

Odessey & Oracle {Revisited}

The Zombies

MVD Visual - MVDV4896 (DVD)

Available from MVD Entertainment Group.

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange by

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There are a number of influential albums that for the most part skirted under the radar, affecting musicians much more than audiences. A while back, Arthur Lee (founder of Love) went back and revived the landmark *Forever Changes* in a fashion that earned him a state of grace following a long period of erratic-at-best tries for a comeback—I caught him early at it, in about the mid-70s at Madame Wong's, and the gig was pathetic. The Jan. 15, 2003 London gig DVD, however, was magnificent, maybe the best showing of his entire career, wowing many in a way they never thought they'd witness.

The Zombies, who recorded a couple of standards (*Tell Her No* and *She's Not There*), also issued a striking release, *Odyssey & Oracle*, that achieved sublime regard among certain critics but baffled others, as well as many fans. However, containing a #1 single, *Time of the Season*—now a semi-standard, it sold okay and then very quickly faded. Many years later, the Chrysanthemums resurrected the LP song for song in a little-known release, a quirky gem treasured by the few who know of it. And here we are, 40 years after the issuance of the original, with all the surviving Zombies gathered again to commemorate the 60s gem...and what a tremendous occasion it turned out to be.

Paul Atkinson having passed away, Rod Argent, Colin Blunstone, Chris White and Hugh Grundy took in Keith Airey, Jim Rodford, Darian Sahanaja, and Vivienne Boucharet to round out the sound, then gathered a string quintet for a number of non-LP cuts and trotted off to the famous Shepherd's Bush Empire venue to entrance London and now, thanks to MVD, the world at large. The document is nothing less than a treasure. From the very beginning, perhaps the most stunning aspect is the strength and range of Colin Blunstone's unique voice, an instrument not a whit diminished in the intervening four decades.

Ah, but then there's Rod Argent, after whom the post-Zombies band Argent was dubbed. Thank God the lads decided to include some of that catalogue as well, not just the hit *Hold Your Head Up* but the boogie *Keep on Rolling* as well. Rod's worked with jazz player John Dankworth over the years and here shows he's lost not an iota of the old spark and élan. Now toss in some of the best of Blunstone's several solo albums, including the stunning rendition of Tim Hardin's *Misty Roses*, and you have a combination that can't be beat.

All of that composes the first half of the DVD and then Al Kooper, a criminally underlauded prime figure in rock as both musician and producer, walks out to disclose a very cool anecdote about his involvement with the *Odyssey & Oracle* LP. Part of that yarn includes the fact that, ironically, The Zombies broke up long before the LP emerged in the U.S. and never once had a chance to tour the disc in concert. 2008 was the very first time they'd performed it. What will shock is the fact that it dates not at all, far more sophisticated than many of its compeers of the time and still miles beyond much being issued now...which goes far to explain why it never caught on in the charts back in the late 60s.

Be prepared for a surprisingly arresting and unorthodox, almost modernly baroque, experience in listening to this rendition, which very closely follows the original. The structures and melodies are not your typical 3/4 compositions at all, part of that having to do with the fact that Argent and White were being influenced by Bartok and other neoclassicalists. Quite progressive, *Odyssey* must be ranked with The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's*, the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, the Kinks' *Muswell Hillbillies*, and a number of the most crafted song cycles and handtooled LPs which emerged in post-50s rock and roll.

The presentation and the process capturing it are flawless, heartfelt, producing a masterpiece and perhaps so far the last word in such recreations of past glories. That it was going to occur at all I'm sure fused a number of cortexes, I was stunned when I heard about it, but I doubt anyone expected this level of perfection. I wish to hell I'd been there but thank the stars in the heavens that MVD preserved it. If you have any interest at all in the music of the period, this is indispensable. Two hours here, ladies and gentlemen, of purest bliss.

Track List:

THE PRE-ODESSEY CONCERT

- I Love You (Chris White)
- Sticks and Stones (Titus Turner)
- Can't Nobody Love You (James Mitchell)
- What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted (Dean / Riser / Weatherspoon)
- Misty Roses (Tim Hardin)
- Her Song (Argent / White)
- Say You Don't Mind (Denny Laine)
- Keep on Rolling (Argent / White)
- Hold Your Head Up (Argent / White)

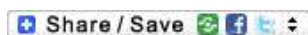
ODESSEY & ORACLE

- Care of Cell 44 (Rod Argent)
- A Rose for Emily (Rod Argent)
- Maybe After He's Gone (Chris White)
- Beechwood Park (Chris White)
- Brief Candles (Chris White)
- Hung Up on a Dream (Rod Argent)
- Changes (Chris White)
- I Want Her, She Wants Me (Rod Argent)
- This will be our Year (Chris White)
- Butcher's Tale (Chris White)
- Friends of Mine (Chris White)
- Time of the Season (Rod Argent)

CLOSING SONGS

- Tell Her No (Rod Argent)
- She's Not There (Rod Argent)

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