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REVIEW**CD Review: *Isabelle Snakes & Music***

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I freely admit when it comes to music I'm an old fart. I don't listen to much new music, preferring to stay nice and safe with the stuff I've liked since God knows when. I started to give up on popular music in the mid eighties when keyboards and synths began replacing guitars, and band names changed from Stranglers to Flock of Seagulls.

It just didn't do it for me anymore. I completely missed out on the whole grunge/ Seattle/Nirvana/ thing and since most people I knew already wore plaid lumberjack jackets and toques (I'm from Canada eh?) the fashion statement meant squat to me. Even since I've started reviewing music on a regular basis, the stuff that attracts me is either by people who have been dead for years, or people playing that style of music.

The pity is I've got a feeling I've been missing out on a lot of good music. But how do you know what's going to be good and what's going to be crap if you have no idea who the players are, and never heard them do anything else before? Well you've got to take a chance every so often and hope at least you're interested by what the band does.

Such was the case with new album *Isabelle* by the band Snakes and Music. Although this is the only the second disc from this collection of musicians, they are all veteran's of the current alternative music scene with plenty of performance and studio time under their

belts.

What struck me first about this CD is the intelligence of the lyrics. These are not simplistic pop tunes crafted to fit into some top forty formulae that will guarantee them air time on cross country radio stations. Prose poetry has never been the most popular of formats on the AM dial and I don't even think FM stations aside from college and some public radio are overtly interested.

Musically the first thing I notice is the guitars, slightly discordant, chug along under the lyrics. Almost, but not quite drowning out the vocals, the guitar on tracks like "Isabelle" and "Shut Up That's Why" help to express the anger and confusion felt by the protagonist. They serve as almost a vocal harmony, but emotionally not musically.

Sometimes listening to the music on *Isabelle* I received the impression a group of people were sneaking through enemy territory and having to avoid detection. Obviously I don't mean literally, but there is a quality of subversiveness and of being on the outside looking in that makes it feel like your part of something being done in spite of obstacles arrayed against you.

Rock and roll, especially the blues based stuff, has always been considered a threat by some of the more conservative elements of society. It was the aggressive music that questioned traditional figures of authority and pushed what was considered the boundaries of good taste.

In other words it was new and exciting and gave people something different to listen to than what their parents were listening too. *Isabelle* by Snakes and Music recaptures the sense of danger that makes Rock music such an adrenalin rush. Even on the songs some people might consider country there is urgency to the vocals and the music that removes them from the safety of the country radio sound.

Whether they've put up a wall of sound; guitars, keyboards, drums, and percussion; or crafted a simpler almost folk/country song, there is no escaping the fact Snakes and Music are not interested in holding your hand and telling you things are doing just fine. Read the lyrics of their songs to try and hear what they're saying, and you find the meaning slides away, but listen to the song and you understand.

A line of poetry can be changed by a word, and a chord of music can alter a song and that's what happens when they blend the music and lyrics together. The lyrics on the page in the booklet seem ambiguous, accompanied by the music the emotion underpinning the words is magnified and the meaning becomes clear.

Isabelle by Snakes and Music is something different from the norm of the majority of pop music you're liable to hear on the radio for the simple reason it is a reminder of what rock and roll music should be. It's not safe and reassuring, but challenging and disturbing.

You'll never hear this music on an "adult radio show" or "classic (corporate) rock" station. This is the music they want you to forget about because it will remind you of the true potential popular music has for intelligence and thoughtfulness. *Isabella* and Snakes and Music recapture the spirit of what a rock song should be; not a formula, not a corporate package, but a breath of independence and freedom; something people older than you can blame the troubles of the world on.

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