

SPOON

They Want My Soul

How many times in musical history has the most acclaimed act of an era peaked in its 20th year? We're not talking a reunion, return to form, twilight years surprise or any of that. We're asking how many times has a critically and publicly adored band—one still in its prime--released (arguably) its best album at the start of its third decade?

To save you valuable Googling time: It's happened once, it is in fact happening now, and unlike Haley's Comet streaking by or whatever, you are fortunate enough to be able to hold it in your hand or on your hard drive. It's called **Spoon: *They Want My Soul*** (out August 5 on Loma Vista).

Yes, the new album from the single most favorably reviewed musical force of the previous decade (Metacritic numbers don't lie: <http://www.metacritic.com/feature/best-music-of-the-decade>) already being hailed as "perfect" (*Rolling Stone*) and "fantastically infectious... perhaps the most confident point of its career" (*NPR*) also falls roughly on the 20th anniversary of Spoon's barely-released 1994 debut EP, *Nefarious*.

So on to the obvious questions: How and why does this happen? After a 20-year streak of unerring excellence in the form of albums like *Telephono*, *A Series Of Sneaks*, *Girls Can Tell*, *Kill The Moonlight*, *Gimme Fiction*, *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* and *Transference* (not to mention EPs like the indispensable *Soft Effects*, *Love Ways*, *Don't You Evah* and *Got Nuffin*), how does *They Want My Soul* raise the bar with surprise premiere first single "Rent I Pay" (<http://www.npr.org/event/music/318886316/spoon-premieres-new-song-live>), current chart climbing summer anthem "Do You" and the sublimely trippy "Inside Out" (all three of which comprise the 45RPM 10" currently flying out of indie record retailers as part of the <http://www.spoontheband.com/vinylgratification/> program)?

Maybe the answer lies in the rejuvenation provided by a first-ever break following a grueling 10-year run that kicked off in 2001 with *Girls Can Tell* and saw the band plow tirelessly through the 2002-2010 releases of *Kill The Moonlight*, *Gimme Fiction*, *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* and *Transference*, and the ever expanding tours supporting each album, all without a pause. Sure, the momentum was as irresistible as it was self-induced: spurred on by singles like *Kill The Moonlight*'s "The Way We Get By," *Gimme Fiction*'s "I Turn My Camera On," *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*'s "The Underdog" and more, sales were progressively doubling from album to album, hitting an incredible peak when *Transference* entered the U.S. album chart at #4.

So who would even think about jumping from that runaway train... until it just happened: at the end of the *Transference* tour, Britt Daniel, Jim Eno, Eric Harvey and Rob Pope all went their separate ways. No consulting one another on next moves, when the band would re-convene, or even if it would at all. Spoon had effectively gone on a naturally occurring indefinite hiatus.

Mind you, even Spoon's hiatuses defy convention. The band members were anything but

idle: Britt formed Divine Fits with Dan Boeckner (late of Handsome Furs, Wolf Parade) and Sam Brown (ex-Gaunt, New Bomb Turks) and recorded the brilliant *A Thing Called Divine Fits* with producer Nick Launay (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Public Image Ltd., etc.). And speaking of producers of renown, Jim continued his ascent in that arena, taking advantage of the downtime to go full-time at his own Public Hi-Fi, producing records by Polica, !!!, Telekinesis and others while releasing a series of Public Hi-Fi Sessions on the studio's own label banner. Rob opened a (new) bar and embarked on the adventure of family life, Eric released the solo *Lake Disappointment* and worked on visual art in Dallas.

So a few years of passion projects, traumatic break ups and even a new marriage later, the members of Spoon started to succumb to whatever force it is that inexorably draws them to one another. And this time there was a significant addition, fifth member Alex Fischel, found on the side of a highway being raised by wolves by Britt, who taught him to play keyboards, gave him a job in Divine Fits, and in turn exacted Alex's blood oath to play by his side in everything he does from that point.

The result has moved the likes of *NPR* to call *They Want My Soul* "unmistakably a Spoon record" while noting that the band is "challenging itself and stretching its sound, particularly with synth textures courtesy of the band's newest addition, Alex Fischel." But lest the new guy get too big a head too, there were other forces at play in making the new disc such a mind blower. *They Want My Soul* found Spoon working with not one but two new producers: Grammy winner Dave Fridmann (Flaming Lips, MGMT, Tame Impala) and Joe Chicarelli (White Stripes, The Shins) were both enlisted, one sonic innovator known for his psychedelic palette, the other a big rock producer known for his arsenal of monolithic tones. The two producers' individual styles couldn't have been more dissimilar, and here they were each crafting half a Spoon record—a band whose signature style made sense with neither of them.

The resultant shake-up was as necessary as it was revitalizing. It accounts for that new energy crackling in every groove of *They Want My Soul*, a wild card frequency underlying every familiar groove and melody... and one that serves to bolster that overall sentiment that this is the best record the band has ever made.

It also shouldn't be overlooked that a good share of *They Want My Soul*'s alien vibe may come as the result of the extended periods of isolation they endured during its recording—one man's pastoral paradise is a primarily Austin-born and bred band's dark night of the soul. The guys spent a lot of time at Fridmann's Cassadaga, NY (pop. 625) outpost, much of it snowed in and some of it punctuated by incidents involving *True Detective/Blair Witch* style teepees and stick structures, mysterious trails of bloodstains in the snow... Details are fuzzy and cabin fever is a real thing, so suffice to say the five men who made that trip are not the same five men who came back from it.

Anyway, whatever happened up there was evidently worth it, as the band that turned heads by leaping from Matador to Elektra nearly 20 years ago (only to begin its true ascent on Merge roughly a year later) now triumphantly resurfaces on Loma Vista for album number eight. But hey that's Spoon, "one of the most consistently great bands in

indie rock” (*Rolling Stone*) yet one not necessarily on an indie label or making records that sound particularly “indie,” the kings of the underground whose music has wormed its way into your brain on *Veronica Mars* and *Saturday Night Live*, the band that has conceived and executed the Vinyl Gratification campaign in the age of the digital pre-order incentive... If there’s a tried and true formula for anything in this business, look for Spoon to be coming in an opposite lane or direction—but when a band is making records as undeniably classic as *They Want My Soul*, does any of that matter?