

BY JON PLEASD

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Billie Ray Martin
Five Takes
(A Song about Andy)
9/10



Billie Ray Martin AKA The Queen of Electronic Soul is back with a new collaborative project where she blurs the lines between music, film, fashion and art.

Inspired by Andy Warhol's Screen Tests, the album features five variations of the song On Borrowed Time, which deals with Warhol's fictional confession in which he reflects on his existence and a life he always experienced as less than real.

Martin collaborated with the London-based menswear designer Felipe Rojas Llanos, who provided the outfits from his AW11 collection, which perfectly compliments the singer's androgynous and otherworldly image. Berlin porn director Joern Hartmann provides the visual slant on the five versions of the song, while Colin Waterson acts as producer and mixer.

On a whole, the visuals take on a haunting and spectral presence, bringing to mind such diverse influences as Pierrat, Rudi Gerreich, the silent movie era and Warhol himself. The musical pieces range from dubby cinematic soundscapes to almost choral sweeps, minimal glitchiness and ambient, Aphex Twin-like sumptuousness.

Never an artist to stand still, Martin once again provides a thought provoking, deeply sensitive and beautiful work that pushes the boundaries of what we have come to know as Pop Music. It's a very welcome return and worth tracking down if you're a fan of electronic music and stunning visuals.

We caught up with Billie Ray Martin to find out what gave her the idea for the project and what we can expect next...

For me this is the first project I've done in my entire working life where everything is perfect. Firstly, the unrehearsed nature of Five Takes means that they end up on the recording unedited. I'd never sung the song before and didn't know what would happen. Secondly, Waterson was incredible - he took these vocals and a bit of a brief from me and just followed his inner guidance, coming back with something I consider a gift; five perfectly crafted pieces of music.

It was the first time in my life I didn't comment or ask for changes. Next came Joern Hartmann, who always surpasses himself in some way. Coming from the porn background, but also from a commercial music video background, he has to drop all pre-formulated ideas and follow our vision. We develop all ideas together in a somewhat funny, but ultimately rewarding process. I tell him what I envision, he does something different,

I go back to him and give more guidance and he goes back to the task and surpasses everything I expected. I also felt that the freedom of not being signed to someone else's label for the first time really showed its advantages - I was able to assemble such a great team around me.

Mastering engineer Steve Honest at Rock of London should be mentioned too for his patience and skill.

Right now, I'm making sure that this momentum doesn't slip away and carrying the positive feelings into the future of this project. Manufacturing and promotion was a challenge, particularly where one is faced with a less creative and positive attitude. It can be such a challenge that I almost lost the feeling for it all, but all seems well at the moment. Having said all this, writing a song about one of my greatest inspirations in life, Andy Warhol, is a reward in itself. I wanted to reflect on his Catholicism and the things he'd really reflect upon during his weekly visits to his local church. Andy was a deep individual, who kept his true feelings to himself, but having read just about every book and watched every film about him I felt I knew a little more about what moved him.

Colin and I have written some other songs and one of them will be the next single; it's a duet with Aerea Negrot and the song is called Off the Rails.

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Hot Chip
In Our Heads
Domino
10/10

Hot Chip present us with In Our Heads, their fifth full length LP and arguably their most accomplished. Where in the past you could find yourself loving half and skipping half of one of their LP's, this is a joy from start to finish with no fillers.

Opener Motion Sickness lays down the gauntlet and rivals anything off the first (and best) Underworld LP Dubnobasswithmyheadman. From there on in we are treated to pop perfection in How Do You Do and Don't Deny Your Heart, the latter recalling Heaven 17 at their peak. Thankfully, the band has replaced their former dabbings in R'n'B with funk and delectable pop hooks.

Clearly, the band's side projects have added a much needed focus and resulted in a playful, euphoric, yet still deep LP: Standout tracks Flutes and Let Me Be Him play to their strengths and are geared directly to the dance floor, without having to resort to Guetta/Harris style pap. The vocals are outstanding throughout and at times bring to mind shades of Peter Gabriel and The Beta Band. An unmissable LP



Keane
Strangeland
Universals
7/10

Keane are back with their fourth studio LP which contains what may be some of their best songs yet. While they may never be the coolest band, who cares when the song writing is this good?

You Are Young and Neon River give U2 and Coldplay a run for their money while Beagle-esque shades on Watch How You Go and The Starting Line show a growing maturity. They are fast turning into the UK's answer to A-Ha who also never lost sight of the magic of a decent tune. Ballads Black Rain and Sea Fog manage to be moving and beautiful without a hint of schmaltz or grandiosity.

Standout tracks are Sovereign Light Cafe, with its nostalgic, tear-jerking street march and Silenced By The Night, a gargantuan festival anthem in the making. The combination of Tom Chaplin's powerful vocals and Tim Rice - Oxley's mega hooks and sky-bound melodies have always been the band's strength and has rewarded them with a long-lasting career.

A less cluttered and more subtle approach have steered Keane in a positive direction which cleverly sees their music maturing in tandem with their fans: a trick that not many artists manage and seem wary of doing. Judging by this LP Keane will be around for a while longer yet.



Pet Shop Boys
Elysium
EMI / Parlophone
7/10

Pet Shop Boys are back with a new LP produced in Los Angeles by Andrew Dawson and the boys themselves. After the crash, bang, wallop of their last LP Yes, produced by Xenomania, they've opted this time for a more subdued and subtle affair. A more organic, sonic palette creates smoother results and tracks that on a first listen seem a bit empty soon stretch out and grow upon further hearing.

Highlights are opener Leaving, which sounds like a smooth drive along a sun-drenched promenade and Pace Like That, the most upbeat track, that harks back to previous songs Love Comes Quickly and Domino Dancing, but with a modern twist. Breathing Space is a gorgeous ballad which reaches for the sky without dragging the kitchen sink with it - thanks to the minimal and uncluttered arrangement and production.

Your Early Stuff and Ego Music should have been kept for B-sides as they veer rather too far towards the gimmicky, while Hold On and Give It a Go sound like a mini musical and recall the group's cover of Noel Coward's Sail Away. The latter two are possibly influenced by their recent forays into theatrical and opera productions.

Requiem in Denim and Leopardskin is a classic PSB disco-tinged, nostalgic slice of joy that's crying out for some great dance floor remixes. Its lyrical references to 'Ossie's last collection' and 'Biba's closing sale' amongst a host of others are reminders of what made/makes the boys so great....Tears on the dance-floor?... Bring it on!

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