



A Cubano heart and a punk rock soul

Writing reviews of albums is fun. You get to listen to new music, quite possibly before it has even been released to the general public; you're "in the know," you're glitterati, baby. Reviewing an EP, however, can be a bit more difficult. It's a smaller taste of an artist's work. Sometimes the songs are unified thematically; other times, not so much.

There was a degree of trepidation felt at the prospect of listening to, and writing about, Ariel Aparicio's new EP, *The Bedroom Tapes*. First of all, the second track is a cover of Jim Carroll's "People Who Died," an absolutely seminal post-punk paean to his lost friends. In 2009, at a Susan G. Komen fundraiser, Aparicio recorded a regular and a dance cover of the Psychedelic Furs' "Pretty in Pink" that makes it seem as though lead singer Richard Butler had been positively bubbling over with emotion when singing the original. Aparicio's far-too-exact enunciation of the lyrics made the song seem more an intellectual exercise than anything else.

Second, the third track is in Spanish, and two semesters of university Spanish classes mean the song is still completely incomprehensible. One cannot help but suspect that any song sung in Spanish is either incredibly insulting or really smutty, which wouldn't be a bad thing necessarily, but one wants to know which it is.

At first listen, the quartet of tracks seem nothing more than some decent pop songs . . . until one gets to the final piece, "The Future." It is so engaging, it engendered a second go-through for the EP, and it was on this replaying that the fullness of the artistry comes through.

While his biography says that his sound and style have been compared to David Bowie (no, I don't hear it), the Stooges (absolutely!) and the Strokes (by God, yes!), there is a mix of the Cubano heart and the punk rock soul that is absolutely unqualifiable, unquantifiable.

The first song, "Lucille," just sounds . . . dirty. Filthy. Raunchy. For a guy who's been married to his husband for 15 years, hearing this sexual-sounding a track is almost disconcerting. One has no idea what the heck it's about, but it definitely makes one feel funny, like climbing the rope in gym class.

While "People Who Died" lacks, by its nature, a bit of the passion that Jim Carroll infused into the original, it is still a punk anthem. Here is a list of those who went before their time, and how; a nihilistic *memento mori*.

"Torito" sounds like it could be playing on any stereo in the barrio, and there is something strangely reassuring in that. That a gay, punk Cuban-American Brooklynite can put out a song that could be the soundtrack of a trip to the bodega to buy a soda just makes everything seem, somehow, strangely all right.

And when one arrives at the final track, "The Future," that "all right" becomes euphoria. It practically sounds like he stole an unreleased Strokes song with this one, and it is absolutely magnificent, the perfect blending of electronic, punk and garage musicianship.

In fact, it's almost enough to make someone forgive that "Pretty in Pink" cover he released last year.

For more information about Ariel Aparicio, or to purchase his albums, go to www.arielaparcio.com.