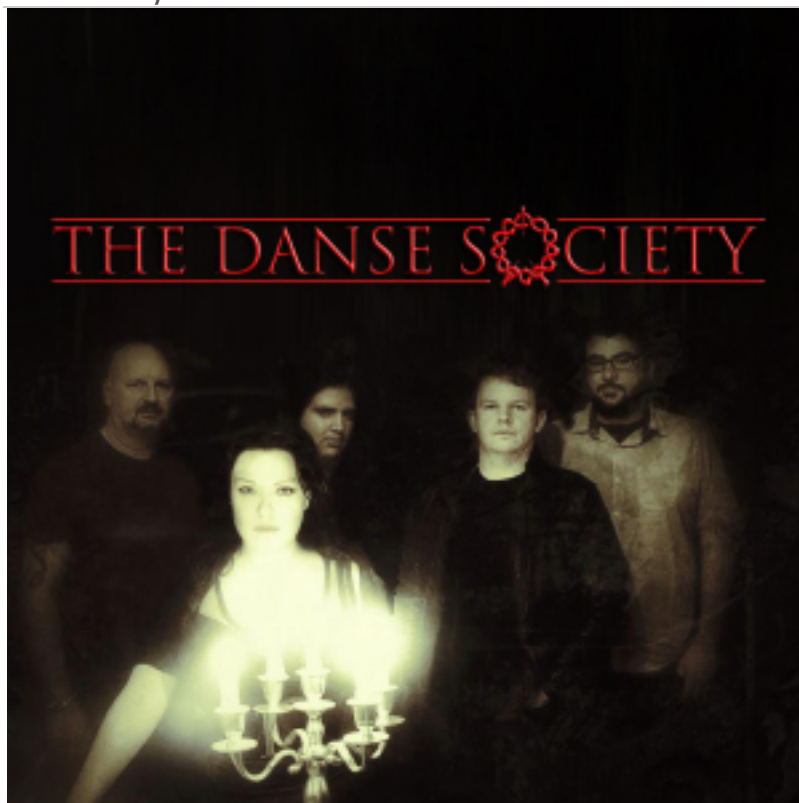


REVIEW: DANSE SOCIETY – IF I WERE JESUS/THE SOUND OF SILENCE



The Danse Society were the dark horse of the British post-punk scene. They were influential and adored both here and internationally but never reaching the heady heights of big hitters such as the Banshees or Sisters of Mercy. Over the space of eight years they recorded sessions for John Peel and Kid Jenson, they notoriously appeared on The Tube and played successful appearances with The Cure, UK Decay, The Cult, Theatre of Hate and Killing Joke. The Post Punk Goth rockers from Barnsley firmly established themselves as headliners in their own right.

Following sell-out gigs across the US and in London, the band's critically acclaimed album 'Heaven Is Waiting' reached No19 in the UK album charts, but disillusionment with the music business eventually caused the collapse of the band and they called it a day in 1986. There are very few local bands that have managed to reach the dizzy (and often nauseating) heights that they did.

In 2011, following a successful Facebook campaign driven by fans, the band reformed but this time fronted by female singer Maethelyiah. They released two albums together – Change Of Skin in 2011 and Scarey Tales in 2013) and then in Feb 2014, just before their UK tour, member Paul Gilmartin and bassist Martin Roberts somewhat unexpectedly left the group, leaving both band and fans up in the air.

Ten months on and the band are back with a double A-side single, released through their own Society Records label. Although I certainly never minded the addition of a female vocalist (I had previously

been a fan of first incarnation of the band) and really liked Maethelyiah's voice, but by the time Scarey Tales was released, my interest had started to wane. Although the production was fantastic, I found the songs too long and the Gothic fairytale theme and aesthetic too much for a whole album. I cautiously put on my headphones to listen to the new song for the first time. Fear not! Here, the band have released their best material in years. Maybe the new line-up has caused a re-think about the sound of the band because on If I Were Jesus, they're sound stripped back, raw, and with the new rhythm section of Jack Cooper and Iain Hunter pushed to the fore, the group slink along, reminiscent of Looking Glass/Peepshow era-Banshees. The minimal guitar work here recalls the outstanding contribution Reeves Gabrels made to Bowie's 90s output. The Danse Society play a nightmarish lounge band with aplomb – think a Lynchian Cabaret. Maethelyiah performance reminds me of Jessica Lange's outstanding turn as American Horror Story: Freak Show's Elsa Mars.

The second track premiered here is a slow-burning and glorious cover of Simon & Garfunkel's The Sound of Silence. Once again, the song starts off minimal, with just a rumble of synth-bass and the simple fuzz of the guitar, with Maethelyiah evoking the smokey spirit of Nico and Marianne Faithful. As the song moves on, so does the arrangement, swelling slowly and appropriately in stature – the stage curtain drops to reveal an orchestra. It is sweeping and grandiose but never needlessly overblown – think The Last Beat of my Heart by Siouxsie or Suede's The Next Life.

Following a difficult year, this is the finest statement the band couldn't have made. In doing so, they have dropped the cliched gothic image that so many associated bands continue to rely on and have instead suited-up into something much more classic and befitting. It is probably too early to assume that the next album will wander further down this freshly dug trail, but assuming it does, then The Danse Society could experience a whole new lease of life and longevity with their music.

If I Were Jesus/The Sound Of Silence is released on limited edition vinyl and digital formats via the official website and is available to pre-order now. Digital copies will be released via itunes and amazon on December 5th.

www.thedansesociety.co.uk

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