

PAULA RAE GIBSON

All Things Bleak and Beautiful, 11 Oct 2007

By Foggy Tewsday courtesy of Amazon

Intimate and intense are two adjectives that, while apt, probably don't do justice to the songs contained on this album. Intimate because all fourteen tracks consist of Paula Rae Gibson's vocal and Tom Pilling's keyboard. Intense because of the raw subject matter upon which the songs are based. After the death of her husband, Paula Rae Gibson did not want to risk the possible heartbreak that a new love affair could bring, but, as her website has it, "Wishing to satisfy her physical needs, she embarked on a series of volatile sexual encounters with all the wrong men." `No More Tiptoes' is not an easy album to get into. It's not full of radio-friendly pop songs and its melancholic backdrop may give the impression of being a one-trick album. It would be a mistake to dismiss it on those terms because it does repay repeated listening.

Paula Rae Gibson's voice, stylistically, lies somewhere between Tori Amos and Fiona Apple with dark undertones of Nico and the idiosyncrasy of Mary Margaret O'Hara. The comparison with Tori Amos is probably the most striking because of the piano accompaniment throughout the album.

Tom Pilling's playing has a blues tinge on `The Wrong Man' as Paula sings of a man who "loves to make you feel small." At other times his sound is akin to a Harold Budd composition, notably on `Busy Fairies'. On `White Bird', the delicacy of Pilling's playing counterpoints the lyrical intensity and mournfulness of Paula's voice to exquisite effect. Paula's most Nico-like performance comes on the album's closing track, `I'll Always Walk Away' and here, Pilling's playing is dark and full of foreboding. Throughout the album, Paula's voice takes on various cadences. At times it barely rises above a whisper as her lyrics are wrung out of her. At others, it cracks, quavers and slows almost to a speaking voice.

Paula Rae Gibson has a book of photography called `Diary of a Love Addict' available. `No More Tiptoes' could perhaps be described as the songs of a love addict. On `Come Tomorrow', she plaintively asks: "Come tomorrow, will we be feeling this still?" and she asserts that, "Love is the only drug." Feelings and love are constant refrains on this stunning album. Poetry and photography seem to have been Paula Rae Gibson's main creative outlets until this album. I wonder if she can come up with another, more thematically varied album, or will this be her only foray into music? I really hope we hear more from her, but, either way, at the moment, `No More Tiptoes' is my favourite album of 2007. Don't miss it.