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A WISHTV.COM Music Review

Mike Downey: Adventure, Bless and Don't Be Sorry

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Mike Downey (picture courtesy of the artist)

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Just in time for spring, Luna Records brings us the thoughtful lyrics and whimsical sounds of Mike Downey. On *Adventure, Bless and Don't Be Sorry*, Downey travels the sometimes bumpy phonic journey of electronic beats, dubs, sound effects and all sorts of fun with a synthesizer. He pairs these often quirky sonic musings with a familiar pop sensibility to create a refreshingly different, if low-key, CD.



Downey's voice is charmingly geeky and the music reminded me, at times, of David Bowie. The third track on this album, *Fancy Forest*, could nearly be an outtake from *Scary Monsters*. A sad guitar riff makes it even more reminiscent of something out of the seventies, remote and lonely.

The lyrics on this CD, which are provided on the sleeve notes, read a lot like poetry. From *Flame Out Flyboy*: "Brushing the rice out of my hair/Letting love disaster in the distance." This is a fairly quiet song with an acoustic treatment apropos for its melancholy reflections.

But if *Flame Out Flyboy* lulls you into thinking this is an acoustic album, *Judge on the Horn* quickly dispels that idea. This is a much rockier song, although still with percussion that sounds like it's been programmed on a computer. I'm not knocking the idea, and in fact it's pretty amazing what kind of sound can be accomplished using a computer program. Bobby Conn played the Midwest Music Summit with a gig at the Vogue last summer accompanied by a violinist dressed in a crazy bodysuit and a Mac laptop that proved to be his "band." It might not pack the same punch, but it does allow a solo artist to create his own sound cheaply and with a minimum of fuss. Anyway, *Judge on the Horn* is a great track that could easily have a

more standard rock treatment with loud guitars etc. Downey gets it just right, building up to the chorus for a compelling riff.

Downey says Adventure was recorded on an eMac computer. On his website he explains how he got started recording with a Tascam four-track. "I do retreat back to my four-track from time to time though and rummage through old tapes to find random sounds/noise to use in my samples and loops. But the computer is the most efficient way for me to work these days."

The opening track, You've Your Spy Map Out, is a good example of Downey's use of electronica sounds as percussion elements. Sometimes this can get a little distracting, but the unexpected sounds are also what keeps it interesting. The CD is entirely a solo effort, which is testament to Downey's prolific output. "I play guitar, bass, synth and obviously I sing. All of the drumming was either programmed in a drum machine or sampled/ looped/manipulated by me from previous recordings," he said.

House/Hotel is another song that reminded me of Bowie - a little bit of Jean Jeanie in there, with its somewhat repetitive verses: "I moved to the basement/I got my own phone line/I hung the posters and I looked in the mirror." But soon Downey is messing with the controls (I feel like this CD should come with a warning that says: Do not attempt to adjust your stereo!) and the chorus begins its menacing, fuzzed-out chant.

There are some fairly cheerful-sounding tracks on here, too. Rates Were Comrades and Oh Randomness come with their own tinge of wistful reflections, and sometimes I get the feeling the overly happy keyboard/synth riff is just a tad tongue-in-cheek. The guitar wakes up for the chorus in Rats Were Comrades, "Arms around my neck/and you should know I'm in control when I'm leaving or letting go." Phonio also has one of the happier riffs: "Wake up/We can't sleep in/I'm warm and my heart just beeped again/Your ear against my skin." This song, like Rats Were Comrades, has a chorus that bursts forth in sudden, glorious pop perfection. I'm an Engineer (and Things Get Weird) is also in the same vein.

Originally from Chicago, Downey is now based in Sweden, where he moved to be with his girlfriend. "This album was recorded all in Chicago. I moved to Sweden after the album was completed. Adventure really is about the conflicts of having a super long distance relationship and how living in a big urban environment affected my day-to-day moods of this longing to be somewhere else with someone. It's a snapshot of a two-year period in my life, the ups and downs of it all."

Adventure, Bless, And Don't Be Sorry is a welcome addition to the low-fi, might-have-been-recorded-in-the-guy's-bedroom genre. These are well-written, thoughtfully produced songs that prove there's a lot of ways to create a worthwhile CD.

If you happen to be in Uppsala, Sweden at the end of March, Downey has a gig coming up there. He says he'd like to come back to the States for a tour: "At this point it's more of a financial question. If I can make it work I'll come back and play shows. I'm weighing all of my options now and really trying to make it work."

Favorite tracks: You've Your Spy Map Out, Judge on the Horn

You can pick up this CD at [Luna Records](#).