**DJANGO DJANGO**

***Marble Skies***

Two years ago, Django Django’s producer/drummer David Maclean was standing backstage at a festival in Chicago, chatting to a group of people, when he happened to raise his eyes skywards. “It was really amazing,” he remembers. “The sky looked like a massive sheet of marble. We were all just kind of staring at it. It triggered something.”

Maclean immediately made a note of the words *Marble Skies*, now the title of the band’s third album. It’s a very Django Django title, following on from their eponymous, Mercury-nominated 2012 debut album and its 2015 follow-up *Born Under Saturn* to underline their inherent wonder of all things natural and elemental.

After the rave-shaped grooves and expansive arrangements of its predecessor, *Marble Skies* is a more concise and focused offering which recalls the dynamic, genre-blurring music of their debut. Where *Born Under Saturn* was recorded in Angelic in rural Northants, in what Django Django regard as a “proper” studio filled with an array of vintage synthesizers, *Marble Skies* found them returning to the handmade, cut-and-paste approach of the *Django Django* album. “We definitely felt like we wanted to take back control a bit more,” says singer/guitarist Vincent Neff. “The first one was done with a very limited palette because we didn’t have that much equipment. Then with the second we had everything.”

Having begun life as the bedroom recording project of the Scottish-born Maclean and Northern Ireland-raised Neff, Django Django evolved into a band with the addition of synth-obsessed Scot Tommy Grace and Yorkshire-hailing bassist Jimmy Dixon, playing anywhere from small clubs to warehouse parties. The four initially met at Edinburgh College Of Art, though didn’t properly get going until they had all relocated to London, where things quickly took off for Django Django following the release of a run of early singles (“Storm/Love’s Dart”, “WOR”, “Waveforms”, “Default”) and their highly-acclaimed debut LP.

Upon their arrival, as a band Django Django were clearly a unique proposition, mixing the US garage rock of The Monks with the playful sonic voyaging of Beck, and adding a dash of the freewheeling, surrealistic humor of The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band.

In the wake of their debut album’s success, they travelled the world, including visiting India at the request of the British Council. Elsewhere, Maclean accepted an invitation from Damon Albarn to travel to Mali as part of Africa Express, before all four members performed a show with Albarn’s amorphous troupe in Marseille.

By the time the tour for *Born Under Saturn* ended in Australia in January 2016, Django Django were both elated and exhausted. Maclean flew on to Los Angeles to lend his programming skills to the making of KT Tunstall’s *KIN* album, then moved back to his hometown of Dundee for a much-needed rest. In the meantime, the others assembled at Urchin Studios in East London with Metronomy drummer Anna Prior to experiment with the idea of coming up with new tracks through loose jamming sessions.

“It was actually quite refreshing,” says Neff. “Just to have a different drummer and a slightly different sound with the way they play. Jamming stuff, you could feel immediately if something had a good energy about it.”

At the end of 10 days of recording, there was plenty of material to send up to Maclean in Scotland for him to edit and refine. It offered him more perspective on the initial part of the process. “They might not have thought that this particular bit they’d played was any good,” he says. “But it would jump out at me and I would loop it and build on that and send it back.”

*Marble Skies* sees Django Django, effectively, returning to the recording environment of Maclean’s bedroom, albeit in the form of their small, equipment-crammed studio in north London. “It’s like a gang hut,” says Maclean. “Kind of like my bedroom in that flat where we made the first album...just without the bed. We feel like we can just do whatever we want there.” Through this process the band sets itself apart from many – seeing all four members contribute not only to the music, but also to the melodies and lyrics.

Parts of Django Django’s third album find them sailing into uncharted territories, not least the driving title track (propelled by Anna Prior’s drumming), with its echoes of Krautrock and Suicide. By contrast, the trippy upbeat rock of “Tic Tac Toe,” with its enormous echoing hookline, will excite fans of the band’s rockabilly-influenced elements. It was cut from the same long recorded jam that produced “WOR” and “Shake & Tremble.” Meanwhile, the hazy Zombies-like summer pop of Champagne, which explores the joys and ills of alcohol, was inspired by a boat trip on the Seine that the Djangos enjoyed at the invitation of their label.

The more dance-orientated side of Django Django comes out with the twisted ‘80s electro pop of “In Your Beat” and the Jamaican dancehall-influenced “Surface To Air,” a dreamy-headed pop song fronted by Rebecca Taylor of Slow Club. Originally conceived as a duet for Taylor and Neff, it ended up being the first Django Django track to solely feature an outside singer. “It’s nice to hear those kind of moments,” says Neff. “When you’re listening to an album, it pulls you out of hearing the same voice for every track.” Another more surprising collaborator on *Marble Skies* is Jan Hammer, the Czech-born, American- based jazz-fusion and electronic artist who shares writing credits with the band on the floaty “Sun Dials.”

If there’s a thread running through *Marble Skies*, it’s one of reflection on things past and present, and finding some kind of peace with your place in the grand scheme of things. This sentiment reaches its peak amid the hypnotic groove of “Fountains,” with its chorus refrain: “Bigger Than You And Me.” Maclean notes, “It’s just this idea of things constantly turning and moving on ... and you’re just kind of part of it and watching it and helpless to time passing. But sort of becoming at ease with that.”