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The Room (La Chambre)

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The Room (2002)
La Chambre (Resista Records)
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Reviewed by Michael Hannan

LaChambre is an unusual experimental rock band that seems to have its roots in the 1980s glam rock sound of David Bowie. On their debut album, *The Room*, they use exotic instruments, and unusual arranging and production concepts in addition to the standard rock rhythm section. Typically their songs begin with an ambient texture of electronic sounds, field recordings, and unlikely instruments such as the "Japanese Tokkai Harp" and glockenspiel. The lead vocal is mostly always heavily processed with reverb, delay and other effects, creating a spooky vibe. In most of the songs the rhythm section eventually appears playing fairly standard, mostly slow, rock grooves. There is usually a build-up of the texture involving bowed string arrangements and a tapering off to an ending of mesmerising ambient sounds. The lyrics are always poetic, often cosmic, sometimes erotic, and certainly open to many interpretations. For a few songs the lead singer Tanaya Meeka breaks into French versions of the texts printed in the CD booklet.

It is a seductive and mysterious sonic formula. However I found myself being also disturbed by some of its compelling soundscapes. For example the 'Till Death Do Us Part' starts with a weird texture of bowed string chords and ambient frog sounds. When the rock groove begins, a persistent dissonant element pervades the simple harmonic textures, cleverly reinforcing the unsettling mood of the lyrics. In 'A Discourse' the insistent blips and blops of the electronic sounds are initially off-putting when heard against the groove and synth pads, but the texture soon appears to be an effective accompaniment for the haunting repeated lyric beginning "See how the way I fall" and the later rap sections of the song.

Unfortunately *The Room* is sometimes marred by poor intonation. The lead vocals are often on the edge of being out of tune although the electronic processing disguises this most of the time. It is not so easy to disguise the intonation of the bowed strings (particularly on tracks 1, and 4) and backing vocals (on tracks 2, 3, 5).

In addition the textures are often too busy and thick to maintain effective production values. This happens at various points of the songs in tracks 1, 4, 7, 9, 10 and 11. One of the solutions to this problem would be using a professional audio engineer to do the mixing (This is a home recording using Protools). Employing a producer with a good ear for subtleties of intonation would also have been a good idea.

Despite these criticisms, this album is original in its sound and its approach to songwriting and arranging. It would be interesting see what La Chambre might be able to create with a more substantial production budget.