

‘There’s too much rigid thinking nowadays’

Alex Callier on ‘LOOKING FOR STARS’, Hooverphonic’s 2018 mission statement

‘I had the ambitious plan to release three albums this year: a Morricone-esque soundtrack, a triphop record, and a collection of poppy funky songs. I started writing with that goal in mind. But Luka Cruysberghs, our new 17-year old singer, considered me an old-fashioned relic. She recommended the Spotify approach: select the best tracks from each record, and subsequently create our own playlist. I initially had my doubts and reservations. Then again: ‘Deja Vu’ by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young is still one of favourite albums of all time, and that’s a mish-mash of styles and genres too. ‘Deja Vu’ is an eclectic mix of four talented songwriters, with the voice being the glue that keeps it all together. I felt like making a more coherent album as the follow-up to ‘In Wonderland’, but I had to agree that Hooverphonic is defined by said variation. I’m a big fan of heterogeneous albums myself. One and the same vibe can become quite boring while listening.’

Alex Callier is a happy man, and rightly so. On the one hand, ‘Looking for Stars’ offers vintage Hooverphonic with lead single ‘Romantic’, a sweeping instant classic steeped in John Barry lore for fans of ‘Anger Never Dies’. On the other hand, there are elusive, intriguing songs in the vein of ‘Pink Fluffy Dinosaurs’ and ‘Jackie’s Delirium’. ‘Looking for Stars’ meanders between triphop, James Bond, funk and programmed tracks. ‘Bands in the sixties released single after single, the eventual album came months later. Take ‘The White Album’: the rocking ‘Helter Skelter’ doesn’t sound out of place next to the folky ‘Rocky Raccoon’. There’s too much rigid thinking nowadays. In an ideal world, the listener creates his own playlist.’

Hooverphonic struck gold with Luka Cruysberghs. New singer, yet familiar sound: ‘Luka is integral to our story, she’s more than just ‘the next singer in line’. In a way, her voice dictates the songs we’ll be performing live. Luka has been chosen because she can pull off a lot of different Hooverphonic tracks. She’s got pipes.’

The title track and ‘Uptight’ are smashes in the making, and therefore the obvious singles. ‘Uptight’ offers phat 80s funk - killer dancefloor material for sure, but you can never put your finger on it. It’s impossible to predict what will catch on, and what won’t. Callier reckons ‘Paranoid Affair’ or ‘Concrete Skin’ have the potential to be even bigger hits: “‘Paranoid Affair’ is the ideal combination between a catchy melody and brooding melancholy. ‘Sleepless’ may be too

dark for radio stations, though. Nowadays, everything has to be happy and fun-fun-fun. You can't even tell your friends you're having an off-day. But I really dig the song. There's a certain duality in all our ditties. You can get away with it, if you infuse your work with black humour. 'Romantic' is not a romantic song, but you might mistake it for one. 'We're looking for stars, but we only find sugar' points to a bigger underlying problem, but there's an ironic upside to it. It's quite funny to have a carefree, joyful, 17-year old girl singing: 'I'm a horrible person'. It's one of Luka's very favourites.'

'Feathers & Tar', the iconic image from many a cowboy film, impresses with a perfect triphopbeat and could be considered the spiritual sequel to 'Jackie Cane'. 'Absolutely, it's my tribute to country and Morricone. Lyric-wise, it's the odd duck out, because it's a real story told in the third person. I've always had a soft spot for cowboy songs. Give me Lee Hazlewood any day, please.'

Each new Hooverphonic record will go off the beaten path, but will still connect with a large audience. 'That's what I'm most proud of. We've been relevant for over twenty years. In concert, we'll play '2 Wicky', 'Eden', 'Mad About You', 'Amalfi', 'Badaboum' and 'Romantic'. These are the songs people want to hear. Compiling a setlist is never easy. Kill your darlings, sadly. Average Joe Concert demands nothing but the hits. Almost no-one is holding his breath for 'Norwegian Stars', but it will always remain one of my absolute faves from our back catalogue.'

One day, Callier might make an album's album - one without singles, just for connoisseurs. Streaming has opened up the possibilities. Callier's new home studio has provided him with the necessary tools to be even more independent and creative. For now, we have 'Looking for Stars', a no-frills, no holds barred, straightforward collection of Hooverphonic excellence. In a record store near you come November, on CD, download, streaming, vinyl and cassette.