

Tygers Of Pan Tang - Ambush (2012)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Keeping Me Alive* 2 *These Eyes* 3 *One Of A Kind* 4 *Rock & Roll Dream* 5 *She*
6 *Man On Fire* 7 *Play To Win* 8 *Burning Desire* 9 *Hey Suzie!* 10 *Mr. Indispensable*
11 *Speed* Bass – Gavin Gray Drums – Craig Ellis Guitar – Dean Robertson, Robb Weir
Vocals – Jacopo Meille

The Tygers of Pan Tang have had a bumpy ride since they reformed in 2001; but when they released the smashing *Animal Instinct* in 2008, a triumphant return to their original sound, it became clear they could still write and perform fine music. The band almost broke up before 2008, but the addition of vocalist Jacopo Meille saved the band – and how! The young Italian's voice is perfectly in line with the band, and filled with vigor and enthusiasm. To solidify their greater intention they hired renowned producer Chris Tsangerides, ready to pump out more quality tunes.

The opening song 'Keeping Me Alive' (originally called 'Biff', in reference to Biff Byford) toys cleverly with the structures, in ways the band never did in their classic day, or on their last album. It immediately shows the Tygers are more daring this time around. They set down a workable approach last album but expanded on it massively this time, in terms of musical architecture and emotional baggage. They push the songs into new territory every direction. Ditching banal party tunes from the past effort like 'Live for the Day' they probe far greater depths. A tune like of 'One of a Kind' (the first written, with demos dating all the way back to 2010) is impressive for its passion: the band members are no longer guys enjoying a party, content with dallying around: they mean to say something too, something which is not quite profound but unmistakably meaningful. The zeal is feasible. The lengthy chorus indicates as much ("your heart plays with fire"). It's still simple and catchy hard rock, but you forget its simplicity, which is swallowed by their far greater ambitions. They soar beyond the limitations of the form. You are first mesmerized by the groovy riff (classic Tygers!) but soon drawn into the effusion. The song has such great flow and power, it's easily a stand-out – yet typical for the album!

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There is variety too: 'Rock & Roll dream' has guitars down-tuned and very powerful bass support, unlike anything ever written by the Tygers – but it works, and fits the album very well. The singing is very fast and steady here, creating a very tense atmosphere: like nearly all songs on the album, it flows amazingly. The lyrical themes on the album are also remarkably varied, including the gambling song 'Play to Win' (taking a page from Motörhead, eh?) and 'Hey Suzie' referencing their charming old single 'Suzie Smiled'.

The only weaker cuts to me are 'She', which almost didn't make it onto the album, and the power ballad 'Burning Desire'. The former is simply dull, from the lyrics to the riffs to the stilted, staccato flow. Luckily it's followed by a very fine song ('Man on Fire') with an intense crescendo build-up towards a powerful chorus bellowed out by Jacopo. 'Burning Desire', however, is a major misstep, a painfully mushy ballad with atrocious lyrics ("stop dragging my heart around / release me"; "a never ending pain / is all that remains"; "step into the fire / of a burning desire"; "the night is my only friend"; "let rain wash away my tears") and emotional content that doesn't resonate. In the other songs the passion seemed so natural, it flowed spontaneously from the heart and from the spirited performance, the chords seemed to vibrate of themselves – but here the chords are forcibly struck again and again, through cheap parlor tricks and hackneyed writing. It is all bathos and false sentiment. A painful treading into territory that is not for the Tygers – but what they do so well, and do in all the other tracks, more than makes up for it.

The production by Chris Tsangerides is meaty and packed with punch – quite the opposite of the breezy, groovy sound from their last album. Yet it works perfectly fine here: the band was ready to step it up on all accounts, including heaviness. The guitars can roar and the drums thump relentlessly – it adds some visceral power that accentuates the passionate playing perfectly.

In brief: the Tygers were truly back last album; this time they are out for blood. It works extremely well. Save two road bumps it delivers from beginning to end with thrilling, passionate material that soars beyond anything the Tygers ever attempted. Their line-up is better than ever (and actually stable for once!), their love for the music is evident and their heart is in the game. This is a first-rate heavy rock album, a great gift to all fans of the NWOBHM. These are the distant deeps and skies, in which burns the Tyger's eyes. ---Ancient Sunlight, metal-archives.com

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