



“It’s Alive !!!”

September 28, 2016.

Full disclosure: I know Michael Laine Hildebrandt and his brother Douglas personally. They were my neighbors.

I knew that when they disappeared for days on end in Michael’s home in a suburb of Dallas, and his Blue Violin Studios, that they would eventually emerge with some fantastic and fantastical form of music, art, or... honestly, sometimes I didn’t know WHAT it was, but it was always amazing. I call these guys my “Mad Scientist” friends, and I mean that entirely as a compliment.

Michael is the man directly behind Bubble Gum Orchestra, and Bubble Gum Orchestra is his heart and soul. Much like the rock bands that he so admires, MLH forms his songs, crafts them, whittles them down, builds them back up, and painstakingly fine-tunes them until he deems them ready for the world. Tom Scholz (Boston), Steve Lukather (Toto), and Jeff Lynne (ELO) would be mighty proud. All at once, BGO pays homage to its musical inspirations, and yet simultaneously defines its own sound. BGO has matured in its style through the years, with numerous albums in its discography so far, each one surpassing the last in music and production. In September 2016, BGO released its latest album, “Sticky

Love Songs, Vol 1 & 2", and in this music lover's humble opinion, has achieved its Magnum Opus. In fact, I dare say, it is one of the best musical albums of the year. Of the last 5 years.

One or two more listens and I might say 10.

It seems like every great band has a defining moment when all the creative stars align. This is what apparently happened over the last 3 years of production of "Sticky Love Songs, Vol 1 & 2". This offering of 20 songs, played beautifully apart, yet even better chronologically, is a joyful melancholy. Lush vocals, catchy hooks, and quirky lyrics unfold in a story of loss, of love, and redemption. I'm not sure what happened to Michael. I'm afraid to ask. But whatever it was, it inspired BGO's best album to date. From the opening track "You Called to Tell Me", BGO gives us one of the best songs (among many), ably-enhanced with a melodic acoustic guitar by brother Douglas (who adds just the right amount of edge on several tracks, in addition to the amazing cover art), while Lannie Flowers lends excellent vocals on another stand-out track, "You Gave Up On Love". The first single from the album, "You're Not the One that Got Away" is a lively and driving 2/4 beat, played with a sense of irony and urgency, and is remarkably memorable (the hallmark of a great song in my mind: one you can still hum an hour after you first hear it). Each song seems better than the last, a musical crescendo that leads you to your final destination: the BGO Hotel. The final song is one of my very favorite tracks on the album, with its fist-pumping chorus and timpani drums accenting "BGO!". It's the defining moment on a phenomenal trip through musical exhilaration, and devastation never felt so satisfying.

The convergence of this great talent with the great music, and whatever it was that inspired such "joyful melancholy" from Michael Laine Hildebrandt, has manifested in the form of not just one, but TWO volumes of Sticky Love Songs. They are fun, some are so catchy they will bounce around in your head for days, and even as they are upbeat in areas, they are cryptically sad and bitter in others. It all amounts to musical goodness that no spork can cut through. You'll need a Ginsu III for this one. It's that good. It's the first album I've felt compelled to "review", and not just because I know and respect Michael Hildebrandt. A mediocre album would have gotten a "good hustle out there" conciliatory pat on the back and a change of subject, so it's my honor and privilege as a lover of music to put the "bat signal" up: It's here, the album we've been waiting for. And it is even better than we hoped.

It has been said that the music industry is dead. Well, it has at the very least been on life support in terms of talent and output, but much like Dr. Frankenstein reviving his creature from the snares of death, BGO has resuscitated the musical monster with "Sticky Love Songs, Vol 1 & 2" and shown us that rock music is actually alive and well.

Do yourself a favor: Buy this album.

Chris Ahrens