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## Album Review: LiTTLe MACHiNe, Madam Life

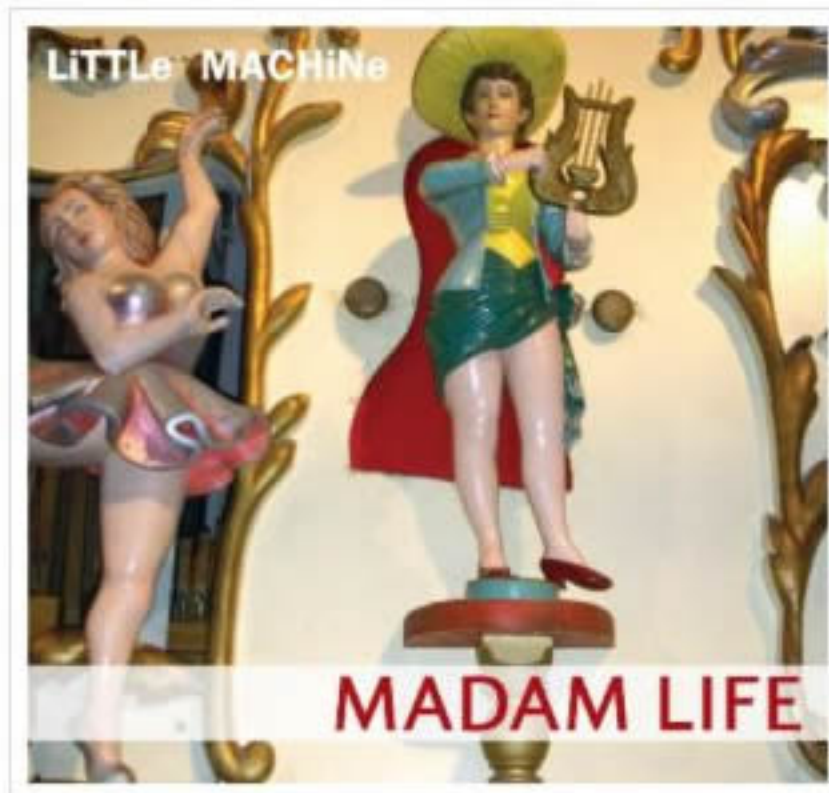
**Ben Browne**

I remember studying Dylan Thomas in school. We watched a video talking about his life and how he continues to be

an inspiration to people. One of these people was a musician who had set Thomas' "Do not go gentle into that good night" to music. It was one of the most god-awful things I'd ever heard and sullied any potential excitement I had for poetry being set to music for a decade or more.

Thank God for Little Machine then, who have done a bang-up job of it with their second album, Madam Life. I'm not really a "music guy", but

just as a backwards farmhand would know whether or not he liked sushi when given some to try, I knows what I likes and I likes this very much.



I'm a lyric man. I really can't get on board with songs that have insanely simplistic lyrics about partying, getting drunk at the club or how good sex is. This is probably why I liked Madam Life. Some of the finest works by amazing writers are here and been given musical twists. I found the album to be a good mix between familiar and unfamiliar poems. Whilst I'd read and studied Donne, Larkin, Thomas and William "Bardcore" Shakespeare, I'd never read "Adam Lay Y'Bounden" which immediately grabbed my attention with its Old English lyrics being coupled with a driving beat and guitar licks. I looked it up after to find out the context and I expect that's Little Machine's goal, to give a fresh spin to famous poems and introduce you to new ones in the most accessible way possible. I guess I have them to blame for getting the line "Deo gracias" stuck in my head as well.

The range of interpretations and tonal takes is impressive. Their version of Shakespeare's "The Rain it Raineth Everyday" for example, plays out like a mix between REM's "Losing My Religion" and a rousing, tankard-swinging singalong melody that wouldn't feel out of place in a Middle Earth tavern. Whereas Larkin's poems "This Be The Verse" and "High Windows" are turned into punk flavoured anthems. I especially liked the fact that the famous first line of "This Be The Verse" (They fuck you up, your mum and dad) is sung by lead singer Wray's daughter. It's an extra level that I think Larkin would have appreciated.

Because I enjoyed the album so much, I was annoyed when I heard that The Poetry Society had all but condemned poetry being put to music, publishing an anti -fun piece saying as much in their newsletter. I really don't understand this mentality. I enjoyed the album partly because of the musicianship and partly because of the lyrics. To have some tit dismiss poetry being set to music outright is irritating. Band member Chris Hardy replied in an e-mail, defending the band, but at the time of writing this piece has not heard back. Hardy made a good point when he drew attention to the fact that "poetry originated in song & religion, and was chanted." bringing up the example of Homer, which used "tune, beat and repetition to keep his improv going over hours in front of whichever King he was getting paid to recall the glories of the tribe in front of." To ignore this is such a frustratingly blinkered view on what makes poetry so good. In my view, poetry isn't just about dry phrases on a page but the inherent rhythms that come with those words. Putting those to music seems like a no-brainer to me.

Anyway, enough about the Poetry Society. Listen to Madam Life. The songs are catchy and give great new interpretations to classic literature. If that doesn't buzz you, do it for the taboo pleasure of listening to something that isn't liked by "the man" and cheer on the underdog.