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DVD Review: The Zombies Rise Again

It's Still Time of the Season for Legendary Brit Pop Outfit

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Rock'n Roll Hall of Fame nominees The Zombies reform to play their legendary LP *Odessey & Oracle*, as well as their other pop gems of the 60s...and even a little 70s.



The Zombies formed in St. Albans, England in 1959. When the Beatles took over the pop world in 1964, the Decca label signed these former school boys with hopes of another Rolling Stones, or at least the Hollies.

Led by keyboard master Rod Argent and bass player Chris White, with vocals by Colin Blunstone, the band never did well in the UK. Yet they quickly garnered two U.S. hit singles, "Tell Her No" and "She's Not There" as well as disparate countries the Philippines and Sweden. One could say the hip Brits missed the boat on their deft, minor key predominant pop gems

Then in 1967, the Zombies recorded their only "real" LP at Abbey Road, *Odessey and Oracle*. It included the band's AM manifesto "Time of the Season." The LP impressed rock legend Al Kooper so much he convinced Columbia Records to sign the band 1968.

The first single released, "A Butcher's Tale," was an admitted miscalculation by Columbia. Then "Time of the Season" soared up U.S. charts to #3 in 1969.

It was too late. By that time, Argent formed his own self-named band, and hit with "Hold Your Head Up." Blunstone, aided by Argent and White, created a series of beautifully dreamy ballads that never quite caught on with consumers. White became a recognized songwriter and session musician.

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Yet by the end of the century Rolling Stone Magazine would rank *Odessey #80* in the top 500 LPs of all time. The now reformed Zombies could join the Pretty Things, Troggs, Moody Blues and Procul Harum on the oldies/PBS fundraiser circuit, but this story has a happier ending for these masters of sophisticated melody.

Zombies Alive!

In 2008, Argent and Blunstone realized *Odessey & Oracle* was 40 years old. They contacted White and drummer Hugh Grundy (guitarist Paul Atkinson unfortunately passed away in 2004) to play O&O live. They were rewarded with three sold-out concerts in London. This DVD, entitled *Odessey & Oracle (Revisited) - The 40th Anniversary Concert (MVD Visual)*, documents the first concert.

Blunstone's vocals have matured over time, from a raspy, sweet thing of the 60s to a more soulful, expressive tool; similar to Bono, but deeper in range. Argent's mastery of the Hammond organ still impresses, especially when he solos on "Time" and "Head." White and Grundy are masters of minimalism, laying down grooves as tight as the original MGs or Sly & Robbie.

The concert is divided into two sets. In the first, Argent and Blunstone tenderize fans with their earliest singles to an appropriate dollop of post-Zombies tunes. Blunstone does his best to steal the show with three songs from his underrated solo effort Year One. There's also an inspired cover of the Motown gem "What Becomes of the Broken Hearted." Yet it's Argent who garners kudos with a truly anthem-ic "Hold Your Head Up" to end the first set.

The Eternal Odessey & Oracle

It's the second set that delivers the knock out. Consisting of a note-for-note recreation of the landmark LP, it's the true treat. To help recreate the exact Abbey Road recording, the band supplemented their personnel with a string quintet, four horns and backing vocals when needed. Kooper himself even shows up to recount how he "advised" Columbia's legendary exec, Clive Davis, to put his trust in the band. When they close with "Time," the audience is enthralled, as should any fan of true classic rock.

Most important, this performance demonstrates that, like the Beach Boys' *Smile*, *Odessey & Oracle* is more than a pretty post-psychedelic artifact. Live on stage it's a truly sophisticated pop masterpiece that was way ahead of its time.

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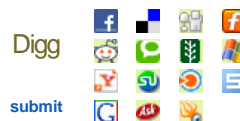
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