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The Beautiful Girls Ziggurats Bio April 2007

Ziggurat (pl. ziggurats): A pyramid temple of the ancient Mesopotamian valley.

"Music is a weird thing," says Mat McHugh. "If you're doing it right, you're only trying to respect the spirit of it, but it seems that every step in making it is a compromise of ego and industry. Maybe you never actually get there. Maybe music is the halfway point between heaven and hell."

Welcome to the Beautiful Girls' latest songs: divinely inspired and realised by human hands; magnificent monuments to unattainable perfection. Ziggurats.

These 10 were made of wood, wind, metal, wire and a surprisingly large dose of electricity in a small studio in Sydney, then mixed in Los Angeles in early 2007. Some of the names and faces around the band's singer-songwriter-guitarist have changed. Expectations engendered by their previous albums are perhaps best left here.

"I'm playing way more electric guitar," Mat says. "There's just the two acoustic songs this time, which I guess is partly reactive. I keep hearing about this acoustic movement, this blues and roots scene, and my feeling is like, F--k that dude, I don't want anything to do with any movement."

The Beautiful Girls' name alone was a pretty good indication of their intention to walk their own trail, regardless of prevailing footwear fashions. Five years ago, no band could get arrested playing acoustic instruments in Sydney. "Periscopes" was therefore a bracing staple of Australian airwaves in 2002.

Two albums later - Learn Yourself and We're Already Gone - four songs would echo the zeitgeist to lodge in the Triple J Hottest 100 in Australia, the latter picking up nominations for an ARIA and a J Award.

Meanwhile, a grassroots live following had escalated to bushfire proportions in the USA. It was there that Ziggurats began to take shape, in the aftermath of a fortuitous disaster. In September '06, several members of the band were deported. From the window of a fleapit hotel in Hollywood, Mat found himself contemplating a fresh musical future.



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"On this record I was really determined to say what I wanted to say," he says. "I wanted to make the guitar really wiry, make the music angular and tough and a bit darker. I wanted the rockier ones to sound tougher and then the pretty ones prettier. It was time to make the record I wanted to make."

In typically contrary style, he soon found influences seeping in through holes in his prior musical education.

"Growing up, I kind of avoided all those massively famous bands – the Police, U2, Midnight Oil," he recalls. "I grew up listening mostly to country and blues, enjoying the left field vibe. But the last few years I've gone back and listened to those bands and really got off on it."

Cue the beefy reggae rock of Ziggurats' opening cut, "Royalty". Next comes the chopping electric syncopations of "Sir, Your Fashion Has the Cold Heart of a Killer"; then the filthy bass intro, poppy double-handclaps and echo chamber effects of the first single, "I Thought About You".

"U2 and the Police in particular I've come to really appreciate," Mat says. "Ostensibly they've got a three-piece musical section like us, and I like the way they derive power from that minimal instrumentation. I like their grooves and their power."

That said, the Beautiful Girls' penchant for sonic sunshine is also in full effect here, in the warm, organic reconstruction of UB40's "Bring Me Your Cup"; the gentle Latino shuffle of "Spanish Town", an evocative aural postcard complete with Hammond organ and swinging horns; and a warm-hearted homage to South African reggae master Johnny Clegg in the feelgood finale, "Dela".

There's shades of Midnight Oil's urgent red dirt rock in the didgeridoo drones and slashing guitars of "Under the Southern Sky", and "Generals" perhaps has more of the spirit of the late Joe Strummer than Mat's earlier acoustic influences. "In Love" and "She's Evil" further push the rock envelope.

"This is definitely a more rockin' kinda thing," Mat agrees, "and the main reason for that is the ability of the guys who played on it." Co-producer Ian Pritchett remains a constant in the expanding ranks of honorary Girls. On the road, the new rhythm section of Paulie B (bass) and Bruce Braybrooke (drums), is set to make good on the band's new palette. That's evolution.

"The first album we did in four hours and it took off," explains Mat. "The next one, I was listening to Johnny Cash and Nick Drake a lot, so we made a mellow acoustic record and that was the one that kind of stamped us.

"But this is the first record I ever wrote where I actually had time to sit back and write the songs, to record them the way I wanted them to sound, and to present it the way I wanted it to be presented. It's way more realised than anything we've done before."



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In store May 2007, through DIE!BOREDOM Records and MGM Distribution.

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