

Silversun Pickups

Neck of the Woods sees Silversun Pickups lighting out for the territories, stretching the boundaries of their exhilarating psychedelia with confidence, invention, and undeniable ambition. Having long made their bones as masters of widescreen power, the Los Angeles-based band's third Dangerbird Records album takes their filmic vision to another level entirely – this is full-on IMAX rock 'n' roll, in stereoscopic 3D and Sensurround. From the low-frequency thrust and motorik pulsebeat that drives "Mean Spirits" to the mesmerizing first single, "Bloody Mary (Nerve Endings)," the album fairly detonates with high definition creativity. Roomier rhythms and judiciously applied electronic shadings form a blissed out base camp for the band's electrifying aural adventures, the elegiac landscapes of Neck of the Woods revealing an unbridled expansion of the already impressive SSPU sound.

"There's a playfulness," says singer/guitarist/songwriter Brian Aubert, "a certain kind of freethinking experimentation that we were fooling around with. We wanted to just let it all fly."

Silversun Pickups – that is, Aubert, bassist Nikki Monninger, keyboardist Joe Lester, and drummer Christopher Guanlao – emerged with 2005's *Pikul* EP and soon caught the attention of the wider world with the following year's *Carnavas*. That collection (featuring the breakthrough single, "Lazy Eye") only barely prepared the way for the band's blockbuster second album, 2009's *Swoon*. Tracks such as "Panic Switch" and "The Royal We" established Silversun Pickups as a potent force in 21st Century Rock, further confirmed by an 18-month tour that included innumerable headline dates, festival sets, and a 2009 Grammy Award nod for "Best New Artist."

The new album's genesis began as Aubert visited cities and hamlets from Italy to Iceland while on a brief hiatus from the non-stop touring that followed *Swoon*. Aubert's European impressions fueled a ream of new songs and late night home demos, quietly recorded as his wife slept in the room next door.

"I got this feedback loop going on in my head," he says, "thinking that these are just towns people are from. It might look kind of magical to me, but I'm definitely an outsider looking in. This is just normal for them, and in a lot of ways, it's very much the same as where I grew up."

While undeniably proud of *Swoon* and its world conquering success, Silversun Pickups also knew that the album had only touched upon their music's infinite possibilities. When the band eventually reconvened in their Silverlake rehearsal space, all involved were determined to take a more open attitude towards their songs, giving their imagination full, unbridled rein.

"We immediately said, no matter how these songs come out, let's try to catch up with them and not try to squeeze them down," Aubert says. "Let's see how and why they are the way they are. Instead of pushing them in unnatural directions, let's let them breathe. Even if we find them strange, let's try and figure them out."

To fuel the project with a fresh energy, the band decided to collaborate with a new producer. The goal, Aubert says, was "to throw something into the mix that might make us feel odd, in the same way the

demos and the music we were thinking about were making us feel odd.” They met with a number of top studio hands before realizing that they had already found the right man for the job in Jacknife Lee, whom they had previously encountered while contributing guest vocals to their pals Snow Patrol’s most recent collection. Lee brought both infectious energy and an atypical recording model to the table, offering the band legroom to improvise and invent without constraint.

“Jacknife said, ‘Let’s get in there, set up everybody’s stuff, and just attack this record from the ground up,’” Aubert says. “That’s exactly what we wanted to do. We weren’t really interested in making a record where we rehearsed everything over and over again, then came in and laid it down. We wanted to be able to screw with things.”

In TK, Silversun Pickups embarked on ten weeks of sessions at Lee’s studio in Topanga – which, as kismet would have it, was Aubert’s childhood hometown, providing flashbulb memories that offered ironic counterpoint to his already dislocated lyricism. The recording pushed the band to the brink, imbuing them with both aesthetic intensity and increased unity.

“It kept everybody involved the entire time,” Aubert says. “Christopher said to me, ‘This is the most involved I’ve been on any of our albums,’ because his drums were set up all ten weeks. Usually the drummer is there for the first seven days and then he’s gone. This time, we never knew when he’d have to add something all of a sudden.”

SSPU pulled apart their swelling songcraft, rending their trademark reverb and distortion to reveal a grander, more dreamlike sound. The oblique duality of Aubert’s songs is matched by a similar sonic tack, simultaneously glacial and volcanic, intimate and overwhelming. The skyscraping scope promised by their previous albums is amplified on such tracks as the closing “Out of Breath,” its multi-layered volatility daubed with unconcealed angst and ill-tempered aggression.

“We wanted to play with negative space,” Aubert says. “We’re always trying to achieve dynamic, but sometimes it gets lost in the shuffle. This time we just pulled things in different directions and made things crisper and more angular. We wanted the louder stuff to sound cranky.”

Epic though they may be, songs like “Here We Are (Chancer)” retain the “nakedness” of Aubert’s home demos, even so far as incorporating many of his original drum machine tracks. Even as they developed synthetic textures and electronic components, the band were resolved that the album would retain what Aubert calls “the human sound in the machine.” That elemental humanity informs Neck of the Woods to its very core as Aubert unpacks evocative imagery that reverberates with the recognition of his transitory place in the universe and the realization that he is least at home in his own hometown.

“These songs started forming in places that were completely foreign to me,” Aubert says, “and then ended in the place that I grew up, an environment that could not be more familiar. I went through my whole childhood and teenage years in the weeks we were there making the record.”

Beginning with the unnervingly hypnotic “Skin Graph,” Neck of the Woods boasts a wintry, suspenseful quality that Aubert links to such cinematic manifestations of dread as *The Shining* and *Let The Right One*

In. Songs like “Make Believe” and “The Pit” – with its bluer than “Blue Monday” beats – are desultory and somewhat adrift, haunted by memory and the inability to escape one’s past no matter what heights you ascend to in adulthood.

“There are certain things about growing up that are horrific,” Aubert says, “things that are inside you, that make you up – those are the things that intrigue me the most.”

Silversun Pickups are now preparing to take this powerfully personal work on the road, marking yet another manifestation of the multiple contradictions of being in a band.

“This is the moment where the introverted side is gone,” he says. “Everything is going to be big from here on in. You’ve got to get out of your head, because for this part of it, that’s the last place you want to be.”

From inception to fruition, a series of happy accidents led Silversun Pickups to the transcendent Neck of the Woods. Every step on the journey was marked by true synchronicity in action – the stars aligned, clouds parted, the cosmos smiling down upon the band. For their part, Silversun Pickups take a more pragmatic view.

“Some people believe in The Force,” Aubert says, “but I’m more like Han Solo – I think it’s just dumb luck! We definitely prepared for if the luck came, but that doesn’t mean that anything we did necessarily had that much to do with how well things went. I don’t know what we did to deserve it, but we’re thankful.”