

## Bittles' Magazine



You know the way it's fashionable right now for bands and female singer-songwriters to market themselves as ›delightfully kooky‹? They're all ›look at me. I have flowers in my hair! Aren't I crazy?‹ I will not name and shame right now, yet when you listen to their songs you can't help but think that the plan was ›Ok. So, my music is pretty derivative and weak. But if I act like I am awfully quirky then maybe people won't realise just how bland I really am‹. Somehow the eccentricity of these bands is always safe and insipid while they create the type of music that is usually so banal they are the aural equivalent of daytime TV. By **JOHN BITTLES**

Not so the band **CocoRosie** who heroically display a strangeness in their music and personas that is altogether otherworldly and, at times, downright uncanny. The duo is formed of sisters Sierra and Bianca Casady who have been charming musical connoisseurs since first forming in 2003. They are quite happy to dress in drag, paint their faces in all manner of outlandish designs, and also release some of the most stunningly exquisite and haunting music around right now.

They have soundtracked a gay zombie movie, (I can't even imagine what that would be like), recorded their debut album *La Maison De Mon Reve* in a bathroom, while second album *Noah's Ark* has a cover so foul that it was quite rightly selected by both *Pitchfork* and *The Guardian* as being one of the worst record covers of all time. If you don't believe me then feel free to google the image, but prepare to be shocked and amazed.

If this all sounds somewhat horribly contrived then please don't worry because the world of **CocoRosie** is entirely sincere. Since 2003 the sisters have released some of the most ›out there‹ music around since the time **Iggy Pop** somehow got his cock stuck in a microwave during a recording session. That some of the duo's output is pretty much unlistenable goes without saying. Album tracks can veer wildly in both style and pace until most right-minded listeners feel like they have no option but to press stop and then go for a nice lie down.

Those same people still feel compelled to stick with the band though as in-between these blasts of feral strangeness we get a glimpse of an eerie world of wonder and joy. The duo seduce and beguile with songs that are utterly enchanting and sound like nothing else on this earth. Lazy journalists have labelled their music as ›freak-folk‹ yet this doesn't even come close to adequately describing the wealth of sounds to be heard in their oeuvre. Within the course of one song you can hear elements of folk, electronica, hip-hop, rock, and, of course, huge grin-inducing dollops of pop.

Their new album *Tales of a Grass Widow* is the band's fifth full-length in total and displays a confidence and coherence that really shines through in the production values and bewitching vocals. Listening to it recalls the spectral majesty of **The Cocteau Twins**, the experimental beauty of **Kate Bush**, and the bang up to date sonic exploration of a feminist **James Blake**. Somehow though the album still manages to contain a yearning quality and moments of such outstanding beauty that you can't help but raise a smile. Imagine the spooky soundscapes created by **Boards of Canada** but with a pair of strong female vocalists who allow their voices to enchant, in multiple ethereal ways.

The album begins with the hushed melody of *After the Afterlife* with its whispered childlike nursery rhyme style vocals intoning 'welcome to the afterlife'. Before long some electronic squiggles eagerly join the party to quietly devastating effect. As an opener it has an eerie and surreal feel, that seduces the listener while sharpening its claws. It is graceful yet freaky, and untrustworthy to boot.



This is a recurring theme of the record. A wilful need to experiment and take the listener to places they aren't expecting. You really don't know what is going to come next. In many ways this is the most varied album I have had the pleasure of hearing in years. We have the skewed hip hop vibes of *End of Time* that incorporates West Coast style beats and a sinister rap, while the **Rihanna** style closer *Villian* takes the blueprint of modern R&B and fucks it up until it resembles something fresh, sinister and new.

Following track *Tears For Animals* finds a deep booming synth paired with **Antony Hegarty's** baritone imploring »Do you have love for humankind?« Nature as a theme recurs throughout the album and is obviously something very close to the band's hearts. In a recent press interview they claimed that the song is looking at 'human beings as animals of the earth'. That they explore these types of sentiments with the type of dense and oppressive music that recalls the majestic splendour of **Fever Ray** shows that the band are more than prepared to go to places few dare to tread.

*Harmless Monster* starts out all spooky and surreal before breaking out into an epic repeated refrain that recalls **Florence and the Machine** in its bombast. In contrast *Far Away* combines downright sinister sounding lyrics with a bruised and battered seeming drum machine and electronic pulses that conjures images of **Autechre** in both their intricacy and design.

*Roots of my Hair* is almost sunny sounding with its calypso style drumming and is an obvious album highlight. The sisters sing with a real sense of loss and despair that forms a perfect contrast to the backing music. In all honesty any song that includes the use of pan-pipes should be declared a travesty and deleted from hard drives everywhere, yet somehow, on this track, **CocoRosie** make it work. And if, at the beginning of the record someone had rather smugly informed you that it would end with a slick, sleek bump n' grind number you would have thought them insane.

Sounding more professional and with far higher production values than some of their previous releases, *Tale of a Grass Widow* sees the duo honing their sound while sneaking a peek into sonic territories of which most could only dream. That they hold back on some of their un-listenable flights of fancy which somewhat marred their earlier releases merely makes the album a more joyful listen from beginning to end.

*Photo: Rodrigo Jardon*

| JOHN BITTLES