



The Uglysuit

The Uglysuit

(Quarter Stick)

US release date: 19 August 2008

UK release date: 6 October 2008

by Lana Cooper

The Uglysuit's debut, eponymously-titled album is the sonic equivalent of a trip to the amusement park, one of those old-timey ones that has a sense of sweetness and charm to it, populated with paddleboats and lovingly crafted carousel horses, all accentuated by the sweet taste of cotton candy melting in your mouth. The thrill rides are there, but there's a sort of wonder surrounding the less bombastic contraptions. On the surface, it seems so simple. But when you pause to think about it, there's an almost magical quality to how even the simplest of amusements, the way the parts work together, is a surprisingly complex enterprise.

A sextet of musically inclined friends hailing from Oklahoma City, it's hard to liken the Uglysuit's sound to anyone else. Sure, there are snippets of other bands that creep in for just the briefest of moments. Despite their Midwestern roots, the band could easily be mistaken as Euro- or Brit-pop with their gauzy, ethereal sound. At times, the band seems somewhat Beatles-esque with its multi-layered arrangements and traces of John Lennon's optimism in their abstract, yet hopeful lyrics. On the other hand, tracks like "Brad's House" channel the Killers at their most mellow, starting off with a sparse soundscape that eventually builds towards the entire band singing along on the piece's starry-eyed coda. There might even be a dab of Coldplay somewhere in the mix, too, owed to a piano-heavy sound and pieces containing multiple, cinematic movements. But these vague resemblances only show up from time to time. Unless you're really desperate to find some predecessor to compare the group to, these elements are hard to pinpoint.

On the disc's single, "Chicago", and at various points throughout, Israel Hindman's vocals are an odd combination of monotone and melodic, employing very few dynamics. That said, *monotone* does not necessarily translate to *soulless*. When Hindman does make with the rare display of vocal pyrotechnics, the results are all the more stunning. The emotional factor isn't a *railingtour de force*, but more of a quiet display. Then again, you don't need the overt sap of a Hallmark card to convey genuine feeling... and the Uglysuit proves it.

There is a singer-songwriter quality to *The Uglysuit* that stems from the band's tranquility. Unlike the bare-bones, often anemic sounds peddled by singer-songwriters, prone to their fits of acoustic maudlin on a lone guitar or with droning piano chords, the Uglysuit is beefed up by its six members contributing to an astonishingly full sound. Each one tackles double-duty on more than one instrument on the album.

Rhythm guitar jangles side-by-side with floaty piano chords, often playing in tandem and giving the Uglysuit an unobtrusively lush sound. Instead of competing for the spotlight, the instruments gel together. The lead guitar doesn't so much riff as twinkle. Pleasant acoustic arpeggios sparkle before an echoing, wordless chorus of harmony on "...And We Became Sunshine", stretching it out into a seven-minute opus that slows itself down with a monstrous stop.

One of the most remarkable things about the Uglysuit's debut is that for a bunch of guys between 20 and 23 years of age, the arrangements are more ambitious than those of a lot of seasoned

musicians. The songs expertly flow into one another, particularly on the latter half of the disc's nine songs. Jonathan Martin gets an opportunity to show off his piano skills on the solo "Elliot Travels", a pleasant interlude that leads into the stunning "Anthem of the Arctic Birds", with its in-the-round chorus and lyrical themes of birds soaring through the air for the first time. As "Anthem" glimmers to a close, "Everyone Now Has a Smile" picks up on the faint guitar noodlings before roaring into what is perhaps the closest the band comes to indie-rock riffing.

Make no mistake about it, *The Uglysuit* is a comfort album. Everything about it feels warm and fuzzy, like a cherished memory or favorite sweater. It's not gonna shake your walls or rattle your cage. At times, all the sweetness and light can be a bit repetitive. But for a first outing, *The Uglysuit* does serve as a much more quiet sort of inspiration—which, sometimes, can be quite profound.

RATING: ●●●●●●●7●●●●

— 23 October 2008

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