

woodstar life sparks

We're a little bit of a late starter on this one, with the album being in your shops for a couple of weeks now, but we knew we'd get round to reviewing it, and we're glad we did. The *LEG* office bought a technics cd player a little while ago, and again we're glad we did, because combine this record with the sound that the technics experts can get out of a bit of a mettle box, and you have 11 tracks that you wouldn't really expect to come out of a feld in Mungret!

This is one of the most polished and lovingly produced albums that has arrived on the *LEG* desk for quite a while. Many comparisons have been made when talking about Woodstar's particular brand of guitar driven music, and we'll make more. There is the obvious comparison with Mercury Rev, which has been made many times, but is due solely to the fact the Fin chambers sings in a similar falsetto style to Mercury Rev's David Baker, and the song structures are sometimes similar. It has to be said though, that to stop here is to make a lazy comparison, because Woodstar are reminiscent of many other acts pushing the boundaries of what is generally known as rock music, blurring the lines between it and what is generally known as electronic music, and using all sorts of effects to achieve the sound they want. There is plenty here to remind you of the best of Beck, Radiohead, The Pixies, Blur in their more creative and adventurous moments, and even The Beatles when they were making ground breaking music, all forward thinking and important bands in their own time and space. The band Woodstar remind me of most, however, is the Belgian genius, dEUS, a band who employed similar techniques in layering sounds, merging strings and computers, changing time structures, using voice as instrument rather than director, and many other touches which raise their records above verse-chorus-verse-chorus releases.

Having said all that though, these comparisons are exactly that, comparisons, and while many of the aspects of this record are recognisable and admirable, Woodstar succeed in creating their own sound and doing things their own way. From the opener 'Sorry Skin', which sets the tone with a full, layered yet simple sound, creating an almost drawn out and lazy feel (but in a good way!), to the single 'Dumb Punk Song', which is a straight up rock song, softened and slowed by Fin's vocals, through to closing track 'The Sky', which has a country edge to it, complete with sliding guitar and jaunty riffs, Woodstar provide the anecdote to the quality music of people like The White Stripes, The Strokes, The Hives and so many others which has come back into the spotlight in recent years. While these acts revive the music and the attitude of the punk scene and the revolution of the 70's music scene in New York, their sometimes frantic efforts are answered by the more measured and perfectly arranged efforts of woodstar, without losing any of the quality, energy or reality that these bands bring to modern music.

It is refreshing and encouraging to see a release of this quality coming out of a room so close to our city, and all the better that it can be produced independently. Woodstar are what The Thrills would love to be if they had the know how, and the attention that they are currently receiving would surely be better placed on this bunch of local lads. Life sparks when Woodstar provide the soundtrack. do yourself a favour and get yourself a copy.

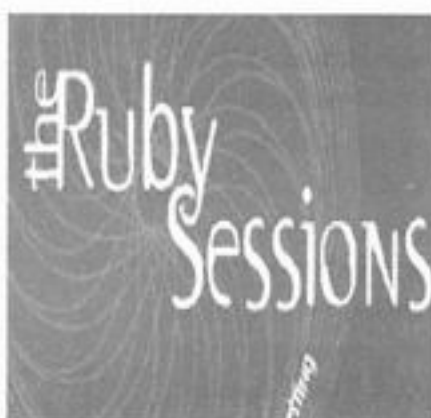
david o'donovan



death in vegas scorpio rising

Comprised of DJ Richard Fearless, formerly of Job Club and Moral Panic, and producer Steve Hellier, Death in Vegas combines reggae, hip-hop and rock to create a unique dance sound. After forming the group in 1994, Fearless and Hellier worked on their first album for several years before releasing *Dead Elvis* on Concrete Records in early 1997. The album spawned the U.K. dance single 'Opium Shuffle' but remains an import-only item in the U.S.

Death in Vegas are now regarded as two British-club-culture alumni who, much like Primal Scream, continue to create heavy grooves influenced by kraut rock, Sixties soul, weird folk and heavy dub. *Scorpio Rising* is an ambitious effort where acid-damaged instrumentals exist alongside songs sung by superstar guests. The fantastic title track is a full-on rocker, with Liam Gallagher of Oasis braying at his Lennon-esque best. Mazzy Star's Hope Sandoval coos through both the mandolin-dappled "Killing Smile" and the blissed-out "Help Yourself". The only blunder is a Paul Weller-sung slog through the Gene Clark classic "So You Say You Lost Your Baby". It all adds up to an album that's transcendent in fits and starts, but undermined by one too many celebs in the vocal booth.



various ruby sessions

There's a whole new breed of eager young singer-songwriters bubbling under the surface in Ireland at the moment, and this album features a bunch of them showcasing their talents. The name 'Ruby Sessions' is taken from an acoustic night in Dublin which was originally set up as an outlet for independent artists in Ireland. To mark the Ruby Sessions fourth birthday this year, they have decided to go one better with the release of this limited edition album featuring studio recordings from a collection of artists who have played over the past twelve months.

The album itself is a mixture of styles from three chords and the truth to electro-pop opening with a simple, guitar driven melody (After the Fall) from Bray's Fionn Regan and then takes a musical turn with leftfield band Babelfish and 'Sometimes'. Babelfish are one of two bigish names on the album, the other one being Nina Hynes. They are joined by lesser known names such as Margaret Healy, Declan O'Rourke and Neosupervital plying their wares and hoping to reach a wider audience.

I really wanted to like this album, was hoping it would be a little gem but I was disappointed, some of the artists (Babelfish, Nina Hynes, Neosupervital) I was already a fan of but the tracks they have on the album are already on other recordings and, much as I like them, I would rather have heard something new. Although, in fairness, if they are trying to reach a new audience more than just pander to their fans then yes, they are better off using what would be considered their stronger material. Out of the 12 artists featured, 7 of them were relatively new to me and I was excited to hear some new music and hopefully discover a couple of musicians from whom I'd want to hear more but it wasn't to be, other than those from Fionn Regan and Susan Enan the songs are meandering and lifeless and maybe not the best representation of the music that these acts are capable of and the talent that is out there on the singer songwriter scene. In Ireland. On the Plus side it's great to see an album like this being produced independent of major labels, the product of pure love of music, it may be a bit hit and miss but it is an intriguing idea and one that the Ruby Session people should pursue further.

Four of the featured artists will be touring the album around the country, check out www.rubysessions.com for further details. Oh, and all proceeds of the album will go to the Dublin Simon Community

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