

SOME GREAT STUFF I'VE HEARD RECENTLY - LAILA BIALI AND THE RADIANCE

PROJECT "HOUSE OF MANY ROOMS"

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When this popped into my inbox, I didn't really know what to make of it. An entirely new name to me, Laila Biali is a jazz singer of some repute as well as a collaborator with Sting and Paula Cole among others. So she's pretty good, right? Right. "Shadowlands" kicked things off and immediately blew my mind clean away. It's a fast-paced piano driven rock song with hard as nails grooves from drummer Ben Whitman (co-producer and also Laila's husband). Not only that, it's covered in swathes and swathes of absolutely gorgeous, soulful horns. Not only *that* but it also features a spine-tingling vocal arrangement, brought to life by the Toronto Mass Choir. The song is astonishing. I cannot tell you the grin that has danced across my face each time this song has played. It's the kind of track that you can't just nod your head, stamp your foot or click your fingers to. You have to do them all. It also contains within it a notably hopeful lyrical sheen. "There is hope beyond the dark and long", Laila riffs at the climax of the chorus. By the songs' end, you'll believe her.

This is by far the best song I've heard this year. If it does not proper Laila Biali into the consciousness of people all over the globe there is no justice on Planet Music. Ok, so we know there is no justice on Planet Music, but allow me to indulge in some proper hyperbole, where only proper hyperbole will do.

And that's only track one.

I could go on, and on, and on. "Love" takes things in a piano pop direction, and features one of *those* choruses. "Sparrow" speaks of the beauty of every day's new mercies over some succulent piano chords. "Upside Down" is all bass groove, topped with sensuous Rhodes, and then surprises with a straight-ahead chorus of considerable power. By the time closer "Plainclothes Hero" rolls in to view, you're ready to submit to the sheer passion, beauty and skill on display here. If there's a better debut album released this year I'll be surprised.

All in all, you can't do without this record. It's a fantastic album. Simply a stellar piece of work. I was floored from minute one. This is pop, this is indie, it could be jazz. It speaks to me of Ben Folds in parts, and not just because the piano features heavily. There is great orchestration throughout, all topped with a series of beautiful and confident vocal performances. Mixed in throughout is the reality of a lived-out faith but whether you agree with her beliefs or not, this is music to transcend divisions and boundaries. As Laila says in the video below, she wanted to mix soul with an independent heart. She succeeds in this aim in spades. One not to miss. Catch her on tour in the UK this autumn.

