

Who's Gonna Love You When Your Looks Are Gone?

By Michelle Duffy

The intricate workings of a great legendary mind like Paul Simon still remains a mystery when we embark on the journey through his most recent album 'Surprise.' This extraordinary album must be first categorized and a myth must be dispelled. Since the incredible impact of the definitive 'Graceland,' way back in 1986, we have been left in limbo state, not far from the feeling of floating on a World Music trip so much to the extreme that his next three albums (Concert In The Park Live; November 1991, Songs From The Capeman; November 1997 and You're The One, October 2000) have quietly simply passed us by. So why was it that this album, quite 'surprised' us in 2006? What on Earth was it that made us sit up so rigidly? It could be the fact that this small proportioned, geeky guy resembling an English teacher is turning sixty five in October this year? It could well be. Simon has yet again, enchanted us with his commitment to modern music. He could, let's face it, have quite easily tripped out on stage every so many years and enlightened us with renditions of '50 Ways To Leave Your Lover' and possibly 'Mother And Child,' both unique records in their own right, but it can be a smoother path to tread at a certain age in an artist's life than embark on the cold, unfriendly route of dipping old toes into the sea of youthful culture. Therefore, we should embrace this man who has allowed us to participate in his life long campaign to awaken us both politically and culturally, as well as bathe us in his spiritual knack of producing such music to let us dream and expand our sometimes, narrow minds. This title, perhaps, says it all. What does it mean to us, to hear someone say 'Surprise!' We are alarmed, astonished and completely taken aback. Well, in that case, I have summed up this whole album in just those few words. 'Graceland' it is not. A 'bolt from the blue,' it most definitely is. The perfection and simplicity of a baby's face stands out at us, staring hard into us, from this pure album cover. Just this picture, automatically conjures up questions in the listener's head; is the child surprised? Is it the surprise of a birth of a child? To me, the idea of re-birth springs to mind and it is these thoughts that stay with me throughout the album. It would suggest that the impression we get on hearing this album is just that. The feeling of re-birth. Simon is certainly finding new feet on his journey through these songs. Or perhaps, it is just the easy feeling of slipping into comfortable, new shoes. Staying faithfully with Warner Bros yet again and producing the album himself, he gives us a small collection of songs; eleven in total, and therefore, it is down to us to make up our own minds as to whether these shoes look good enough on him. In topical moods of the current state of the planet through the eyes of a wise, mature artist, the pictures within the cover booklet are simple, touched with strong, sobering undertones. We see a picture of a giant wave from the sea about to drown a sleepy coastline resort. An American City engulfed with smoke. A young boy's ear, just in shot of the camera. A man getting drenched up another throwing a bucket of water over him. An Ape-like couple, with arms around each other. A missile plummeting into the sea. The face of an Oriental baby. Foxgloves growing on the side of a hill covered in ferns. A photograph of a family, dropped onto the dirt of a footpath. The reflection of the Empire State Building in a puddle at night. A very young photograph of the man himself, and lastly, the delightful face of a happy little girl, playing. These images are thought provoking and dare I say it, reminding us of events, that in today's daily life, we have seemed to have forgotten. Yet it is these images that, in a certain light, are reflections of the musical content within. Although it is wrong to equal a piece of music or a simple song to a World disaster, it is fusion of the music and the pictures that we see, that shape a definition of what the world looks like through the eyes of this man. The album opens with a question. The song, 'How Can You Live In The North East?,' takes on a swirling crescendo of heavy guitar riffs and plundering drums. These lyrics are in true Simon style, he immediately bombards the listener with question after question of religion and creed. Touching on every note that identifies a human being, this song could be seen as quite intrusive, yet somewhere there is a moral. The mood is somewhat depressing through this track and the next. We wonder, as listeners, where Simon thought he was going with this album. He seems to have a lot to say. We witness abstract sounds and disjointed noises that we could probably only get to hear from artists such as Coldplay or David Gray. The theme is reflective and sorrowful, yet don't let this put you off. Simon's music creates messages for us, so there we must take note and appreciate what this man has to say. Simon, who is famous for dipping his talented fingers into the sounds of the musical world taps away at our humorous bones with 'Outrageous,' which, lyrically, touches briefly on the comedy of 'You Can Call Me Al,' from 'Graceland.' He chants, 'Who's gonna love you when your looks are gone?' which will create a smile on any face. The theme is funky and straight to the point. It is light, happy and a welcomed Simon trait. We embrace him at the delightful, familiar sounds that we already recognise as Paul Simon. Wading further out into the sea of current sounds, Simon dares to play with some of the more up to date funkier styles of just drums beats and a voice. Little a compliment is noted here and an experimental play with a Prince's idea of a high pitched vocal also, surprisingly, works. So, in deep thought, we understand the need to come down to Earth in slow motion in 'Wartime Prayers.' Gentle and beautifully crafted around the style of acoustic guitar and angelic voice that is Paul Simon. Joined by the warm, arm hair moving voices of the Jessy Dixon Singers, this song is as powerful as a Michael Jackson planet based anthem. It glides up and down and along our musical spines like ripples on a still lake. Simon wraps his arms around the World in this track. Soulful we find him in this mood and through the calypso themes of 'Beautiful,' also. Simon still captivates us with his unusual, church like vocals. His voice, like Elvis, will, I don't think, ever leave him. These drifting, coming together moods travel along the rest of this retrospective album. Throughout these tracks, Simon is joined with some of the finest musicians he could have ever laid his hands on. There is a handful here who also appeared on 'Graceland.' So it is with no surprise that in 'Another Galaxy,' we find these men handing out their extraordinary sounds like audible fairy dust to our ears. This track has a delicate country tone to it, about as prominent as Dire Straits ever got to country, yet this track will probably stun you into motionless poise the most. There is a distant element that captures the ears more than the rest. A hint of this far away theme is also present in 'Once Upon A Time The Was An Ocean.' These titles are again, of such simplicity that they ignite our minds with World issues of Global Warming, War, pain, happiness and beauty. All elements it would seem, make up the fundamentals of a human being today. 'We'll just skip the boring parts chapters one, two and three and get to the place where you can read my face and my biography..' is the opening lines of the heavy groove livened 'That's Me,' Laced with scraping guitar string sounds at first, this track is quite literally, a mini autobiography including the first flush of young love. It would appear that he has question

himself throughout this album. He is almost asking to justify himself for 'being here.' We wonder actually, if Simon has now reached a point in his career where he feels introspective of his work. We all get a brief notion to analyse ourselves as some point in our lives, and I feel that this was the very time for Paul Simon. Perhaps the track that makes the album complete in the listener's mind is 'Father And Daughter,' heavy on the bass, it is, however, a gentle, rocking piece with country tones and foot tapping themes. It is unassuming and as non offensive as any track could ever get. It is the very elements that we love so much about Simon; a strong reflection back to reality. It is almost as if Simon is realising his own ability to produce a song that it both warm, welcoming and embracing of a love and a life. Not just his own, although, touching on his own ideas and feelings has always lead to his finest work. This track can only be yet another brush with his own reality. Used as the ending track of 'The Wild Thornberries,' (the movie) it is as just as fitting for a child's cartoon as it is the ending for such a sobering, adult album. On another reflection, one would be quite disappointed to hear this album come to a calming close. We have been allowed yet again, to wander through the mind of this unique and giving artist who still, today, campaigns on his political trail through the baron lands of Africa and the rest of the World. Over the years, Simon has become an institution, both musically and politically. He has moved us and at the same time, presented us with sounds, ideas and musicians we would have still, not ever heard or. He is a legacy to how music should be written, produced and appreciated. Effortlessly, smoothly and completely cherished. So for those of you who were expecting an old man with lost talent, no originality and a lack of fuds I will let the inside page of the cover booklet say it all Tracks;

How Can You Live In The North East?

Everything About It Is A Love Song,

Outrageous,

Sure Don't Feel Like Love,

Wartime Prayers,

Beautiful,

I Don't Believe,

Another Galaxy,

Once Upon A Time There Was An Ocean,

That's Me,

Father And Daughter.

Paul Simon - Words/Music/Production

Sonic landscape and addition words and music - Brian Eno

Bass - Pino Palladino/Abraham Laboriel/Alex AI

Drums - Steve Gadd/Robin Dimaggio

Harmonium - Gil Goldstein

Electric guitar - Bill Frisell

Fretless Bass - Leo Abrahams

Percussion - Jamey Haddad

Warner Bros. 2006

©Michelle Duffy 'sam1942' 2006 Ciao/dooyoo and everywhere else

About the Author

Michelle is a freelance writer and owner of the websites, <http://www.generationsounds.co.uk> and its successful sister, 'Never Mind The Bloggers' at paperback-writer29.tripod.com She has been writing over the last year, for five major consumer websites across the world and is one of the only two music category advisors for one website in the U.K. She has also written her first novel which is now awaiting publication. Her websites promote young, amateur bands and their fan clubs whilst also reviewing them for local press releases. She has also recently launched the blogs, 'The Ramblings Of An Old Rocker,' 'Bohemian Waffle,' 'The Rhythm Rock And Blues Machine' and 'The Moped's Musings.' She is currently working on a third website. Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Michelle_Duffy

Source: <http://www.gig-events-guide.co.uk>