

REVIEWS OF TOTALLY MILD

'Totally Mild: Down Time review – empowered bedroom sulk music'

5 stars

Written by Everett True at The Guardian (International), 07/08/2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/aug/07/totally-mild-down-time-review-empowered-bedroom-sulk-music>

'The overlooked gem from the Melbourne band, filled with doomed teen romance and surf guitars, is about as good as it gets. Just don't call it dolewave...

The salacious cover image, when taken in conjunction with the band's name (a 1970s slogan for Rothmans cigarettes perhaps), might suggest slinky nightclub music somewhere near the twin sister swoon of Swedish-Australian duo Say Lou Lou. Wrong. Dreamy this music may well be (somnambulist, even) but it has little to do with euphoria and artificial highs.

This is music drenched in ennui and sadness. Every song is a tear-streaked ballad, doomed teen romances filtered through Melbourne's unrelenting gaze (former lovers threatening to burn your house down, that sort of thing). The guitars are a riot of hazy intention, vocals (courtesy of Elizabeth Mitchell) hiccupping and lilting melancholy and regret, in a fashion somewhere between Best Coast's Bethany Cosentino and She and Him's Zooey Deschanel.

In the same way the Baltimore band Animal Collective once sounded like someone had spilled beer on a Beach Boys' Pet Sounds CD (the engorged harmonies constantly skip), and in the same way US Girls – aka Meg Remy – wonderfully reinvented 1960s girl group for the post-electro generation, often Mitchell sounds as though she's on the verge of breaking into a Shangri-La's song (Dressed in Black, say) but she always pulls back right at the last moment to burst into a new form. Battleship in particular exhibits this tendency, as does the single Move On.

Elsewhere, the surf guitar and laidback, almost not-there drumming that characterises so much of Melbourne's dolewave scene is in evidence – specifically on the wistful Christa, courtesy of band members Zac Schneider (Full Ugly, the Great Outdoors), Lehmann Smith (Kes Band) and Ashley Bundang.

Apologies for mentioning the dreaded 'd' word (the band profess to despise it) – indie Flying Nun-influenced jangle this is not. Mitchell's awkwardly beautiful vocals lift the music to another place altogether. As Mess and Noise pointed out when this album was released in Australia this year, there is none of the wry Australiana, the hard proper nouns, the lyrical Kmart realism, the self-deprecation. There is a similar feeling of a denial of hopelessness, a determination, behind the music of Totally Mild. And of course there are those textural guitars. The stand out is the lingering When I'm Tired with its catalogue of night terrors.

There is even a haunting saxophone on the final song – the 1980s groove of Money or Fame – set loose from Hazel O'Connor's back catalogue. These cats are not named Totally Mild for no reason.

When Down Time was released in April it was, despite a flurry of favourable write-ups, mostly ignored. A crying shame really because this music – engorged, engaged, empowered bedroom sulk music, saturated with ennui and hope, and a love for the 1960s visions of Shadow Morton and the 2000s gush of Camera Obscura and the Concretes – is really as good as this music gets, which is plenty good.

Maybe the album's presence in the UK (where it is released this week) will generate more interest abroad. It certainly merits it.'

'Record Reviews: Downtime'

Written by Anthony Carew at MESS AND NOISE, 06/04/2015

<http://messandnoise.com/releases/2001435>

'Melbourne's Totally Mild exhibit a considered playfulness on their first fully-realised LP...

Children, the times they are a-becoming quite different. Six billion years of evolution have led to seven billion humans all scrambling for their own piece of the planet's dwindling plenty; whole generations who were raised to chase their unique-snowflake dreams left to deal with the deflating realisation that they're owed nothing, and unlikely to get it. And yet, old people as they have for time immemorial – still lament the mettle of kids-these-days; keep preaching the belief that the Western capitalist marketplace is a true meritocracy, and that, with but a bit of elbow grease and/or the right self-help incantation, "success" is waiting to be had.

'They were young once, like we are / Don't they know it's hard?' laments Elizabeth Mitchell, voice ringing clear as a bell, midway through 'Move On'. Its classic jangle and playful vocal shows no ambitions of being some self-appointed anthem-for-a-generation (or its modern-day equivalent: a soundtrack for a beer commercial). But Mitchell's young-person's ache is real, and relatable, and universal: a desire to be seen, to be heard, to be acknowledged; to live a life true to one's self, in the face of an indifferent world.

Mitchell, the leader of Totally Mild, runs her blues through the prism of songwriting ('If you do it wrong / If you make a mistake / Start another song'), expressing desire to be heard literal. It's about putting out those songs – each with the implicit hope that they'll offer a connection to others, that the artist will be understood through their art – into a world oft-unfeeling. It's about fashioning two-minute bespoke artworks that'll instantly be turned into compressed audio commodities; at best fodder for blogs, at worst lost in the teeming infinity of the uploaded masses.

That's where Totally Mild began: 2013's *Castanet*, an ultra-lo-fi, Bandcamp-issued home-recording that found Mitchell building songs almost entirely around her voice. Helping her, in assorted moments, were Full Ugly's Zachary Schneider and Kes off-sider/one-man-industry Lehmann B. Smith, in whose band Mitchell was playing. Along with drummer Ashley Bundang (in whose own project, *Zone Out*, Mitchell also plays), they've slowly turned Totally Mild from shaky recording project into rock band proper, growing tauter with every passing, charming show; Schneider's sharp, trebly guitar lead now a distinctive part of the band's sound.

Down Time is, then, a second record that feels like a debut, a proper introduction to Mitchell's sweet songwriting voice, both figurative and literal. Totally Mild may be another jangle-pop band from Melbourne, and Mitchell may be singing about daily art/commerce realities – 'You've got to go to work in the day / Put on a show again', she sings, in 'Go Home' – but I can't imagine anyone calling them dolewave, no matter how often they've toured with The Ocean Party. There's none of the wry Australiana, the hard proper nouns, the lyrical Kmart realism, the self-deprecation, the Hills Hoist artwork.

Instead, *Down Time*'s cover is a hyper-glossy Darren Sylvester photograph, whose plethora of sexual signifiers could support its own essay (those down for added suggestiveness can also lend an ear to saxophone-drizzled, soft-rock-ballad closer 'Money Or Fame', in which the line 'You said you'd never stop coming / Until I stopped calling your name' revels in its double-entendre). And the production, by Super Melody's James Cecil, is, if not quite glossy, sparkling in its clarity. Scrappy, that favoured dolewave descriptive, gets no play here. The pristine recording captures the bending of strings, the trailing of echo, the tiny, knotty details in the spangling, tangled play between Mitchell and Schneider's guitars.

A song like 'Nights' is a work of controlled mood and unexpected elegance, Mitchell's high, airy voice recounting on-the-tiles-in-a-couple social anxieties ('If you're looking happy / I won't speak to you / I never trust just what a smile will do'), as reedy, seedy saxophone wheeze joins in a slow, surging build; this the only song on the album to push on past three minutes. 'Always Around' manages to sound epic in two, changing shape as it swims with multi-tracked, reverb-bathed vocals and wonky synth haze.

Mitchell compresses ideas into tight spaces, and will often pull an unexpected reverse, be it compositional or tonal. 'When I'm Tired' (the only song to appear in a proto form on Castanet) is 110 sprightly seconds whose opening, sunshine-and-smiles gambit – 'I had a good day today!' chirrups its opening line – turns almost instantly nightmarish, even as the tune remains unchanged; the bouncy bass and A-OK mood going from pure twee to darkly ironic in a blink. And lead single 'Christa' has a playful sense of disorientation, its Lynchian slow-dance seeming, at first, to swagger, only to start to stagger; the guitars sounding as if on the brink of unravelling, its lyrics making a motif from blood.

Down Time is filled with a host of songs that match bright hooks with thoughtful composition; full of odd moods and smirking sleights. It's an indie-pop album both quietly heady and genuinely pretty; and, if we're to take it as Totally Mild's essential debut, it marks quite the arrival. True, there's nothing else so crystallising, lyrically or melodically, as 'Move On'; nothing that steps outside the personal (be it of subconscious or of relationship) to look at the songwriter's place in the bigger picture. But it's hard to hold that against Mitchell. One not-quite-anthem-for-a-generation is one more than most people'll ever write.'

'Totally Mild: "Move On"'

Written by Jake Cleland at Pitchfork, 16/06/2015

<http://pitchfork.com/reviews/tracks/17523-totally-mild-move-on/>

'While Totally Mild's debut album Down Time has flown relatively under the radar, it's received far more attention in the band's hometown of Melbourne. Awash in verdant arrangements highlighted by Zac Schneider's textural guitar playing and Liz Mitchell's striking voice, soothing with an undercurrent of deep pain, Down Time hops from woozy to buoyant as it wrestles with the various shapes of heartbreak.

On the album, "Move On" comes at a point of resolution after wallowing in the emotional exhaustion of a broken relationship, singer Liz Mitchell taking her feelings into her own hands. "Move On" feels like that point after a breakup, maybe a couple months on, when you realize clinging to the spectre of love, and trying to bring it back to life, is doing nobody any good. Whimsical and determined in equal parts, it's a shining talisman for the heartbroken.'

'Totally Mild Ride a New Wave'

4 stars

Written by Mikey Cahill at www.news.com.au, The Herald Sun, and The Sydney Morning Herald, 08/05/2015

<http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/music/totally-mild-ride-a-new-wave-rowland-s-howards-laneway-festival-amp-remi-gets-weird/news-story/d6b7c0374ae6871a672562176c381aa1>

'All this "dolewave" music is well and good but it's time we took a walk on the mild side...

Totally Mild are here and they want to massage your ears with rich production and fill you up with soaring, seemingly happy, secretly sardonic choruses. Sounds good? Totally.

The Melbourne quartet's debut album *Down Time* earned itself a glowing four star review this week from some bozo and lead singer and brains trust of the band Elizabeth Mitchell wants to elucidate the record's title.

"Down Time's meaning is three fold, actually it's four fold. One is chilling out, relaxing, the second is when you're sad and you're having a DOWN time. Third, it's silly (laughs nervously) but if time was a dog you'd say to the dog 'DOWN TIME!' Because time is moving too fast," she says, fetching us all a universal truth.

"The fourth one is the sexy imagery on the cover — all my friends think it's this one — 'Getting downwwn time' or having a 'romantic' time. We worked on it with Darren Sylvester, I wanted it to be glamorous and feminine, we made a cassette a few years and it was hand drawn, I didn't want it to be lo-fi I wanted it to be clean like the production on the album, feminine and sexual," she says.

"It's my girlfriend on the front cover, Xanthe Dobbie, and it's a shift away from a male gaze, if you flip the album it's actually my hand resting on her."

Mitchell has spoken of the stagnancy she felt while making the record while everybody was feverishly bugling about their escapades on social media.

"It's not like I feel like nothing has happened, things are moving forward, that's just a feeling I have in myself, I'm never doing enough, it's a part of being in a time where everybody is like 'Let's be busy all the time and LIVE EVERY DAY AS YOUR LAST!' I'm like — ahhhhh - am I doing it?" she asks, faux dramatically.

It's important to have some "you-time"...some down time. The dolewave sound can come off as sluggish and, well, stagnant. Joe Alexander from Bedroom Suck Records fired the first shot over the bows in Totally Mild's press release to accompany *Down Time*:

"It's a new year and time for a new sound. Forget everything you heard about the Melbourne 'dolewave', what a crock of shit. We have found something much more important for you to listen to," then started proselytising Totally Mild. I love it when people rattle the cage.

Mitchell feels "excited about the anti-dolewave stuff, it's not the kind of music I wanna make, I don't mind if we look like we're being ambitious, it's because we care," she asserts.

Still, she had moments of being fed up with certain songs, even LP highlight *Next Day*.

"It's my favourite song on the record. It's nice to be able to listen to it again I was like 'I HATE YOU (laughs) You mean nothing to me because I've heard that snare part isolated for three hours today,' Now it's back to being my number one."

Let's hope *Next Day* earns its very own video like young Christa.

After the band went through "a big tropicalia phase," Mitchell owns up to loving "big female power ballads, I like Adele, that's kinda dorky, I love Yoko Ono's solo stuff and Stevie Wonder was my favourite thing growing up."

Down Time is the album to keep you warm on the rug this winter, Totally Mild make songs in the key of life.'

'Album Review: Totally Mild, Downtime'

Written by Mikey Cahill at www.news.com.au, The Herald Sun, and The Sydney Morning Herald, 08/05/2015

<http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/music/totally-mild-ride-a-new-wave-rowland-s-howards-laneway-festival-amp-remi-gets-weird/news-story/d6b7c0374ae6871a672562176c381aa1>

'2015 is Twin Peaks' silver jubilee. It's uncanny how the icky seduction and owl-blink intrigue of Lynch's TV series permeates so much new music. Melbourne band Totally Mild's slow-sex, weird pop debut does it better than most. It smacks bottoms like Pikelet in Red Pleather and deals with mental illness, expectation and blurred lines. When I'm Tired jumps around on sparkly Buddy Holly guitars as Elizabeth Mitchell recounts night terrors "I went to find you're setting my house on fire." Go Home is a hiccup shuffle down alleyways, Move On leaves a light on for Belinda Carlisle and then Nights and Next Day leave me wordless. Gah. This is a really important record. Could give The Australian Music Prize a shake.

Sounds like: Anna Calvi checkin' into 'Motels bag-less

In a word: saxual'

'Totally Mild: On their debut album Down Time'

Written by Chris Scott at Aphra Mag (UK), 23/09/2015

<http://www.aphramag.com/totally-mild-on-their-debut-album-down-time/>

'Totally Mild make jangle-pop music from Melbourne, but clever pop is a much more appropriate label. The quartet's debut album Down Time, released earlier this month, is brimming with melt in your mouth melodies, dreamy textures and for all intents and purposes, a host of wistful, transfixing pop ballads. It's brightly lit and squeaky-clean pop, just as much as it is a healthy musical platter of dark and depressing truths. The notion of kicking back in your 20's is just as meaningful as the disenchantment that comes with it. And the laid-back hooks are underpinned by thoughtful, undeniably crafty instrumentation.

I'm chatting with frontwoman Elizabeth Mitchell and guitarist Zachary Schneider, and it's clear that behind the band's fantastic debut album and imminent rise—having recently supported Best Coast on their Australian tour, and been announced as part of the Meredith Music Festival 2015 lineup—is a crystal clear creative focus, and a special kind of collaborative chemistry.

'I remember when we went in to actually talk about making the record and we had the tracks ready to go, and we were talking about it from a production side, but also an arrangement side, where we were going, it's gotta be a band like Television where things interlock and it moves, but then it also has to be like Beyoncé. It has to be this bold pop... yet clever rock instrumentation,' says Schneider. 'Hooks and emotions,' adds Mitchell.

Totally Mild was originally the moniker for Mitchell's solo work, and saw the release of 2013's Castanet cassette – a folk-leaning set of lo-fi tracks that she refers to as 'very much home recordings'. But even back then Mitchell was still playing live shows with Schneider and bassist Lehmann B. Smith who were both also regular contributors to the project. 'And then we decided, because it was a lot more folky then—a lot more acoustic instruments and very much vocal driven—that we wanted to be a bit more rock', she says, 'Even though everyone is always like, "you're not a rock band" (laughs), I feel like we're the rockiest rock band'.

Mitchell and Schneider have been friends for around 10 years now, and they joke about it being their '10 year anniversary of being friends and making music together'. And so it comes as no surprise that Down Time is charged with an innate cathartic charm, one based on a collaborative openness between its members. 'It's one of the beautiful things about playing music with a really close friend and for a long time, I think, is that you get that kind of intuition between each other where you kind of know what the other one's going to do before they even do it. It's spooky,' says Mitchell. It's the coupling of Mitchell's musical background, which revolves around soul music and arrangements rather than band music, with Schneider's knack for complementing and accentuating pop melodies that makes the band so unique. Schneider articulates the pairing, stating, 'Liz is so pop-minded that it was like, it has to be this crossover band where it's like really, really pop, but still maintains those elements of classic kind of intellectual rock 'n' roll'.

The band's rhythm section is intently minimalist, particularly Ashley Bundang's drumming, and while beautifully understated, still brings to the floor enticing backdrops and shines brighter when needed. Every member contributes with a prevailing reference to melody, conscious of each other's playing and with a keen eye on the final product. 'Everyone get's their moment and nothing feels swamped,' Says Schneider. 'Ultimately, the vocal shines through the most... it's about the song more than anything else.'

It's the all-important foundation from which Elizabeth's beautiful vocals and poignant lyricism prosper and shine. As she explains, 'I wrote most of it [Down Time] when I was living by myself and I was very party, like I was drinking too much and I was in a pretty bad state of mental health and just not really looking after myself. And I was listening to a lot of Lana Del Rey and just being like, "this will be feelings writing now". The experience of being young, of leaving university and gaining control of her life as an adult without really knowing what to do with it, fuelled her writing. 'It's just that feeling of in between, that kind of stagnancy,' she says.

The band recently released a video for album track 'Move On', in which each member is drinking a glass of milk, being splattered and gradually covered in milk, and eventually spitting all of said consumed milk back into its original glass. Mitchell tells me that the video is based on a recurring dream she used to have when she was a vegan, where she had to drink a glass of milk, but when getting to the bottom of the cup, more milk would appear. She's no longer a vegan, and laughs about now loving 'drinking cups of milk', and being 'really addicted to milk'. But beyond her burgeoning love for dairy products exists a deeper symbolic meaning: 'There's a lot of stuff about repetition and it does tie into a lot of the themes on the album, like that kind of repetition of being stuck, and not really doing anything, but then feeling like you have to keep going. And it also ties in with the theme of 'Move On' as a song, which is like being stuck on the same feeling, again and again.'

While quite reluctant, I bring up the dreaded dolewave sound. After all, Joe Alexander from Bedroom Suck Records did write in the presser for Down Time, 'It's a new year and time for a new sound. Forget everything you heard about the Melbourne 'dolewave', what a crock of shit. We have found something much more important for you to listen to'. The band didn't write this, and clearly aren't dolewave, yet it's a term that can unwantedly attach itself to any jangle-pop band that comes out of Melbourne.

'When I saw the press release come out I was like wow, we're really going out on the offensive here, like it's pretty intense. But also it was like no, we do want to distance ourselves from that side of music criticism,' remarks Schneider. Mitchell references making the album in the studio, how considered it was and the fact that they wanted it to be really slick and pop. 'There's dolewave music that I like and there [are] bands that get called dolewave that are our friends and who I think are really talented and make really awesome music. For me I just don't identify with that at all... There seems to be like in the ideology of dolewave... this flippancy that "we just do this and have fun and make music, but we don't really care that much about it,"' she says. There's an evident desire to have the music judged on its own terms rather than contextualised through a local scene that it really doesn't fit into, and rightly so.

On a song like 'Money or Fame', for instance, there's a sassy Saxophone solo that hits just right, and brings the album to a dramatic end. Mitchell was looking for a '80s vibe and initially wanted the inclusion of a flute. But they tried sax, and after getting some inspiration from Yoko Ono's Season of Glass stood by the decision. There's also bass clarinet on a few album tracks as well as the inclusion of some recorders. As Schneider indicates, 'we made a very, very strong decision to be like, if there's going to be any extra instrumentation on these songs we pick one thing per song, one little moment, so that it's a feature and it's not 'wall of sound' Phil Spector style sort of stuff'.

As of late Totally Mild have been playing shows with the likes of Best Coast, which they say has been a game changer in terms of the band moving forward. They were also recently announced as part of the 2015 Meredith Music Festival lineup. Now that they are living it up with international bands and landing big time festival shows, I asked them if they had a rider for Meredith, and what would be on it? If you don't remember, the Golden Plains (Meredith's sister festival) organisers met Parquet Courts hilariously crazy rider earlier this year, and so I imagine that anything would be on the table. Schneider professes that he's a whisky man, while Mitchell goes for the classic aloe vera drink and dairy products (namely cheese and milk) combo. 'Some dairy, aloe vera drink and lots of whisky (laughs all round),' Schneider summarises. With the band's upward trajectory, this may well be the future blueprint for many rider's to come.'

'Melbourne quartet Totally Mild released ethereal debut album, 'Down Time''

Written by Bill Pearis for Brooklyn Vegan (USA), 17/09/2015

http://www.brooklynvegan.com/archives/2015/08/melbourne_quart.html

'A lot of Melbourne bands get written about on BrooklynVegan and lately most seem to be of the noisy/bleak/postpunk variety, but Totally Mild are totally not that. What began as a solo project for songwriter Elizabeth Mitchell (she released a cassette in 2013) soon turned into a full band, and Totally Mild released their debut album, Down Time, this month on Bedroom Suck in Australia and Fire Records in the UK.

Mitchell is possessed with an ethereal voice, prone to falsetto and is probably the most striking thing about the band but it wouldn't be so without her lovely songs and the just-so jangly arrangements. (You could compare them to Brooklyn's Hospitality, same sort of vibe.) It's a truly lovely album and you can stream the whole thing, and watch videos for "Christa" and "Move On," below.'