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JACK OF NONE – WHO'S LISTENING TO VAN GOGH'S EAR

Album Review



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Jack Of None – *Who's Listening To Van Gogh's Ear* – Album Review

Alright...gotta do my best to remain objective here and not simply love this album for its name alone...but C'MON...that's one of the best titles you've ever seen too, admit it!

I will say this though...there are certain indications you can derive from a title like that, which indicate thinking that is on an entirely different level – and believe me, you'll feel that springing to life here on the debut record from Jack Of None and their album *Who's Listening To Van Gogh's Ear*. This project is heavily set in atmosphere, poetry and the experimental...all things I love to hear combined. You add in the fact that the majority of this project has taken place via the internet for these three players to collaborate their talents...and you really feel quite quickly that you're hearing something truly unique and truly special from this three-piece band that resides partly in Chicago of the USA and partly way the heck across the seas in Manila of the Philippines. It's an impressive way to make music to begin with – and certainly what you'd assume would be a very challenging one. These three however...they have put vibrant life into their music, ideas and project in a way

that sounds so completely honest, effortless and clever that it quite simply sounds exactly as if it was always meant to be. Like this music itself was waiting inside them, just searching for the right pieces of the puzzle needed to put it all together, once and for all. They've found each other over time...and now this picture is brilliantly clear.

Best way I can put this to begin with...is that this is the exact type of album that rips by altogether too quickly for me. I love the unique...I love poetry...I love rock-music and experimental ideas...and with a massive depth to the layers that make their music fantastic, Jack Of None quickly took hold of my attention and didn't once let go of it through what becomes an incredible ride of adventure in sound & ideas on *Who's Listening To Van Gogh's Ear*. I'm somewhat in the minority in that sense...though I work hard every day of my life to help change this. A good pop-song or rock-song is one thing...and we all love listening to those of course – but if you're looking for something that will truly last over time, you need to find & tap into that uniqueness...you need to give us a depth so deep we can swim in your ideas...and Jack Of None are the complete masters of this.

It's probably a good time to mention that they're all related. A product of the collective-genius of three siblings, Maxine, A.G. and Julian Syjuco – they might live in different places, but man does this album hit home with me. There's like, absolutely nothing I can find at fault here. I'll admit...my intense love of poetry, art & music combined certainly helps here...can't lie to you there. But I'm also often asked, what makes music truly unique anyhow? The answer is simple and usually comes when someone is asked to describe it or compare it to something else that's already been done...and you absolutely can't with Jack Of None – this is all-new terrain for music.

In an ironic twist to it all...years ago, I was commissioned to make a video for an artist or band whose name is actually escaping me at the moment...though once I was done with it and had sent it off, was told that they not only loved the video, but appreciated the subtle visual references that reminded this person of the band FAUST! – who A.G. was actually the lead guitarist and composer for. How bizarre is that right? I had never actually heard the band before...I came by any comparisons honestly...but I took it all as a compliment as the person in question seemed to be quite happy with the work. But FAUST! ended up being quite well-known, even in their short existence after putting out two brilliant albums full of controversial and dynamic material...and here we are, now with A.G. leading the way once again in a brand-new project that is certainly worth as much time as you can give to it.

The sly way that the music creeps up on you as "Hotel Carcass" begins this record is wonderfully dark. I'll admit as well that, due to my love of poetry...it was actually Maxine that stood out to me immediately as this record began. I absolutely fell in love quickly with what she brought to this song – but also to the entire record to follow. She's a published and well-renowned poet...and the evidence of her mastery of art is stamped all over *Who's Listening To Van Gogh's Ear*. The musical combination of A.G. and youngest sibling Julian made for an incredible ride instantly on "Hotel Carcass" – it's brilliantly spaced out and contains amazingly produced sounds and atmosphere that includes guitars, horns and all kinds of samples that make the music have a sweet & dark contrast that work completely perfectly with the vocalizations.

Sliding into a more straight-forward and heavy-rock sound, "Pater, Ignosce Mihi" comes across sharply clever as it grinds out a serious riff amongst layers of vocals and samples that play off each other in very smart ways. Bouncing from the lefts and rights of your stereo – Jack Of None is not just well played, it's massively well-produced and designed to free your mind into maximum entertainment. The guitars of this second-cut bring their A-game and the music takes you for an inventive ride as the vocals swirl overtop. "Pater, Ignosce Mihi" has solos that would make Jack White drop his jaw in complete awe – the tones, the style, the instrumentation...it's severely brilliant and definitely a part of what truly defines this band's sound overall. The samples and electro-elements also play a huge role in the atmosphere of their music – and "Mrs. Stitcher" will go on to confirm that instantly. The way that Maxine fits into the mix is absolutely stunning – she's right in the middle of the mix...you can hear the words breakthrough, but it'll take many repeat listens to fully grasp the words and concepts. In my world – that's an incredible thing...I like to think of that as the 'reason to return.' I don't want music that I can always hear everything cleanly and clearly at every single moment...and even though technically you CAN here on this record and songs like "Mrs. Stitcher" – there are also so many layers and intricate things happening within the music that there's just no way your brain can keep up with all the amazing ideas at once. There are plenty of reasons to return to this record over and over again..."Mrs. Stitcher" is every bit of evidence I need to support that theory right away and early on in this record – from the smart ideas like including the sound of a record spinning in the music, to the filters used on Maxine's vocals – there are clearly incredible ears for music at work here.

LISTEN to a track like "On The Streets" and I guarantee you'll agree. From the smart piano-line melody that subtly hides in the background behind the guitars, to the darkened poetry of Maxine turning a familiar childhood rhyme like "Ring Around The Rosie" from a dream into a nightmare in all the right ways – "On The Streets" is HUGE in its ambition and completely delivers. The backing vocals soar with brilliance,

the lead sounds nearly robotic, cold, dark and chilling as the guitars turn up their distortion to amplify the menacing atmosphere. As the album flows, the transitions from track-to-track are just as clever...and you can hear that hit exceptional-levels of imagination and precision as "Confessions Of A Chop Chop Lady" takes over where "On The Streets" leaves you. Definitely one of my favorite...ummm...'cuts' on this record – I think that Maxine has some of her darkest and best lyrics here on "Confessions Of A Chop Chop Lady." Even the chorus...which consists almost entirely of words you'd never think to find in a song...I love the way she expresses herself through the lyrics – that's what makes it all magical. That being said...I'd be completely lying to you if I didn't say this track worked so well for me as a result of the amazing verses that the song contains. Jack Of None proves to be beyond entertaining here...and Maxine's lyrics provide intense imagery you simply can't ignore.

All of these players truly deserve credit though. Listening to a track like "(But) Noise" you have to appreciate just how smart this band really is. The music has such incredibly versatile and strong dynamics to it that the stage is set perfectly each time Maxine goes to add in her darkly-angelic vocals. "(But) Noise" is just as powerful of an expression musically as it is through the lyricism...the clever ways that Jack Of None trades off the guitar sounds for haunting piano-keys in the music has been brilliant throughout this record – but perhaps never as powerful as you'll find on this cut. A track like "Fire Song" also really shows just how important each part of this band truly is as it all comes together...and just how clearly artistic the band is. None of this record could just be described as merely music...this is truly ART as much as music could ever be.

Just don't forget...art can certainly be dark as all fuck...and the music of Jack Of None is certainly mired in the deepest, dank-parts of the human heart. It's a stunning combination that you can't help but hear for the brilliance it truly shines with, even throughout all the layers of mist, murk and haunting imagery. "Fire Song" exemplifies all of the intensely wonderful reasons I'm loving this band...it's extraordinary from an angle you look at it or listen to it.

They bring up the groove collectively on "There Was A Crooked Man," which if there was any comparisons to ever be made upon this record, you could potentially cite the main guitar-riff as playing somewhat on Rage Against The Machine's "Sleep Now In The Fire" – just with a little more style & funk to its core. It's a great combination that works really well for them though...you can hear everything from a sweeter, more sexy & sultry delivery to the vocals, to the brightened-up guitar work and beat; I wouldn't go as far as to say they've found their way into the sweet sunshine here – but there's no doubt about this track sounding a little bit more 'fun' for this band. Excellent production stands out again on "There Was A Crooked Man" – great ideas in the background, solid drum-lines and absolutely immaculate guitar-solos, vocals and tones throughout this less-than three-minute gem.

Jack Of None takes you screaming back into the murk and mire of the dark of whence they came from on "The Witherling" as they bring up the intensity and pound out a serious grind on this stunning cut. I know I've overused the term brilliant in this review already – but again, they're keeping me at a loss for words as I try to describe what is absolutely incredibly unique. The attack of the guitars on "The Witherling" are bent on destroying you – the vocals hiss with menace and danger – the beat and pacing of this song is a complete straightjacket love-affair. I love the way this song is edited, cut, produced and performed...it all sounds like an insane amount of work...the precision and care put onto this track and this record is quite honestly astonishing...I've actually never heard anything like it before! And those of you that follow my writing here at sleepingbagstudios...you know already that this is saying quite a lot after 850+ reviews. To be this pleasantly surprised by something that sounds as incredibly new, fresh and unique as this is...well...it's beyond rare at this point. For that reason alone, Jack Of None should be massively proud of the effort they've put into *Who's Listening To Van Gogh's Ear*.

NO WEAK POINTS! Seriously – this album is built of solid-steel when it comes to ideas and execution. At every turn and twist, each transition into a new song...I kept waiting for a ball to be dropped...a stone to be unturned...a sound to be started and never fully explored...until I stopped altogether, realizing that these would be moments that would never come along. Jack Of None has done a tremendous job of holding our attention on this album – and they never let me down for a single moment. As it headed towards the end, I honestly felt that the album just continued to pick up steam...tracks like "Unravel Me" were a complete venture into the ultra-fantastic of the darkest corners of the mind. Some of my favorite sounds, textures and tones come through this song...it's absolutely deadly. "Unravel Me" has a wonderfully darkened, twisted-contrast to the sweetness of the music and the menacing lyrics. All executed as perfectly as you'll find upon this record – Jack Of None proves that the only 'mistake' they might have ever made is by misleading you with their band-name; they would have been much more apt to call themselves Masters Of ALL in my humble opinion. I'll never put this album down or remove it from my playlist – and you can quote me on that.

A.G. and Julian take over for the longest cut on the album on "Nocturnes In Dorian" as Maxine takes the moment off on this instrumental cut. Assembled with brilliant textures and tones – this track is every bit as well thought-out as it is played...and these two musicians certainly deserve a ton of credit for driving the music of this record to extraordinarily creative heights. "Nocturnes In Dorian" rages through its composition and different parts, connecting them all in clever transitions...you won't find yourself bored for a single moment. Quite the opposite really...as far as instrumentals are concerned, there's pretty much more to listen to here than you'll hear on any other out there. Fantastic low-end bass meets soaring guitar-notes...and the electro-elements that are added in are massively captivating.

There is however...unfortunately a nagging suspicion in my mind that tells me that much of the music of Jack Of None is going to escape the general public. Fans of Electro, Rock, Goth and Industrial music are definitely going to 'get' this right away...but it's going to be an uphill battle to convince the rest. I don't think they care about that – nor do I think that they should; and I firmly believe that real art is never made with the public's opinion in mind. These players and musicians have their heads-down, enveloped right into their passion, work and music – and as a result, they've come out with a niche-album that maybe appeals to a fewer number of people...but those of us that 'get' it are going to become fans for LIFE. There's definitely something to be said for that. Best advice I can ever give you...especially those of you out there that live within the safe-shell of your own styles of music...is to have a listen to this extraordinary album and embrace the uniqueness of it all – it's truly rare that real art like this is ever established this firmly on a record, let alone a DEBUT. So break free of your own comfort-zones...and step into the world of Jack Of None...because this is art & music that should truly be heard, absorbed and listened to on the constant.

With a final flash of brilliance, "Poem For The Invisible" takes you right back into the clever production and soundscapes that have made this album entirely wonderful to listen to. Using stark and bold imagery through the lyrics and intense effects on the vocals, angelic background vocals and glitch-filled electro-elements in their music – Jack Of None ends *Who's Listening To Van Gogh's Ear* every bit as brilliantly as it all began. I mentioned this album was brilliant right? Hmm. Maybe I'm not saying it right...

BRILLIANT. There! It was an all-caps version that I was missing. Now I feel better.

I'm a writer. I have no other words in my vocabulary to describe what I'm hearing better than that or that would potentially sum up how I feel about the music of Jack Of None. This album is BRILLIANT – all the way through its twelve incredible songs, atmospheres and intense-degree of true art. Do NOT let this album pass you by! For the next decade, this entire album is going to still be ahead of its time... but I truly hope that this band continues on making the extraordinary music they're making. I simply cannot express enough just how unique it is, and how much of an impact it's truly made upon me.

BRILLIANT. Purely, utterly, sonically BRILLIANT. Go listen – now!

Find out more about Jack Of None at their official homepage here: <http://www.jackofnone.net> (<http://www.jackofnone.net>)

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