

REVIEW

Arcade Fire's *Neon Bible* at #1 in Canada

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Reporter

Well, it grew on me. And thank god it did; I was worried for a bit.

When I heard, a few days before the March 6 release, that Arcade Fire was mere moments away from another full-length album being out, I was excited. Giddy even. The Montreal based outfit's first CD, *Funeral*, was huge. Huge. In every way. The music was huge, the impact was huge, and the slowly building ripples stemming from Lower Canada were starting to make waves. Huge ones.

It was with excitement and fear that I first heard the low rumble that opens the CD. Fear, of course, of it not living up to the excitement. The first track, "Black Mirror," lent more to the fear than the excitement. The music was big, it was important, it could have been the orchestral soundtrack for any epic tale - but I was concerned that the vocal melodies and the lyrics weren't pulling their weight (although I appreciate both official languages sneaking in). And this was to be the first single! I shivered, tucked morosely in the fetal position in the corner of my room as the track faded.

However - and you knew this, because I gave it all away in the first sentence ("Well, it grew on me" if you don't recall) - the second track took things up a notch. Then the third, the title track, "Neon Bible." I regained faith. But I wasn't sold yet.

As the album played on, the music stayed, as I said, big. Really big. Hell, almost too big. Arcade Fire is a seven-piece band on the worst of days, and they recruited a pipe organ, a choir and an orchestra to put *Neon Bible* together at points.

Maybe it's simply the ambition of the music that set the bar too high; we'll never know.

Regardless, playing out in the foreground was a constant string of similar rhyming schemes and vocals that couldn't inspire me. Maybe, if not the music, it was *Funeral* that set my standards impossibly high. I was waiting for a "Rebellion (Lies)" or even a "Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels)" and never quite getting there. Perhaps it was the lack of parentheses in their track listing that came up short.

Fortunately, as track bled into track and my second listen into my third, I stopped dissecting the vocals, started getting into things and most importantly, found myself skipping back to "Intervention" and "The Well and the Lighthouse" every now and again.

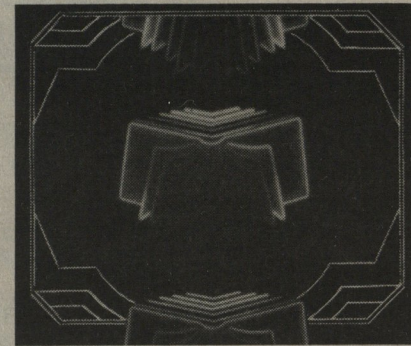
Any other band, if they recorded any one of *Neon Bible's* songs, would have

been seen as their attempt at an anthem. The subject matter, angle and delivery that this album is laden, almost riddled, maybe even inundated with is pure ambition. And Arcade Fire does, in the end, come admirably close to nailing it - close enough, consistently enough, to maintain their status as one of Canada's most important bands.

That doesn't mean that I don't still

have some regrets. I would have liked to have seen at least a track or two that I wouldn't be able to resist playing to death. The sheer stunning quality of Arcade Fire, in this case, is layered almost evenly over 11 tracks. It's great to see that Arcade Fire is deservedly currently at #1 in Canada and #2 in the U.S.

Don't take this album, or this band, lightly.



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