

FRIENDS OF ALICE IVY

The Last Days of Fenwyck

An explanation.

"Fenwyck is very much a symbolic creation; and in the context of this album, he is a symbol of old versus new. We wanted to utilise a symbol that represented our view that as humans, we have become too far removed from the natural world. We know it is there, and to a degree we appreciate it; but it is something "other", an alternative that isn't part of our daily lives".
Amps

"Fenwyck is a symbol of nature and its cycles. The stag represents seasons...life, death and renewal. This album is our way of saying that those ancient ways of understanding change are dying and our connection with nature is dying. We are not hippies, but that disconnect is not a good thing. Our connection with nature is more distant than it has ever been". Kylie

Friends of Alice Ivy are somewhat reticent to describe their new album "The Last Days of Fenwyck" as a "concept" album; partly for fear of sounding pretentious, but partly due to an unwillingness to entertain comparisons between their dynamic new work and overblown, sluggish, prog epics. "This album is a concept album in so much as the songs are deeply inter-related and connected" says vocalist Kylie, "though there is nothing lethargic about it" she adds. At less than 30 minutes, and filled with tense, pulsing drama, it's a rather eccentric beast that marries the old-world English folk leanings of Mellow Candle, with the sometimes unsettling and brooding electronica of Massive Attack's "Mezzanine".

"The Last Days of Fenwyck", is the band's first new work since the critically acclaimed "The Golden Cage and its Mirrored Maze", nearly 3 years ago. That album presented the listener with a dizzying kaleidoscope of exoticism, flights of fancy, star-gazing wonder and neoclassicism. Whilst the new album maintains their signature ethereal sound and otherworldly atmospheres, it's perhaps a far more consistent work, remaining anchored to its themes and stylistically grounded by its constant and expressive production. Kylie's pride in the result shows as she speaks of it. "I'm most delighted by the fact that unlike previous work, this has been far more collaborative between the two of us...both from the perspective that we had fewer people involved in the studio, as well as the fact that the songs were developed with equal amounts of input from the two of us. So I can hear much more of myself in these songs...and that's quite aside from the vocals".

The album's six songs take the listener through a beautiful, and yet troubled musical landscape. Opener "Fenwyck" is a whimsical and ethereal introduction; a chiming zither giving way to exotic percussion that gently propels Kylie's melodious canticle for the titular stag to a rousing crescendo of cello and driving beats. It is followed by "Blackthorn", a bleak, vibrating song of troubled visions that climbs into a culmination of swimming exoticism and driving bass guitar. The

mood is lighter on "Albion" which begins as a neoclassical hymn to ancient Britain before exploding into a powerful climax of electronica and strings. "Albion" is followed by the digital single "Wycca", a pulsating and atmospheric pop song, enriched by swelling strings, climbing cellos and Kylie's melancholy ode to serenity. "Rooks" follows, with its rich, orchestral introduction giving way to a tense electronic tapestry of beats and dark ambient soundscapes that are as foreboding as the circling crows that Kylie sings of with passion. The album's closer is "Brambling", a beautiful piano-led lament, driven by a melodic bass, building into a taut climax of increasingly desperate piano and frantic electronic beats.

Kylie is resolute that the band have produced something truly unique. "At least in my frame of reference, I cannot think of another album that sounds like this one does. Though we've been quite upfront about what our influences have been, I don't think you can necessarily hear any of them in there explicitly. I honestly believe we've done something quite strange and without equal...I know that sounds very arrogant, but it's not a comment about the quality, it's merely to indicate that I think it has a character and sound all of its own".

Regarding the title, multi-instrumentalist, Amps, says that "Fenwyck" refers to the stag on the album's cover. "He's very much a symbolic creation" he says "we used him as the lens through which to view a changing world and he represents "someone" changed by the decay of the old and the emergence of the new. The old being the nature-worshipping pagan world; the new being the industrialised and dogmatic world we know". Kylie agrees, but suggests that she sees more in Fenwyck "he's also a symbol of cycles. The stag represents seasons...life, death and renewal. This album is our way of saying that those means of understanding change, and our connection with nature is dying. We are not hippies, but that disconnect is not a good thing. Our connection to nature is more distant than it has ever been".

Though the album has its moments of levity, in parts it can be ominous, and symbolic shadows recur frequently throughout the album's six songs. Moreover, the titular reference to "the last days" carries a sense of foreboding. "In a linear sense, the album is really a story of this stag and his relationship with the land, the people, and his surrounds" says Kylie. "The concept of his "last days" are again about the cycles of life and death...but not literal, it's more symbolic. So far as shadows go, to me they represent the unknown, the uncertain and the transitory nature of the future". Amps agrees, "I think most people, whether they are talking about economics, politics, the environment or whatever, there's broad agreement that the future is highly uncertain and volatile. Shadows are a very powerful concept...we jump at them, we are scared of them, they are often characterised by darkness...however, on the flip side, there's often nothing to fear from them. So they can be interpreted as either a symbol of fear, or they can be interpreted as a symbol of falsely-placed fear".

Despite the band's delight in the ultimate result, they describe the genesis of the album as troubled "It was a difficult birth" says Amps with a smile, referring to the fact that Friends of Alice Ivy's planned follow-up to "The Golden Cage" was at one time a very different prospect. "The songs on the new album are relatively new; we actually had another album in the process of being recorded. They were very different songs, they had a much more "rock" sound designed for a traditional band set-up. They were great songs and we may revisit them at some point, but we abandoned them due to the fact that they were starting to sound like a different band and they just didn't sound like "us" anymore". Friends of Alice Ivy went as far as taking the new songs into the studio. "We got as far as recording one song called "Forever Folding Owls", which was based on Alan Garner's book "The Owl Service". Thematically it would have suited this album beautifully, but musically it really didn't suit us and we just felt uncomfortable with it really. It's a shame, there was some great stuff in that batch of songs and we really should try to re-imagine some of them and make them our own again!" he says.

Mention of Garner's book leads us to further discussion of the band's literary and visual reference points. As in Friends of Alice Ivy's earlier works, the written word and forgotten television classics have played an important role. "I read William Rayner's "Stag Boy" not long ago, and I was taken by it on many levels" says Amps. "First, I really enjoyed the surface of it, it's a great coming of age tale in classic, young adolescent literary style! But more than that, I enjoyed the symbolism of the story and its connection to myth and legend. It's a powerful story that tackles children's experiences at the age of the protagonist, and it's honest and unwavering in its depiction of them. We carried some of the imagery into the album. We'd also been watching a lot of strange seventies children's TV shows like "Children of the Stones" and "Chocky". Their otherworldliness is tangible in the songs".

The film "Whistle Down the Wind" was an influence on Kylie. The British film from the sixties concerns a group of farm-dwelling children who believe that a bank robber hiding in a farm shed is actually Jesus. "Its contrasting themes of child-like imagination and adult cynicism are really beautiful, and this infiltrated "The Last Days of Fenwyck" in that we were able to relate to, or acknowledge, that ever-widening divide between mystery and wonderment versus the cold, hard, and dull things that adults think are important".

To help them realise the album, Friends of Alice Ivy once again called on the services of producer Adam Calaitzis, who they worked with on "The Golden Cage". "Choosing to use the same producer again is about the "journey" for me; as well as a process of learning" says Kylie. "Adam has taught us things along the way...so it was a pretty natural decision to choose to work with him again as it's almost a case of pursuing a continuous improvement of what came before, rather than throwing everything out and starting all over again." "Looking back, we've actually worked with Adam for a long time now" says Amps. "He mastered our "In the Gloaming" EP way back in 2011. We recorded a single, "We are as Ghosts" with him in 2013 as a "test-drive" for the "Golden Cage" album. I will be honest, I don't always agree with his ideas initially, but 9 times out of 10 he ends up being right, so I think we increasingly trust him and next time I am going to learn to give him even more creative freedom to see what comes out...his objectivity is very important given how close to the work we are".

Friends of Alice Ivy have already begun planning their next moves, including the potential for live shows in the near future. "It's always been hard to translate our music into a live context" says Amps, but adds that they feel duty-bound to bring the songs to life somehow "otherwise you're just not connecting with people properly". The band also know that they don't want to wait too long before their next return to the studio "We're feeling a sense of momentum" says Kylie, "and for me there's an element of Fenwyck that tells me that it's just the beginning of something greater" she adds.



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Fenwyck
Blackthorn
Albion
Wycca
Rooks
Brambling

friendsofaliceivy.com | hereaftermoth@gmail.com

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