

Judith & Holofernes

Abraça a Tristeza

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Judith and Holofernes is a band from San Francisco who play an American variation of traditional Portuguese fado music (“fado” translates as “fate”). Like fado, Judith and Holofernes’ music is sad and melancholic, evoking feelings of sorrow, futility and longing – what the Portuguese refer to as *saudade*. The four members of the band come from indie/punk roots and started playing fado music after a pilgrimage to Lisbon, where they were acquainted with the mixture of wine, tragedy and Catholic guilt that the time-honored fadistas had perfected.

The band owes as much to its collective conviviality as it does to its despair. The sleepy town the band members called home suffered a rash of suicides; Judith and Holofernes lost three friends to the noose. Each member dealt with their guilt differently: drink, escape, sex, isolation. Collectively, they set it all against a backdrop of old-world melody, making them stronger together than they are individually. The music is as much about sadness as it is about survival, as much about the suicides as it is about the everyday life—the afterward. The music of Judith and Holofernes is not lighthearted—it is sincere—and that sincerity, that genuine quality, is what makes their music so engaging.

The name of the band references a biblical story of a beautiful Jewess, Judith, who seduces one of Nebuchadnezzar’s invading generals, Holofernes. After getting him drunk, Judith beheaded and de-balled Holofernes, then marched into the city with the severed head, empowering the Jews to defeat their enemy. This narrative of sex, betrayal, revenge and death—similar to the fado music of Lisbon—is echoed by the band.

On this, the group’s third album, Judith and Holofernes has found a way to proceed untrammelled by the conventional methods of the music industry. On this, the group’s first album released on Vanguard Squad, the band has come not only to understand itself, but to be comfortable in its own skin, as the title suggests. *Abraça a Tristeza*, translated from Portuguese, means “Embrace the Sadness.” While the band is comfortable, they aren’t sheepish when it comes to difficult subject matter. The stories may be grim, but the songs are melodic and sweet, making themselves memorials in the mind; things you recollect later, humming to yourself, reminiscing on the universal similarities of the human condition. Because, after all, haven’t most of us been *there*.

This album is about moving on *while* being reverential of the past. This album is about hopelessness and what comes after. This album is about staying afloat through the doldrums, enduring the pain, and finding camaraderie. How many songs can you sing about lost love, dead friends, and shattered lives? The whores and drunks in the barrio of Lisbon have been at it for two hundred years so far; Judith and Holofernes is proud to carry on that tradition.

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