



Suzzy & Maggie Roche **“Why The Long Face”** Red House Records

**“Why The Long Face”** resumes the search for truth, sustenance and understanding in these modern, troubled times, that Suzzy and Maggie launched with **“Zero Church.”** According to a liner note by Suzzy [currently found on The Roches website], *“If I had to say what the theme of this recording is I guess it would be the ever thinning line between opposites: comedy & tragedy, hope & despair, the political & the personal, the truth & the lie, success & failure, the simple & complex - just to name a few.”* In fact there are intense moments of beauty on **“Why The Long Face”** when it’s [quite] simply enough to allow their two voices to wrap themselves around you like a safe, warm blanket. Aural heaven can particularly be found on the cuts **“The Warwick Flog”** and **“A Day In The Life Of A Tree.”** In fact the closing line *“I just can’t get enough of you,”* from the already familiar **“One Season,”** is a comment I’d personally offer regarding the contents of this collection.

This duo opens its sophomore album with a Mark Johnson song, **“I Don’t Have You.”** Despite the negative sounding title, rhythmically it’s a sprightly little number replete with shuffle beat, except that, subjectively, it relates to the loss of love. Johnson is a Manhattan based songwriter with distinct pop leanings, and The Roches covered his **“Love Radiates Around”** [on 1985’s **“Another World”**] and along with Maggie and Andy Block, he co-wrote the title cut of their mini album **“No Trespassing”** [1986]. Pursuing the theme of melancholy that comes hand-in-glove with loss, Maggie’s **“Broken Places”** passes through some of those *“oh so public,”* as well as the *“precious and private”* facets of our lives. As **“Who Cares”** unfolds, Suzzy tackles the reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century American politics – *“guys dressed up in suits and ties telling lies”* and concludes that while the procrastination goes on and on and on, innocent people suffer and die – adults, children and the military. The lyric also tangentially refers to 9/11 – *“Keep your eye on the sky, Afraid to take a subway ride, Wondering about the next time,”* and finally indulges in some personal introspection by the youngest Roche sister.

The words to **“The Warwick Flog”** were inspired by a workshop that the sisters, assisted by their friend Bill Bowers, held for a group of women in Warwick, New York and culminate in them writing a prayer. *Random imagery* is probably the most concise way of describing the lyric – for example, here’s a verse *“Scream bless, Earth the ripple, Water the sound, Creature spirit”* [#]. As for Suzzy and Maggie voices, on the curiously titled **“The Warwick Flog,”** they intertwine exquisitely. **“La Vie C’est La Vie”** [it translates as **“Life This Is Life”**] is a poem dating from 1922 by the late Jessie Fauset [one time literary editor of **The Crisis**], that was first brought to the sister’s notice by their father, and which Maggie set music. The Roches first included this heartrending treatise on the mystery of love on **“No Trespassing.”**

The cautionary **“Don’t Be Afraid”** was composed by Suzzy and features David Amram’s French horn, while Maggie’s **“One Season”** first appeared on The Roches **“Nurds”** back in 1980. Maggie’s use of words in terms of their image or meaning [sometimes, their double meaning] confirms a sharp mind at work – as in the opening verse *“One season I was born, Fell down like an acorn, I am the only tree, And everybody leaves.”* In the opening line Suzzy’s amusing **“The Long Lonely Road To Nowhere”** she references Stephen R. Covey’s self-help bestseller **“The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People”** and goes on to offer a series of personal insights, directly and indirectly, related to the book. The words to **“For Those Whose Work Is Invisible”** are those of Mary Gordon [novelist and Professor of English at Barnard College] for which Suzzy provided the music. Basically speaking, the lyric amounts to a list of occupations whose completed work is not always apparent to the human eye. For example, *“Cobblers who labour over inner souls”* and *“surgeons whose sutures are things of beauty.”* **“Training Wheels”** exposes the emotional cruelty that children can inflict on a contemporary who is *different*, and is a poem written by Jon Turner [+] – he’s a young man Suzzy met at a Summer Camp for teenagers a few years

ago. The sisters end **“Why The Long Face”** in precisely the manner they began, by cutting a song by an acknowledged composer of great pop songs – *genre classics* even. A melancholic and atmospheric paeon to aging, “A Day In The Life Of A Tree” is the work of Jack Rieley and the *totally unique* Brian Wilson, and the song originally appeared on The Beach Boys **“Surf’s Up”** [1971].

There’s a degree of irony in the decision to title this collection **“Why The Long Face”** considering the measure of melancholy that pervades the eleven cuts. What’s missing is a dash of that old Roche sister quirkyness, but that’s a minor forfeit in the light of this grand vocal symphony. Congratulations are due to Stewart Lerman [and Suzzy] for another sterling production job. The bulk of the sounds that emit from the disc – vocal and instrumental - were created by Lerman and the two girls, and, frankly Suzzy and Maggie have never sounded better.

**Note.**

[#] – Don’t so much look at the words set out as lines, rather think, individual words.

[+] – When a child, Jon was diagnosed as suffering from a form of autism.

Folkwax Rating 9 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 11/04