



RUN, BUNNY, RUN

Echo & The Bunnymen rework classics on new album

If you're of a certain age, odds are you've had your heart melted a time or two by the velvety baritone of Ian McCulloch and the romantic, post-punk atmosphere of his band, **Echo & The Bunnymen**.

Formed in 1978, the Liverpool quartet leapt from the margins of the new wave to this-band-changed-my-life status with tunes like "Killing Moon," "Lips Like Sugar" and "Bring on the Dancing Horses." "Horses" was enshrined on the movie soundtrack to John Hughes' classic 1980s era teen-angst manifesto *Pretty in Pink*.

This past October, the Bunnymen released *The Stars, The Ocean & The Moon*, in which guitarist Will Sergeant and McCulloch reimagine their catalog, not so much acoustically but with symphonic flourishes, alongside two new songs.

Overall, the record feels a bit like some middle-aged musicians putting on their comfy slippers for a victory lap. A lot of the stab and slash of Sergeant's guitar work steps aside for things like strings and xylophone, and McCulloch's voice has grown a little creakier with age, but no less absorbing.

Bunnymen hit *Lips Like Sugar*, version 2.0, has the sexy kick of the original with a little added keyboard work and electronic scribbling. "The Cutter" is still fueled by incense and psychedelia. "Killing Moon" is now a deep blue piano ballad.

But these songs are strong enough to stand up to some tinkering, despite the varying degrees of success. The impact, like the scent of an old lover, reminds you of what made them so great in the first place.

Bunnymen lead guitarist Will Sergeant tells me all he ever wanted was for the Bunnymen to be considered a classic band, "like The Kinks, or The Who," he says. Otherwise, he continues, the Bunnymen had no real plan when starting, except to stand apart.

"We were sort of punks," Sergeant recalls. "It was never really a plan, becoming a band and all that stuff. It was more to fit in really."

Though associated in a lot of people's minds with artists like The Cure, The Smiths and U2, Echo & The Bunnymen are only contemporaries of those bands by "accident of time," according to Sergeant.

"We always felt we were separate," he says. But he does admit part of the Bunnymen's agenda was to reject the Mersey Beat popularized by the Beatles.

Some of Sergeant's early guitar heroes were Mick Ronson and Tom Verlaine and "more cerebral stuff" like Yes, he says. "As unhip as it is, I still like Yes," he jokes. "That's what I grew up in. That's what you like."

So how does it feel for Bunnymen to be that kind of band for so many people? A band that helped define an aesthetic for an entire generation of music fans?

"It feels great," Sergeant says, with the kind of dry emotional response that can only come from the British. ■

*Echo & The Bunnymen play with **Enation** 8 pm Saturday, Dec. 1, at McDonald Theatre; \$39-\$57, reserved seating, all-ages.*

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