

THE BOOK OF THE LOST

Emily Jones & The Rowan Amber Mill.

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CD Album / Multimedia Project

Released March 5th 2014 on the Millersounds and Owltextures labels

Some histories are too dark to share with the bright, careless world out here. They should be read in here, in the shadows, for it is in the shadows that they were born...

Come closer, sit down, and we will tell you a tale from...

The Book of the Lost

(The Book of the Lost, Emily Jones & The Rowan Amber Mill, 2013)

A chance encounter between disembodied souls in an imaginary environment was perhaps bound to lead to the creation of something extraordinary. Musicians Emily Jones and The Rowan Amber Mill have never met in person. Yet the mutual admiration of each other's work on virtual music platform MySpace blossomed into a unique friendship. This friendship in turn bore the fruit of *The Book of the Lost*, a collaborative album featuring original songs and incidental music from a series of lost and forgotten folk horror films from the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Purchase of the album includes collectors' items such as post cards of the original movie posters, information about the histories of the production companies ('British Liger' for example), and fan gossip about the behaviour of some of the stars (Georgiah Susette, Warren Davids, Sharon Pendragon).

The movies were aired during the 1970s and '80s on Sunday nights. Most have either vanished without trace with film companies collapsing in financial ruin, or otherwise failed to receive the respect that Emily Jones and The Rowan Amber Mill felt they deserved. The films share many of the common features of British 'folk horror' of

the period – all were shot on a shoestring budget, all feature a mystical association with the landscape of England, there's a mild element of kitsch running throughout, and a quality of darkness that covers everything with a chilly allure. All the films from *The Book of the Lost* are set in, or based on stories about, the South West of England. The South West theme is kept strong with the project's release date planned for March 5th 2014, the official Saint's Day of St Piran, patron saint of Cornwall.

Perhaps most importantly, all the movies, songs, posters, incidental music, back stories, film companies and fan gossip are entirely fictional. This is the gem of the project, every single aspect is completely original, and all stems from the imaginations of Jones and The Rowan Amber Mill. Their careful authorial stylings and attention to period detail bring to mind similar projects, such as James MacPherson's fabulous 1761 'discovery' of the myths of 'Ossian'. Scottish poet and politician MacPherson convinced many people that these self-authored works were in fact a lost Celtic epic, penned originally by Oisín, the son of Fionn mac Cumhaill. MacPherson's claims were contested by many, notably by Irish historian Charles O'Connor, who noticed several anomalies in the material. However, where MacPherson's work may lack a lightness of touch and boundless love for the subject matter, *The Book of the Lost* demonstrates these qualities in abundance.

There's a pleasing imaginary intertextuality at play here. The scripts mention other, equally non-existent films that heavily influenced the fictitious scriptwriters. These include *The House that Cried Wolf*, a simultaneous homage to Hammer's cult favourite *The House That Bled to Death* (Dir: Tom Clegg, Hammer House of Horror 1980) and to the era's love of a good admonishing proverb. Then there is *Ghosts on Mopeds*, a hilarious nod to the 1973 zombie biker classic, *Psychomania* (Dir: Don Sharp, 1973).

Both Emily Jones and The Rowan Amber Mill have fond childhood memories of watching such serialised folk-horror narratives on television, and both share a feeling that the imagery, music and stories have somehow marked them indelibly at a deep level. As the daughter of renowned folk musician Al Jones, inventor the Ashworth transducers and a good friend of John Renbourn, Emily Jones was born into a ready-made atmosphere of folk music and folk culture.

There was also the influence of books such as Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (Garner, Alan 1976) a modern-day dramatisation of the Welsh story of Blodeuwedd from the *Mabionogion*. In 1969 *The Owl Service* (Granada Television) was made into a dreamy children's TV series, featuring jump-cuts and disorienting editing that created an intensely other-worldly atmosphere. It was re-broadcast by Channel 4 in the late '80s, profoundly influencing the imaginations of another generation of children.

There's a beautiful authenticity to *The Book of the Lost*. Each detail has been attended to with love, care and an obvious joy, even down to the sourcing of an actual ident from the now defunct SouthWest TV channel for their Facebook page.

Musically, *The Book of the Lost* is a masterpiece of atmospherics. Vintage analogue synthesisers lurk darkly alongside acoustic instrumentation and chilling spoken word interludes. "The Book of the Lost Opening Titles" and "Instrumental Theme" feature a wailing early '80s synth line that would be perfectly at home in anything from the glory days of the *Hammer House of Horror*. In "Marsh Thing", Emily Jones is an ethereal Sandy Denny narrating an unearthly tale from the perspective of the title creature. The Rowan Amber Mill takes over the vocals on "The Villagers", where lightly floating recorders evoke the fantasy of a pastoral idyll gone awry, an iconic narrative structure of 1970s folk horror.

It's almost as though a dreamlike web of formative influences has been weaving itself quietly and unconsciously over time. This ghostly web now emerges in a highly resolved intricacy, nestling into the newly-fashioned genre of hauntology in the form of *The Book of the Lost*.

I spoke with Emily Jones about the project.

So you both met randomly on MySpace as fans of each other's music. How did your conversation turn to '70s folk horror?

It's a genre that both of us love, and The Rowan Amber Mill had already based some work on this theme. He'd done a song called 'Face of Flowers' based on The Owl Service, and we gradually got talking. We'd wanted to do a collaboration together for ages. We had a few ideas, but nothing that really stuck until this one. Originally we had the idea that it would take the form of a couple of tracks for download, but gradually the more we talked about it the more excited we got about all the possibilities. So from that original EP idea we now have a full website, back stories about all the films, a few made-up media clips, release postcards of all the films, things like that. You have to make a physical product something special these days if you want to sell it, and we wanted to make this exactly the kind of thing we'd like to buy ourselves.

Can you tell me a bit more about the idea to create an imaginary TV series?

We wanted to get a lot of films into the project, but we also wanted to have an overriding concept that tied everything together. So we came up with the idea that on Sunday nights throughout the '70s and '80s, there was a series showing old British B-movies in the folk-horror genre. All the films in the series were specific to the South West – they were either set there or featured mythology that originated from there. We decided it should have been shown on SouthWest Television.

Four of the films in the series are *The Villagers*, *Middlewich Lake*, *The Marsh Thing* and *A Necklace of Shells*.

We'd come up with script ideas for each film, then everything – the theme tunes, the incidental music, the dialogue, the original songs – all of this would be inspired by the film. Only one of the songs – 'A Necklace of Shells', sung in the tavern scene of the film of the same name – was written to appear in the film itself.

We really wanted to create the kind of thing we'd want to stumble across ourselves, and something that felt very authentic. The whole thing was a real labour of love, so we sustained ourselves with the amount of fun we were having doing it, deliberately amusing ourselves and each other. The Rowan Amber Mill would send me a script and I'd be laughing out loud at the screen because it would be just so perfect – so

authentic and so true to itself. It's the kind of joy you feel when you watch Clint Eastwood walk into bar in a western and tip his hat in that certain way – and that gesture is so perfectly, authentically *him* that it almost makes you laugh with the sheer joy of it.

What real films and real music inspired you both?

We both love Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968, starring Vincent Price, Ian Ogilvy and Hilary Dwyer). The film is really about the darkness in human beings, how people behave towards each other, the sorrow in all of that... it's one of the most moral films I've ever seen, though at the time the film was accused of immorality. Many of these films have a strong moral message, though it's never presented in a didactic way.

There's also *The Wicker Man* of course, Robin Hardy's 1973 classic that is almost the touchstone for the entire genre. These films were all made on a budget, and because of that they're quite cheesy in some ways. In other ways they're utterly brilliant – there's a core of integrity that runs through all the cheesiness.

As far as sounds go, we both love the weird brilliance of anything from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. We have consciously worked to create a 'BBC Radiophonic Workshop' feel in the quality of the incidental music.

My parents had a huge library of sci-fi books which I'd regularly read. We were both brought up on folk music as well, and that's definitely had a part to play.

What part did MySpace play in all this?

In a way, The Rowan Amber Mill and myself only really exist for one another online. This is one of the interesting things about the digital age, you can have a friendship without even meeting someone. I've collaborated with musicians I've never met as far away as Italy. With this project, we really got into the disembodied way of working. I've made some very close friendships through MySpace. At the time it was like a little door opening on to a particular world for a very short while. If you

were lucky you got to pass through the doorway, but now it's closed again. You could meet your heroes and chat to them in a way that you can't on Facebook. MySpace really happened in the infancy of social media, but now it's not really possible to get to know people in the same way, as social media is so flooded.

*How did you decide on the name, *The Book of the Lost*?*

We chose this name for the series because these films are lost in more than one way. First of all they're lost in the sense that they'll never be found. Secondly because the genre of film that we're paying homage to really never received the critical acclaim that it should have enjoyed at the time. These are British classics, in the same way that the explosion of creativity that happened around the 1960s and '70s resulted in wonderful British psychedelia, British folk music, British writing... there was also this incredible genre happening in British cinema that was never properly celebrated in its day.

In our project, the TV series *The Book of the Lost* broadcast each weekly old horror B-movie with a voice-over by a former Shakespearian actor named Anthony Lumley, whose glory days were really behind him by that point. The rumour we invented for him was that he knocked off the voiceovers in ten minutes flat in exchange for a bottle of single malt... but you can't always trust rumours.

The Book of the Lost was released on 5th March 2014 on the Millersounds and Owltextures record labels. The sequel, Children of the Scorpion, is currently in production.

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