

SON OF THE VELVET RAT

Album: Red Chamber Music



Red Chamber Music
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Music. Pure & simple. Sound. Atmosphere. Reduced to the essence, without ornament, flourishes or tricky ploys designed to distract. With words, though. Or rather: studded with them, integrated with text, endowed with a voice. Purism is the watchword that immediately comes to mind when the Velvet Rat's Son steps up to the mike. And: beauty. Peter Jespersen, formerly producer & manager of The Replacements, put it aptly: "... *beautiful and somber music, their lyrics are pure poetry.*"

In fact, actual practice in this case – discovering songs, writing them down, playing them in the studio, on stage, alone where no one else can hear – goes hand in hand with the process of reflection, the soul-searching, the wholehearted, no-holds-barred elaboration of the song as an art form. From time to time, this process brings forth a collection of lyrics and pieces of music conducive to being fed into the pipelines, merchandising channels and distribution paths of the world of retailing. Georg Altziebler, the "best singer/songwriter this country has ever produced" (Andreas Russ, Kurier), would surely prefer magical dissemination of his oeuvre, a form of propagation that pierces directly to the heart. A melody reverberating eternally. A line that grabs you and never lets go.

And who says that this very thing can't be done? Son of the Velvet Rat's just-released sixth album, "Red Chamber Music," crowns what is already an impressive discography. Now, songs such as "Moment of Fame" ("*We may even shoot our way to freedom / if it wasn't for a hopeless cause*"), "Feed Your Dream," "Little Flower" and "Love Song #9" attest to their having once again intensified and expanded their musical vocabulary. In the process of ascending The Tower of Song, Georg Altziebler, SOTVR's vocalist and songwriter, and Heike Binder (vocals, keyboard, accordion), his accompanist of many years, pause occasionally on one of the observation platforms along their way, eyes open, sensors still set to receive. This sort of rest stop is evidently what goes into forming the character of SOTVR and an album like "Red Chamber Music", fully formulating it in all its munificent complexity.

"Red Chamber Music" is a definitively consummate work. From the first song – "Prayers (You're Not Bold Enough to Say)" with its sincere sentiment ("*I wish them well*") – to the final number – "Silence Is a Crown" ("*A golden glimmer shining / in the eye of a songbird*") – these ten pieces flow on effortlessly, with no apparent exertion. In doing so, they reveal, almost incidentally but nevertheless insistently, their beauty and the emotions at their core, often gleaned from minute internal movements, unpretentious insights ("*Hope is a sweet little sting*" are the terms in which the opener puts it).

"Red Chamber Music" is so validly formulated that it's difficult to take leave of this current, to quit this rich mosaic that, like a great novel or an enthralling film, contains so much, is so stirring, imparts the feeling of understanding something, of having understood more, perhaps even everything. Thus, but not for this reason alone, "Red Chamber Music" is a true album and not just a random assemblage of material.

Altziebler produced "Red Chamber Music" himself. Nashville connection Ken Coomer, who was in charge of "Animals" in 2009, is on the drums this time around. Altziebler calls this the first album he's completely satisfied with, the one that doesn't leave him wishing he'd done something differently. All the way to the vocals, where, in every instance, he has reached a clearly palpable, audible point of always singing these songs – of the many ways they conceivably could have been sung – in precisely the way they ought to be sung. *"I imagine that I'm able to recognize when I couldn't do it any better, when I could only do it differently"*, he says. You can hear that in the way things turned out.

As the songs on this album slowly began taking shape in the summer of 2010, Georg Altziebler created a space for himself, a domain for collecting and experimenting with lines of text, thoughts, harmonies, chord progressions and emerging melodies. This space, the cellar of an old building in Graz, was painted bright red, and this color scheme ultimately gave the resulting album its title.

Additional recording sessions took place in Los Angeles, New York and Nashville, and we should not fail to give due credit to the creative stimulus provided by those who collaborated on "Red Chamber Music" there. These are great moments. For instance, when Lucinda Williams, the reigning broken Queen of Alternative Country, joins her voice to Altziebler's on "White Patch of Canvas" (*"I'm just a blank reflection in your eyes / a message straight & cold & purified"*). Or in "Vampire Song" when two Macedonian brass instrumentalists, Kiril Kuzmanov and Trajce Velkov, take music widely referred to as Americana and transport it to far distant realms. The melancholy that is often attributed to SOTVR dances on the table to this accompaniment, exuberantly and unrestrained – *"We don't look as good as we did before, we don't smell that good, we're foul to the core / our flesh may be moldy / but our spirits are free..."*

Our spirits are free? Maybe this is exactly what the 10 essential songs on "Red Chamber Music" are all about. Freedom and openness that render the facile ascriptions to categories like chanson, alternative country and Americana Noir obsolete as far as this music is concerned, that make them too petty and narrow to define this music's coming to terms with things. This is electrified, electrifying chamber music. Communiqués from and on the subject of the world. About the soul, about distress, about dreams both welcome and horrifying, about boredom, emptiness and love (not necessarily Georg Altziebler's). All of them infused with an unsettling, elevating beauty, but at the same time full of lightness and tender humor.

And "7 Stars" includes one of the most beautiful "political" passages to come along in a while: *"It's all good if you have those seven stars at hand / one in the middle, three stars to each side / if you must share, you can spare one for the homeless, put three in your pocket and ride away."*

(Rainer Krispel)

Tracklisting:

01. prayers (you're not bold enough to say)
02. the vampire song
03. 7 stars
04. moment of fame / feat. Lucinda Williams
05. white patch of canvas / feat. Lucinda Williams
06. for free
07. feed your dream
08. lovesong #9
09. little flower / feat. Richard McGraw
10. silence is a crown (the jealous song)

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Concerts:

10.11.2011 Album release concert „Red Chamber Music“ - Postgarage Graz

11.11.2011 Album release concert „Red Chamber Music“ - Szene Vienna

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