

Let's Eat Grandma: I'm All Ears

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One of 2016's most exciting albums was the immersive psych-pop album *I, Gemini*, the debut from teenage British duo Let's Eat Grandma. At the time, they were 16-year-olds who sounded even younger. Some of their songs were written when they were as young as 14. Their whispered voices, whimsical subject matter and Victorian-gothic visual aesthetic made us feel like we were dealing less with prodigies and more with evil twins in a horror movie who spoke their own psychic language. But their talent for creating haunted, pastoral landscapes steeped in dark fairytale imagery was offset by their age-appropriate lack of quality control. It might have been something close to perfect if not for how they seemed to be in love with every single idea.

That hasn't changed on *I'm All Ears*, their second album, except the ideas are a little better than rapping about shiitake mushrooms. Now 19, they seem able to do it all, and they just about have, taking palpable delight in their expanded budget and ability to call up collaborators like Sophie, who produces "Hot Pink." Heavy on shimmering pads and clicks-and-cuts disco beats, this is essentially a synth-pop album. Except there's something about it that's curiously

—maybe not rockist, but it nods to the Album in the classic LP sense, with a shuddering intro that sets gangrenous violins over bone-rattling blats of Hans Zimmer synth bass and not one but two climactic opuses that flirt with the ten-minute mark. Think “Carouselambra” in the club.

One of the band’s biggest strengths is their ability to transmute modern concerns into ancient magic. Appropriate for its digitized sonic aesthetic, *I’m All Ears* is bathed in the sickly glow of smartphones, which are treated not as dystopian messengers of doom but as a fact of life, a way for them to maintain the sometimes-thrilling, sometimes awkward romances that are a major lyrical focus. “*I’ll see you when the screen is vibrating,*” they sing on “It’s Not Just Me”—a lyric that’s simple, sweet, and true. One of the album’s most delightful moments is “Missed Call (1),” which reverses the flow of time by translating a ringtone—or perhaps just the feeling of anxiety at missing a call, perhaps from a parent—into the language of spidery strings.

Like nearly all teenagers, Let’s Eat Grandma present themselves as outsiders and are eager to assert themselves through any power source they can get their hands on. “Cool & Collected,” the first of the two prog epics, is about the simple feeling of wanting to be cool, and though the cry of “*I WISH I WAS YOU!*” might read as melodrama to those who see themselves as above such feelings, it packs a punch precisely through its bluntness. Who hasn’t had those exact same five words flash through their head? On “Hot Pink,” they lament not being taken seriously enough by a paramour before finding power through an intervention of “hot pink”—a color long derided for its associations with women, here representing a channeling of the divine feminine.

And on “Falling Into Me,” which manages to cram a dizzying number of sections and parts and diversions and distractions into six minutes while still feeling like a streamlined club banger, it’s their own heads. “*I paved the backstreets with the mists of my brain,*” they sing over a miasma of synth pad that opens up a miniature ambient space within this Tetris-tight pop song. It’s a great image, bringing to mind those quiet moments late at night in the city where you seem to have total control over your environment. It’s also a fantastic summation of the album itself, which feels like the architecture of the two band members’ minds splattered directly onto wax.