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Ben Hughes January 14th, 2020



US guitar romantics The Cry! have been pretty quiet the last few years. In fact, it's been 6 long years since their fantastic sophomore album 'Dangerous Game' hit our turntables. Rumor has it, the band has studio time booked in the spring to polish off the follow-up. In the meantime, their illustrious front man and main songwriter Tommy Ray (Nelsen) is flying the flag releasing tasty rock 'n' roll records. Tommy follows up last year's 'The Decayed: PDX PUNX' album with a new long-player entitled 'First Hits Free' and what a banger it is.

'First Hits Free' is a collection of Tommy Ray songs that The Cry! passed on for one reason or another. That's not to say these songs are substandard, oh no, far from it. These songs follow the same retro, low-slung power pop route of his day job for sure. If you dig the raw and emotional pop punk delivered by the likes of The Speedways and

Cyanide Pills on this side of the pond, then watch out boys, as this Portland, Oregon based songwriter has the minerals to mix up the sounds of The Heartbreakers (Thunders, not Petty), The Attractions and The Buzzcocks like the last 40 years never even happened!

Tommy Ray delivers raw and unadulterated rock 'n' roll straight from the heart. Opener 'Ain't No Use' fills the speakers with raw guitars, pumping bass and urgent beats, topped off by a tinkling of the ivories, a nonchalant vocal delivery, and a melody to die for. Single 'Life Goes On' follows, with its cool Yaffa-like bass rumble, handclaps and irresistible gang vocal you'll be hooked after the first listen.

Do you miss The Biters already, or are you still shedding a tear over The Exploding Hearts? Well, dry those khol stained eyes, as Tommy Ray has a handful of songs that are just what the doctor ordered. Yes, the production is raw, but it matters not one iota when the songwriting is top-notch and the delivery is sincere and from the heart. You could say songs of broken love and reflection have never sounded so upbeat, but Tommy has that knack, that certain something that makes his songs stand out from the crowd.

'Hey Suzanne' is a glorious combination of Costello and Strummer goodness, punk with pop sensibilities, something that not a lot of young songwriters get right. The glam slam 70's stomp of 'Voices' hits in the feels for sure. Gloriously upbeat and as ramshackle as you like, it's a riot from start to finish, as the singer snarls his way over cool guitar riffs and big beats like Hanoi Rocks in their prime. You will swear you have heard the likes of 'Good Love Gone South' and 'Trouble' before, such is the instant feel of the catchy melodies.

As a whole the songs on this album make the majority of Tommy Ray's contemporaries sound dull as dishwater. Who wants to hear a half-arsed, bedraggled Indie boy staring at his shoes recounting how unfair his life is, when Tommy Ray is living his best life like the bastard son of Johnny Thunders and Joe Strummer.

If these are the songs that didn't make the highly anticipated 3rd album from The Cry! then they should have one hell of a record under their studded leather belts. We await that album with baited breath, but until then bask in the glory that is 'First Hits Free', the first great new album you will hear in 2020.\