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Snakes and Music - Isabelle

Written by Sebastian Frye



Although the rise of independent music heralds a do-it-yourself idiom, not all things which musicians "do themselves" are ultimately very good. Snakes and Music aren't and awful band but they simply aren't very exciting. Their fifteen song album displays that, even when given the ample amounts of time to appreciate the music, you might only come to love nine or ten of the tracks.

Their idea remains a strong one, to create music which is of a indie rock essence but has strong influences in country and folk music. The light instruments and use of organs, banjos, and harmonicas creates a nice air for the group to create in, but they might be relying too heavily on the use of electronic instruments without a reason to incorporate them. Andrew Low sings in a often unnoticed vocal which sounds as though it carries some kind of depth but isn't placed in front of the sounds enough to allow one's sonic focus to follow him. Gregg Levy plays a uninspired and often lazy guitar while Dan O'Neil on bass creates disharmonious layers beneath everything. Newest members, Brent Sisk on Keyboards and Jonathon Nigro on drums, don't yet seem attached to the group and, overall, the band sounds



slightly incomplete.

Songs such as the title track "Isabelle" involve some strange lyrics buried deep within the barrage of rhythm, guitars, and keys layering over each other with little purpose. The song plateaus at the 30 second range and doesn't move far after that moment. It isn't particularly clear when the band is reaching a climax or is dropping into a steady ensemble groove. There is just too much of a mess to start shifting through it all.

The percussive elements and use of low-fi recording don't utilize the musician's talents to their potential or realize their limitations to their benefit on the short blues driven "Take Me Down to The River". Before the song even begins it's over and what could have exploded into an exploration into a grungy blues turns into a parody of something that could have been very beautiful.

"Sinking Ships" allows the emotional vocals of Low to shine but comes off with very little in terms of musical meat. The song just slaps together everything into a similar stew of rushing rhythms and distorted chords. Most songs involving ships usually allow for some very nice material as musicians can exploit the feeling of sailing into their music; unfortunately "Sinking Ships" sounds as though the hole in the boat was discovered before it even left the dock.

Slower and more melancholy songs such as "Philadelphia" are the group's strong points but their consistency falters at times and once again the muddy sound overwhelms a perfectly enjoyable experience. The band starts very thoughtfully incorporating sparse percussion accents into a chasm of sound which slowly unfolds and then destroys itself in its prolonged jamming. Finally though the themes are distinguishable and the group seems to be enjoying themselves and listening to each other more rather than just playing for whatever reason. Tracks like these allow Snakes and Music to shine, but there is not nearly enough of them.

Even though our culture no longer sees a necessity for standards and discretion, they still exist regardless of what many may think. Not just anyone can start up a band and become The Strokes or Radiohead or The Band; it takes hard work, skill, patience, and most of all talent. Unfortunately Snakes and Music can't deliver all their potential in "Isabelle" but perhaps with the aforementioned ingredients they will reinvent themselves appropriately.



Track Listing

- 1 Isabelle
- 2 Please Explain
- 3 Hope Texas Treats You Like A Queen
- 4 Take Me Down To The River
- 5 Sinking Ships
- 6 Heavy Strings
- 7 Head Sparks
- 8 Treading Water
- 9 Philadelphia
- 10 Burn The Bushes
- 11 Snake Bites
- 12 Sleeping On The Couch
- 13 Cleaning Up the Mess
- 14 Shut Up That's Why
- 15 Isabelle Revisited