

Trembling Bells – ABANDONED LOVE (Honest Jon's HJRCD.47)



Glasgow-based band Trembling Bells' striking and original debut album Carbeth is now succeeded by Abandoned Love, where even more adventurous arabesques are woven by classically-trained singer Lavinia Blackwall, bassist Simon Shaw and new guitarist Mike Hastings beneath and all around the thudding drumming of songwriter Alex Neilson.

It's every bit as richly scored as its predecessor, but allows in even more disparate influences, all filtered through a weighty, murky haze of loudly aromatic, piercing and blinding electric instrumentation, brass and wind. Beyond the Home Service, the English Hymnal, swirling organs and grinding fuzz bass lines, there may literally be No Roses in Albion any longer but their thorns still linger...

The first few tracks carry on where Carbeth left off: the leisurely lament Adieu England is set to a swaying, plaintive harmonica melody, while Man Is As A Garden Born fairly blazes with the swinging brassy swagger of the New St. George. Baby, Lay Your Burden Down both smothers and soothes, initial eerie cascades of comforting jew's-harp-and-glockenspiel Koeoaddi waltzery giving in to an insidiously catchy singalong chorus section. Did You Sing Together? marries deep ancestral memories of traditional folk song modes before a rousing crumhorn-cocooned coda. On the majestic pomp-and-circumstance/Lead-Kindly-Light processional of September Is The Month Of Death, Lavinia's gorgeous soprano rises aloft. The disc's second half veers into increasingly strange (for Trembling Bells) territory. Love Made An Outlaw Of My Heart somehow manages to cross Creedence grunge with R&B, punctuated with doowop piano chords and a brazen duet-vocal line! Ravenna is also less Poe-faced than you might expect; its bustling quasi-mariachi groove, bongo rhythms, effervescent organ chords, brass syncopations and sinuous guitar lines all build to a raucous orgy of sound. The distinctly torchy, harp-rippled Darling is characterised by an almost pleading vocal part that tames Lavinia's former Carbeth stridency.

One reviewer wrote of Trembling Bells as having undergone an ISB-like album journey between their two records, but skipping from 5000 Spirits to Wee Tam & The Big Huge; personally, I hear the gothic, sometimes cluttered richness of Hangman's Beautiful Daughter (Carbeth) skipping to the wayward stylistic adventures of Changing Horses (Abandoned Love). There's a similar sense of relaxed abandon at work (and at play) here: not unattractive, but erratic, needing keeping in check, if nothing else in order to avoid peering too closely in the mirror and finding out who they are.

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