

DAN SHEARS — & — THE VELVETEEN ORKESTRA

While weaving tales of love, heartache and fantasy with their intensely dark and ethereal style, Dan Shears & The Velveteen Orkestra are proving themselves to be one of London's most interesting and captivating bands. Beautiful, flowing vocal melodies, with lyrics that bring to mind carnivalesque lullabies written by a much older soul, cascade over delicate and intricate guitar work, soaring vocal harmonies, a surging ocean of orchestral sound and songs so immersed in passion and pathos that they're sure to haunt the memory long after the first listen.

Dan Shears recalls Matt Bellamy's slower and more resonant tones but the Muse similarities end there. With an incredibly wide vocal range and a gorgeous poetic quality, he has a sharp wit and cockney charm and a voice that evokes memories of artists as diverse as Nick Cave, Morrissey, Frankie Valli and Roy Orbison amongst others.

Born in South East London in the mid-80s and living on the road where Bon Scott had died six years earlier, Dan Shears grew up surrounded by music. He would make his dad play Pink Floyd's 'On The Run' continually because it 'scared him'. He was intrigued by how certain music seemed intent on painting a moving picture and evolving a narrative, be it lyrically or sonically. He was introduced to blues and various forms of guitar based rock music and would make mix tapes and pretend to play them as a live set in front of the mirror. "The first band I can really remember getting into was Squeeze. My brother had a collection of all their music videos and I would watch them all the time".

When Dan's brother first played him 'Creep' by Radiohead, he was only seven years old but became instantly hooked and used his brother's old guitar to play along to the record. "I would pluck the strings and move my hands up and down the neck convinced that I had learned the song. It was only when the CD was turned off that I realised I couldn't actually play it".

During his childhood, although he was popular with his friends, Dan spent much of his time playing alone. He would entertain himself by writing stories, watching videos or playing games that usually involved a ball and a wall to hit it against. "It wasn't that I didn't like anyone or saw myself as any better or worse than anyone else, there was just this private little world around me that I felt was

so precious to me and wouldn't seem as important to others. My brothers and their friends were all over eighteen and introduced me to music, films and comedy that probably shouldn't have been experienced by a kid of my age. This equipped me with an understanding of more mature themes and aspects of life ahead of my peers".

Dan would study things in meticulous detail, being able to recite chunks of dialogue from film and television, or statistics from football matches that happened before he was even born. Before his ambition to make music emerged during his teens, Dan's obsession had been football. He would invent entire football clubs, name the players, design their emblems and strips and place them in leagues and tournaments where he would log all the scores. He had played competitive football since the age of six but despite trials with several London clubs his dream of becoming a professional footballer did not come to fruition. As a toddler Dan had been seriously ill with meningococcal meningitis, lost a large percentage of his body weight and hadn't been expected to survive. "I still use it as an excuse for why I'm so thin now but I don't know how much longer I can keep attributing the blame to something that happened when I was two" he jokes.

When Dan moved to a secondary school in Bromley he experienced the British class system for the first time and found it fascinating to meet people who seemingly had no knowledge or experience of the world he had known up to that point. He excelled academically, particularly in English and Drama. In one of his English lessons Dan delivered a presentation about the music of the 1970s which culminated in him singing a Black Sabbath song. As a result of that he was invited to be the vocalist in a covers band. Dan then began to teach himself guitar on borrowed instruments and developed his playing skills with his innate attention to detail. On his sixteenth birthday he was rewarded with a guitar of his own and started his own band. Named Coma as a reference to his childhood illness, the band entered and won a music industry competition. This encouraged Dan to push on further with his music and the gigs grew bigger but the band played their last show in the Spring of 2007.

Dan moved to Brighton and began to study for a music degree at Sussex University where he continued to write songs and perform under the name Petrushka, a favourite fairy tale character of Dan's when he was a little boy. He was inspired by and empathised with the protagonist who displayed characteristics that might be associated with the archetypal villain. Dan's love of the dark and fantastical writing of authors such as Angela Carter and Franz Kafka and the mood and imagery created by film directors such as Stanley Kubrick and Tim Burton infused with his admiration for artists like Jeff Buckley and The Smiths and folk music from around Europe and the US. From this elixir emerged the sound of 'Dan Shears and the Velvetten Orkestra'. Work began on what was to become 'The Eternal Mystery of the Human Heart'. The budget was modest and Dan funded the recordings doing various jobs such as fitting carpets, varnishing wooden barrels and digging up Christmas trees. He felt inspired by the idea of assembling an orchestra essentially from the street. The notion of rich, epic, orchestral and almost operatic sounds being created by a group of

working class musicians with more than a touch of venom and snarl felt very liberating to Dan. In the Spring of 2010 he sent copies of the finished EP to a handful of independent record shops across the UK and they quickly sold out.

After the release, Dan continued to write and record new songs and regularly played live around London and the South. In February 2012, he embarked on his first ever full tour, supporting Charlene Soraia at her sold out shows around the UK, receiving glowing reviews from press and fans for his mesmerising solo performances.

A second EP, 'Against a Sea of Troubles', was launched and sold only at gigs until it's official release. The new EP, featuring live favourite, 'In The Shadows of Better Men', received fantastic reviews and showed a glimpse of Dan Shears & The Velveteen Orkestra's more theatrical and, at times, gothic sound. Festival dates, including performances at Kendal Calling (Peak District), the main stage at Leefest (London) and Blue Balls (Lucerne, Switzerland), as well as a small solo tour followed the launch and a third was recorded but never released. After recording 'The Street Urchin Opera', the follow up to 'Against a Sea of Troubles', the masters were lost and the band was unable to release it.

After the disappointment of losing an entire record, the band regrouped with a whole bunch of new songs and set to work on their debut album 'Shadow & Whimsy'. They joined up with producer Richard Neuberg (Viarosa) and spent much of 2015 recording in the Oxfordshire countryside. A crowd-funding campaign for 'Shadow & Whimsy' became very successful, with fans pre-ordering the album and far exceeding the campaign's target. 'Shadow & Whimsy', the debut album from Dan Shears & The Velveteen Orkestra will be released in 2016 and shows a real development and maturity in the band's sound and approach. 'Dressed Up in Sables' is the album's first single and is a hard hitting indie-folk anthem about mania and depression, and the blurred lines between the two, with a touch of post-punk venom and snarl, but also the camp swagger and imagination of a melodramatic musical theatre number. We look forward to seeing what 2016 holds for Dan Shears & The Velveteen Orkestra.

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