

Mick Mercer

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IMBOLG

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Forever Autumn

Goth, with a smidgeon of Metal (as in older Rock) and a Pagan aura, there is an unusual innocence to Imbolg on their debut album.

Instrumental 'A Restless Sleep' is a luscious organ opening, and fitting for an album dedicated to musicians who have passed on but continue to inspire. Cut directly into the guitar warmth of 'Duisigh' and you notice the odd, possibly unintentional, ambience of the production which finds the vocals almost coyly hidden behind nagging guitar and adventurous keyboards. This gives them, an easy, engaging charm for such a spritely song, but it is frustrating too, as I can't grasp the lyrics in the smartly undulating piece.

They clomp harder in 'Dissolved' but there's no major murk because Mark Patterson's keys swirl so prettily. Nate Dal Cais doesn't have the greatest vocal control on the higher notes, but it doesn't matter as he strides in a droll fashion through the song, teasing with occasional guitar lashing, as Julius Heumann (bass) and Ryan Solomon (drums) maintain a dour presence. This provides an eerie atmosphere with a sense of purpose. The sudden bursting into life of 'Encased In Madness' is a slap round the ears, as it gurgles darkly, guitar chomping happily, vocals opting for ghastly and ghostly, but keyboards going for glossy pomp, all adding up to an enticingly macabre musical soup, ambitious but successful.

'Winter's Bane' is a full throttle windblown singsong affair, the organic closeness of the recording somewhat blurring the lines, so it becomes a pacey rock thing with a lovely drizzle of gentler touches. It's weirder on the evidently gripping story of 'Tieg O'Kane & The Corpse' as reverb spreads and feedback menaces, but such is that vibrant nature of the recording I don't actually know what the story involves. It's like they've recorded a scrupulously observed rehearsal.

'Thy Dark Gift' has a robust tread and sonorous tones, with more glorious keyboards riffling the edges. The heavenly 'Echoes On Water' is a wonderfully thoughtful piece, and seriously transporting, a quintessentially beautiful instrumental that tells you all you need to know about the potential of this band. 'Generation Sloth' is a weirdly grumpy rock item, wheezing proudly, elements spilling gradually away from its portly core, including a meandering museum piece of a guitar break, a trace of wah-wah caught in its beard.

'Now' is snappier, with some guitar fizz as stately vocals deliver bleak observations, as 'Room 101' is tumbling inwards, a hint of The Doors drifting through, with a histrionic close, then off we trail via 'Tragedy In The Key Of A Major', a lingering slice of maudlin gentility crudely interrupted by vocal wrath then astutely curtailed with attractive guitar.

This is a distinctly odd record, full of majestic elements and delivered with a full-on immediacy that never relies on outright power. I don't think they actually have the sound balance right to bring the best out of their compositions, as they've made do with what's available to them, so next time around with some tighter reins expect something seismic.

For a debut though this is truly tantalising.