

THE BEAUTIFUL GIRLS



The Beautiful Girls Spooks

In store May 21st through Die!Boredom Records and MGM Distribution

It's strange, the things a man will hear in his own heartbeat when the mad, bad world of expectation and compromise is safely locked outside.

Listen. The Beautiful Girls have been a long time underground. OK, there was one tour of Brazil, the odd show here and there. But since Mat McHugh wound up touring his solo album, *Seperatista!*, in March 2009, he's been a virtual recluse, digging deep for new sound and meaning downstairs in his home studio on Sydney's northern beaches.

What he found surprised and thrilled him.

"The weird thing, is I don't even like much reggae," says the singer-songwriter and visionary of a radically evolving roots-rock ensemble that began infiltrating the world stage some seven years and four albums ago. "But the reggae I do like, I love, love, love."

The exotic passion that stirs the souls of Mat and his rhythm compadres, Paulie B and Bruce Braybrooke, begins to drip like some rare and potent elixir from the opening beats of their new album, *Spooks*.

Dig the spaced-out effects, skittering drums and dark blue horns of *My Mind Is An Echo Chamber*; the brash toasting and cops-and-rude-boys narrative of *10:10*; the offbeat keys and dub undertow of *Running*.

The rich production and stylistic threads run deep, pure and almost mystically familiar — albeit a world apart from the ubiquitous Bob Marley borrowings of the Australian summer festival scenesters.

"I love the really early dancehall and rock steady stuff," says Mat. "It's as crusty and weird as early punk, to me. King Tubby, Johnny Osbourne . . . that's the more influential side of reggae, to me, the originators who led to the punky stuff like The Specials, The Clash, The Beat . . ."

"When any style of music starts it's a bit naïve and crusty and done completely out of passion and desire, instead of trying to fit into some scene or style. That early dancehall stuff is maybe one bass and a drum machine with some guy toasting over the top, but it's some of the coolest stuff you're ever gonna hear."

A similar spirit of naïve passion played a big role here, from the moment Mat began sampling Bruce's drums and piecing together rhythms under his own bass, guitars and keys. Unlike *Learn Yourself* (2003), *We're Already Gone* (2005) and *Ziggurats* (2007), *Spooks* was played almost exclusively by the songwriter over the aforementioned period of intense studio exploration.

"I look at the band as a co-operative," he says, "a group of friends and musos that I admire getting together and playing the songs that I write. I differentiate between live and studio. Live is where the guys come into their own and are SUPER important. But this recording was a radically different process."

Mat estimates that he discarded around 30 songs before they began to fall in the right direction. First to stick was the album's lead single, the edgy electric party starter, *Don't Wait*. Next was the brassy dub number, *Rockers!*, inspired by his love of the 1978 Jamaican film of that name. Then the work began.

"It was the hardest, most involved thing I've ever done," he says. "For the best part of the year I was piecing it altogether. It was monstrous, all-consuming. I didn't see anyone. I was up at nine o'clock and some days down there until two in the morning. I should have made 10 albums."

Except that distilling it all down to 11 tracks made for a far more focused and compelling album when the band decamped to Jim Moginie's Oceanic Studios to add brass, backing vocals and other embellishments. Spooks was mixed by Ian Pritchett, another constant thread though the band's changing ranks.

Lyrically, "the theme of the record is a bit more personal this time," says Mat. "Whereas Ziggurats was more outward looking, a bit more angry in a way, this one is more about stuff close to me. There's been a huge shift in my life. I got engaged, I feel a really strong sense of home now."

The eight-minute, two-part trip of Home/ Family is the obvious heart of the matter. There's also the intimate ukulele tune B Some Melody, a tender promise of better days, and the introspective acoustic finale, My Latest Mistake, "the first song I've recorded in 3/4 time," says Mat. "It's basically owning up to being a constant fuckup — but hopeful things will be OK."

Things look better than OK for the Beautiful Girls.

"I see us really heading somewhere with this record," says Mat. "It's only now that I'm getting happy with where it is, getting into our own space, really being worthy of having people come to our shows."

"Onstage I'm looking forward to going really big and three-dimensional. I want to step beyond being just a band performing and have some really interesting sonic stuff going on. There's a lot of crazy atmospheric stuff happening on the record: weird, subtle things. I want to include it all."

"The band has got to a certain place in its career, here and around the world, where I feel we're grown men and we have the responsibility to present exactly what we're into in the best way we possibly can. So here it is."

Spooks Track listing:

1. Spooks
2. My Mind Is An Echo Chamber
3. 10:10
4. Home/Family
5. Running
6. After all this time
7. Gratitude
8. Don't Wait
9. B some melody
10. Rockers! (downtown upstyling)
11. My Latest Mistake



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