

Bittles' Magazine | dEUS: Worst Case Scenario

Like all the best things in life it begins with a strangulated violin. Suddenly a loud and raucous guitar riff arrives in an almighty roar that slaps you in the face while screaming »it's fucking great to be alive«. Next, twin vocals erupt, as if to herald a rock apocalypse. By now your heart is pounding, your hands are sweaty and you are giving praise to the rock n' roll Gods. By **JOHN BITTLES**



If you have heard the twisted genius of ›Suds & Soda‹, the opening tracks on **dEUS's** debut album ›Worst Case Scenario‹, then you will know what I mean. When people are making out their bucket lists then rocking out to this song should be in the top ten at least.

As a teen, rock music always seemed pretty one-dimensional to me. It struggled in comparison to the alien-sounding bleeps and beats of the electronic music scene that made up the sound of my youth. Acid house had heralded a seismic shift in the world of music, and rock seemed outdated and somewhat passé. Then, in the year 1994 something happened that would change my viewpoint forever; I discovered a band from Belgium that went by the name of **dEUS**.

For this I can thank the Technicolor delight of ›MTV‹ (scoff all you like, but it wasn't just so cringe-worthy back in those days). Sitting on the sofa one night wondering about the futility of life, and whether alcoholism, professional banana peeler, or male prostitution might be a good career plan, I stumbled upon the aforementioned ›Suds & Soda‹. Screaming guitars, nonsensical lyrics, not one, but two impassioned vocalists. It was like grunge, but it seemed real, and not like a group of American kids trying oh so desperately to appear »Cool«.

A trip to the record store followed (independent of course) where the band's debut album ›Worst Case Scenario‹ was bought, and a deep, enduring love was born. Raving to my friends, it deeply upset me that none of them appeared to have a clue who **dEUS** were! Yet the group spoke to me like no other guitar band before! For the next few years I made it my mission to bore strangers senseless by ranting about how great these unassuming chaps from Belgium really were. ›In A Bar Under The Sea‹ followed two years later, and ›The Ideal Crash‹ three years after that. Excellent albums both. And then nothing! I got a job, a proper girlfriend and forgot all about the band.

Then, this month (November 2014) the band released a double-disc best off called ›Selected Songs 1994-2014‹. Packed full of proto-grunge goodness, and art-rock gems the album ably brought out the inner teenager in me, something which may not necessarily be endearing in a ?? year old man. More than a mere greatest hits album, the thirty track collection contains hits, rarities, curveballs, and all manner of sonic

delights that perfectly encapsulate how **dEUS** are one of the most underrated bands around. Yet, great as all these tracks were, the songs I kept going back to on ›Selected Songs 1994-2014‹ were all from the first album. Finally, I put the new record away and brought out my old and battered, yet much loved copy of ›Worst Case Scenario‹ and proceeded to rekindle the love which had first blossomed between us during the long-haired years of my youth.

After a short, spoken-word intro, the album bursts into life with the shrieking violins and twisted emotional rock of the mosh-pit slaying ›Suds & Soda‹. A bona fide anthem for the lost generation, the song provides a thrilling and tear-inducingly good combination of the ferocity of grunge with the twisted introspection of the works of **David Lynch**. This is a song so good you, literally, have to tell all your friends about no matter how disinterested they are.

From here, the record moves on to the cool as **Michael Caine** dad-dancing to hip hop title track, or ›W.S.C. (First Draft)‹ to give the song its proper name. At first the song sounds like an overly sedated version of **The Velvet Underground**. The hushed jazz backing, together with vocalist Tom Barman's spoken word vocals lure the listener into a deeply alien yet vivid world. The lyrics don't make a lot of sense, yet there is an air of self-loathing and the deconstruction of the psyche hidden within the words. Lines such as "It's a matter of seeing and of being seen. As far as I'm concerned, time is the state of my jeans" and "Father of fuck-ups. You did it on purpose" make the listener strive to decipher the subject even though it resolutely remains just out of reach. Just as you are leaning forward, straining to hear better though, the song roars in your ear during a ferocious finale that is as thrilling as anything I have ever heard.

›Jigsaw You's‹ downbeat charm follows to ably showcase the emotional vulnerability which exists at the heart of the album. The song's quiet reflection is a stunningly beautiful and evocative thing. The track serves another purpose though by also allowing the listener to grab a quick breath before their senses are bludgeoned by the aural assault of ›Morticiachair‹ and ›Via‹. Squealing guitars and strangled lyrics dominate in two of the most adrenalin fuelling pieces of rock you will ever hear. ›Via‹ should be considered as essential as air, and if you haven't heard this song yet then you should be made to wear a paper bag over your head to hide your shame.

›Right As Rain‹ heralds another moment of self-reflective calm. The song contains nothing more than Tom's heartbroken voice, a gentle guitar strum and an air of miserabilism that gently seeps its way into the soul. Yet, before things are allowed to get too melancholic the twisted jazz fusion of ›Mute‹ and the quiet/loud dynamic of the epic ›Lets Get Lost‹ have you screaming at the moon.

Another track which really shouldn't be missed is the spellbindingly beautiful ›Hotellounge (Be The Death Of me)‹. The song is a deep, brooding masterpiece that, from its opening line of "There's an elevator, only takes you down. She said." creates a deeply personal and emotional journey into the loneliness and dislocation that exists in one person's soul. Brimming with pent-up frustration that is never quite allowed release, if you have a dry eye by the final line of »You see that man, in the left hand corner? You see that woman? Their love story is famous« then you, sir, are an emotional stone.

From here the album flounders a little, with ›Shake Your Hip‹ no more than an afterthought, while final track ›Divebomb Djingle‹ is almost bad enough to ruin the entire LP. Yet, even in this final flurry of songs you have the gloriously deranged experimentation of ›Great American Nude‹ and the gorgeously heartfelt ›Secret Hell‹. The latter is a quiet, gentle cry into a dark, uncaring night, perfect for people who imagine themselves smoking a cigarette while staring forlornly into the emptiness of space. The album would be absolutely perfect

should it just end here.

That the set ends with the by the numbers rock of ›Divebomb Djingle‹ should not detract from the greatness of this album though. To listen to it in its entirety is to journey into a long, tortured night of the soul. Deeply personal and poetic, for every balls-out rocker there is a corresponding moment of sad reflection that helps it rise above the plethora of noisy records that were out at this time. Admittedly, there are also the occasional head-scratching moment, yet ›Worst Case Scenario‹ is a thing of surprising emotional power and intensity. It reveals numerous layers and depths after every few plays where you find that the songs which you previously skipped, have suddenly become your personal faves. Tough, angular, and cathartic, I would be an entirely different person if I had never had this record in my life.

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