

Like their name suggests, Model/Actriz seek to channel raw emotions into striking new forms. The band's surface glamor is supported by nerves of steel, leveraging their focus into moments of wild abandon. Since their songs roar to life off the back of blistering guitar, relentless drums, and pummeling bass there's an expectation that Model/Actriz aim first and foremost to be shit-starters. But their instrumental muscle couches a searching heart and the Brooklyn quartet have long made a mission to reconcile undefinable feelings by charting a ferocious new path through sound, one that brings jagged emotions back into full, sweaty alignment with the listeners' bodies.

Their debut record *Dogsboddy* was sexy, dark, and humid, full of eerie passages and veiled menace. Songs like "Amaranth" and "Mosquito" were hot house scenes cast in foreboding half-shadow, with frontman Cole Haden as the hero at the center of its shifting, sultry gloom. The figure he cut was reassuring and ominous, both an experienced guide who could light up the music's dim corridors and a haunting presence who was inextricably bound to them. The lyrics found him fumbling around in its darkness to become the person he is today – scarred, but made stronger in pursuit of its seduction.

Model/Actriz's sophomore album *Pirouette*, which was co-produced and mixed by Seth Manchester and mastered by Matt Colton, their collaborators on *Dogsboddy*, swerves out of the maze and directly into the spotlight. It is *Dogsboddy*'s equally accomplished, but much more self-possessed sister record – thumping and immediate rather than dark and obscure. The light it casts off originates from within, and reflects a band that's not only grown into its strengths but conquered its demons. Haden no longer vamps from the shadows but at the very front of the stage – and often in the very thick of the crowd – commanding the music's chaotic center with a poise that channels Grace Jones and Lady Gaga.

After much critical acclaim and an exhausting tour to support the record, the band sought to reinvigorate their visceral live shows that invite that audience into a shared room of carnal ritual. *Pirouette* is both a natural progression and a calculated reset, a move toward reasserting their command as artists by peeling away the smoke and mirrors to become brighter, heavier, and more direct. The pop thread running throughout the album allows the crowd to witness thumping club music in the spirit of cabaret and manifest the catharsis that comes with hitting the dancefloor.

The word "Pirouette" literally dances on the tongue and few lyricists delectate in the flavor of words as expertly as Haden does. "Like 'matinee' or 'seraglio'" he pouts on "Departures," "all I want is to be beautiful." The beauty Haden pines after on *Pirouette* is the kind that's forbidden until you give yourself permission to indulge, and even then, it's

an enjoyment that's tempered by a history of shame. On standout track "Cinderella," the singer's strutting bravado suddenly gives way to crushing vulnerability – as he stares into a love interest's eyes, he recounts the childhood shame of backing out of having a *Cinderella*-themed birthday party, a psychic scar that he's still able to trace over years later. Even though the memory still aches, the song's driving force is a willingness to be vulnerable, to extend his arms out for love even if it risks courting hurt.

These lapses, where style and cleverness can't paper over roiling emotions, are what gives the record its awkward grace. It's elegant when a ballerina does a pirouette and shameful when a faggot attempts the same, but Haden isn't defensive or cowed anymore; he grew into the diva he once worshipped growing up as a queer kid, singing along to a pantheon of pop icons like Britney Spears and Mariah Carey. Throughout the record, past and present chafe against one another until Haden claims them as part of a larger tapestry: present day DeKalb station giving way to the Delaware of his childhood, the sexually commanding adult only a memory away from the panicked preadolescent confessing a crush. Throughout *Pirouette*, Haden isn't merely strutting through the music but commanding the whole narrative of his life.

The inventiveness of the band's cohesive musicianship is evident on "Poppy," with Haden's lyrics capturing the full scope of their ability to fluctuate between instrumental squalls and barreling, dissonant dance music: "*as flesh is made in marble/as marble captures softness/as softness holds a violence/within a pure expression.*" Aaron Shapiro, Ruben Radlauer, and Jack Wetmore are a fearsome unit, rearranging the floor and the ceiling of rock music, with punishment and uplift coming from the jagged but interlocking complexity of each band member responding to one another. What should be a fist-fight is instead a well-oiled machine: the knife edge of Wetmore's guitar shimmering and lacerating from one moment to the next, Radlauer establishing a firm floor only to open a chasm beneath your feet, Shapiro driving his bass backwards and forwards, taking the texture from burnished to bruising and back again.

One of the most oppressive divisions in music is how certain sounds are mapped onto and parceled off from the listener's body, a fracturing that on *Pirouette* the group set out to reconcile and transcend. "*Be embodied,*" Haden whispers at the beginning of "Departures," as the trill of Wetmore's guitar and the thump of Radlauer's drums activate your senses from both high and low ends. As the song builds to a blaze, it triggers elbows and knees, shoulders and hips, as punk aggression surrenders to club-pop. Like their music, Model/Actriz grapple with the thorniness of assuming one's self to arrive at stunning new ways to be free.