

MOJAVE 3 golden shadows

Phasers On Mellow Former Members of Slowdive Slowdown to Seduce Us

ILLUSTRATION BY KIKI KID
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It's Christmas again so we lit all the candles and we tried to pretend your room was a palace," sing Neil Halstead and Rachel Goswell, who, together with drummer Ian McCutcheon, comprise Mojave 3.

The lone, "Candle Song," like all the tracks on the newly released *Ask Me Tomorrow*, is maximally mellow, a hazy soft-edged vision of a song, low affect, whimsical, nervous. The sparseness of the song is more commitment of thought than speech. I asked the band what they picture people doing when they listen to the album.

They laughed instead of answering, thinking no doubt that I was pursuing the arbitrary angle when instead I meant that these songs of longing, love and resignation suggest being alone is best.

Ask Me Tomorrow's songs are crafted and articulated close to the center of acoustic tradition and so each have many near relations. The Cowboy Junkies are an immediate association; Mojave 3's "Love Songs on the Radio," the first track on the album, is prominent in distant American ballad form. The understated beauty of Halstead's voice together with Goswell's cool soprano suggest Simon and Garfunkle's quiet message, Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne" and CSN and Y's "Guinnevere" also come to mind as antecedents for the reveries Mojave 3 weaves. Halstead's guitar is a constant throughout, either languidly strummed or sliding jagged curves through the heavy thick tones of the solo and the piano that when spun leads continuously to the melody.

This is a departure for these English individuals. Halstead and Goswell had gotten together musically in high school and shortly after joined McCutcheon and several others for three critically acclaimed albums with their first enterprise, Slowdive. This earlier incarnation had more in common with My Bloody Valentine than Chelsea Manning. Five years into their seven-gig career in sound and TV, Slowdive continued their career with the experimental and barely ambient, *Zipgunation*... and did not renew their contract.

In this year, Halstead's acoustic endeavor started to assert themselves. The evolution in Halstead's songwriting, however, was leading in a direction with which some in the band were uncomfortable. After five years, the bandmembers split in two different directions.

Halstead, Goswell and McCutcheon viewed it as a break-out. The three gathered in Cornwall, where Halstead had recently moved, Goswell recalls being really comfortable in an informal setting, that is, outside of the studio which had been the laboratory for Slowdive's sound. "When I did vocals, I was sitting on a little mattress in Neil's kitchen. That helped a great deal since I'm not used to doing songs when I'm actually able to hear my voice." "There wasn't any big concepts," remembers Halstead. "The only concept was we wanted to record them as a single was just for, really. These tracks ended up being what's on the record. Then they gave us more money and we did another disc."

In the contemporary music climate, few albums sound like Ask Me Tomorrow. Its focused simplicity, its understatement and solemnity are a rare direction when hard rocking and heavy

... things are still packing their in and missing A & B. ... We just wanted to make something better... something

personal that people can relate to," he explains. "Slowdive was noisy and that could overwhelm you, but when I thought I think it is quieter that does people in."

