

All the Saints:
Fire on Corridor X
[Killer Pimp/Touch & Go; 2008]
Rating: 7.0

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For two subgenres built upon a common ideal-- burying classic-rock tunefulness underneath fuzzbox-stomped guitar squall-- grunge and shoegaze experienced markedly different fates in the early 1990s. While the former conquered the magazine covers and fashion runways of America, the latter saw its most visible adherents either fade into oblivion (My Bloody Valentine) or make transitions into Britpop (Ride, Swervedriver) without fully transcending cult status. But then, when you consider what grunge ultimately wrought-- just tune into any modern-rock radio station for the sorry evidence-- it's hard to say it fared any better in the long run.

So you can forgive Atlanta trio All the Saints (never has a "the" played such an important distinguishing function in a band's name) for wanting to turn back the clock to 1990, and imagine an alternate history where grunge and shoegazer rock stayed underground, left to fester in a thick psychedelic sludge. But All the Saints are an early-90s-throwback band experimenting with a contemporary business model: their debut album, *Fire on Corridor X*, was given a wide release last November by Touch & Go in vinyl and mp3 formats only, before the label issued a CD run; however, the album first surfaced in early 2008 through Boston-based indie Killer Pimp, the same imprint that introduced us to A Place to Bury Strangers. Like that band, All the Saints strive for sensory obliteration through effects-pedal abuse, but where APTBS opt for strobe-lit acceleration and car-crash cacophony, All the Saints stew in a slow-motion magma and brace themselves for the inevitable eruptions.

Fire on Corridor X is certainly heavy, but it refuses to rock out in the obvious, cathartic sense. The ominously tranquil opening instrumental "Shadow, Shadow" and steamrolling surge "Sheffield" establish the album's pattern of calm/calamity early on, as bassist Titus Brown and drummer Jim Crook set the patient pace with lumbering, choppy grooves that rarely waver through the course of the album; add guitarist Matt Lambert's distant vocals and vaguely shamanistic proclamations ("give all your problems to me," "do as I say") and the result is not unlike the heady, early excursions of Smashing Pumpkins or The Verve, minus the latent pop-star aspirations.

What All the Saints lack in rhythmic variation, they make up for with absorbing atmosphere-- their sound truly is subterranean, a dimly lit, cavernous rumble that gets more suffocating as the album progresses. The album's lone folk-song reprieve, "Leeds", actually further emphasizes this quality: a sprightly piano-tapped fade-out hints at levity, only for the chords to mutate and melt away just before the fiery title track kicks in. With so much tension and little release, it's no surprise that, despite their shared hometown, All the Saints exist outside of the communal Deerhunter/Black Lips nexus that's come to define contemporary Atlanta indie-rock-- like their grunge-gazer forbears, All the Saints believe misanthropy makes for the best company.

MySpace: <http://www.myspace.com/allthesaints>

- Stuart Berman, January 7, 2009
