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THE ALICE ROSE

5 TO 1 BABY



For music fanatics, there are few greater joys than having a band seemingly burst out of nowhere armed with an album's worth of captivating new music, brimming with enthusiasm and vitality, giving the scene a huge jolt of excitement. The Alice Rose, a quintet out of Austin, TX, is just such a band capturing lightning in a bottle, channeling influences like the Beatles, the Beach Boys, and Big Star into a tasty new set of melodic rockers that are catchy without sounding derivative. It may share its influences with many bands, but The Alice Rose has a secret weapon in songwriter JoDee Purkeypyle (vocals, guitar), who expertly crafts melodic, rollicking rock tracks that capture the melodic joy of the post-Beatles years, avoiding clichéd chord progressions and overly played out boy-girl lyrics. Sounding like a younger, raspier cousin of Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, Purkeypyle, along with co-founders Sean Crooks (bass/vocals) and Chris Sensat (drums) filled out the band with Brendan Rogers (keyboards/background vocals) and Colin Slagle (lead guitar) in late 2005. Within two weeks of their debut album, *Phonographic Memory*, being released this past November, the song "West" was selected to be NPR's Song of the Day, exposing the band to a giant cross section of listeners across the county. Speaking by phone from his home in Austin, Purkeypyle says that the NPR selection was an honor that was the culmination of a lot of hard work.

"We got the NPR gig through David Brown on WKUT, who I believe had heard us on MySpace. And he submitted us to that. I kind of found out about it over the phone. So it was sort of a neat thing because I really hadn't expected that," says Purkeypyle. "Our record had been out for, I guess, less than a week at that point. So yeah, it was pretty groovy, we enjoyed it. Y'know, it's been a long adventure for us. When we formed back in 2001, we didn't have a fan-base, we didn't have a record, we didn't have anything. So, we're happy that we're starting to build a buzz and an audience."

Although *Phonographic Memory* was only just recently released, The Alice Rose have actually been around for awhile, featuring the steady trio of Purkeypyle, Crooks, and Sensat alongside a rotating cast of additional players. Purkeypyle explains that "Sean and Chris and I formed the band in the summer of 2001, after having played together in another group as teenagers. I named us the Alice Rose in a sort of tribute to Sadie Warren, who was a very talented artist and a good friend of a friend of mine. She died in 2000 at the age of 16, and although I only knew her briefly, her influence has stuck with me to this day. So, I named us the Alice Rose after her niece, who I'm sure has no idea, and hopefully she won't find that creepy [chuckles]. The name sort of embodies the kind of songs I began to write at that time, which were worlds away from the kind of crap I'd been writing. And plus it has sort of a surreal quality to it, which I liked..."

The early years of the band were a time of trial and error, as the three musicians went through a number of augmenting players, trying to find the right balance of sound and personalities. Purkeypyle states that "...we've always had maybe one other guy who...[just had a hard time] fitting in to the kind of thing that Sean, Chris and I had. So it was always this one outside guy and us. When Brendan and Colin joined in the fall of last year, we became a five-piece, and things really started to get going for us, which had never been the case."

With the lineup complete, The Alice Rose set out to record its full length debut with producer Mark Hallman (Shawn Colvin, Jimmie Vaughan). "The oldest song on there is 'Stop,' which I wrote when I was 18. I've always known...that the first record was really gonna have to be sort of a mix of older material as well as some of the newer stuff," says the songwriter, explaining that he is basically always working on new ideas during his spare time. "It is kind of hard, because I'm still writing constantly, so I've gotten new stuff just ready to go for the next record. I think the most recent song on there is probably 'Wisteria,' and 'All Over Your Body.' That's definitely the path that we're going down at this point, which is more of a Motown kind of trip. The much older stuff, like 'Stop,' is more [influenced by] the Beatles. I'm not sure if you know who they are," he says, chuckling.

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Sure enough, there are echoes of the Liverpool legends all over the disc, from the layered acoustic guitars fleshing out the sound on "Saints" to the sheer pop catchiness of "Stop." But the writer manages to throw in curveballs throughout; chords that don't resolve where you think they will, time changes, and funky instrumentation that seems almost too complicated to work - but does. Purkeypille explains that "It's kind of like watching TV: I'm searching for a bit that keeps me interested, but after awhile I'll just get bored, and it has to not only surprise ME, but kind of surprise the listener. I see three minutes as my palette, y'know, and I'm trying to work as many ideas as I have into that without getting off-track and losing myself in the process." With as much care that goes into the melodies, Purkeypille states that the lyrics are purposely vague and poetic. "I never write about one thing or person. It's not a Nashville, 9-5 kind of thing for me. It's more about trying to understand why I am the way that I am. I mean, for most of these songs, I don't know what they're about. Maybe someone who hears one might get something from it - hopefully not a headache!"

The musician is philosophical in describing how his band has evolved, saying that "I know there's tons of bands out there that are going out there doing the same kind of thing that we're doing, but I think part of what's made us different is that we've been stuck here in Austin, TX for the past five years. We've always felt like outsiders here...and for all of us, it's all about the music we grew up listening to. My main thing has always been that wave of English influences." Those are influences that he shares with his band mates, and while Purkeypille writes the material for the band, he explains that it is very much a collaborative process.

"When I write a song, I'll do a demo for my own personal [use], just to hear how it sounds, maybe show it to the rest of the guys. But definitely, even from the earliest days, writing songs and bringing them to Sean and Chris...who've really been my biggest support. They've definitely been the guys that have pushed me to get it out there. And when I take it to them and we work on it as a band, that's really when it begins to make sense. Working on this record in the studio, that was real enjoyable for me, having a full band. In the past it was just the three of us and we were always together, and believed in what we were doing, but it was just impossible to pull a lot of it off. Because a lot of the songs I'd write on piano, and they'd have all these harmonies, layered organs and mellotrons on it, and we just couldn't pull it off live. So now it's great to work on something and be able to know that we can go out and perform it."

When he's asked about the band's plans for 2007, Purkeypille doesn't miss a beat and jokes, "Well, we'll probably just break up! [Laughs]. No, the record just came out last month, so we're still trying to get as much press as possible, we've been shopping a bunch to college radio and magazines and that kind of thing, as well as management. And I'd like us to get a good team together. Hopefully by the summer of next year, we can start working on the next record. That's what I'd like." Full of enthusiasm, Purkeypille concludes that the band is "...real happy with the record, we're excited about it, we're glad to have it done, and it's such a relief for me as a writer to be able to move on past it and be able to concentrate on the recent stuff!"

~ Neal Alpert

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