

JUSTICE - †

OUT NOW ON DOWNTOWN / ED BANGER / VICE

No one can say they didn't see these two brats coming! Justice, who's name the world (well at least that part of the world that loves to dance) chants with emotion and whose first album is awaited with bated breath ever since the French duo revolutionised dancefloors with two radically different hits. First, the housey and uplifting "Never Be Alone" which plunged clubbers into full on hedonism. Then, two years later, the striking and screeching "Waters of Nazareth" that brought darkness onto clubs worldwide with its glitchy rhythms and sombre mood.

Xavier de Rosnay and Gaspard Augé met three years ago and were both raised in the suburbs of Paris. Xavier was studying graphic design and Gaspard designed flyers. Xavier had been playing bass and guitar in dated disco bands and Gaspard played drums in average rock bands. Xavier is a chatter box, Gaspard is quiet. A month after they met, with the help of a groovebox and a sampler, they came-up with two tracks. The first, a tribute to the Buggles, ended-up on an obscure compilation and was quickly forgotten. The second, which contained vocal samples from "Never Be Alone" by the British electro act Simian, ended-up being heard by Pedro Winter, a rather fortunate turn of events. Pedro is an important figure in the French Touch scene as both manager of Daft Punk and boss of the label Ed Banger Records through which he was trying to give a new lease of life to the concept of the French Touch that had become oh so drab by being over copied by producers the world over. At that time Pedro was looking for a B side for his label's second release, a remix of DJ Mehdi by Château Flight. Ed Banger Records signed Justice and the test pressings went out to the world's top DJs. The response was so positive that the track went from a being a B side to the A side. "Never Be Alone" was licensed by Gigolo, DJ Hell's label, and that's when the Brits got a hold of it. 50,000 copies were sold and the track ruled dancefloors for three years and announced Justice's noisy entrance into the history of dance music. Boosted by their sudden popularity, they were booked to DJ across the planet and did remix after remix, applying their sense of Justice to Britney Spears, Franz Ferdinand, Soulwax, Scenario Rock, NERD and many more... with a surprising sense of appreciation towards the original melodies and the would be rules applied in dance music.

Cut to 2005. Instead of capitalising on their sudden success and doing a "Never Be Alone" mark two, which would have assured them a healthy retirement at the top of the charts, the duo tones it down and, running the risk of rubbing everyone the wrong way, come-up with "Waters of Nazareth". Where "Never Be Alone" was luminous, limpid joyous and pop, "Waters of Nazareth" throws the dancefloor into obscurity, upturning rhythms, popping eardrums and giving-in to the innocent pleasure of brutality that injected a much needed breath of fresh air into the electro scene.

Retreating to their underground post-nuclear shelter/studio, exiting only on weekends to shatter clubbers' eardrums, Gaspard and Xavier have been working on their first album as if their lives depended on it. The result has exceeded all expectations, a wonderful twelve track album which opens with "Genesis". A dark baroque beginning that introduces a mind fuck of an album that proves that Justice's unique talent is to be found where least expected. Take for example "Let There Be Light" and its strident angry electro driven by a jabbing bassline, "D.A.N.C.E", a pure piece of vicious house

sang innocently by a choir of children, “Newjack” a funky parody of the opulent times of the French Touch. “Phantom I” that takes over where “Waters of Nazareth” left off to drift towards “Phantom II” and its head-swirling disco violins. “Valentine”, an erotic melancholic nursery rhyme, like a tribute to Vladimir Cosma and “The Party” a pure electro funk track where the sexy Uffie plays more than ever the cheeky Lolita. “DVNO”, a lesson to anyone trying to fuse electro with rock. “Stress”, a hectic race that would drive the Chemical Brothers insane with jealousy. Or the finale, “One Minute to Midnight”, a parallel to the “Genesis” opening, which closes the album beautifully.

As children of the French Touch, Justice are throwing the established rules out the window (the notion of good and bad taste, the thin line between underground and pop music, the pigeon hole labelling between rock and electro, etc...) and have a fantastic talent for synthesising and mixing their influences with total candour, be it the cosmic disco of Larry Levan or Vladimir Cosma’s party wetting romantics, Camel’s prog rock or the anxious theme of The Goblins for Dario Argento, the flashy funk of the Brothers Johnson or ABC by the Jackson 5, in a very personal and inimitable manner. Its evocative strength and striking power commands respect.

It comes as no surprise that «†», the first album by Justice, is a fantastic treat for the ears and for the feet. A kind of musical opera marked with religious and baroque symbols, where the melodies are ripped to shreds by the beats, where electro teaches rock a lesson and where pop gets a botox injection. Rarely in the history of French house music has a first album lived up so well to expectancies.

But the best thing about this great Justice swindle is that not only did they manage to create an immediately recognisable sound, they also dodged the pitfalls of the first album. «†» isn’t a collection of random dancefloor singles. «†» doesn’t accumulate 12 noisy offsprings of “Waters of Nazareth”. «†» is never what is expected. «†» is like an album of compartments where the tracks spill over into others, like when the bass from « D.A.N.C.E » comes to die out on “Phantom II”. «†» is for listening at home or in clubs. «†» is a link between pop at it’s purest and experimental music. «†» brings together hardcore elements and cheese. «†» makes the Goths link arms with the fluo kids... Thus be it.

A generational manifest, ideally positioned on the side of the dancefloor, «†», insolent with youth, is a testimony that the French electro scene is healthier than ever. Justice first.

† (Downtown/Vice/Ed Banger)