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## CD: Little Machine – Madam Life

Inventive trio put old poetry to new melodies with impressive results

by [Bruce Dessau](#) | Sunday, 14 October 2012+1 0 Share | [f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [p](#)

Little Machine: even the best poems can benefit from a little light music

Poetry has a habit of colliding with rock'n'roll. Mick Jagger read some Shelley when the Stones played in Hyde Park in 1969. John Cooper Clarke's speedball delivery lit up the late Seventies and helped to inspire comedy poet John Hegley and the ranting punk scene of the Eighties. Let's not forget there was also the cod-Byronic Murray Lachlan Young who, legend has it, signed to EMI for a million-pound advance in 1996, but if he did he hardly shifted the units to justify the cheque. Poetry and rock can clearly be cosy bedfellows, but unmitigated successes are rarer than rhymes for the word "orange".

The latest cross-pollination comes from Little Machine, alias seasoned musicians and versifiers Chris Hardy, Walter Wray and Steve Halliwell. Their wizard wheeze is to take classic works from the likes of [Dylan Thomas](#), John Donne, and some pretentious bozo called Lord Bryon and add their own tunes. Some might say sacrilege, but others disagree. Poet Laureate [Carol Ann Duffy](#) has called them "the most brilliant music and poetry band I've seen in ages". Curiously they frequently remind me of another Duffy – Stephen Duffy in his pastoral Lilac Time incarnation, maybe with a hint of strumming [Mumford](#) – particularly when they lend a folksy tinge to the "Moon and Pleiades" by Sappho and come over more wistful than raging on the definitive Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"

Eisewhere the style varies from the politely gothic on "Madam Life's a Piece in Bloom" (WE Henley) to their positively punky take on Larkin's "This Be The Verse" with Wray's daughter Lily Rae squealing "They fuck you up your mum and dad..." (though clearly not fucking her up that much or she wouldn't be working with dad). The lyrics are obviously sublime, the music is pretty tidy too. The band's name, incidentally, is inspired by The Pixies' refrain "My bone's got a little machine" as well as a line by Scottish poet Don Paterson that "a poem is a little machine for remembering itself". There is certainly plenty here to remember. Roll over Murray Lachlan Young and tell John Hegley the news.

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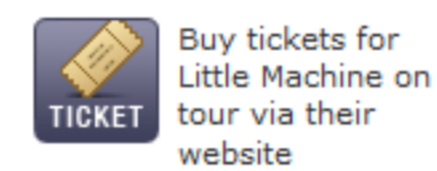
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“The lyrics are obviously sublime, the music is pretty tidy too”

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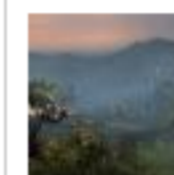
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