



ABSOLUTE PUNK

July 2010

Suburba really could not have come at a better time. In the middle of summer, all we want is something to wrap our ears around and enjoy like summer blockbuster movie. Big, lavish production on top of harmonious soundscapes that could fill the entire acoustic spectrum of an amphitheater. You want it to sound as good as you can possibly get it, and House of Heroes is the current band that can give it to you. They are quickly becoming colossal rock demigods, creating a widely contagious rock sound that is a blend of arena-clogging throwbacks who took advantage of high-wire production techniques and alternative rock bands with a glossy pop edge. It's a match made in heaven, and while it fails to overshadow the band's 2008 predecessor, *The End Is Not The End*, it comes about as close as anyone else could dream of.

The main source of Suburba's problem (if you really want to call it that) is how ambitious it truly is, particularly in scope. The band doesn't hide the fact they want to carry their penchant for crafting honest melodies onto a much grander scale, however it is all delivered in such an epic proportion, it can be a bit much to digest. It's not as spread out as their previous album, but it saves itself from complete overindulgence, thanks in part to a few dignified tracks that especially play on the band's strengths. Using the universal themes of hope, love and youth, Tim Skipper is a voice who is on par with some of rock's greats, throwing all his weight into his role of remaining the integral stitch in House of Heroes' bombastic quilt. At times, he is comparable to Freddie Mercury (the rock-opera "God Save the Foolish Kings") and Chris Martin ("So Far Away," a bona-fide hit Coldplay missed the chance on writing). Shall we anticipate an impending solo record sometime soon?

"Elevator" is flamenco-style pop-punk that would make Switchfoot blush, "Love is For the Middle Class" is explosive powerpop in the vein of Cheap Trick or the Knack, and "She Mighty Mighty" sounds like Matchbox Twenty performing an unreleased Huey Lewis & the News cut. That's good news, by the way, because this is the type of record you would have wanted to hear back in 1983. Suburba has the slick pop-rock coat to ride alongside some of the best pop records in recent memory. The experimental pop musings of the last record are replaced here with doses of choir arrangements and orchestral backdrops (check out "Disappear" and "God Save the Foolish Kings" for the best examples of this). The rhythm-based wall of sound that is "Burn Me Down" is a moodier replication of a Foo Fighters track, shifting from one sonic element to another that suits the band's allegiance with massive rock and roll song structure.

They do play it simple every now and then, however. "Independence Day For a Petty Thief" is straight-up hard-nosed rock & roll without too many gimmicks; "Somebody Knows" is an Oasis-style mid-tempo number, and "Constant" is a bluesy power ballad that may or may not be about Desmond Hume (this is merely speculation on my part). "Disappear" miraculously gets better and better right up until the very last second, and by the time you catch your breath, you might have to pop your eyes back into your skull. Mainly because Suburba has so much to it, it can be hard to take all at once. That's the record's only true downside: that it wants to be so large, so mammoth and so much all at once, it feels like it is trying to outdo what the last album did so well for the entire idea of what great pop music can be. "Salt in the Sea" limps by on an unimpressive build-up, attempting to shake some Beatles flavor from a rather tepid melody, and "Relentless" seems to lose its Queen-like luster on repeated listens (it doesn't feel as particularly fitting for an opening track as other songs here do). Still, you have to hand it to House of Heroes for their fearless ambition, charging full-steam ahead with producer Mark Lee Townsend on developing a rock album with some real life to it.

It does beg the question, however, where does the band go from here? With a stellar vocalist in Tim Skipper (he's also not too shabby on the six-string), absolutely stunning drummer (courtesy of Colin Rigsby) and sensationally rhythmic bass player (A.J. Babcock), the only place has to be up -- and House of Heroes may have just set up their most strenuous challenge yet: following up two incredibly tight rock records that might need a more subtle approach the next time around. This isn't a popcorn movie for your ears or anything of the like: Suburba will whet any fan's appetite perfectly fine -- just make sure to take small bites and to chew carefully; Suburba is most certainly a full-course meal.

Author's Rating	
Vocals	9
Musicianship	8.75
Lyrics	7
Production	9.5
Creativity	7.5
Lasting Value	8.75
Reviewer Tilt	8.25
Final Verdict: 84%	

Member Ratings	Rate It
Vocals	9.75
Musicianship	9.95
Lyrics	9.7
Production	9.95
Creativity	9.65
Lasting Value	9.85
Reviewer Tilt	9.85
Average: 98%	