of the weathered creases and well-earned lines on its own skin. Chadwick's lyrics do, of course, still wade through oil and salt-water somewhere between deliverance and desperation, but there are also splashes of wry devil in the eye, mischievous cut-ups behind the quarter-of-a-century cataract.

During the middle section of PKR (previously recorded as 1991 b-side PURPLE KILLER ROSE, but perfected here) Bickers pours cathedral quantities of liquid Led Zeppelin over a pulsing menace below. Neurotically tight first single BABY GOT BACK ON ITS FEET, with engaged / disengaged vocals and wraparound picked-out guitar lines could, but for the crisp presence of its production, fit reasonably easily on any of the band's first three albums.

Despite what is a fairly generic title for gentlemen of a certain age, LOST IN THE BLUES is disarming and gorgeous, each stroke of Bickers' lead line needle sharp and scratching at Chadwick's tumbling harmonies, while LOW BLACK CLOUDS sends BABE RAINBOW's FEEL for a weekend away at the Maharishi's retreat and SUNSHINE OUT OF THE RAIN breaks any clouds with an impressively bright 50s guitar twang.

A makeshift handle on the general sound of 2013 may, perhaps, open doors to a room somewhere between BEATLES AND THE STONES and THE GIRL WITH THE LONELIEST EYES. Some of the band's more urgent moments would be tapping at the window and, indeed, some of them would be breaking up through the floorboards or scaling down the chimney – but, even so, it's unlikely The House Of Love have ever before let in something as utterly upfront as HEMINGWAY. Chadwick's resigned disgust / self-deprecating delight in holding himself up to one of literature's – life's – largest rogues plays out over what appears to be the result of Bickers inviting The La's round for a surprisingly cheery cup of mushroom tea.

There are myriad overt influences on, and deliberate reference points across, this album: Cohen, The Beatles, The Smiths, Velvet Underground, Bowie, American psychedelic rock, 1960s British Pop (with that deliberate capital P) and – most often – The House Of Love themselves.

Chadwick and Bickers are no longer sitting lonely on their plastic chairs – all are welcome, it seems. With the wisdom to widen the doors comes a subtle dignity running throughout this record.

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Despite not always sounding exactly like The House Of Love, the excellent SHE PAINTS WORDS IN RED always sounds like The House Of Love.

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