The Innocence Mission
Sun On The Square

**Bella Union Bella789 (CD/LP)**

Veteran trio’s first in four years.

Between their refusal to play the music-industry game and lifting folk-pop craft, Pennsylvania’s The Innocence Mission make inviting work with a cultish mystique. The trio’s commitment to different shades of quietude brings a purity of purpose to their delicacy, justifying the reverence they’re afforded by alt. folk’s high-rankers.

That missionary zeal allows spouses Don and Karen Peris (plus bassist Mike Bitts) room to move on their homemade 10th album, the impalpable glint of finger-picked guitars and the crystalline coo of Karen’s vocals providing understated frameworks for their tender elegies. The warm, thrumming Records From Your Room typifies their approach, a glancing piano providing sympathetic backing for the evocations of Vashti Bunyan and Stina Nordenstam in Karen’s rueful vocal: “Is there a word for these things we’ve felt and we’ve seen?”

Elsewhere, aided by the Peris’ children on violin and viola, the Mission find strength in sweetness and warmth, subtlety and sensitivity. Green Bus evokes early Sufjan Stevens, meditating on the elusive pursuit of something beautiful enough to honour love. Look Out From Your Window summons vintage Leonard Cohen; Radioloudish一日的Fromen illuminate Light Of Winter. The synaesthetic title-track, meanwhile, mounts a plea for “more kindness in the world” over its Astrud Gilberto-ish swing, even at their most exquisitey fragile, The Innocence Mission’s determination to cherish all they hold dear rings true and timely. *Kevn Harley*

James
Living In Extraordinary Times

Both as artefacts and as totemic touchstones, psych and freakbeat singles from 1966-69 perch on a plane of perfection and desirability next to which Fabergé eggs might as well be congaled bar junkie. Original psych/freakbeat singles also look like a better investment. (Than Fabergé eggs, not bin juice.)

So, if you’re going to whip out yet another compilation devoted to a sub-genre which represents an impeccable confluence of evocatively utilitarian design and magic-realist content, what better way to present it than as a box set of reprod 7” vinyl 45s?

A Kaleidoscope Of Sounds: Psychedelic And Freakbeat Masterpieces

**B&W 4575324 (7x7)**

A singly attractive psych/freakbeat summit

It’s pretty much one big highlight, though special mention should be made of several inclusions in particular. Beside from Tintern Abbey is, of course, the inscrutable quintessence of UK psych-pop, a hot afternoon reverie in which every detail feels decadent and drugged: the marginally flat Mellotron, the incorporal vocals, the endless, musky cinematic smash of drums and suspended time. And then there’s the almighty Save My Soul by The Wimple Winch: Phil Smeee claims dibs on the term “freakbeat”, which he appended to this single when it appeared on the Bam-Caruso comp *The Psychodelic Snarl in 1984*. An inspired appellation, as it happens – even though Save My Soul’s expertly ridden dynamics elevate it to an ionosphere of its own. The last 30 seconds build to a teetering climax of Dennis Hopper-grade murderous intensity. And if it’s freakbeat ye seek, savour the looming clang of When The Night Falls by The Eyes and Say Those Magic Words by Birds Birds; but above all, cherish the behemoth that is Mud In Your Eye by Les Fleur De Lys, a Who-bronzing episode of crunching, thudding malignance, with a Jeff Beck-frightener of a solo by Phil Sawyer. (Though we’ll always ponder why those lazily-pitched backing vocals were removed from the cannonball that is Save My Soul.)

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*Kevn Harley*