

"Strangeways, Here We Come"

The Smiths

Earth-Sun-Moon

Love and Rockets

by Andrew M. Duke

The prolific combination of lyricist Steven Morrissey and music-maker Johnny Marr, joined by pals Andy Rourke and Mike Joyce, have released yet another album under the name of The Smiths. "Strangeways, Here We Come" (Rough Trade/Sire Records) holds true to Morrissey's motto of "Themselves being themselves", as this LP employs the expected formula that all fans of The Smiths have come to appreciate.

A record company meeting is the scene for "Paint A Vulgar Picture" with talk of "I knew him first/re-issue, re-package, re-evaluate the song/extra track with a tacky badge". These lyrics could be Morrissey's way of taking a stab at their record company. He has been quoted as saying The Smiths are "mismanaged" and receive little promotion. The *Louder Than Bombs* compilation and the rapid-fire releasing of new albums ("Strangeways" included) are attempts by The Smiths to get out of their current recording contract and switch labels. The lyric "this is your life/but you could have said no/if you wanted to" has Morrissey trying to put his career in perspective.

Tracks such as "A Rush And A Push And The Land Is Ours" and "Death At One's Elbow" are Morrisseyan looks at life in an abstract way, personal vignettes where "too much caffeine in your bloodstream/and a lack of

real spice in your life" are what the doctor will tell you. Morrissey's typical love songs dripping with melancholy are found in "I Won't Share You" and "Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me", complete with angst-ridden string sections.

Journey to Wonderland with Morrissey and find that "you're evil and you lie/and if you ever die/I may feel slightly sad/but I won't cry" is the most anger he can muster when wishing someone an "Unhappy Birthday". Only Morrissey could make the question of euthanasia sound light, as he does in "Girlfriend In A Coma", so much so that he must remind us that "it's serious". This track and "Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before", dancefloor ready, and in the same vein as "The Queen Is Dead", are the album's strongest.

Thankfully, "Strangeways" lacks the silliness of "Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others", a track that would be throwaway material if performed by any other group. Regretably missing are the expected absolutely comical trademark songs to match past joyrides such as "Vicar In A Tutu". Morrissey's songs of depression are less numerous and have been replaced by sane looks at life. Nonetheless, "Strangeways" is a fine album.

It will be interesting to see if the Smiths can survive without guitarist/songwriter Johnny Marr, who has recently left the band.

Most music artists find a formula that sells, then stick with it. Love and Rockets do not fit into this category.

Vocalist/guitarist Daniel Ash, along with brothers David J. and Kevin Haskins, bass/vocals and drums, respectively, are collectively known as Love and Rockets. Their musical careers began in the group Bauhaus, who, along with vocalist Peter Murphy, recorded 1979's classic "Bela Lugosi's Dead". Peter Murphy went solo in 1983 and Daniel Ash formed Tones on Tail with Haskins. Glenn Campling was recruited to replace David J., who was doing solo work and helping in Jazz Butcher. Love and Rockets was born when Campling left and David J. returned.

Their debut, *Seventh Dream of Teenage Heaven* (remember "Ball Of Confusion"?) featured eight lengthy, dreary tracks. *Express*, the follow-up, helped define the L&R sound with their trademark use of space and controlled musical wandering.

An astronomy lesson courtesy of Love and Rockets: L-R, David J., Kevin Haskins, Daniel Ash. Their latest is *Earth-Sun-Moon* (Vertigo/PolyGram).

Their third and latest album, *Earth-Sun-Moon*, is yet another change for them, as it is almost entirely acoustic. "Mirror People" (big guitar and drums) and "The Light" (a wall of hazy guitar and eerie bass) could be outtakes from *Express*. This was quite likely, as they had enough material for two albums when *Express* was released. The new LP has vocalists J. and Ash complimenting each other (as on "Welcome Tomorrow") amid acoustic strumming, sparse drumming, and sax work.

Everything is back to basics, even the album cover with its taped-on photo and scribbled lyrics, much like the "All in my Mind" 12" which features a stunning cover of Pink Floyd's "Lucifer Sam". Apart from the psychedelity of "Rainbird" and "The Telephone is Empty", the

lyrics focus on the future while taking subtle shots at religion. Great effects such as the whistling that closes "Youth" and beating broken bottles on "Lazy" set L&R apart from other bands with this sound. Standouts are "No New Tale to Tell" with its flute solo and "Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven". The latter is a superb emotion-laden vocal performance by Daniel Ash over sweeping keyboard strains.



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