



THEBIGCD

Electric Soft Parade

Martin Aston on No Need to Be Downhearted



★ ★ ★ ☆
On Electric Soft Parade's MySpace site there is a very prominently placed quote from Hunter S. Thompson: "The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There is also a negative side."
In rock folklore, tales of major label skulduggery are ten-a-penny. But the blame for ESP's woes might be linked more to the curse of expectation. The radiant, quasi-Britpop debut single *Silent to the Dark* had given the band, fronted by the

teenage brothers Alex and Tom White, a flying start. A Mercury prize nomination for their debut album, *Hole in the Wall*, and Q magazine's Best Newcomers award for 2002 followed. But having climbed into bed with BMG, ESP produced a confused follow-up, *The American Adventure*, which didn't even sell enough to vanish without trace. Licking their wounds, the Whites retreated to play supporting roles in Brakes.

Two Brakes albums later, that sense of freedom must have rubbed off. This album throbs with kaleidoscopic intent, less Britpop than the kind of surprise turn associated with Super Furry Animals. Take the opening title track, which sets the tone of an aching Bacharach ballad, with the line "don't get caught up, be the person and the people that you

love all your life" repeated like a self-help mantra. Or the current single, *If That's the Case*, then *I Don't Know*, whose trebly guitar figure and motoring beat would flatter, say, Kaiser Chiefs. Impressively, Tom and Alex play every single instrument themselves, adding and subtracting layers where necessary. *Shore Song* is whispery folk, with a gorgeous, twinkling coda, while *Woken by a Kiss* — one of several tracks that look to America's West Coast for spiritual and aural guidance — is luscious psych-pop. All of a sudden, the studio is their oyster.

On the intensifying piano rocker *Cold World*, over a string of Beach Boys-style harmonies, Tom encapsulates everything that has gone wrong, and right: "I wanna get rid of this feeling/ I want to be a part of everything." Forget the return of Genesis — this is the comeback of the year. Time to take down that Hunter S. Thompson quote, boys, and embrace your positive side.