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## House of Heroes – Suburba

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Many a time I've pondered about what kind of big break it takes for a band to truly "make it". Obviously, every widely known band is popular for their own reasons (and sometimes this can be credited to actual talent, as opposed to money; what a novel thought). But why is it that, quite often, a great many wonderful bands fly so far under the radar?

Such is the case with House of Heroes, a painfully, grossly underrated group of wildly talented fellows, yet somehow still (suspiciously) mostly unrecognized by a wider audience.

One could make the argument that *Suburba*, the Heroes' latest release, can – and will – change this. Huge, exhilarating and fanciful, the album is a clear-cut favorite for end of the year lists, a true stud and stalwart; an instant album of the year candidate. In short: on my first listen through, *Suburba* made me say "Daaaang" out loud.

Based on the title alone and the fact that you are smart, you've most likely already gleaned that the record is thematically about growing up thug-lyfe style in suburbia. About a certain generation on the rise currently that probably grew up without Sesame Street or *Goosebumps*; rather, with Spongebob and super-sized kids meals. About growing up alongside an unfortunate sect of young people whose parents perhaps possessed a little bit more paper than other families. Whose children have been instilled with an unnatural and deviant sense of entitlement. Kids with Escalades at 16. Maybe their first DUI by 17. Maybe in rehab before high school graduation.

About cutting through the "pawns and perfect lawns" to find a life of substance and maybe true love. About the haves and the have-nots.

It's a hard knock life.

Produced by Mark Lee Townsend (whose previous work includes Relient K and Deas Vail), the production values on the record are impeccable: sound is crisp and squeaky clean throughout, featuring some

amazing guitar tones from Tim Skipper and Jared Rigsby, AJ Babcock's fuzzy bass, and solid drumming from Colin Rigsby.

"**Relentless**" is as the title implies. Kicking off the record with urgency and sounding like it could be the transition music for "breaking news" on a cable television broadcast, the track then makes you certain that you aren't watching CNN anymore. The song sets Skipper's lyrical standard early, with the album's underdog motif peeking through:

*"Our faith is small but it is strong,  
Enough to carry on  
Though we are poor, we shall not want."*

"**Elevator**" takes you to the 2nd floor of the record (sorry, I couldn't resist), foraying briefly some kind of Latin flavor. Though the track serves as the lead single of the album, I feel like "God Save the Foolish Kings" is more-suited for radio airplay. Either way, the bass playing is top notch and an indication of how the whole album is wildly, infectious catchy. With "**Love is for the Middle Class**" it vaguely sounds as if the Heroes have manipulated a certain couple of classic licks from The Knack's "My Sharona" enough to call them their own, and into a capable rock song complete with well-placed shouts.

"**So Far Away**" is flighty and thoughtful, with Skipper soliciting the listener to hold onto hope in a hopeless world, especially something as hapless as suburbia. The rattlesnake rattle (note: not a technical musical term) adds a nice southwestern touch as well. Perhaps the best song on the album, "**God Save the Foolish Kings**" (featuring guest vocals from fellow Gotee artist, the talented and easy on the eyes Stephanie Smith), is so catchy it's dumb. Just stupid. Skipper's harmonies with Jared Rigsby throughout the album are sure to elicit a substantial amount of goosebumps. "**Salt in the Sea**" is acoustic, fully stripped down and solemn. Skipper sings:

*"Until I become one with the salt in the sea,  
I will stand up straight and let you roll right into me.  
Until I become one with everything I dream,  
I will give you praise,  
Praise eternally."*

The album picks back up, and hot dang does it ever. A regretful tale of breaking and entering, "**Independence Day For A Petty Thief**" is shut your mouth off your face good. I'm a sucker for killer basslines. They get me every time, and this song is no exception. Featuring some literal fireworks, nothing short of the "Hallelujah" chorus is worthy enough praise here. "**Somebody Knows**" is a fairly straight-forward, mid-tempo rock song. But what makes this song really great is the House of Heroes' patented harmonies, very nearly climbing into the operatic reaches, breaking champagne glasses along the way.

Meanwhile, "**Disappear**" is a brief departure in ambience. The song eventually segues into head-bobbing post-rock, with the band's signature, humongous viking harmonies la "Code Name: Raven" from *The End is Not The End*. Goosebumps prevail again. And obviously, no record can be an album of the year contender without some cowbell. Fulfilling this requirement is "**She Mighty Mighty**", another fine rock tune about a gal that truly completes her mate. "Constant" slows down *Suburba* for the last time. Anthemic with a southern-ish feel, the track is worshipful and youth group friendly without being cheesy. Skipper croons:

*“All thru the night I was fallin’  
Straining to see your light shinin’  
You never gave out  
You never gave in  
You never quite gave up on me  
You are my constant.”*

The album’s closer “**Burn Me Down**” will draw strong Muse comparisons for good reasons, what with its spacey feel and eventual solo. Should this song be played live, I’d like to see it played with a guitar on fire. Just because. Skipper’s lyrics continue to glow, and the album closes with:

*“There’s a spirit fire growing inside me  
Burn me down, burn me down.  
There’s a holy fire growing inside me,  
Burn me down, burn me down.  
Let it out...”*

At the risk of speaking entirely in hyperbole, *Suburba* is one or more of the following: Granite solid. Lofty. Ambitious. Gigantic. Featuring liberal doses of whimsy. Balladlicious? Like a hot air balloon ride. Like closing the last page on your favorite book.

Rock album of the year? Wouldn’t surprise me. *Suburba* is unrelenting. It possesses all the “positive” aspects of an arena rock show without being unnecessarily pretentious (so: no \$7000 pyrotechnics bill. Save that mess for Skillet). While it may draw some wild and ultimately appropriate comparisons to bands like The Who and Queen, I sincerely doubt a House of Heroes-themed episode of “Behind the Music”, because let’s face it: no band has ever ended up on that show without the supreme downfall to reemerge from some great life pit or valley.

The only tracks I didn’t particularly care for were “So Far Away” and “Salt in the Sea”, but I understand what purpose they serve in the complete structure of the album, and you may dig ‘em simply for the fact that they’re acoustic.

Let there be no doubt about it: this is the perfect summer record. In a recent interview, Tim Skipper said he wanted the record to “sound and feel like the best summer of your life... when everything meant something and the world was wide open.” The album’s mission statement holds up well.

The only real (read: facetious) concern I have for this album in terms of staying power is when it’s not being played at summer block parties. You can’t have an effective cook out in the snow... or can you?

**Overall:** Don’t listen to the naysayers. This record stands on its own feet against its older sibling, 2008’s critically-acclaimed *The End is Not the End*. Don’t get it twisted: it’s every bit as good.

**Recommended if you like:** Life. Living. Breathing. Being alive. Barbecues. Sweet tea. Freddy Mercury. The planet Mercury. Fireworks. I prefer mortars, you might only be into sparklers, but that’s cool too man.



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