

Big Strides

Cry It All Out

EMMS

Tall Order
February 19th

www.bigstrides.net
www.myspace.com/bigstrides

'An epic and deeply textured album. Anyone who is anyone should have it.' **Clash**

'A brilliantly satisfying mixture that had me hooked from the start. 'Cry It All Out' starts off strong, continues strongly, and ends, ever stronger.' **Favourite album of 2006 # 2CMU Daily**

'I can't tell if I love it or if it upsets me.' **Jonathon Ross, Radio 2**

Marcus O'Neill – voice, guitar, harmonica / **Chris Kelly** – double bass / **Lewis Kirk** - drums

On February 19th, London-based three piece Big Strides present 'Cry It All Out', the follow up to their acclaimed debut 'Small Town, Big Strides'. At times riotous, at times mellow, the album is a loose-limbed body of punk energy, jazz, funk and blues. Aside from critical acclaim for the debut over here, Big Strides have also notched up an incredible 300,000 downloads for debut single 'Suicidal' in the US.

Marcus' melancholy lyrics and sardonic take on problems in his life, observations on others and on the world at large are tempered with a 'dance in the face of adversity' attitude. He explains: "Music is fun but life isn't. If you're going to have a sad song you might as well have good beat. Look at 'Tracks Of My Tears' by Smokey Robinson, it's the ultimate party song but the lyrics are seriously sad." On the unusual musical juxtapositions, Marcus adds, "we've been described as a jazz version of the Jam and John Lee Hooker meets Pavement." Although hard to categorise, their widespread musical net could easily snare fans of bands as disparate as Red Snapper, Gomez, Howlin' Wolf, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Reprazent, Archie Bronson Outfit, Fugazi, or Ian Dury and The Blockheads.

The Music

"Album opener '£2.49' always gets the 'kids' dancing," says Marcus, "it's a lot like a satanic version of the Sesame Street Theme tune," his comment highlighting their characteristic sense of humour and Beelzebub-infused grooves. The track also features a very deft guitar solo followed by some tasty slide.

'Let's Get Nice' has an almost Roni Size/ Reprazent vibe to it, a fast double bass and breakbeat workout with a sing-along chorus, with Marcus rapping, he says, "about pointless preoccupations, urban whinging, and bad TV – the Big Brother generation."

"'Breakfast' is the first angry song I've written," says Marcus, "British daytime radio can be really bland and rarely takes any chances. If there's one way to take all genuine emotion out of music it's to convince an entire nation that what they really want to listen to is the same moronic pop repeated every twenty minutes. This is especially annoying in the mornings." A heavy, lurching twelve bar stomp, the track could match the grit and muscle of anything by Queens Of The Stone Age.

'Cookies (Donald's Theme)', has to be the funkiest, badass political song since 'War', or 'Inner City Blues'. Marcus explains: "These were Donald Rumsfeld's words from a few years ago about civilians killed in Afghanistan, 'Whatever they were doing in those mountains, they weren't making cookies, right?' I don't normally do politics," says Marcus, "but he's beyond political – a high profile example for all idiots and psychopaths to aspire to."

The History

Hailing from small British outposts, (Marcus - Ipswich, Lewis - Kirkcudbright, Scotland and Chris - Whitehead, outside Belfast) founding member Marcus formed the first incarnation whilst studying French at Uni in Leeds. Wanting to take things further, Marcus saw it necessary to move to London, where, on hooking up with original bassist Tom Pi and drummer Lewis Kirk, they recorded debut 'Small Town Big Strides'. Despite being recorded in 'chunks' the album formed a very coherent whole, with a consistent level of quality control throughout.

Chris Kelly recently replaced original double bassist Tom Pi, who left on amicable terms. Despite scarcity of jazz-rock-funk-savvy double-bassists, Chris answered an advert, and fitted perfectly. "Chris turned out to be brilliant, and picked everything up almost straight away" says Marcus, "We were really lucky, and he is one of those weird people willing to lump a double bass around with him."

The three current members got into music by various routes. Marcus would sing whilst playing ukulele with his brothers and Lewis was inspired by Tommy Lees drumming/ theatrics in Motley Crue, himself starting more humbly learning the snare. Nonchalantly, Chris saw a double bass lying around at his school, and, being tall enough, thought 'why not'? Collective early influences include, Miles Davis, Muddy Waters, Herbie Hancock, Frank Zappa, The Pixies and Soundgarden.

A chance meeting with Dan Swift cemented a productive, musical love-hate environment where Swift, used to working with more straight up guitar bands like Art Brut, Snow Patrol and the Datsuns, rose to the challenge of doing something a bit different. Having gigged a lot, the tracks evolved on the road, partly due to the scope jazz/ funk based music has for jamming and playing with structure. This led the Strides to creating what they see as a more fully realised album than the first, having whittled down the sixteen best tracks from twenty four.

Despite being pleased, and the album gaining acclaim around its original soft release, the band are keen to avoid too much perfection-based gloss. "It's good to hear skilled musicians, and we aim to be as perfect as we can be, but it's more about feeling," says Luke, "Ringo is a good example, he wasn't technically a great drummer but he made it up as he went along and as a result it sounds original and works."

The unorthodox musical combination of harmonica, double bass, half rapping-half singing, funk drums and rock and roll may make the band harder to lump in with any 'scene' or genre but instead of closing doors, surely this will leave things wide open for Big Strides? They've already supported Roy Ayers, Bloc Party, Horace Andy and Arctic Monkeys, which says it all really.

Big Strides headline Electric Ballroom, Camden on March 1st 2007

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