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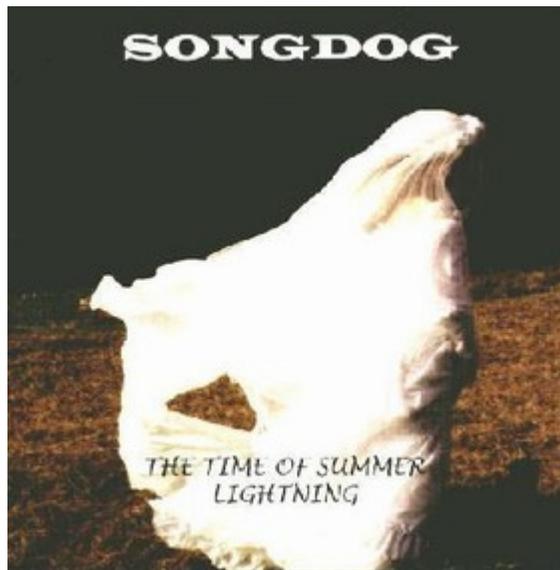
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Reviewing: THE TIME OF SUMMER LIGHTNING

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'SONGDOG' 'THE TIME OF SUMMER LIGHTNING'

- Album: 'THE TIME OF SUMMER LIGHTNING' - Label: 'ONE LITTLE INDIAN
(www.songdog.co.uk)'

- Genre: 'Alt/Country' - Release Date: 'June 2005' - Catalogue No: 'TPLP473CD'

Our Rating: ★★★★★★☆☆

This writer was entirely taken by the curious, folksy delights and tales of sexually-frustrated shenanigans that encompassed Welsh trio SONGDOG'S tremendous second album "Haiku" back in the dark days of, ooh, early 2003. Since then, they seemed to have slipped off the map, but now they're back under the influential wing of the evergreen One Little Indian and with a splendid sequel in "The Time Of Summer Lightning."

"Haiku" was a bizarre treasure based around Lyndon Morgan's skewwhiff reality and stoned love songs featuring odes to bridge-jumping suicide pacts and unrequited love affairs with Glamorgan's most glamorous female HMV counter assistants, and you'll be pleased to hear he hasn't lost his unlikely touch with this new album.

Admittedly, Songdog are something on an acquired taste. Morgan's songs are wordy affairs built on sparse backdrops, with cohorts Karl Woodward and Dave Paterson fleshing out his skeletal acoustic strums with (largely) subtle tinges of everything from tabla, banjo and melodica as well as the more traditional guitar, bass and drums. Mostly they amble to a conclusion at around the six minute mark, too, so don't expect

For all the loopy observations, though, Lyndon's also capable of hitting the target without the merest hint of irony, and it's when he comes out with a gem like "She'd like to meet someone in the end, maybe just a friend, someone to miss here when she's gone" ("Childhood Skies") that you really begin to appreciate his talent. Not that his curious urges have entirely abated, mind: check out the tale of unrequited lust that is "The Time Of Summer Lightning" itself. Over a tune that uncannily resembles Vinny Peculiar's "Everlasting Teenage Bedroom", Morgan admits "I sucked my stomach in and imagined your nipples hard") before the jealousy really bites and he gets stuck in with "Said he got a hard-on at the sound of your voice, but I said "you just look strange together." Ooyah! Catty or wot?

Arguably, though, they save the best for last and "Souvenir", which very much encapsulates the other side of summer. It's an ultra-sparse acoustic outing and it perfectly suits Lyndon's confessional tone when he cuts to the forlorn chase with "I'll never get over you, but that's OK...who said I wanted to?" It's devastating stuff and hijacks Paterson's melodica and what appears to a couple of confused Gregorian-chanting monks to

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quick fixes and simple choruses, because you'll be barking up the wrong tree.

For those of you after something a little more esoteric, though, Songdog might just be your bag. Certainly, "The Time Of Summer Lightning" contains goodly amounts of oddball magic and a ream of hilarious lyrical chicanes and is refreshingly difficult to easily categorise. The immortally-titled "One Day When God Begs My Forgiveness" ushers us into their madcap world via a few contemplative, folksy chords and drifting harmonica and Lyndon admitting "I lost my cherry to 'Strawberry Fields Forever', I fell in love to "Rubber Soul" during this irreverent open letter to The Man Upstairs. His voice is tremulous and fragile and carries echoes of Clayhill's Gavin Clark while Paterson adds the most minimal of melodica along the way.

It's a great start, and merely the first of several unlikely, but spectacular lyrical set-pieces contained within. "The Republic Of Howlin' Wolf" goes off at an equally fascinating tangent and enters via whooshy theremin and gentle, brushed drums. Morgan's lyrics contain numerous gems, but my personal favourite would probably be "Somedays my life makes no sense, I just twist in the wind like Crematorium smoke." Or maybe that's just because I'm a miserable bastard anyway.

Elsewhere, Songdog make like Smog in the Welsh Valleys during the blasted, low-life Bonnie & Clyde folk-blues of "Fairytale" (sample lyric: "Sometimes I beg outside the abbatoir and sometimes I turn tricks") and the band make their presence felt when they paint in broader strokes during the epic "Jerusalem Road". It's a skewed, but emotional piece of work interrupted by lines like "And the bus stop girl's biting her nails and the hell hound on their trail's been distracted by the cold white frisbee", which could almost have come from the pen of Half Man Half Biscuit's Nigel Blackwell.

add instrumental and vocal touches respectively. It's bloody sad and surely the perfect way to leave it for now.

There's lots more of course (not least a gentle and surprisingly tender cover of, of all things, The Clash's "Janie Jones"), but really the only way to appreciate Songdog's quirks and likeably fuzzy logic is to simply immerse yourself. "The Time Of Summer Lightning" is probably the most fun anyone who's repeatedly denied the opportunity of getting their clothes off can have, but - more importantly - this writer's simply glad that One Little Indian stepped in to ensure Lyndon and co didn't have to apply to Ann Summers for employment in the interim.

Mind you, I bet they'd have got a shedload of new songs out of it if they weren't arrested first.

author: TIM PEACOCK

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