

Album Review: Moonlane Gardens – Orange & Lemons

Contributed by Ian Emmanuel C. Urrutia
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Ghostly but prettily decorated with chirping pop hooks, Orange & Lemons' third outing maintains the lush mood and disquieting innocence of the previous records *Love in the Land of Rubber Shoes* and *Dirty Ice Cream* and the sophomore major label release *Strike Whilst the Iron is Hot*, with the still Morrissey-Lennon fixation carved at the utterly mesmerizing tunes. Although the aesthetics are vintage ONL, maturity comes along with the careful intermarriage of honeyed melody and lyrics sieved in genuine poetic merits.

Artistic differences could lead into a serious case of politicking in a band, and in the case of Orange n Lemons – Clementine Castro's departure was such an assenting approval of how clash of music ideas turns the routinely healthy brainstorming into something "irreconcilable" and worst, being fueled into a reckless publicity.

While the confluence of event happened unexpectedly, it is the marketing strategy to rake the attention of print gossip columns and new media's intrigue-crazed online forum discussions and a timely essay to revive the dying mainstream career of the pseudo-Smiths from Bulacan that regrettably loads to the pile of bantering the band has been receiving since *The Chandeliers* rip off accusation-days.

Clem's apparent contribution (the most brooding and groundbreaking to date) on the latest concept record, *Moonlane Gardens* must be at least squashed into considerations by the management before axing him into the line-up whatever the infamously despicable act he has committed in the short run. It might have been just a typical case of coked rockstar gone rebellious, and it doesn't hurt giving a chance to a musician whom obviously would choose the limelight of a career rather than diminutive indulgences.

Of course I'm not being spooned by the most recent of details or the subjective of being objective among things, but being a fan of their music and the ambition their music makes, I feel sorely affected by the sudden turn-out of events.

Clem would always be remembered as the brain behind the morosely melancholic songs that serenade the airwaves, his foppish britishness worn at his gentle gender-bending voice that sails smoothly over Mc Coy Fundales' moping croons and his Johnny Marr-ish innovative guitar albeit not being antiseptic all the time, would always be the garnishing element of the band's music.

Luckily, his bearing is strongly felt in the band's sweetly fabled third release, *Moonlane Gardens* – an ambigram of their band moniker, Orange and Lemons. But to dismiss the album a Clem tribute of all sorts might be too imposing.

Video: "Ang Katulad Mong Walang Katulad"

Directed by Marie Jamora.

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There are hints of restructuring their distinct 80's brit guitar pop meets Rey Valera montage to millennial, mope britpop ("Let me"), post-Nirvana indie rock ("I feel good, I feel fine") and even kundiman pop ("Ang Katulad Mong Walang Katulad," "Buhay at Pag-ibig") but everything's still familiar territory here: the androgynous vocal harmonies produced by the orgasmic gender-bending trades of Mc Coy and Clem, charmingly lukewarm guitar sounds that jerks from jangly to angular to distortion-free heavy, 80's and new wave pop fetishisms, british twangy-accented tunes that could rival even the royal family, Beatles lyrical references, the intimacy and sensitivity of the songs most discernible to the british bands of yesterday and today.

But there is also a swooning newfound direction. *Moonlane Gardens* is strangely the Dylanesque of the three albums ONL made. It's more curvaceous on wordplay and imagery in which the richness can be tendered by sowing its stories of heartaches, escape, and lovers lost in paradise. It's so real and authentic that it hurts. But at the same time, it's also a figurative place where "broken hearts mend."

There's fondness on finely dreamy portraits in the album that gives off the feeling of escapism to the real world. Mc Coy sings on the title track "There's a place where the moon is under the sea... there's a place where the sun's inside the cup of tea ... there's a place you can go where no one else has been but me," and entices us to curiously imagine the life outside of pain and misery. Brilliantly, it could be an ode to daydreaming but there's also a piece of puzzle in me that says it's a suicidal song written in amorous verses so as to direct its listeners more on the GP-rated side than the connotative meaning (but the line "how do we get there?" almost gives me the creeps).

Carrier single "Ang katulad mong walang katulad" darts on pop culture references from the San Miguel beer-inspired title to lyrical affirmation on the Iza Calzado-starrer *Moments of Love* ("di-nial na ang lahat ng numero sa telepono kong antigo, hawak ang pag-asa na makausap ko na ang katulad mong walang katulad") to alarming semblance to Sting's "Until" and to citing kundiman and as the main rhythmic backdrop. Some might not like it, but the bold move to put up a song with whirring associations to commercial jingles and local movies is a breath of fresh air from the serious image they wear on their sleeves. Sometimes, messing up and deprecating one's self could make a calculable worth of greatness. And ONL just nailed that with this kind of song.

Gawking on murky neo-psychedelic sounds with strapping indication of 80's disco-inspired new wave anthems, *Orange n Lemons*' "Moonjive" is what "How soon is Now?" is to The Smiths. It's pulsating beats and fainting headrush more often than not radiates atmospheric feeling to the senses and thrills you of dancing oddly in purple haze, particularly lost into the unconsciousness. This isn't exactly melodically ambitious as compared to the grandeur of "New Day" which features crunching guitars and siren-blowing synthesizers building up into Live 8 arena-sized chorus that resonates something epic would come after the smoke machine histrionics.

But if you worship the band because of the tranquil pop ballads and the sentimental lyrics they make, the threesome alone of "It's about time," "Be with you" and the shampoo commercial-themed "Let me" are enough warmth to accompany one's grieving intimacy. It has the same downer effect of old *Lemons*' smooch, with simple tearjerking one-liners flirting with throbbing melodies and warming melancholia. These songs also are potential radio staples and could easily end up in everyone's "dedication" mixtapes along with secretly fondled cheesy hair glam ballads and David Pomeranz prom songs.

While *Moonlane Gardens* showcased ONL's most experimental and concise work of poetic elegance to date, it could also be the make or break record for the band in maintaining their commercial success, as earlier defined by *Strike Whilst the*

Iron is Hot. The publicity involving Clem's departure might have a lot to say, but there's no harder fuss than laming the public's trust. That is, rotting its creativity in years to come.

But then again, critics are always on the look out.

This just in! Clementine's post-ouster MySpace posting.