

Big Blood - The Daughters Union (2017)

Written by bluelover

Saturday, 09 September 2017 13:00 -

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01. *Blind Owl I* 02:45 02. *Reproduce & Get Dirty* 07:45 03. *Thank You For The Path* 05:16
04. *Our Love Will Still Be There* 03:19 05. *All Is Clear* 05:03 06. *Stars Sewn Into Our Skies*
08:26 07. *On & On* 06:02 08. *I Have Known Love* 07:00 09. *Blind Owl II* 03:15 Big Blood is:
Colleen Kinsella, Caleb Mulkerin and Quinnisa Kinsella Mulkerin

There's little more tiresome than those who complain that music ain't what it used to be. Times change and people change — let alone vast, corporate-controlled industries — but the reasons to come together for making art and documenting a life are always within reach.

Indifferent to classification and rigorously do-it-yourself, the players in Portland's folk group Big Blood have been evolving the reasons to make music for more than 10 years (and, considering their work in old Portland experimental folk group Cerberus Shoal, many more beyond that.)

But The Daughters Union marks a novel next chapter in the band's quixotic legacy. After a steady output of more than one release per year since their inception, this is the first Big Blood album it could be said that pre-teen Quinnisa Kinsella Mulkerin, the daughter of Caleb and Colleen, is a full-time member.

At least that's true from a listener's ear. But in Big Blood lore, she's arguably been there all along. Caleb and Colleen's first recording output, a 7-song live album titled Strange Maine 11.04.06, bore a rendering of an infant child on the cover. (All the band's artwork has been handmade by Colleen.) On the following album, another live recording from two months later, we heard the standout track "The Ballad of Quinnisa Rose." From an outsider's perspective, the

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arc of the band is nearly co-linear with the kid's life.

At nine songs and roughly 48 minutes, *The Daughters Union* functions more like a proper "album" than most of the spirited, experimental output in the Big Blood's history. The album is — let's say roughly — the band's sixteenth in their ten-and-a-half-year history, and while the Big Blood aesthetic has seemed anchored by a radically prolific schedule, *The Daughters Union* contains greater cohesion, and noticeably higher stakes. Bookending the album's nine tracks is the rhythmically mesmerizing "Blind Owl," a six-minute harmony built from Colleen and Quinnisa's vocals, looped into a rhythmic bassline and interlocking in warm choruses. The track weaves and flutters, the group showcasing a will for more electronically produced sounds amid their typical comfort with noise.

The songwriting chemistry between Caleb and Colleen has always been a distinct strength. Here, the songs seem deliberate and less experimental. "Thank You For the Path" lurches along like a typical Caleb song, glowering and swampy, fleshed out by a fuller sonic range than his songs usually tread. His lurching bassline pushes along nearly eight minutes of repetitive, rhythmic ballast of Colleen-track "Reproduce & Get Dirty," a mud which the feminine vocals cut through to frame the band's ethos in dizzying effect.

But it's the band's choice of covers that may ring the loudest. "Our Love Will Still Be There," a 1966 fuzzy pop ballad by British proto-garage group The Troggs, is transformed gorgeously, its guitar wall and errant noise effects more Jesus and Mary Chain than we've ever heard from Big Blood. Proud, matter-of-fact and anguish-free, Colleen delivers the lyrics in her soaring high register as if the principles of devotion were declarations from on high. Later, the band covers Silver Apples' monolithic 1969 "I Have Known Love," spinning it into another beautiful testament. At nearly twice the length of the original, the Colleen-sung version smooths out the trippy declarations of the psyched-out original into calm, sober affirmations of a life having been lived. "I burned my fingers on the sun / I've been imprisoned on the moon," rings Colleen's inimitable peal, triumphant. "I've done some things that can't be done. I've known love and love has won."

What Big Blood model is a nothing less than a new definition of what it means to be a band. As the rest of the world spins into chaos, I look forward to another ten years of peeking in on the one they've created. ---Nick Schroeder, portlandphoenix.me

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