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Dancefloor divas prove they can still cut it

rock & pop cds By Graeme Virtue

ONE good thing about the download revolution is you don't have to wade through a glossy CD booklet filled with a list of dedications, where everyone from God to a music publishing lawyer gets a mention, often in the artist's own gushing words ("THANX!!!"). But, as is their way, Scissor Sisters do things a little differently. With their debut album selling two-and-a-half million copies (and counting), there's a long list of people to thank this time round, but it's hard to hate a band who acknowledge the support of both Bob Geldof and the Jim Henson Creature Workshop.

They've always been a glorious anomaly; five self-confessed freaks from the New York underground, not so much walking on the wild side as skipping on it, creating outrageously over-the-top party music that cherry-picks the sparkliest ingredients of disco, pop, showtunes and house. They are Abba informed by Andy Warhol. They made humourless Pink Floyd fans cry with a genuinely weird cover of Comfortably Numb. The UK may have pressed them to its bosom, but they still can't get arrested in New York (well, maybe on charges of lewd conduct). They don't care. They are, simply, fabulous.

Ta-Dah – what a title! – is their difficult second album, but superficially everything seems hunky dory; it's packed with upbeat, high-NRG tunes that brazenly steal the unashamed melodicism of the 1970s, the syrupy production techniques of the 1980s and the dance music dynamics of the 1990s. Look closer beneath the glitter and mascara, though, and you can detect signs of melancholy. Even the triumphant, strutting first single, I Don't Feel Like Dancing – the best Bee Gees song the Gibb brothers never wrote – lyrically suggests that the cocktail glass is half-empty. "I don't feel like dancing when the old Joanna plays," intones Jake Shears, their sprite-like lead singer. "My heart could take a chance but my feet can't find a way." (Elton John is the guy playing the old Joanna on the song, incidentally, perhaps realising that the continued success of Scissor Sisters can only boost his back catalogue sales.)

Where once it was all single entendres and unchecked randiness, now the Sisters want us to glimpse the tears beneath the tiaras; notably, the album's cover features a man removing a theatrical mask (the startled reaction of a young boy in the picture doesn't bode well for what's underneath). To that end, the album's centrepiece (and next single) is Land Of A Thousand Tears, a supercharged, swaying ballad that channels both Elton and Fleetwood Mac. It's impressively staged, but lacks the lyrical and emotional directness that can turn such a song – like Robbie Williams's Angels – into a cultural touchstone. More successful are the defiant glam stomp Kiss Me Off (one of the few tracks sung by the divine Ana Matronic) and the pounding, Daft Punk-esque Ooh, which see them return to the party groove, emotional armour strapped back in place.

For existing fans, Ta-Dah is the equivalent of a knickerbocker glory – more of the same with a cherry on top. For those who admire Scissor Sisters' implausible success story but aren't quite ready to embrace the alternative lifestyle just yet, there are a couple of moments that perhaps land on the wrong side of kitsch.

The first is the banjo-powered square-dance I Can't Decide, which to all intents and purposes sounds like it's been lifted from the Buggy Malone soundtrack. The second is an outrageously smooth Kenny G-style saxophone solo during The Other Side, which even the most irony-soaked hipster would struggle to even pretend to enjoy. No sax please, we're British.

RECOMMENDED DOWNLOAD: Ooh

17 September 2006

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/reviews/story/0,,1875458,00.html>

Scissor Sisters

★★★★★ Trafalgar Square, London

Gareth McLean
Tuesday September 19, 2006
[The Guardian](#)



No more the cool outsiders ... Scissor Sisters on stage at Trafalgar Square. Photograph: Dave Hogan/Getty

At few other gigs would the hands-in-the-air, pedal-to-the-metal encore see semi-naked out-and-proud gay boys cavorting in fountains. But then Scissor Sisters inspire a certain delirium in their devotees. This free concert saw the New York band filling Trafalgar Square in a way they could only have dreamed of two years ago, when they were an unknown act whose electro-ish cover of Pink Floyd's Comfortably Numb was attracting the attention of the cool club DJs.

They have since been taken under Elton John's wing and collaborated with Kylie - who introduced them tonight - while their single, Filthy Gorgeous, has become a floor-filler from Aberdeen to Aberystwyth. One half of the encore, Filthy Gorgeous was complemented by the band's new single, I Don't Feel Like Dancing, which, while not as irresistible, is still the best number one there has been in ages.

As is the way of these things, material from the new album, Ta-Dah, was greeted with less exuberant enthusiasm than songs from their first. Nevertheless, I Can't Decide, a delicious hate song, and Kiss You Off ("think I am going to buy me a brand new shade of man") held their own against Take Your Mama Out and Mary, though slower songs fell a bit flat.

But Kylie's introduction aside, there was little to surprise. The performance was good because they are good performers. The songs were great because the songs are great - Shears, Babydaddy and Matronic certainly don't get the credit they deserve as songwriters. But despite the outfits (gold rubber all-in-one, anyone?) and the encore's Jim Henson Creature Shop stage invasion, it lacked theatricality and needed to be bigger and bolder.

Scissor Sisters are no more the cool outsiders. Indeed, the corporate cheerleading for the event's (ethical) sponsor was a little disheartening. The band should be careful they don't lose their souls and their credibility. We don't want them turning into the Rolling Stones.

- At Manchester Arena on November 6. Box office: 0870 380 0017. Then touring.