**Scarlett Jane**

Precisely when the moment of realization will occur is anyone’s guess.

It might be as Andrea Ramolo and Cindy Doire are stepping up to collect a prestigious award. Maybe they’ll be on a plane zipping towards their latest European tour. Or maybe it’ll come much, much later, while the pair is gleefully tossing back margaritas and baking their septuagenarian skin on a beach somewhere, recalling their glorious past.

One thing’s certain, though. Ramolo and Doire – collectively rootsy folk/pop duo Scarlett Jane – will single out the release of their poignant and astonishingly assured self-titled second album as the time when their status as musicians and performers of the highest order was cemented.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but Scarlett Jane are about to skyrocket.

Their 2012 debut, *Stranger* – re-mixed and re-mastered to widespread notice and radio play in 2014 – was stunningly beautiful, leading to ecstatically received Canadian and European shows. That it built on Ramolo and Doire’s acclaimed and overlapping solo output (an impressive five albums between them to date) gave the pairing even more propulsion.

Yet *Scarlett Jane*, the brand new album, goes even deeper (and higher and lighter and darker), presenting a collection of breathtakingly personal songs bolstered by a mostly understated instrumental framework designed to showcase Ramolo and Doire’s buttery and mellifluous voices.

If Scarlett Jane’s tightly knitted harmonies don’t flatten you, their lyrical candour – the musical equivalent of a slightly tipsy girlfriend laying it on the line – definitely will.

“This album is pretty damn honest,” Ramolo confirms with a laugh. “You really get to know the character and heart of Scarlett Jane. But this whole project was actually born out of heartbreak.

“Scarlett Jane started when we both left relationships around 2011. People told us they wanted to hear our two voices together more because we performed on each other’s solo stuff. The breakups felt like the universe telling us, ‘OK, this is your time to do this.’”

Adds Doire: “If we think about these songs too much it freaks us out because we do reveal a lot of information in our songwriting. The live show, too. There are moments on stage when one of us is crying. We live real life in front of our fans.”

“We have fallen apart in laughter and in tears on stage,” Ramolo says. “And it’s so special. We are both very energetic forces and we firmly believe two heads are better than one.”

“It’s been dynamic from the beginning,” says Doire. “And once you’ve had this kind of collaboration, it’s hard to step away.”

Written during an intense woodshedding holiday to Cuba in 2013 ahead of *Stranger*’s re-release, and recorded in early 2015 with producer and friend Colin Cripps at Ontario’s famed Bathouse Studios and in Toronto with Chris Stringer, *Scarlett Jane* presents stories like postcards: vivid, immediate, rich in detail.

Witness the first single, ‘Little Secret,’ which places the pair’s sunny, multi-layered vocals against a neon scrim of chiming guitar. That buoyancy is countered by more sombre tracks like ‘Broken Open’ – a candlelit ballad that glides by on the barest of ambient instrumentation – and the almost incandescent, slow-burning ‘We All Just Wanna Be Loved.’

Elsewhere, the deceptively simple ‘Tic Toc’ juxtaposes the mundane clatter of time-keeping against life’s biggest game-changer: falling in love for keeps. (Both can seem endless and uncontrollable somehow). The slinking, cinematic ‘I Grew Wild,’ meanwhile, conjures a spectral landscape where you half expect a lonely train whistle to howl in the background.

The corn-fed and ridiculously earworm-y ‘Come Away with Me’ perhaps best captures the salty/sweet terrain Scarlett Jane songs expertly mine, beseeching its protagonist to ‘Come away with me/ come away with me’ (aw, sweet) then warning ‘The sky is falling’ (oh dear).

“If I had to use adjectives to describe this record, I’d say moody, sultry, playful, heartbreaking… like most of our albums,” Ramolo chuckles. “There’s lots of textures and tones but all of the songs come from the heart, even the ones that are a little more playful and colourful.”

“Everything on the album is a co-write because it always filters through both our minds and hearts,” adds Doire, who also speaks (and frequently sings in) French. “We feel there is more clarity because we are going through this creative process together. Coming up with something we both can relate to forces us to be very clear in what we’re trying to say. It takes our songwriting to the next level.”

Such openness inspired tangible devotion in fans, which Doire and Ramolo happily discovered when they sought to underwrite the new album through crowdfunding. Not only was the campaign successful, it showcased the pair’s wry humour, so evident in person. To wit: a promotional video in which neither Doire nor Ramolo could keep a straight face. And for a pledge of $10,000, Ramolo and Doire promised – wait for it - babysitting services.

No one took them up on that particular offer but the crusade did expose one very keen, highly placed Scarlett Jane fan who – rather like our heroines - knows a thing or two about breaking hearts on record and busting guts on stage.

“Jann Arden bought two pairs of our cowboy boots for $500 apiece,” beams Ramolo. “We were super-grateful. It’s an honour to have her as a fan.”

“We did have some trepidation about crowdfunding because you don’t want to appear to be begging for money,” Doire allows. “But it felt like we were making our fans part of the process.”

“Plus,” says Ramolo, “Cindy and I have been do-it-yourselfers for a long time, booking our own tours, doing our own marketing. So why not reach out to the people who are going to buy the album anyway?

“Somebody said something beautiful to me recently about what we do as artists,” Ramolo continues. “She said, ‘You put yourselves out there and you’re so honest about what you’re going through. It really helps people like me who *can’t* do that. People like me live vicariously through you.’”

Ramolo stops, chokes up, collects herself, and continues. “We’re not heroes. We’re just two women who get together and write about our lives. But at the end of the day it really means something to actually connect with people in that way.”

“For us, sharing our lives and our sorrows helps us to feel connected, too” adds Doire. “We can feel happy being sad because we know we are not alone.”

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