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YEASAYER

"We were jokingly calling this our classic rock record at one point, referencing The Turtles or the Stones or Fleetwood Mac," laughs Yeasayer's Chris Keating while describing his band's fifth LP, *Erotic Reruns*. But really, this is Yeasayer distilling all their strengths, while paring them to their essence.

Intros are shortened, hooks are immediate, and its songs are concise, all the fat trimmed. This is an eminently danceable record that also encourages its audience to think, an attribute the band aren't given enough credit for which they desperately deserve. Their societal and political commentary is erudite and trenchant. But ultimately, *Erotic Reruns* finds Keating, singer/multi-instrumentalist Anand Wilder, and bassist/singer Ira Wolf Tuton at an arresting peak creatively, their beguiling chemistry palpable throughout.

Erotic Reruns is light years removed from the band's 2007 opening volley, *All Hour Cymbals*, as they found their footing on their own terms, impervious to outside "scenes," and the then ubiquitous DIY culture so prevalent in Brooklyn, with classic '00s singles "2080" and "Sunrise" foreshadowing the greatness the band would fully realize on *Cymbals*. Their artistic progression continued on 2009's *Odd Blood*, with the fantastic trio of singles "O.N.E.," "Ambling Alp," and "Madder Red." 2012's *Fragrant World*, an album with a Kurtzweil-esque infatuation with technology, retained the band's boogie down groove and innate pop instincts, with lattices of '80s pop, '60s baroque, and the halcyon days of cut-and-paste sampling added into their byzantine equation. 2016's *Joey Waronker* produced *Amen & Goodbye* continued the overriding theme of technology colliding with sentience, as well as taking organized religion to task with glorious melodies wrapped up in trademark Yeasayer sounds.

Erotic Reruns is like nothing they've done before, cutting to the bone marrow in its directness and brevity. It's still easily recognizable as Yeasayer and yet enough of a departure to render it a bizarre entry in the band's discography. The title alone says a great deal, explained by vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Anand Wilder as "Something happening over and over again, but reruns are never erotic. They're always stale and tried and true. The erotic ones get cancelled or relegated to the dustbin. Keep it sleazy." And in Yeasayer's idiosyncratic world, this album full of "erotic reruns" captures the sleaze and grime so prevalent in our brave new world of surveillance and self-policing juxtaposed with tender moments that lend the album a humanistic warmth, flashbulb memories of love and loss recognizing the inherently ephemeral nature of existence.

Erotic Reruns also marks a return to the band's origins, taking total control and making the album themselves from the ground up (with assistance from engineer Daniel Neiman). It was produced by the core 3 members of the band, as a collective. In recent years, each member has built their own home studio (two in Brooklyn, one in Roscoe, NY in the Catskills), each specializing in a different area

of recording/production that helped bring this album to life. "All of the studios are very different, in a voltron way" says Tuton.

The album's opener, "People I Loved," finds Wilder striving for compassion and empathy for those he's closest to, attempting to forego unnecessary pettiness. He explains, "The song is partly about my grandpa who died in 2017 who I'm sure loved and respected me but he had a funny way of showing it. But it's also about how I see authoritarian tendencies in myself all the time, that impatience and disappointment with loved ones that finds expression in rudeness. I am striving to be better about it since life is short and we should just shower love and generosity on our friends and family or just say goodbye. Or be more direct about what irritates you and hopefully resolve the conflict. It's about striving to overcome authoritarian tendencies, learned or part of your nature." The high gravitas expressed in the lyrics belies the sun-bleached, McCartney-esque melodies which pervade the song, with an element of grit evocative of Iggy Pop and James Williamson's unsung classic Kill City.

"Ecstatic Baby" is a joyful ode to the redemptive nature of love, a pure rush of deep rhythmic grooves and melodic synth swells, with a "disco Bollywood feel," according to Chris Keating. He admits to borrowing heavily from ESG on it with a nod to Liquid Liquid in its rhythmic structure. "It has that NYC thing I love," he admits. Yeasayer have long embraced myriad styles of NYC music, but never as powerfully as they do here.

"Crack a Smile" rounds out the knockout trio of songs that open the album, embracing its "don't bore us, get to the chorus" imperative. Keating explicitly comments on politics, his sinister lyrics rendering the song's epicurean melodies chilling, as he calls out the rotten to the core nature of the current administration with his bilious invective, "Every time you flash the crooked smile I sigh...you're a liar."

The Wilder sung "Blue Skies Dandelions" slows the album's pace but continues the political theme. Wilder's lyrics are more elliptical, though, as at first blush this Travelling Willbury's-esque vaguely country tinged number "as produced by Q-Tip," according to Wilder. It alludes to James Comey and Donald Trump, and the loneliness of an authoritarian regime, fantasizing of locking them in a pyramid while the rest of the populous goes on with their life, imagining Trump copiously ingesting pharmaceutical drugs. It's a quixotic daydream, sure, but it evinces a gallows humour.

"Let Me Listen in On You" and "I'll Kiss You Tonight" reveal Wilder's take on the surreal nature of our modern surveillance state and the rising tide of strong man leaders. The former is a catatonic recitation, finding Wilder sardonically urging "I can make your dreams come true/If you let me listen in on you," while "I'll Kiss You Tonight" is a ballad at the surface, betrayed by the sinister lyric, "But I can't resist your authoritarian embrace." Both nod strongly to Phil Ochs and his sense of humour as a liberal, poking fun at taking oneself too seriously. "Phil Ochs reminds us that the liberal and the conservative can be the same beast, someone can be hard line leftist who is completely close-minded and just searching for reasons to distance himself from someone who doesn't share the exact same outlook, and build up walls in communication that he feels are justified because of impermeable cultural differences." Yeasayer call modern life as it is, and don't spare the "good guy" liberals from opprobrium, brazen in an era when grey areas and nuance have been eliminated from discourse.

Tuton is the band's secret weapon throughout the album, whether they're string arrangements, backing vocals, or an inventively melodic bass line. He's also an integral element in the band's

songwriting process. His political views are well-considered and candid, and while he's not a lyricist, it's obvious that his point of view is expressed throughout this album, at least by proxy. He's keenly aware of the United States' rapid drift into an insidious police state, "one in which we police one another."

Tuton's thoughts illustrate a crucial reason Yeasayer remain a band in a classic sense, that they have a shared collective ethos. They may have disagreements, but ultimately, as Keating acknowledges, "Being in a band is a bit like being married. There's a level of intuition there. But hopefully not a lot of fighting," as he trails off with a laugh. This intuition is all over *Erotic Reruns*, refreshing in an era where the classic "band model" has been inverted and singer/songwriters round up hired hands to play their songs live as what now passes for an actual band. Yeasayer, while using auxiliary musicians, are composed of three protean parts. That's an anachronism in 2019, but a damn refreshing one.

Erotic Reruns is certainly one of Yeasayer's best albums due to its singular vision. It captures what it's like to be alive in 2019 with wide-eyed clarity. The songs veer from the intensely personal and romantic to the fervently political, but all challenge their audience and make them think a bit more slowly to ponder issues so germane to our maddening, speed of light era of content consumption.

MEMBERS:

Vocalist Chris Keating

Bassist Ira Wolf Tuton

Guita, Keyboard & Vocals Anand Wilder

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