

s f t w MUSIC

MICK JAGGER ON CUBA

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Album of the week

NEW MUSIC
By Jim Gellatly

SHVLLOWS

WHO: Connor Joss (vocals/guitar), Scott Cowie (synth/guitar), Kieran Lewis (synth/guitar), Kyle Grievie (drums/samples).

WHERE: Edinburgh.

FOR FANS OF: Everything Everything, The 1975, Prides.

JIM SAYS: Only emerging in March, Shvllows are already starting to make a huge impact on the scene. After studying music at Edinburgh College, and playing in various bands, they made an immediate impact with their debut single Shake.

An instant electro pop classic, it got an incredible reaction. Briefly topping Amazon UK's electronic chart, it also made a big dent on iTunes. With radio play across the world, the song was even featured on TV's Made In Chelsea.

Kieran said: "We originally wrote about 45 minutes' worth of indie songs in 2015 but as we pushed our material further and further, our collection of synthesizers, laptops and sample pads grew with it. "The music has been slowly progressing over that entire year in the rehearsal room and it shows today."

Their glorious second single Zurich, released today, is another infectious slab of electronica from the band.

When I first came across Shvllows, I had to ask about the pronunciation. It may seem obvious now, but they confirmed it was "shallows".

The letter "v" seems to be used rather liberally by bands these days. Acts like Pvriz, Always and, of course, Scotland's own Chvrches



each use the letter in a different way, so I had to be sure for announcing Shvllows on the radio. In these days of internet searches, it makes total sense.

Incredibly Shvllows have still only played five gigs.

They include an appearance for BBC Radio Nan Gàidheal's Rapal show in the BBC Castle Tent last month as part of the BBC at the Edinburgh Festivals, along with an appearance at King Tut's in Glasgow in July for the This Feeling club night.

Shvllows are getting noticed in all the right places. It's only a matter of time until they make a major breakthrough.

Kieran added: "We just want to write and play music that not only inspires us, but our listeners as well. We want to continue the ridiculous work ethic we have displayed so far and just go wherever the great journey decides to take us next."

Shvllows play Tenement TV's multi-venue Tenement Trail all-dayer in Glasgow on October 8.

There's an official Zurich single launch at The Mash House in Edinburgh on October 15.

Kieran said: "We have a huge show with some very special friends of ours in November that we can't announce yet, but keep an eye out on our social media for an announcement soon. It's going to be unbelievable."

MORE: facebook.com/shvllows
● Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio on Sundays from 2-4pm.

Watch video of Shvllows at thescottishsun.co.uk

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it started to be mentioned by people because the American restrictions were easing, bit by bit.

We probably could have played there ages ago, but it would have been quite difficult. A lot of my friends, going back three, four, five years, were saying, "Why don't you do a concert there?"

Was this like the final frontier for the Stones in terms of live locations?

Not really, no. We've played one gig in Africa. That's a big place. Like to go back. And maybe India as well.

Had you been to Cuba before?
Yeah, I'd always wanted to go. I have a house in the Caribbean and kept thinking, "I've got to go before it changes". So I went last October/November with some friends... just Havana. It was very quiet, off season, really lovely, and I went to a lot of music clubs to get a feeling of the place. There were no tourists around, so it was an "only Cubans" thing.

I met a few people and got the feeling of how it would be if we played there, whether it would be exciting and what people thought. I was scoping it out but also having a really good time.

Did any fan mail for the band ever get through from Cuba in the past?

No, I don't remember any. It's very close to America, so the radio overlaps and there's a lot of exchange of music. The people all knew about The Beatles and the Rolling Stones etc.

It was cut off, yes, and it was difficult to get things there, but it was the same in Poland. People got music if they were that interested. We went to Poland in 1966... a weird one. It was a much more repressed state than Cuba.

(Jagger reflects on the slow pace of change in Cuba but also finds glimmers of hope. He continues...)

Recently, there was an amazing month for Cuba. You had the Pope, Obama, Major Lazer and then the Stones, all there. But you'd have to ask Cuban people whether they're feeling anything or not. It's not a free place, you're still not allowed to say what you like, you're still not allowed to assemble and you're not allowed much internet access. It appears to the outside world that this is a liberated place but I don't know the answer to that.

In the other film we've made about Latin America, called Olé Olé Olé (a documentary following the Stones on their 2016 trip through Latin America, culminating in their concert in Havana), there's a lot of that history. There was repression in a lot of Latin American countries because they were right-wing military dictatorships. It also happened in Franco's Spain where they banned rock 'n' roll and in the Soviet satellite countries and the Soviet Union. So Fidel Castro copied the Soviet Union's banning of bourgeois, decadent music. That didn't last forever.

Rock 'n' roll is just one part of the cultural jigsaw. You need all these parts. You need cultural and political exchanges on every level. Movies, music and television are all part of the dialogue.



Pictures: DAVE HOGAN



Did the crowd behave differently from your audiences in other countries?

They were super-enthusiastic and dancing but they seemed to know the songs. They behaved just like a Latin American audience at some of the other concerts. It didn't feel like you were in another world. There was a lot of waving of smartphones. On top of it all, they appear to be just like us, but underneath, I think it's problematic though everyone's used to it.

So your impressions of Havana were good?

I love it. I'd love to go back. People were wonderful, so welcoming and the music was great. The history of it is very interesting, it goes back a really

long way and I'd love to explore it a bit more.

Did you get another chance to explore the city before or after the concert?

There was no time. You arrive one day... it's a kerfuffle of press. You go and eat and do the gig and the next day you're gone. It's almost impossible to get much of an impression. There was a party at the British Embassy. But you're trying to concentrate on doing the show. I had a lot of fun with it, because

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I'd been there for a couple of weeks before, and it was fresh in my mind, and I met people that I'd met. But if I hadn't been there before, I would have been in this rush to try and get everything right for the show, which was a bit up in the air.

The show came eight days after the previous date on the América Latina Olé tour in Mexico City. Is eight days a short enough time to slay match-fit for the next show?

It's a bit of a gap, but you've got to keep going. You have to do all your vocal practices and exercises. I think I went to the West Indies and everyone else went to Miami. I had to get good for that show. I didn't want to disappoint the Cubans.

You spoke quite a lot of

Spanish during the show. Do you speak the language?

Not really, but I find it quite easy. If I prep it, I can get by. I'd just been doing Spanish for almost the whole tour, apart from the whole Brazil part, which is Portuguese and more difficult. So I was kind of OK. Even my daughter Jade gave me a grudging compliment. Her Spanish is quite good and she said, "Your Spanish wasn't bad". I said, "Well, I've been doing it for three months or so".

The appearance of the local choir, Entrevoces, for the encore of You Can't Always Get What You Want was very stirring...

The Cuban choir were very good. We have a network of choirs all over the world. We do a practice

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I think people appreciate you trying. A lot of people speak English, but not everywhere, so it's good to do phrases. The thing about Spanish is that it's different in each country, they have different words and slang and ways of pronouncing it. Someone said, "You can't pronounce it like that, you're speaking like a Chilean", I was like, "What's wrong with that?!"

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The Cuban choir were very good. We have a network of choirs all over the world. We do a practice

with them the day before and then, if we can, we do one on the day, backstage or on stage.

The Stones have been captured on film on stage in many different settings, but it must be nice to have a permanent reminder of this particular show?

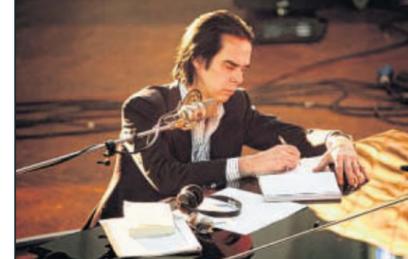
Yeah, I think so. It was a really special night for Cubans, and some of the older people said they never thought it would ever

I hope other people will follow us to Cuba and overcome the difficulties

happen, that that kind of world had kind of passed them by. The younger people don't think quite like that. They just want to have a good time.

They don't have to be all outdoor free concerts, because that's really hard to do. But they do like an outdoor free concert! I hope other people will follow and overcome the difficulties, so that it becomes more of a stop on the trail, because Cuban people will love it. They had a special night and it was a wonderful thing for us as well.

● Havana Moon will be premiered at cinemas globally for one night only on Friday, September 23. See stonesincuba.com.



Tragic album is a triumph

NOTHING can compensate for the loss of a child. For Nick Cave, father and musician, and Susie Bick, mother and fashion designer, that devastation arrived when their beloved twin son Arthur, 15, fell to his death.

It means that the 16th Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds album, Skeleton Tree, will for ever be defined by such a traumatic event.

And it probably explains why Cave felt compelled to express his feelings in an accompanying film called One More Time With Feeling.

Shot in black and white and presented in 3D, the film charts final sessions for the album and is interspersed with Nick and Susie bravely confronting life without Arthur.

The film is crushing yet somehow life-affirming, the music revealed as bleak but shot through with radiant beauty.

Cave's comments are spontaneous and natural. "Look at my face... those bags under my eyes," he says at one point.

"Where did they come from? They weren't there last year. The director says I look like a battered monument. I have a terrible feeling he's trying to be kind to me. I must remember to be kind back."

Near the end of the film, this fragile and introspective version of a usually vibrant character decides: "All of this stuff I'm saying now, it just feels like it's a load of bullshit to me."

"You know, it may mean something but in the end, there's something that happened and there's a kind of ring around that event. It's fenced off."

"Everything else is OK around it but there's just something that happened in that short space of time that we can never get that far away from."

He likens the situation to being attached to a piece of elastic constantly ping-pong him back to his family's enduring pain.

It's clear both Nick and Susie have found as much solace as they can from their work... he immersing himself with his intuitive Bad Seeds and she coming up with fresh ideas for her Vampire's Wife range.

Work on the album began before the tragedy but the eight songs bear classic Cave themes of loss and longing. I Need You, in particular, is an exercise in controlled desperation.

The album typically questions the existence of God as only the Aussie singer can.

Yet every note resonates with the pain he's going through. It's a compelling achievement made all the more convincing by the atmospheric and sympathetic support from his ever-reliable band.

Hirsute multi-instrumentalist Warren Ellis remains Cave's main collaborator, his touchstone, but the contributions of Jim Sclavunos (percussion), Martyn Casey (bass), Thomas Wydler (drums) and George Vjestica (acoustic guitar) are understated but key.

Droning synthesizers allied to stately grand piano give the album an almost ambient vibe with Cave's ghostly, often half-spoken ruminations seemingly hanging in mid-air above the instruments.

One song, Distant Sky, is heartbreaking yet utterly gorgeous, employing Danish soprano Else Torp and some of Cave's most affecting lines.

"Let us go now, my darling companion. Set Out for the distant skies. See the sun. See it rising. Rising in your eyes."

And you just know that when Cave comes in, he's singing for Susie, he's singing for surviving son Earl and he's singing for Arthur. And he's singing for all of us.
SIMON COSYNS

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS
Skeleton Tree
★★★★