

RELEASE INFORMATION

KARATE JOE RECORDS / WWW.KJREC.COM / ZIEGLERGASSE 68/8, 1070 VIENNA, AUSTRIA / TEL: +43 720 50 17 32

ARTIST

SONGS OF CLAIRE MADISON

TITLE

LINE OF BEAUTY AND GRACE

CAT NO

KJ024EP

EAN/UPC

9120025080618

TYPE

EP (DEBUT)

FORMAT

VINYL 10", DIGITAL

RELEASE DATE

02. OCTOBER 2009 /FINISHED P./DIGITAL
AUSTRIA/GERMANY

DISTRIBUTION

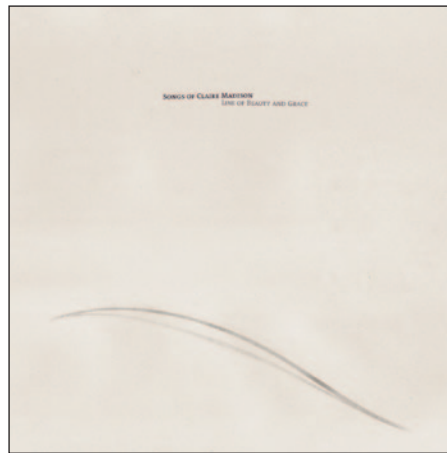
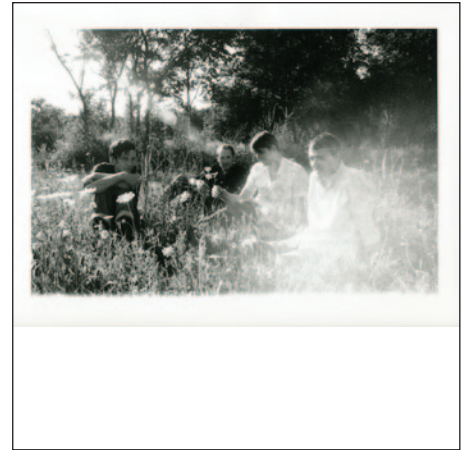
HOANZL /A
BROKEN SILENCE /D

PLAYLIST

- 1 GET ALONG
- 2 LINE OF BEAUTY AND GRACE
- 3 SUMMERDRESS
- 4 RESIGNED

MEMBERS

STEPHAN PECK
ROBERT PINZOLITS (CHARMANT ROUGE)
THOMAS PRONAI (BEAUTIFUL KANTINE BAND)
ANDREAS SPECHTL (JA, PANIK!)



TEXT: ROBERT ROTIFER

Songs of Claire Madison – a search result

To be honest with you, when I first heard of this band I googled "Claire Madison" straight away. You never know these days, it could be some extremely clever cover versions project, maybe a tribute to some obscure seventies songwriter you wouldn't want to admit never to have heard of. After all, this is supposed to be an Austrian band, and their lyrics sound so perceptive, uncontrived and true that they surely can't have written them all by themselves.

But all that my search turned up, apart from the band's own rather cryptic Myspace page, was a photo album of a baby born in 2006, some mad-eyed woman from Memphis, Tennessee, on Facebook, and a Twitter page from a girl who follows Zac Efron. Her latest entry read: "rainy rainy rainy this weekend, 85 and sunny today."

This, at last, sounded like the Claire Madison I had got to know from listening to Songs of Claire Madison's first EP, the one who, in the first song To Get Along, is found crying all over the narrator's floor.

"There's nothing else worth to tell, except for the ringing baby bells of some people you used to know / Wednesday I've been to a miserable rock'n'roll show," she tweets in Line Of Beauty And Grace, a song whose title might equally allude to a documentary about controversial photographer Jock Sturges or the inscription on the palette that the painter William Hogarth placed next to his own image in his self-portrait.

Maybe it is Sturges after all, as his predatory gaze falls on Claire Madison's body underneath her favourite Summerdress as he watches her "talking to some cute little surfing boy" in the next song from behind a bench on a beach promenade, camera at the ready.

You might think I'm making all this up, but SOCM's main songwriter Stephan Peck is the sort of conceptualist who would incorporate a hidden nod to Hogarth's "line" into the design of the EP cover. "Don't ask me why," he says, "but in my mind Hogarth's line of beauty and grace has always been conflated with the image of a freight

train. That's why there is a steam engine in the rhythm of the song, as well as the loud train whistle of the guitar."

I don't know if Peck (vocals, guitar, drums) has explained all this to his band mates Thomas Pronai (guitar, bass, baritone guitar, vocals), Andreas Spechtl (guitar, bass) and Robert Pinzolits (drums, omnichord), but their ideas of who exactly Claire Madison might be seem to match effortlessly on these astonishingly full and well-balanced sounding live recordings from a Viennese rehearsal room.

As it turns out, any of the Claire Madisons I found on the web could have been the one I was looking for, because her fictional namesake who inspired the band's moniker is a flat incidental character from a novel by Austrian author Peter Handke that Stephan Peck picked up just before travelling to the US in 2006. Neither the character nor the novel seemed convincing to him as a portrayal of American life. In his self-deprecating way, Peck decided that this would fit in perfectly with his idea of a band that likes to dabble in folk and country music without aspiring to the glorification of authenticity inherent to the genre:

"Should you really go to Nashville and record everything completely by the book? Do you have to play and play for five years until your fingers bleed before you can dare to go onstage with your pedal steel? Somehow, we didn't want to subscribe to any of this. Of course, we were going to quote from the genre and use its tropes, but in a way that breaks them up and subverts the masculine myth that goes along with the whole thing. It should be Claire's songs after all."

"I know you didn't wait for this song, but baby, here you've got it" (Resigned)

Instead of paying their dues touring the American heartland, Songs of Claire Madison have derived their musical grounding from repeated exposure to The Byrds' "Sweetheart of the Rodeo", the works of The Band, Dylan's "Basement Tapes" and "listening to that

incredible song Dead Flowers over and over again," as Peck imparts without specifying whether he means the Stones' original or the celebrated version by Townes Van Zandt.

When the Stones released it on "Sticky Fingers" in 1971, Rolling Stone magazine dismissed their attempts at doing straight country music as "appalling". Interestingly, Van Zandt seems to have thought otherwise.

The fact that a Vienna-based band, whose members all hail from the flatlands of Burgenland, the Eastern-most Austrian province, should use this wonderful bastard of an American song imagined by a bunch of Brits and reappraised by an American as a yardstick for their own, decidedly unauthentic approach to Americana, perfectly encapsulates Peck's original idea.

Anyway, in spite of the odd imported American phrase in their lyrics and the American feel of their music, Songs of Claire Madison never actually pretend to live there. Far from it. Resigned, the last song on their debut 10-inch, travels all the way from Tel Aviv to Sherwood Forest, discreetly quoting a verse from (I Can Get No) Satisfaction on the way out.

So was it the Stones version of Dead Flowers after all?