



## Merry Hell: Head Full Of Magic, Shoes Full Of Rain – album review

Posted on May 17, 2013 by [Paul Ariss](#)



**Merry Hell – Head Full Of Magic, Shoes Full Of Rain (Mrs Casey Records)  
CD**

**Available now**

**Can Merry Hell overcome second album syndrome and deliver the goods again? Paul Ariss listens in and thinks they can.**

Second Album Syndrome is often cited as a cruel trick played on the creative will of those following up a near perfect debut release, brought upon not by the exposure of a talent punching above its weight, but by the pressures of expectation. The musical equivalent of erectile dysfunction if you will.

[Merry Hell](#) clearly hold no sway with such shenanigans. After announcing themselves as the new heavyweights on the folk n rock block with last years Blink and You Miss It, an album strutting with confidence and belief backed by big fistful melodies and compassionate, wry humoured lyrics, the band seamlessly follow on without even a hint of breaking stride.

The opening Loving The Skin You're In, a plea for the abandonment of living up to a media created body ideal trips in with a playful, impish banjo intro before the rest of

the band gate crash in with joyful intent. By the time you're halfway through the opening verse of the following Dreaming Of The Time you're already a believer.

Where Head Full Of Magic, Shoes Full Of Rain differs is as a more folk conscious offering than its predecessor. This is of course where Merry Hell's soul resides, and is probably no better illustrated than on Virginia Kettle's Let's Not Have A Morning After ('Til We've Had A Night Before), featuring a certain folk luminary Dave Swarbrick on fiddle.

Virginia continues to emerge as a beautifully astute observer of the oddities and eccentricities of human behaviour, and wraps her observations in gentle, memorable melodies and crowd pleasing choruses, perfectly illustrated on Bury Me Naked and Build A Mansion. Penning eight of the thirteen new songs on the album, her diversity is demonstrated on more biting themes hidden in the stomping verse and dance inducing rhythmic chorus of Let The Music Speak For Itself, and in the humorous tale of male sexual frustration in My Finest Hour.

Her ability to synch both character and narrative together best however is on arguably the albums standout track Emerald Green, a song of war written from the perspective of both the soldier at battle and the wife at home, each independently sharing the same memories of each other and their longing to once again dance their lives as one. An ageless theme, and a song which courageously avoids a neat ending to either joy or disaster.

Andrew Kettle tenderly trades dual vocals on the song, and throughout the new material shows greater vocal dexterity than ever before, demonstrated particularly well on Bob Kettles aforementioned Dreaming..., and on John Kettles Roseanna, Let Me In. And an added bonus for the band is that keyboardist Lee Goulding continues to grow in confidence as a songsmith, where any writing credits in a band blessed with such skilled composers is validation in itself.

Backed by the rock steady foundation of Andrew Dawson on bass and Andy Jones on drums Merry Hell feel like an outfit fully formed and with an identity separate from any previous incarnation. Curious then to feel the need to end the album with a strongly identifiable Tansads track Iron Man. But that's a minor personal question mark on an otherwise highly enjoyable release from a band who continue to delight and grow with a real and encouraging substance.

Buy this or have a thoroughly empty summer with rain sodden shoes and no magic in your head.

Merry Hell can be found at their [website](#) and at their [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [MySpace](#) pages.

All words by Paul Ariss. More work by Paul on Louder Than War can be found [here](#).

- See more at: <http://louderthanwar.com/merry-hell-head-full-of-magic-shoes-full-of-rain-album-review/#sthash.eeANokz4.dpuf>