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■ CD review

Band dials up British pop rock influences for soulful album

The High Dials call from Canada with gentle, but still rocking melodies on "War of the Wakening Phantoms"

BY RYAN NYBURG
 PULSE EDITOR

inspiration from the right places to make good music.

It's popular for some critics to deride popular music that they feel relies too heavily on sounds from the past rather than creating something that sounds new. This is remarkably simple-minded and thoughtless. Music is about recycling, from which comes new innovations. Relying on sounds from the past is not a new trend, especially in rock. In the 1950s rock drew from 1940s R&B; 1960s rock drew from 1940s and 1950s electric blues and (later) acoustic folk. Punk took from garage, which took from R&B. And the High Dials take from the Zombies on their new album, "War of the Wakening Phantoms." I hardly see this as a crime.

The High Dials is a Canadian group that is trying to make a place for itself in the American indie scene, and with this sort of heartfelt pop rock that doesn't seem like it will be a problem. The group draws heavily from British pop rock of the late 1960s, not to mention a handful of American influences. The Zombies, the Byrds and a few other choice selections come to mind, but there are few duller critic games than listing influences, so let's just say that these guys are apparently drawing

The music is slow to mid-tempo, well-crafted and lyrical, using the atmospheric of harmony to create gentle melodies along rock songs that are almost soothing, yet are still distinctly rock.

Lead singer Trevor Anderson

modern pop rock group (say, The Shins), it still shows a level of sophistication missing from popular pop music (as redundant and self-contradictory as that sounds).

The sounds here recall the music of the 1960s in a way that is both fresh and invigorating. No band has shown this level of knowledge of 1960s pop and how to use it properly since the Brian Jonestown Massacre, and the High Dials are a

much more consistent

group. While there are obvious highlights, every single song on this album works. "The Lost Explorer" builds with such subtle momentum that you hardly notice it until it peaks. "A River Haunting" surprises with its sudden changes in tone while "Higher and Brighter" is almost perfect pop rock.

While the band still seems to be developing, the direction they are heading is the right one. The album, though not one of the best of the year, is certainly one of the most listenable, and is a great piece of work from a band destined to do much better work. Or so we hope.

The High Dials will be performing at Diablo's Downtown Lounge on July 31.

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