

Notes on Static Transmission by Stav Sherez

There's a friend of mine who swears that Steve Wynn ruined his hearing. He tells me that every time he's in a quiet room he can still hear the guitar solo from Halloween pulsating through his head. I tell my friend - that's fucking great, there are far worse things that could be spinning round your head. This record you have here isn't going to blow your hearing, it's not that kind of deal, but these songs will sound like they've always been playing inside your head.

What can I say about the Dream Syndicate, Steve's legendary band, that hasn't already been said? You've heard them even if you haven't heard them. Their ghostly electricity still haunts the bones of so many records; you can hear that chainsaw Grateful-Dead-take-on-the-Velvet-Underground rhythm in countless fashionable rock bands, in their swagger and attitude, the way their amps hiss and spit back and forth, the cool sneer and snarl of their work. But that's history man, and the future is right here with us.

Steve's last album, 'Here Come The Miracles' was a massive, heaving, shifting behemoth of fuzzed-up grooves and scorching riffs and was quite rightly regarded as his best ever. Well, you know what...'Static Transmission' is even better - a 'Sticky Fingers' to 'Miracles' 'Exile' (except Steve's done it the right way round).

Utilising the same sand-blasted desert surroundings of Tucson and recording once again at Wavelab with Craig Schumacher (Giant Sand / Calexico), Steve's managed the almost impossible. Creating a truly different and startling piece of work from the same raw materials. He's bought his band, the Miracle 3 (trained and prepped after playing over a 100 wild shows in the last two years, aided and augmented by permanent auxiliary Miracle worker Chris Cacavas), back for a return bout, 12 rounds of the heavyweight recording of the year.

And it's the stories that always draw me in, that blotch of darkness amidst the 12 strings and layered harmonies, the fraught, incessant struggles with the dark. Steve's songs catch their characters at a crisis point, strung out and wracked, in the middle of life's highway, about to choose, or not to. They share the same mental landscape with the fictions of Denis Johnson and Thom Jones. There's the Barry Gifford-esque tale of the woman just off the bus from South Dakota, trying to find her way amidst the car crash sonics of Candy Machine. The man in One Less Shining Star who alights off a private plane on some empty airfield in Argentina and quietly slips away into the darkness - a tale of

disappearance propelled by a mean snarling beat, Linda Pitmon's propulsive palpitation producing drumbeat interlocking with Dave DeCastro's fluid bass and Chris Cacavas' stabbing organ over which Wynn and Jason Victor's guitars screech and fight like hawks in an empty sky. You want more? How about the beautiful bittersweet symphony of *Maybe Tomorrow*, a *Wild Horses* for the 21st Century or the late-nite sleazoid-neon-funk of *Hollywood*?

Each song displays a distinct sonic palette, from the jangle sunshine stream of *California Style* (which even makes me forget the drizzling darkness of the British winter outside) to the astonishing scream and bend power of *Amphetamine* - one of Steve's best ever songs, right up there with such classic as *Days of Wine and Roses* and *Merritville*, the narrative bringing to mind Hunter S. Thompson riding 101 on his *Vincent Black Shadow* at 130MPH with a head full of bad chemicals while the guitars riff and rise, jacked up and wild like chattering hyenas.

But words ultimately fail us all, mere dressing for this exquisite and frightening trip through the dark heart of the dream, tempered by a wary but powerful optimism and a bunch of skin prickling chord progressions. And man, I'm still spinning over the greatness of the closing couplet of *A Fond Farewell* which seems to say it all so well : "And as we fade into the ether we provide nourishment and fodder for the soil / To be replaced by big machines and derricks to dig deep down in search of oil" - which is then made into vinyl - you work it out...

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