



BENEATH THE SKIN

OMAM revisits their roots on a darker note

NAZIFA RAIDAH

Release date: June 8, 2015
Artist: Of Monsters and Men
Genre: Indie folk, Indie pop
Length: 48:33
Rating: 4/5

Beneath the Skin is the second studio album by the Icelandic folk-pop band, Of Monsters and Men released on 8 June 2015. It's much darker than its debut album, contains about an equal number of wolves but far lesser use of acoustic guitars. The band is famous for connecting their work to their Icelandic roots, with references to fantastical mountains and forests. But this time the band tried to approach for an album which was polar opposite to their sophomore effort in 2011's *My Head is an Animal*. Where *My Head is an Animal* whirls in its playful charm, *Beneath the Skin* goes deeper and takes life more seriously. It would be misleading to say that this

album has a completely different departure. "*Crystals*," the first single from this album is a full-bodied guitar-sluggier featuring *whoa ohs* in a chorus already tailor-made for sing-alongs. "*Human*" is a song that addresses naturalistic wilderness of human and animal behavior, stringing unconnected phrases together in a way that was so infectiously catchy, no one noticed it. One noticeable change is how co-vocalist Nanna Hilmarsdóttir takes away the primary vocal duties from Ragnar Þórhallsson.

Although the two continue to complement each other, Ragnar gets his first chance to lead only by the thundering track five, "*Empire*." Together they appear to have realised that she is the natural candidate to spearhead their return. By the third track, the band collapses into warm harmonies and dappled folk-pop – and, in fact, it's the latter that tug hardest at the heart. "*Hunger*" is a queasy soft-rocker that sees both singers at their respective peaks,

reaching a climactic harmony at the chorus with thundering drums in the background before collapsing into a breathless, calmer tone.

Beneath the Skin's most telling moments centre around Nanna's emotional lyrics, on the track "*Organs*" The band manages to offer an intense moment of clarity through their track with the heartfelt ballad sung by Nanna.

As the piano and string sections come in, it unveils a whole different band that is possible inside the existing Of Monsters And Men. This is, however, an exception and not the norm. After "*Organs*" it felt like Of Monsters and Men could have achieved a more moving record by building up these personal moments rather than the whimsical world their songs inhabit.

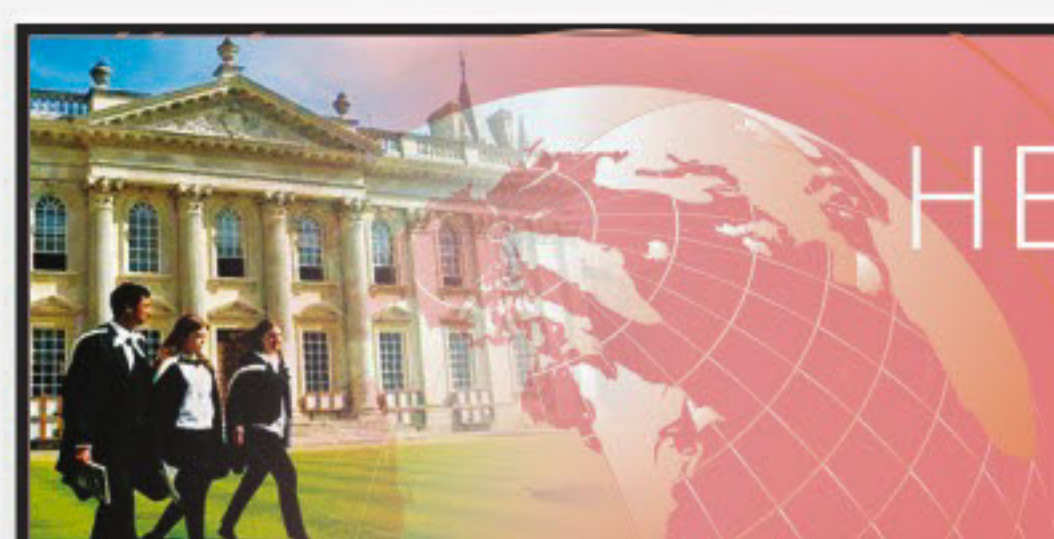
"*Thousand Eyes*" and "*I of the storm*" were other highlights of the album where the band showcases their instrumentation through menacing guitar riffs that keep

pace with an urgent drumbeat creating a thundering soundscape.

Not all is perfect on this band's second run however, it goes without saying that a lot of the band's appeal as a fun-loving, insanely catchy indie-folk band was left temporarily by the shore. *Beneath the Skin* offers lyrics which are tighter, more poetic and speak volumes of a band that have something quite specific to express.

This isn't a feel good record; in fact, it delves into some pretty hefty topics that reward the band for creating something deeply personal and a little self-indulgent. This is probably the reason why by stepping out of their comfort zones, Of Monsters and Men have stepped straight into our hearts.

Nazifa Raidah loves books, movies, creeping people out and singing in the shower. She also checks for monsters under her bed every now and then. Send her your thoughts at nazifa45678@gmail.com




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