

Not Afraid

Heavy Heavy, Young Fathers (Ninja Tune)

This Edinburgh trio, who met as kids, produce an amazing music together. Somehow there's rap, chant, rhythm, electronica and soul all in the mix, with this new album definitely bringing out the soul and the band's connection and vital energy to the fore, far more than their previous recordings.

They are not afraid to use hooks and choruses, but neither are they afraid to make a noise: layering up vocals, crashing beats and samples to clever effect. The rhythms appear simple but accumulate into layered complexities and dense echoing space, a kind of dub intensity without reggae, a generous soul-full music.

When I saw them live, supporting – but also singing with/for – Massive Attack, Young Fathers almost blew the stage apart in a way that Massive Attack could only match with their information overload stagemusic. Young Fathers don't need anything more than their voices, some instruments and time; mix in some joyful exuberance and you have 10 short songs (the whole album is only 33 minutes) full of pulsating drive, streetwise lyrics, emotional longing and loss, attitude and desire.

The 70s are in the mix here as well as grime and dance music. I hear traces of disco, glam rock, pop and postpunk too; the closing 'Be Your Lady' even has a hint of Barry White in there too, before the track explodes into rays of broken-glass crystal synthesizer, then loops back into song and rap.

It's this slipping between genres and styles, this totally appropriate mash-up of 21st century sound, that may be the reason that Young Fathers have eluded popular rather than critical acclaim. When it's as hard to pin a label on a band as it is here lazy audiences get confused and shut their ears. They are, however, missing a treat. Young Fathers are a perfect blend and reinvention of all that's good in popular music, the sound of appropriation, celebration and joyful resistance.

Rupert Loydell

(325 words)