



Augie March "Sunset Studies"

"Sunset Studies" is Augie March's debut album.

It has fifteen songs on it, and weighs in at a hefty 76 minutes. This shouldn't surprise Augie March fans: they would know that this band have a penchant for giving a song or a tune its full length and breadth. Two previous five-track releases have both been around 25 minutes long. Turn up to an Augie March show and you won't hear a collection of three minute throwaway ditties to jump up and down to on a Saturday night, you are more likely to be treated to a narcotic sonic adventure with unexpected twists and turns, meditative jams and glorious melodic moments.

The album was recorded in fairly quick and sporadic sessions between March and September 2000, in nine different studios, with six different engineers. The bulk of it was tracked at a pace of one song per day in a fortnight period, with a few additional songs subsequently added. Some of it was recorded at home by the band themselves. Some of it was plain sailing - first takes, happy accidents - some of it was more considered - multiple mixes, overdubs and the occasional re-working.

The album has a beginning, a middle and an end - the closing track "Owen's Lament" is of epic proportions and tells a tale that the very best screenwriters would kill for.

Although the band's make up is nominally comprised of two guitars, bass and drums, you will find songs on here that are driven by or augmented by instruments like banjo, dobro, hammond organ, piano, violin, trumpet, clarinet, clavinet, pedal steel and in one case a suitcase full of cutlery being kicked around the studio, chased by a microphone. There is some bleeps, bleeps, sampling and tampering. And then there's some ballads which reveal their beauty through naked melody.

Don't bother looking for 'fast food' on the "Sunset Studies" menu, the fare consists more of sumptuous gourmet, exotic cuisine and subtle blends which don't cause indigestion no matter how much you eat. They don't fill you up with bread at this restaurant. It's a fifteen course banquet for fans of beautiful original music.

There's no point 'explaining' the songs. The lyrics are on the album cover, and if you are still reading this, then it's time you put the album on, disconnected all phones and dimmed the lights. You may find something you'll be enjoying for the rest of your life.

The History

Adam, Glenn and Dave grew up in and around Shepparton in country Victoria, Australia, and met up again in Melbourne in 1996. Glenn told them he wrote songs, the other two quickly recruited bassist Edmond, or "E", who they were studying music with, and Augie March was born. After a handful of gigs they were signed to the prestigious Ra Records label. They recorded their debut EP, "Thanks For The Memes", with Victor Van Vugt (Beth Orton, Nick Cave), which was released in January 1998. After incredible reviews but minimal radio play, they set about recording the mini-album, "Waltz", in October 1998.

Produced by the band and Richard Pleasance, it is a work of amazing musicality and originality. This recording included the most requested song of the moment, "Asleep In Perfection". It was so good that it earned Augie March their first batch of ARIA nominations, including a gong for "Best New Artist" -for what it's worth. It also led to the band getting a vast collection of fans in Australia and other parts of the world. In July 2000 the first stand alone single from "Sunset Studies", "The Hole In Your Roof" was released, the full-length version of which appears on the album. Augie March are much more than the sum of their parts: each member brings a whole lot more to the table.

Walk into an Augie March gig and you'll probably have to wade through waist-high bass signal, courtesy of Edmond's bass equipment, some of which he designed and built himself. Total commitment to honest expression means you may or may not see him, silent except for his bass. Or you might see him leading the band, singing tenor backing vocals and finally smashing his instrument.

They say 'from the deserts prophets come'. Now, that's way too corny and hyperbolic, even for a band biography. But upbringing and environment so often influence great art. Glenn Richards grew up on the outskirts of a very small town, which in turn was a satellite of a country town. He first started writing songs and playing guitar only two years before the release of the first EP, while studying literature amongst other things at Melbourne University. You can hear the purity and isolation in some of Glenn's songs, which the band then arranges as a whole, each bringing their own experience to the creation. He and the band refuse point blank to compromise their music on any level; if they are not able to genuinely express themselves as a group on stage then they are more likely to walk off stage or leave the studio than go through the motions.

Adam lived over the back fence from Dave in Shepparton, so they are childhood friends, and like most people who've spent that much time together, very humorous enemies. To call Adam 'the guitarist' in the band barely does him justice - at times he pulls sounds that seem to be more likely to originate from the animal kingdom or another galaxy. Dave's free-form, supremely-skilled drumming sends the band into sonic spaces that seemed impossible a split second earlier. He also possesses an angelic voice which may or may not be a result of his formative years spent singing in churches with his (large) family's musical group.

Recently Rob Dawson, a longtime friend of Glenn, started playing keyboards and piano with the band, and brings a rich history of folk, classical and pop music, playing and drinking experience to the band. He plays on two tracks on the album, and brings to the live sound the added dimensions the band sought in recording.

October 2000 see the long-awaited release of Augie March's debut album, "Sunset Studies". The band produced or co-produced every track on it. It's a long album, but you can expect to be still finding something new and joyous in it decades from now.

