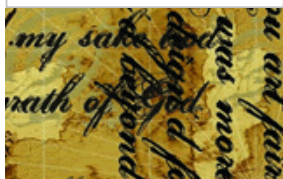




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Mission of Burma

The Obliterati
Matador
2006
B+



Despite all the perceived difficulties and potential pitfalls, comebacks—even ones that take place after twenty-five years—are safer than they might seem. The prolonged quiet simply allows for myths to be spun, legends to build, and hearts to grow fonder. By the time the comeback actually happens, it's easy to lose sight of the true shape of things in the shimmer of all the starry eyes, thrilled just to have something they can chew on. It's for these reasons that the comeback pales in comparison to what comes after it: the keeping going.

Luckily for Mission of Burma, *ONOFFON*, their epic return to fighting form and the public eye, was a breathtakingly perfect reintroduction to one of the most innovative and challenging bands in American music. The nostalgia-fueled comeback shimmer was there all right, but it was essentially drowned out by the record's fiery, abrasive salvo of intelligent and well crafted songs, certainly superior to most contemporary bands' releases. *The Obliterati*, however, faces an even greater challenge than *ONOFFON* ever did: leaving behind the comeback and establishing the band as more than just a reunion.

The album storms forth with the one-two combination of "2wice" and "Spider's Web," giving Conley and Miller, respectively, their chance to set the tone for the album. While *ONOFFON* explored the heights and depths of melody and dynamics, often incorporating elements reminiscent of the member's various side projects, *The Obliterati* is laser-focused, a hard-charging thrust of punk rock intensity. "Spider's Web" is particularly sticky, and by putting it second the band risks having listeners never hear the rest of the album, constantly pressing the previous button to listen to Miller cudgel his guitar strings and spit meandering invectives.

"Donna Sumeria" moves beyond the cute title to provide a cheering, tuneful chorus that's tailor made for in-concert sing-a-longs, much like the previous album's fist-pumping "Wounded World." The band even indulges in a breakdown in which they pay homage to the titular disco diva, cooing "I need love" in their best falsetto harmony.

Drummer Peter Prescott reinforces his reputation as the band's most punishing songwriter, as his songs speed along at a nearly hardcore clip. He kicks up a lot of dust on "Let Yourself Go," which stutters and squalls incessantly. "I'm just a kamikaze / Peeking out the door," he growls, providing some of the most feverish and cathartic moments on the album.

The songs on *The Obliterati* are dirtier, darker, at times evoking the mischievous demos of *Let There Be Burma* like "Foreign Country" and "Nu Disco." They're petulant, bratty creations that demand attention and stick themselves right up in your face. Each one is imbued with a sense of urgency that wrenches the listener in the gut, an electrifying sensation that would no doubt create a truly amazing live experience, with everyone embracing those impulses in unison.

"Good Not Great" shows Conley moving away from the light melodies of earlier songs, even opening with the line "feeling kind of punk." Rather than striking the ear as a little too self-aware, the song quickly ingratiates itself with a hopping, half-spoken vocal delivery that never comes up for air amidst the thick chug of the bass. He also puts his intensity to use on the peculiar "Nancy Reagan's Head," which is highly enjoyable once you get past the fact that he's calling out an elderly widow. Old grudges die hard, for sure, and though it's the only obvious reference to the band's Reagan era origins, it's a stark reminder that some grudges should never die, if only to inform our future ones.

The Obliterati succeeds in proving that Mission of Burma is not only capable of a comeback and a return to form, but also has exponential potential to evolve and thrive as a working band. No throwbacks or nostalgia trips are necessary, the band is moving only upward, onward, and forward, bristling with fervent intensity.



Reviewed by: Michael Patrick Brady

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