

Foo Fighters have become one of those bands whose omnipresence is so far-reaching that their World War II alien aircraft inspired name has been deleted from the American lexicon and replaced with a picture of Dave Grohl. Shocking then, that when rock and roll mega-god Grohl turned on his radio and heard the heavy sounds of Welsh band The Joy Formidable he felt the need to reach out and get them on tour with his own musical powerhouse.

Ritzy Bryan, with her eye-catching, straw-like blonde hair, hosts both vocal and guitar duties for The Joy Formidable. Armed with a glamorously adorned mic stand, Ritzy quickly dispels the shine and polish her name implies by championing the fuzziest tones this side of The Smashing Pumpkins. On stage, she plays the part of restrained punk rocker. Her expressive and playful eyes conceal the sonic villain that routinely makes an appearance by night's finish. It's this earnest energy that caught Dave Grohl's attention and had him quickly in contact with the band. She was touched by what he saw in her group, and doesn't downplay its importance to their growth.

"It was very heartwarming," she says, "I think it says a lot about him and the band in general, and their ethics towards new music. They're obviously listening to new music and they're still passionate. They're not jaded; they're still excited by new bands."

Stints alongside the Foos at venues like Madison Square Garden augment the frenzied yet reserved nature of The Joy Formidable's live show. Dirty guitars slinking alongside hooky, anthemic vocal melodies radiate with enough force for The Joy Formidable's sound to fully fill stadium-sized venues. Ritzy's lyrics don't hang too firmly on sentimentality, and her voice inspires through fist-thrusting, arm-pumping choruses. Though their refrains encourage rousing sing-alongs, Ritzy maintains that their subject matter rings true.

"When songs come from a meaningful place and they come from somewhere that's personal and dear the emotions that they fill every night can be quite different. They come from a time and a place; they actually happened, and they actually meant something."

Their well-written and tight compositions get an injection of chaos in a live setting, where the riffs get muddier, bass fuzzier, and drums grumpier. Painted with a thick glaze of shoegaze, their raucous performances contrast greatly with their stiff and brooding 80's alt-rock progenitors. Always having a wee bit of fun on stage doesn't hurt, and with The Joy Formidable it enhances the spectacle. Bass player Rhyddian Dafydd (whose quirky illustrations form the bands visual presence) plays with a focused menace. His lines go in the direction you'd expect, but with a power that jolts from left field, while Matt Thomas's drums

act as a sleeping bomb whose timer will undoubtedly strike zero before song's end. The band's ability matures unconsciously, as the deeper they get into the songs the deeper they get into themselves.

"The greatest shows are when you are almost in a daze, almost trance-like, and you're unaware of your surroundings and you can completely get absorbed and lose yourself in the songs that you're playing," says Ritzy.

Now over a year old, The Joy Formidable's debut, *The Big Roar*, still hits hard. Opening track, "The Everchanging Spectrum of a Lie" is an exploration in genre bashing that begins with scatter-shot clanging, morphs into a deep and enveloping fog, and smacks like a legion of cracking whips during the chorus. The metallic jamming that sees the song to its conclusion is a recorded reminder of their well-crafted stage show. Catchy track "Austere" is a pop thumper that features high pitched wails and ends with a flourish of drums and cacophonous melodic instrumentation. Deeper cut, "Buoy" takes guitar lessons from professors Billy Corgan and Steven Wilson in a prog melding, mind-altering study of The Joy Formidable's darker side. Ritzy's vocals relax in the middle of the mix, while Rhyddian's bass runs circles around the gloomy melody. It's certainly a change of pace, and something the band actively seeks out as they tour and continue to produce more music.

"I'd say if you haven't naturally evolved then you've stagnated. We like to challenge each other creatively. You want to experiment and evolve your sonic pallet," says Ritzy.

The band's biggest single thus far is the mellow rocker "Whirring". Having played it on television programs like Jimmy Kimmel Live! and Late Show with David Letterman, it's probably their most well-known tune. The far longer album cut descends into a Sonic Youth madness that feels like a fitting translation of the song's title.

"Everything comes from a very sincere place," says Ritzy, who insists that the band acts out their pure natural tendencies and grows from there. "We've always felt very, very close as a band, creatively and intuitively on stage."

It shows. The Joy Formidable come off as a band that loves playing together. It's the kind of appearance that is given off by a band that's played forever together, but only recently come into the limelight. It's the kind of attitude that is presented by a group without any misgivings, and has a clean and direct love for what they're doing.

"As soon as you finish the record and you can play your record back and you've got no regrets, I think that's the moment when you know that you've done what you've always set out to do," says Ritzy, "it's just about fucking enjoying the journey." ■



The Joy Formidable

Words | *Daniel Taveras*



Images provided by The Joy Formidable