



First albums by any band can be the litmus test to indicate if there's any real potential there or if it's all self-deluded hype. To grab the attention of both the public and critics alike, there needs to be substance that thrills the listener in some way and promises a lifelong devotion, even before the "difficult second album" has become the next worry. Most debuts go without notice, lost in a sea of other releases, but occasionally the likes of 'Van Halen 1', 'Boston', 'Appetite For Destruction' and 'Are You Experienced?' emerge, full of brilliance and huge promise that change the world.

Whilst Luna Marble are too modest to put themselves in the same category as these legendary acts, there's no doubt that their self-titled debut is one of the best things to emerge onto the Rock scene for a good decade or two. A young band with old souls, the Manchester quartet have carefully distilled the very best of sixties and seventies Rock into one irresistible bundle that has enough edge and other influences to make it stand out from some acts who just carbon copy other bands. Somehow, walking the tightrope of freshness and familiarity with no little aplomb, the outfit have put together ten tracks that hum with life and with a "live in the studio" feel, captured and given enough of a sonic polish where necessary, it makes for vital listening.

With the sweet but soulful vocals of Maria Rico, Dragos Colceriu's powerfully fluid fretwork, along with rhythm section David Grundy on bass and Sean Stewart on drums providing the grooving engine room, the quartet launch into opener 'Running' like their lives depended on it. Equally impressive, the tremendous solo and soaring vocals of 'All My Love' continue the wave with ease, the slow and sensuous 'Crazy Loving' showing how they can build a song perfectly from a whisper to a tumultuous crescendo. All killer, no filler, there isn't a patchy track to be found, and the Blues-drenched 'So Long', dynamic 'Sea Of Sorrows' and sensual Gospel of 'Begging Mercy' all hit the bullseye.

Never short of ambition, this collection has a quality and class that many established bands take years to develop, and with the band apparently already working on the sophomore album, there's a guarantee of much more to come. An easy contender for album of the year, 'Luna Marble' is magnificent.

Paul Monkhouse