

Roma Amor - Occhi Neri (2012)

Written by bluelover

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1 *Occhi Neri* 4:09 2 *Mon Amour* 3:44 3 *Le Coeur Au Chaud* 2:45 4 *A Te Che Mi Vinci* 3:01 5 *Disertore* 4:20 6 *Euforia* 3:39 7 *La Concièrge* 3:36 8 *Mélancolie* 2:50 9 *Elle Est Seule* 3:10 10 *Sensualità* 3:53 11 *Fuoco Sottile* 3:30 12 *Madrigale* 3:01
Accordion, Bass, Spoons, Castanets – Candela Guitar, Mandolin, Harmonica – Roberto Zabberoni Voice, Guitar, Synthesizer, Glockenspiel – Euski

Just few years ago, Roma Amor was one of the best kept secrets of the modern folk world for reasons that included their self-titled debut having only just been released in 2008 on Old Europa Cafe and their style being somewhat far removed from both the dark folk of the Mediterranean region and the popular neo-cabaret that they were said to resemble in part. How quickly things change. Though OEC is still firmly planted in a position to support the project now five years and three albums later, Roma Amor's popularity has grown significantly, allowing the band to find success in a great deal of both live opportunities and positive press coverage. Last year, they also made their first excursion beyond OEC, releasing their first EP and vinyl record entitled "17.3" in collaboration with Albin Julius' Hau Ruck! SPQR imprint. Hailing from the Central Italian city of Ravenna just off the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and roughly 70 kilometers East of Bologna, Euski, Candela, and Roberto Zabberoni, whom make up the project, are directly entrenched both within their own Italian heritage and the romanticism that comes with the traditional art and music of their region.

Despite the presence of these understandably overwhelming traditional Italian elements, there is more complexity to the music of Roma Amor than is immediately apparent. The opening title track, "Occhi Neri", for example, is a track that takes a dark, even ethereal atmosphere into a style of deconstructed, extremely minimal tango. It's an unusual but most welcome take on a style of rhythmic folk music that is usually unheard of in our small corner of the underground. The album continues with the accordion-heavy and raspy female vocal stylings of a retro 60's French/Euro-folk while "Le Coeur au Chaud" continues the French style into a more traditional guitar-vocal pairing. At this point, it becomes pretty clear that the lion's share of songs on "Occhi

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Neri” are surrounding the concept of love and inevitable heartbreak — a theme prevalent in Italy’s rich music tradition and French chansonniers alike. “A te che mi Vinci” takes up a guitar-heavy melodic waltz and “Euforia” introduced an element that was shockingly absent to this point: the beautifully accented sound of flamenco guitar.

The buried gem in this release is, without a doubt, track 8, “Mélancolie”. This song represents an achingly short moment where all of the instrumentation and the emotions of the tracks prior come together in one brilliantly heart-tearing effort that finds the instrumentation taking on somewhat of a droning spirit in comparison to the likes of Julia Kent. The vocals are haunting, nearly howling towards the stars in despair and yet in perfect harmony with its surroundings. It’s simply amazing the way that the diversity of styles present in the opening half of the album come together in one shockingly reserved moment that brings the album to its climax. Subtle hints of psychedelic textures can be found weaving within the background of the track as well, making clear a unique view in that Roma Amor seems to sound like an inverted version of Ô Paradis — whereas Demian’s work in that project is defiantly geared towards the experimental with only hints of his traditional surroundings present within his music, Roma Amor crosses its path in the opposite direction, fully devoted to traditional melodic music with subtle experimental elements touching the soul of the music here and there.

Towards the end of the album, “Elle est Seule” finally welcomes the neo-cabaret sound that the project has been noted to contain elements of, utilizing layered vocals, bell percussion and, primarily, accordion to create its cirque atmosphere and conjuring images from films like Santa Sangre, specifically the character “Alma”. The album closes on a beautiful note with the projects own take on a traditional Italian Madrigal, with lush polyphonic vocals dominating the background of the track underneath of the spoken word that meanders through the frontal portion of the mix.

I find Occhi Neri to be a brilliant mixture of old and new, of traditional and progressive elements, of antiquity and novelty reposed in absolute harmony. Regardless of that, it is certain that this music isn’t for everyone. Some may find the Romantic elements overbearing, others still may be turned off by the strong usage of Mediterranean elements including perhaps the boldest implementation of accordion that I’ve heard in some time. Its allure towards a niche audience aside, there are few flaws to be found with Occhi Neri, and it proves that the recent success that the project has found is absolutely justified. ---heathenharvest.org

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