

Black magic

They rode to the Mercurys on a breeze of summery pop – but their new album is a much gloomier affair. Angela from the Magic Numbers tells **etc.** why

Those *the brokes*, the second Magic Numbers record, has been trailed by the chirpy single 'Take a chance', which makes it sound like business as usual. But the full album is much more thoughtful, there are dense strings and mournful lyrics, and the sense that life in the limelight is not quite what the band expected. 'It's not all it's cracked up to be,' admits a tired-sounding Angela Gannon, the melodica player, with a laugh. 'It's an awful lot of hard work, I never thought how hard it would be.' Then she adds, not quite believably, 'but it's all good fun at the same

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'It's definitely a happy sad song – that song can mean so many different things to different people. Whatever mood you're in, it makes you feel kind of...appreciative and uplifted, but still kind of sad at the same time!'

Q. Is it really fun, or do you sometimes think 'this is a bad idea'?

A. Well, you do get a few glimmers of that! But to be able to tour, play to so many different people, that's what we do – all the other stuff is to make sure there are people at the gigs...

Q. So, doing what you do...what do you mean by 'Those the Brokes'? Is it like 'them's the breaks'?

A. It's exactly that, yes. A friend of ours used to say it, we all started saying it, and as a little 'in band' phrase we thought it would be a good thing to call the album.

Q. So does the title refer to the Magic Numbers in particular, or to life in general?

A. It's a general thing, you know, just getting on with life and dealing with whatever comes at you. That's probably the kind of Magic Numbers attitude – if people don't like our stuff, we're just going to keep on doing it, and that's it!

Q. Who's dared to say they don't like your stuff?

A. I don't know, I'd like to meet them!

Q. Thing is, it's a great album, but why are you all so sad?

A. I think that's Romeo, that's how he deals with things, he writes songs about them. There are a couple of happy ones on there, but there's always a sad element to everything, isn't there? We're having the time of our lives, but we hardly ever get to see our families, and that's quite sad.

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Q. See, we've always thought that your music sounds cheerful, but is actually about miserable things underneath – like a lot of pop music, really.

A. Definitely! Personally, I find great pleasure in listening to really sad songs, for some weird reason... Music helps you get through stuff, it's a way to carry on and keep going. A lot of the happy stuff [in our music] is the optimism coming out, saying 'you can carry on'. We listen to the Smiths a lot, and Morrissey's lyrics aren't the most upbeat of songwriters'... but Johnny Marr's guitar lines are so cheerful; it's a nice contrast. We're kind of like that.

Q. Making the album must have been interesting, if the songs are really about such personal things. Was it really made on a mountaintop?

A. It was, yes, in upstate New York. It's really secluded, with bears and deer running around; it was really lovely.

Q. Was the bigger sound something deliberate, after living with the first record for a while?

A. I guess we wanted to show we'd moved on a bit. The first record sounds a bit sparse, whereas this one's quite full-on. We definitely wanted to add a few more things, like the strings; and I play a Wurlitzer on it, too, so I've moved from one hand to two!

Q. The strings are a new thing, what's the story there?

A. Robert Kirby, who did all Nick Drake's arrangements, did the strings, and it was so amazing to witness nine people come along and play along perfectly to something they'd never done before; it brings a tear to the eye really, hearing something so beautiful. It was a good day.

Q. Are you pleased to be ploughing your own furrow, then?

A. Yeah, we're very different to what's around at the minute. We all love classic songs, songs that make you feel something; we're not really about rocking out or looking cool, it's all about the songs. There are a lot of very 'cool' bands out there, which is good in a way, there's a place for everything...

Q. But you won't be strapping on skinny ties and getting asymmetric haircuts.

A. [Laughs] No, definitely not! I don't think it would really suit us, anyway.

Those the brokes is out now. Indulge and enjoy! etc.