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FADED PAPER FIGURES

Relics

Review by Greg Clifford

FADED PAPER FIGURES are an American three piece that create a wonderful synthesis of Indie-Rock and synth-laden Electronica. 'Relics', released 5th August 2014, is their 4th studio album and arguably their strongest and most accomplished to date. The group has crafted a signature sound and certainly knows how to grab the listener's attention. Aside from their musical exploits they have quite exhausting and impressive day jobs too including a doctor, a full-time professor of English at Yale and a composer for Robot Repair, a production company. I must say it's most admirable that they manage to find the time and energy to produce such \accomplished material!

'Breathing' is a cracking opener, which really excels in terms of its infectious beats and interwoven synth riffs. One could certainly lose oneself in the musical depth and textures explored and be reminded of MGMT along the way. The song is also lyrically astute and encapsulates what FADED PAPER FIGURES are all about. Two thumbs up so! 'Wake Up Dead' is an intriguing number in which we're treated to a slightly new age country tinged synth-pop fusion, for want of a better classification. This is quite unique really. The acoustic guitar, shakers, glockenspiel and pizzicato strings sees the song find a certain warmth embedded within electronic components, thus creating unity between this and the previous track. It also reveals their true musicality and willingness to pursue different sound-worlds. 'Not The End Of The World (Even As We Know It)' is then lyrically very impressive with many words being uperimposed into the rhythmic spaces. The song also includes well-executed, yet subtle crescendos.



'Lost Stars' opens with solo synth suggesting a cosmic atmosphere. The groove is like a mellower, sun-kissed KAVINSKY. The synth sounds selected again are quite canny and give the track a celebrated density. The blend of male and female vocals also gives the song a genuinely charming character. Next up is the ballad-like 'Fellaheen'. The simple repetitive drum pattern engages the listener, as do the almost whispered and hushed vocals. A voyage is conjured up in terms of subject matter as the band assures 'it's ok if you follow me tonight'. For me this is one of the standout numbers on the LP, with the piano being introduced effectively in places. 'On The Line' and 'Spare Me' further explores their chosen genre. With these songs we see a certain formula develop which works for the group.

'Who Will Save Us Now' contains traces of MGMT and the catchy assessable nature of groups like OF MONSTERS AND MEN. Following on from that is 'Horizons Fall' and is a touch insipid for my liking. They still create interesting sounds here, but the track is certainly less dynamic and interesting than say 'Breathing', which is when the band is at their strongest. 'Real Lies' then makes a virtue of stomping kick drum and synth arpeggiations, in which the repeated refrain gives this one a nightclub anthem quality. There is single potential here for sure. There appears to be a sitar solo too in the coda and a sampled voice that I find most appealing and alluring. The penultimate track, 'What You See', for me, has touches of AIR, while the comparisons between the group and OF MONSTERS OF MEN are again pertinent. It's a quirky pop number, which is sure to get the listener moving. High register synth sounds suggest Morse code signals, thus creating eerie undertones. Bringing proceedings to a close is then the haunting farewell 'Forked Paths'. Vocal pads and harmonies further instill this atmosphere, along with the foreboding piano. Rather than going for a 'belting' closer, the band decides to exit on a reflective note.

Overall FADED PAPER FIGURES serve up a polished, savvy album. They seek to appeal to the masses while allowing fellow musicians enjoy their shrewd textures, instrumentations and hooks. A strong offering all round.