



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Race To The Blackout

DFM-079

AIDING & ABETTING

Clouds Forming Crowns
"Race To The Black Out"
August 2006

Sweet, fuzzy swagger that never lets up. Indie rock meets cock rock with some seriously glorious consequences. I've liked these guys for a while, and this album makes me happy.

AMERICANA UK

Clouds Forming Crowns
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July 2006
Patrick Wilkins
7 out of 10

Former GBV acolytes cram in more ideas and influences than you can shake a stick at.

Clouds Forming Crowns is a band formed by Todd and Tim Tobias both formerly associated with oddball genius Robert Pollard in Guided By Voices. Tim plays guitar (he played bass in GBV) and writes the lyrics, Todd produces, engineers and writes the music with Tim, and, though he plays on this record, he doesn't play in the 'live unit'. This is a follow up to their 2005 self-titled record also on Morphius Records, though there was another self released record and the odd EP before that too. Tim doesn't have the greatest voice, a rough, sometimes sub Dylan style that calls to mind Ian Hunter after a heavy night, partly for this reason, one song, 'Have A Dream', sounds like it could easily wander into 'All The Young Dudes', 'Electric Fools' has a similar Brit glam feel too, but in a good way, it really does work quite well. Its not all Brits though, the title track starts like the middle of a Blue Oyster Cult song, then goes back across the Atlantic with some 70s prog in the vein of King Crimson or ELP, before changing character completely with a subtle Ray Davies interlude. Some songs too often resort to hitting the garage rifferama button, which is something that's starting to sound a little too common place. They do get away with it though on the closing track, 'Sea Witch #19', which has a dirty Who/Stones/Bowie guitar jumble that comes out like something you'd always wished Eddie and The Hotrods could have done, probably the best track on the record. It does need pointing out that Tim writes some truly unfathomable lyrics, on 'Satellite Ingestion' for example '... more on a suicide hotlines, leaky allegiance, orthodox dynamite...', er, OK then. Possibly too many ideas thrown in at the same time to be consistently enjoyable, but this record does have more than a few moments of interest.



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ROCHESTER CITY NEWS

Clouds Forming Crowns

"Race To The Blackout"

August 2006

Andrew Frisicano

The members of Clouds forming Crowns know where they're coming from. References to rock progenitors like The Who and the Rolling Stones border on cliché, but the Clouds' combination of collage and innovation leans more toward familiarity than repetition. The band creates a distinct sound somewhere beyond trite rock homage and early '90s indie rehash that would sound right at home on the front porch during a summer afternoon or in a damp bar under some dim neon lights.

At the band's core are Ohio brothers Tim and Todd Tobias, former bassist and producer, respectively, for Guided by Voices. They borrow GbV's mid-fi vibe, but cut the sound with steaming piles of rock. My personal taste favors the more melodic tracks on the album. But be warned, the bulk of it is fairly riff heavy. Are you?

CLEVELAND SCENE

Clouds forming Crowns

"Race To The BlackOut"

June 2006

D.X. Ferris

Clouds Forming Crowns play barroom rock that deserves an arena-sized stage and PA system. Their M.O. recalls Guided by Voices, and with good reason: Writer-singer-guitarist Tim Tobias cut his teeth with the retro-rock heroes, and brother/producer-multi-instrumentalist Todd Tobias produced some of GBV's most notable material. Live, the group kicks out the jams as a quartet, but in the studio, it's just the brothers Tobias, playing big, fat rock and roll. With a low end that can rock your clothes off, the fuzzed-out opener "Phantom Dog Black Water" could give rawk sensation Wolfmother a run for its money.

The expertly jagged mix makes the disc impossible to play quietly, but broken-amps hot licks account for only half the group's tricks. "Matter of Choice" finds Tim going all Dylan, exhaling strained poetry over acoustic strumming. In the virtual Who tribute "Ghost Looms," he floats a sneering melody like glam-era Bowie shot full of testosterone. With GBV RIP, it's only a matter of time until the coronation of the Crowns



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AVERSION MEDIA

Clouds Forming Crowns

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July 2006

Jennifer Doyle

You know what the best thing about being a Guided By Voices fan is? It's that even though the act's broken up for more than a year now, you'll always – always – have some sort of GBV product to spend you money on. If it's not wading through the band's large back catalog, saving up for the ludicrous number of ig-ticket GBV boxed sets or GBV biographies, you have spin-offs such as Robert Pollard's solo career, Tobin Sprout's solo stuff and various other GBV footnotes.

Clouds Forming Crowns, the project of brothers Tim and Todd Tobias, who played or recorded with Pollard's troupe in its declining years, is but one of those many options available for the modern-day GBV fanatic. With nonessential cast members and a sound that's less about recreating the Ohio indie-rock magic than kicking up a racket in the garage, Race to Blackout is about as essential to the casual GBV fan as a that second vinyl copy of Suitcase 2. Really. Clouds Forming Crowns is part of the extended GBV family, but the connection will only matter to GBV diehards.

It doesn't matter to the music. Clouds Forming Crowns escapes its past on its sophomore record, and goes for more lo-fi power pop than indie stuff. That often translates into a vaguely garage-rock feel, dosing up on bits of everything from The Who to The Replacements, while more than a few casual nods toward psychedelia creeping in from time to time. While that's probably a bummer to the GBV cult searching for a lost testament, it's not much of an impediment to letting CFC rock out. Half of the time, Clouds Forming Crowns sounds like a back-to-basics garage pop outfit, with guitars caught in the middle of a tug-of-war between jangly melodies and fuzzy, lo-fi tones ("Floating," "Have a Dream" and "Ghost Looms"). When it's not doing that, Clouds Forming Crowns gets a little dirtier, whipping out classic garage fuzz and grime ("Seat of New Elation" and "Phantom Dog Black Water").

Whether or not the Tobias' GBV alumni status means anything to this albums is up in the air – the perceived ties to the GBV legacy might shock, outrage or discourage Pollard disciples from giving Race to Blackout a listen it deserves when Clouds Forming Crowns doesn't deliver. Then again, the pair has the chops to stand up without needing support from its GBV days.



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DELUSIONS OF ADEQUACY

Clouds Forming Crowns

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Matt Cohen

It's common knowledge to never mix business with family. The combination usually results in broken hearts, hurt pride, and bankruptcy. Yet while most people take heed to precedence and avoid working with their family like Kansas City Royals home games, brothers Todd and Tim Tobias relish in it, creating some truly amazing music, both with the legendary Guided By Voices and with their pet project, Clouds Forming Crowns.

The latter's most recent album, Race to the Blackout, is, quite simply, excellent. It's pure rock and roll pulled straight out of the 1960s, complete with everything I love about the genre: hypnotic and heavy guitars, fuzzy, growling bass, and surreal lyrics, tied together in a concise, no frills package. Mars Volta, listen up. There's not a filler track or interminable noodling jam to be found on this album. No, Race to the Blackout has nary an ounce of fat on it, as the brothers Tobias choose instead to cut the crap and stuff the record full with some of the dirtiest, meatiest blues riffs this side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Within the first five seconds of album-opener "Phantom Dog Black Water," you're hit with ball-breaking distortion and grimey cymbal decay. The song segues into the second track, "Animal Drunk," without skipping a beat, shifting into an ingenious variation on the main riff of "Phantom Dog."

Throughout the album, Todd and Tim play around with their gritty tone, altering it just enough to keep it from getting boring. On one of my favorite songs, "Matter of Choice," grungy guitars and psychedelic moans stutter and collide with breakneck intensity. The following tracks, "Have a Dream" and "Satellite Ingestion," are vastly subdued, airy pieces, like Bob Dylan's songs after he went electric. And "Floating" features an utterly brilliant, floating chorus that just elegantly drops the bottom out when the up-tempo, bobbing verse and bridge screeches to a halt.

One after another, Race to the Blackout fires off incredibly breathtaking songs, each one memorable and unique in its own right. I have literally been unable to stop playing it, and on each listen, I marvel at the Tobias brothers' knack for writing swampy melodies and hooks that rival quicksand in their ability to grab hold on someone. Savor this album, as it's one of the best of the year so far.



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SLUG MAGAZINE

Clouds Forming Crowns
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July 2006
Tom Carbone Jr.

Clouds Forming Crowns = The Who + Guided By Voices + David Bowie – glam Combining elements of indie and classic rock, along with an obvious Guided By Voices influence, brothers Todd and Tim Tobias have created Clouds Forming Crowns. Todd and Tim, former producer and member respectively of GBV, create music that will trip the mind of even the most veteran 60's rocker. They do so with arcane lyrics such as "snow hand bat laughs/seeds begin to quiver.../electric fools – start to deliver," combined with tough, distorted bass lines. "Phantom Dog Black Water," starts the album off with heavy distortion and cryptic vocals that become more apparent in the tracks to come. Working with indie rock advocate, and Guided By Voices front man, Robert Pollard in the past has definitely helped the siblings evolve their brainchild into a more mature and focused release than their self-titled debut. Clouds Forming Crowns is more than just a Guided By Voices side project. Its provocative musical style and puzzling lyrical content deserve to have their own spot in the musical world. – Tom Carbone Jr.



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