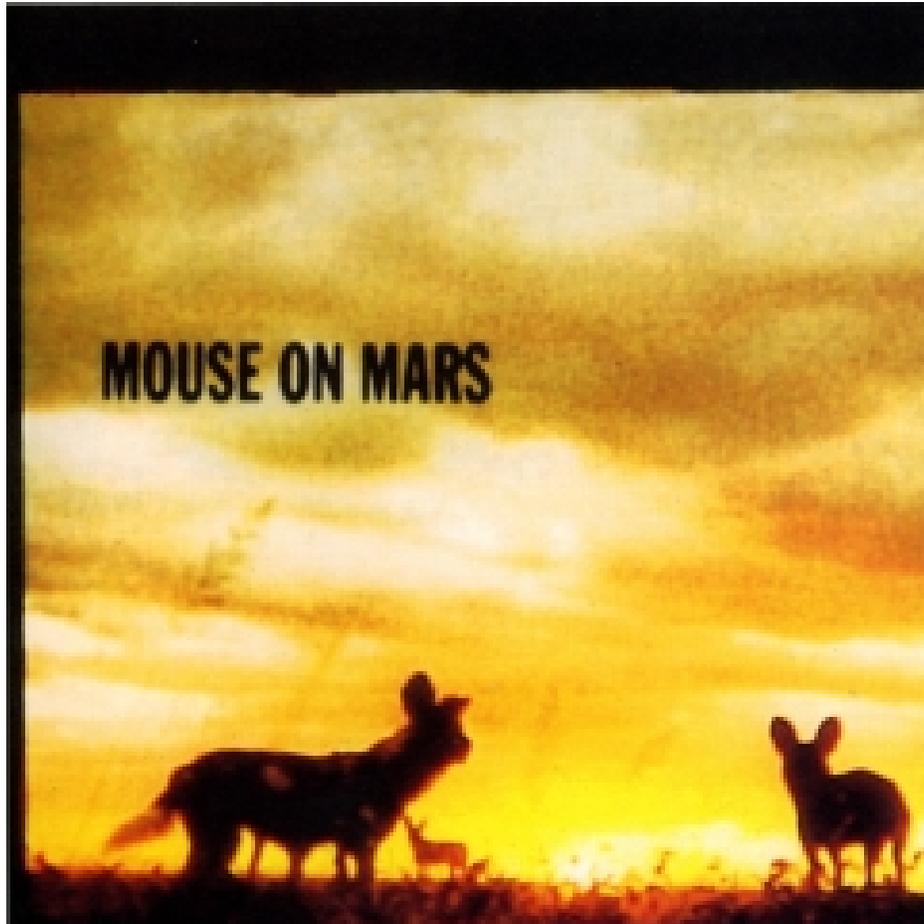


Holy Hell! Glam Turns 20

SC spectrumculture.com/2018/04/03/holy-hell-glam-turns-20

Daniel Bromfield

April 3, 2018



Mouse on Mars' *Glam* is one of the most obstinately difficult of all IDM albums—yet, 20 years after its release, it's one that still invites deep, almost neotenuous love from its devotees. The reviews for the 2003 CD reissue on Thrill Jockey, which cemented its stature, were rapturous. *Rolling Stone* hailed them as geniuses. Kareem Estefan at *Stylus Magazine* described it as “a comprehensive examination of life, one that describes its evolution, searches for meaning as all humans do, and produces beautiful results with the frequency of a thoroughly rewarding life.”

Some praised its experimentalism. Others hailed its emotional power. The common thread was that it was somehow great in spite of itself. “An album that moves you powerfully and consistently, even if it contains nothing you can hold onto, nothing you can be sure about,” said Estefan. Pitchfork's Mark Richardson called *Glam* “an album packed with brilliant but unfinished ideas,” while still giving it a 9.1 and admitting he listened to it almost constantly when it first came out.

The core of the *Glam* mythology is that it was meant to soundtrack a film starring Tony Danza. A tidbit this absurd threatens to overshadow the content of the album, especially given how

little this music sounds like anything you'd expect on a straight-to-DVD vehicle for an ex-boxer. But it makes sense in that this isn't an album that presents itself as a masterpiece. The mixing is often atrocious, and it's tonally inconsistent, veering between starlit ambient and industrial irascibility. It's as scattershot as any soundtrack, yet it's hard to imagine this stuff working with any movie.

Glam is almost ascetic in its resistance to any dramatic cues or moments that make your jaw drop. There's rarely the palpable sense of a puppet master behind the music; more often, it feels like a rusty machine left to run overnight. When these tracks change, it's either so gradually you barely notice (the motorik groove that slowly emerges from the murk of "Funky Tiste") or so suddenly it's scary (the scratching knife-groove breakbeat of opener "Port Dusk"). It often seems to interrupt itself—with a deafening beep, as on "Grindscore," or by bubbling up into the red. The album's only truly visceral moment comes mere minutes from the end, as "Glim" explodes into fireworks.

This isn't an album that invites you in. It lies in wait. It breaks from the popular conception of a magnum opus by being less of a monolithic object than a cloud of mystery. Though it can seem dated at times, especially in its reliance on sensitively rendered approximations of jungle breakbeats, it also seems to be in touch with some vaguely ominous force outside this world, outside of time—something sentient leering through the low-end murk, making itself known through a glint of sine-wave synth on "Funky Tiste" or a distant pad roiling beneath "Tankpark."

Glam challenges the way you respond to it, so what you bring to it is really up to the imagination. This is why it rewards so many more replays than Mouse on Mars albums that come on stronger, like the warped pop album *Radical Connector*, or that are more viscerally rewarding to the ears, like the ambient expanse of *Instrumentals*. Those albums tell you how to respond to them. *Glam* confounds. It doesn't work as a soundtrack, it doesn't work as a rock-LP-style narrative, it doesn't work as ambient music. It's something special—but what? The answer slips further away with each listen, and the mystery becomes only more intoxicating.