

THE DANSE SOCIETY - CHANGE OF SKIN - And why you needn't look back

by Mick Mercer on Thursday, 17 November 2011 at 16:29

THE DANSE SOCIETY

CHANGE OF SKIN

Society Records

People like living in the past, even if they tend to avoid throwing their excrement into the streets from top windows anymore (a notable exception being the majority of ebm acts). Bands reforming can excite people initially, only for them to make the shocking discovery the band haven't remained making exactly the same music they once did for thirty years running. People are rankled, and they get ratty. (Apologies to unusually sophisticated rats who also specialise in Post-Punk sounds.)

The main complaint people seem to have about TDS reforming is that Steve Rawlings isn't involved, but he was initially, then dropped out. As this isn't an era involving the pressgang he wasn't going to be held against his will, it's his choice, as it is for the band to develop the way they chose. I think it's more of a problem at the moment that the band don't have bassist Tim involved, as Paul is handling both guitar and bass, which changes the dynamic. Less throbbiness. Apart from that it all makes sense, with new vocalist Maethelyiah (Maeth for short) from the excellent Bleeding Mask, David Whitaker (in the wonderful Music For Pleasure before joining the original TDS after Lynden Scarfe departed, so you know how good he is), and founding members Paul Gilmartin and Paul Nash

'Revelation' whirls purposefully, like a robotic moth, stocky drums and synth twinkles offering dark and light, before Maeth

glides across, disturbing guitar chippings, and obviously she genuinely sings, where Steve emitted, so that's a distinct change in style. Steve fitted the nervous, jittery energy of the early band perfectly. They were restless, almost fast-forwarding sepulchral soundtracks. Now they're robustly morose. It's a great song, but would have created a stronger impact if it had ended directly after the part about the brother is introduced, because it would catch you unawares and be stylish. Instead, they continue a while longer, with superb guitar dripping off the undulating cortex.

'Change Of Skin' is notable for having unnecessary background vocal activity when Maeth really just needs to be stamped upfront as a straightforward presence, but also a fluid brooding quality as the darker synth style becomes evident. The lighting flashes of yore have gone to be replaced by a smoother, active twilight realm, but the synth acts as the main instrument to guide the song as it spins in a mini-torment. Another fine song, which people who don't like the new TDS direction would surely recognise as quality if by someone else, and there's the rub. If you look for many comparisons you won't find them. I haven't. To me it feels like them, rather than sounding like them. I'm happy with that, as I don't want someone coming back and simply replicating glories past. That's just sad.

'God Cry' is beautiful, dreamy vocals gently basted in stunning synth work, with delicate guitar embroidery and deft drumming. The vocals are exquisite, the atmosphere serenely filmic. 'Black Dream' seems initially livelier but it's a bit constipated and verging on rocky, which we don't need. The thing missing from this record is some genuinely pacey songs, as this is the closest we get to demonstrative activity, and it seems to be stuck in a holding pattern with a repetition. Once they get the balance right in what makes a song come alive I think it will then help give future songs more uplift naturally.

'Slowfire' is interesting, like an ambient compress at first, then sedate bass bulges, and it plods along not unlike Inkubus

Sukkubus, having a historical ethereal element to it, especially at the politely seething close. 'Fornication' skips and dips with angular twinges aplenty and there's less of the full-on approach which gives this song more life, Maeth even getting closer to Steve's old speaking cadence. In many songs they're all so constantly busy it clogs the musical veins, but this one wiggles with a lighter gait. 'Let Me Sleep' is also leaner, the drums clipped, the guitar a balletic gnat, the vocals elegantly agitated, and the sense of space and trim decorum is welcome. 'Resurrection' has a cool sense of electronic thyroid trouble, the rhythm clicking by, vocals opting for winsome histrionics, which again moves towards sumptuous melodic rock, and that really needed some extra filleting as it would have enhanced the atmospherics but then they shunt into some spirited annex before returning to catchy charm, and while this doesn't sound remotely like anything TDS have done before it's a gorgeous number.

'Embrace Of The Ice Swan' is another full-on rock warble on an attractive sonic palette, so it's no surprise people are struggling with the identity problem, but again it's an excellent song. 'Vatican' fidgets frostily, and some interesting vocal scuffles emerging. They're too laid back at times, particularly the guitar, almost frilly, when they could have exerted a grimmer, taut control, but it certainly stirs in some variety. 'Homelands' clomps quite happily, closer to a carefree MFP than TDS, but you can see a link there. It has a wiry intensity to it, as well as a harmonious rapture. 'Sinking' is a finely wrought bout of overwrought noodling which hangs together rather well and then they very gracefully drift off with the gracious 'End Of Days' which reminds me, oddly, of Shakespeare's Sister with all the pretentious bits excised, until a truly horrendous rock cyst bursts. Nothing on Earth justifies that! (It still ends beautifully after that strange bout of senility.)

Now if anyone else had done this album people would be saying how good it was and recommending it as a matter of course, because it is top of the range, but coming from a band with a name and known 'sound' the problems arise. Easily

solved, mind. They need to speed up in future. Just because they're no spring chickens doesn't mean they shouldn't be aiming to die of heart attacks onstage. As for the sound picture? Change when a band returns isn't just important, it's vital. People expecting, and treasuring, the past should stick to their old records. People who want the very best will want to know what the band is doing now. Now. As in *not then*.

The Danse Society have broadened out their sound, and use broader strokes instead of the old quixotic shorthand. An obvious way to appease the doubters would be to stop putting unnecessary videos up of outdoor wanderings, but to show rehearsal footage of how they'll approach old material which will invariably be present in the live set, and I'd love to see how Maeth tackles some of the fiery old glories, and then the full picture will be obvious to people, as will the major plus. We have here a band with a fabulous body of work, who have new ideas. Yes they need to remember that less can sometimes be much more, and not always have the songs clogged with sound, but this is no cabaret or museum trip they are offering the listener, but a living, breathing entity.

Heaven is still waiting.

<http://www.thedansesociety.com>