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NO DEPRESSION

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Greg's Grab Bag - Vincent Poag's Heroes And Demons



Vincent Poag – *Heroes And Demons*

If variety is truly the spice of life, Vincent Poag's new album is a stocked spice cabinet. The 10 songs, all written by the New York-based singer/songwriter, highlight the artist's command over a broad palette of genres like rock, folk, blues, jazz and even military marches. He takes elements of these musical styles and combines them to create compositions which support his heartfelt and engaging narratives.

Perhaps the greatest example of Poag's ability to bring together a range of distinctive styles and instruments is the mini-epic "Piper Play." The tune begins with playful Irish flute, which is quickly joined by acoustic guitar, mandolin, accordion, fiddle, cello, piano, tambourine, upright bass, drums and a selection of percussion instruments. Poag even takes Eli Tokash's background vocal contributions and uses them as another instrument in his musical landscape – a brief and

haunting accent that brings to life the children mentioned in the lyrics while also offering a musical counterpoint to the song's overall jaunty feel.

The album-closing "And The Ocean Rolls" is an example of how Poag creates mood and a sense of location through his arrangements. A field snare drum, marching snare drum, and a concert bass drum work in-conjunction with trumpets, trombones and a tuba to give the song a military vibe. This is bolstered by a deep-voiced quartet which provides drone-like and wordless backing vocals, which are vaguely nautical.

This song feels like a sister piece to Pink Floyd's underappreciated "When The Tigers Broke Free," a deeply-personal Roger Waters composition that was originally intended for *The Wall* album and which was included in the film by the same name. The fact that Poag created something reminiscent speaks volumes about what he achieves with his arrangement.

Poag is at his most abstract and experimental on "One Step Ahead Of Gloom," a song that deftly blends instruments like hair drum, djembe, clarinet, bass clarinet and slide guitar while also dropping names like Roger Federer, Tom Brady, Tiger Woods, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Davey Crocket, Robin Hood, Spartacus, George Cohen, Barbara Streisand and Meryl Streep. The resulting tune is truly a lyrical and musical mulligan stew – one of the most interesting songs on this set.

Not everything on *Heroes And Demons* is dependent on complex arrangements and a wealth of instruments. "Here I Am," which features lead vocals by Diana Hope, is a study in the beauty of simplicity. The lyrics about appreciation, love and mutual support are placed at the forefront thanks to an arrangement that only features piano, oboe, violins, viola, cello and upright bass.

Poag also goes minimal on the pretty and wistful "Daisy," a meditation on obsession and longing that only features vocals, acoustic guitar, some keyboard programming and a well-placed whistle feature.

Thanks to Poag's rough-hewn vocals, narrative songwriting, and unique arrangements, *Heroes And Demons* is an enjoyable listen from start to finish.

Until next time, enjoy the music!