



**BIOGRAPHY 2013**

Peu de temps après la fin de leur tournée pour defendre le dernier disque en date, “Head First”, Alison Goldfrapp et Will Gregory ont decidé de s’enfermer à nouveau dans leur studio de Bristol, affamés de travailler sur un sixième album permettant au groupe de completer sa discographie impeccable. Très rapidement, et surtout plus vite qu’il ne l’aurait pensé, le duo de Golfrapp s’avéra prêt pour un nouveau disque. Après de considerables recherches professionnelles et personnelles sur la question, Alison finit par comprendre qu’elle n’était jamais aussi heureuse que lorsqu’elle pouvait se permettre de plonger pleinement dans un monde de fantaisie. "Quand vous êtes détendus et confiant, vous accédez à des pieces que vous pensiez jusque là inaccessibles” dit-elle. Inévitablement, le nouvel album studio,“Tales of Us”, apparait comme un virage important dans la carrière du groupe et si Will Gregory semble avoir opté pour le noir, Alison tient quant à elle une forme olympique.

The aural lineage of the record is the dreamy, acoustic, David Lynch-like flavour of Goldfrapp’s opening set, *Felt Mountain*, and their defining mid-period masterwork, *Seventh Tree*. Like Beck and Nick Cave before them, there has always been an almost schizophrenic split in the sound palette of Goldfrapp: on the one hand the compulsive rhythms of the hit act that stomped through hits ‘Strict Machine’ and ‘Ooh La La’, indebted to a fetishistic mid-European disco thud and the dress-up fantasia of glam-rock. ***Tales of Us*** is part of the flip side of that coin. “I'm drawn more and more to the intimacy and simplicity of the voice & guitar.”

*Seventh Tree*’s opening song ‘Clown’s is a useful foreshadowing touchstone for what happened musically with ***Tales of Us***. It is suffused with winding melodies that veer toward the black keys of the keyboard, reflecting the narrative drive, hearts that have lived, loved and stung. Sometimes voice and music is indistinguishable. For ‘Laurel’ she found herself in an usually low register. On ‘Jo’, she went high. Always, she was faithfully following the rhythm and texture of the story. “I don’t want to sound too dramatic or ridiculous about this but it really is like you’ve been possessed.”

The pace only rises on throbbing ‘Thea’ and even then the rhythm appears to be chasing the thematic mood of the song, of an illicit couple determined to kill the bride of a cheating husband. “I allowed myself to be the woman or the guy in the song.” ‘Thea’ is not the only homicidal moment on ***Tales of Us***. In ‘Laurel’ she breathes life into the journey of a young actress, doomed by her casting couch approach to ascending the steely, spiral Hollywood fame staircase, as she alights on the fact that her facilitating boyfriend is a murderer.

‘Clay’ is about two men who met in wartime. “It’s a true story,” she says, “They became lovers and desperately wanted to meet again after the war but tragically one had died in battle.  I read a letter by the man who wrote it on the anniversary of the other’s death, as if he was writing to him.” “This letter of these two men moved me to tears. It was so visual and sweet and touching and absolutely tragic.”

Nothing in their back catalogue has hinted at the new lyrical breadth Alison has introduced to ***Tales of Us***. All the songs bar one, the haunting ‘Stranger’, are named in the first person. The cast list of sensuous character sketches, the contrary love affairs, the suspense, hallucinations, fairy tales and modern folklores documented and the traces of redemption they find in song take the poetry of Goldfrapp’s delicately considered pop music somewhere new. “I am interested in horror, psychologically. Not blood and guts. That’s too literal. I like the horror of the mind.”

The sumptuous accompaniment to these cinemascope narrative worlds has rendered them gorgeously lived-in. When they decamp to make a new record together, they work as much by instinct as decision, with every musical impulse navigated by a joint sense of direction. Though much of the public aspect of Goldfrapp resides in the singer fronting the band, they are keen to spell out how key their partnership is, with every musical impulse, both writing and production, split down the middle.

While touring the last Goldfrapp album, *Head First* – their most direct, commercial and linear yet – Alison had begun, by a natural process of osmosis to desire inspiration from something deeper and more quizzical. “These are just stories that have moved me,’ she says. ‘What interests me is the idea of not being one thing. I can’t get my head round the idea of being one thing.” Pop music at its best is notoriously noble at verbalising the black and white of our emotional states. Goldfrapp is notoriously nimble at finding the grey spots.

The songs narrative form makes sense given they were born out of a rediscovered love of cinema and the written word for Alison. “I read and read and spent many an evening at the cinema,” she says of her accidental research for the next wave of the riveting musical life of Goldfrapp. She became enamoured of an old favourite, Patricia Highsmith. “She has some really evil little stories.” She took the central, inter-gender character of ‘Annabel’, from Kathleen Winter’s 2010 heartbreaking novel of the same name before spring boarding her take on this tale into life in song.

Two years in the crafting, recorded in chunks mostly in isolation in the familiar Goldfrapp Bristol studio habitat, Alison found herself enveloped in the world of her fantastical new cast list of characters. She would wake up at home singing melodies appropriate to one or another of them and feel compelled to get them down on tape, whatever the hour.

Alison has always taken a central role in the visual side of Goldfrapp and taken responsibility for conceptualising the artwork, styling and stage sets. Given the uniquely filmic, quasi-fictional nature of the record, it made sense for Alison’s partner, filmmaker Lisa Gunning to become more involved in their visual realisation. Lisa is currently mid-way through answering one of Alison’s preoccupations with presenting their music, by making short films out of five of these intensely visual musical moments. “She’s done such a beautiful job of it. Will and I trusted her implicitly with them but from what we’ve seen so far they’ve exceeded every one of our expectations.”

There is a sense in Alison Goldfrapp at the moment of allowing her life to become littler while the music expands into a fully three-dimensional vision. The live journey for ***Tales of Us*** will begin with the Royal Northern Academy of Music orchestra, the first time the band has played with a full 23 piece, at the Manchester International Festival. “I cannot wait.”

Alison Goldfrapp is in spectacularly clear voice right now. Together with Will Gregory, she has conjured dream-like scenes, settings told like folk stories and framed them in compelling sound. This clever, thoughtful act of musical ellipsis has rarely sounded as well rendered as it does on ***Tales of Us***. There is a reason she has used the inclusive pronoun in the title. The album is not really third person at all. It is all about her and Will’s emotional response to some uniquely affecting tales; perhaps even of the quiet storm approaching in all of us.

<http://www.goldfrapp.com/>

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