**Dralms / press bio 2016**

Since 2010, Vancouver artist Christopher Smith had carved a notable space in his native Canada for his exquisitely rendered, emotionally bold music, over the course of two solo albums. In a great leap forward, he’s now fronting the five-piece Dralms, which is making inroads overseas with European shows and now a towering debut album.

*Shook* is defined by its hypnotic, rich and simmering heart of darkness, its contents are as provocatively elusive as the band’s name, yet there are lyrical clues to draw you in. Beneath the music’s deceptively unruffled and dreamy exterior are viscous eddies, which can turn into dangerous riptides when the tension is unleashed. This dichotomy is exemplary in Dralms’ recent 12" single ‘Pillars And Pyre,’ which Clash described as “a contagious, thrilling fare with a unique melodic sense.” Debut single 'Crushed Pleats' is another case of gorgeous rippling lows escalating into a stormy coda.

“The process has been a natural transition,” Smith ventures. Personnel-wise, Dralms wasn’t a big leap, as Smith was already working with drummer Shaunn Thomas Watt and bassist Peter Carruthers (of Siskiyou), and keyboardist William Kendrick (of Failing) in a live capacity. But as the quartet honed Smith’s solo songs (drawn from 2012’s *Earning Keep*) on stage, they transported them to a different place, playing with greater clout, complexity and shades of darkness. *Shook*’s sound has been further enhanced with electronic beats and programming from Andy Dixon (of Secret Mommy), and engineering and co-production by John Raham.

*Earning Keep* fans will recognise earlier versions of ‘Pillars And Pyre’ and ‘Gang Of Pricks’ while one of its linking vignettes has been expanded to become the title track, ‘Shook.’

There are moments of slowly uncoiling grace and precision, such as with ‘Usage,’ the opening track, and ‘Wholly Present’, but there is a newly minted pop acumen at work too, in the rock/beats interface and relative buoyancy of ‘Objects Of Affection’ and ‘My Heart Is In The Right Place’.

The sound of Dralms, says Smith, “is an assemblage of different inspirations. But it’s hard articulating what the influences are.” That Dralms’ only recorded cover is a version of Fever Ray’s ‘If I Had A Heart’ might provide some insight. In search of comparisons, reviewers have referenced the likes of Talk Talk, Radiohead, The Antlers, Pink Floyd and Spiritualized, but they can only hint at the indeterminable quality Dralms can have. The band’s own name, Smith ventures, might have to suffice alone. “I just stumbled on it, I can’t even remember how. It kind of sounds half way between a drug and a classical composer. But I like band names that just feel right and don’t necessarily have a message - especially since this project will evolve, rather than something direct and literal that you’re stuck with.”

The same indirect approach underlines some of Smith’s song titles and lyrical themes; it’s about creating images as well as personal references for the singer. “I don’t want to be outspoken about things,” he says. “I prefer to write about heavier subjects by tucking them away in metaphors and analogies.”

 “The title *Shook* comes out of what I was going through during the making of the album. There’s a lot of dialogue around power and control, in a personal sense, like between two people romantically involved, but as well as in other facets of life. *Shook* is kind of that moment when everything changes. Where you hold on to what’s true to you for dear life, or let it all crumble, accept it, pick up the pieces and move on”

Smith visits these topics in different ways throughout the album such as in ‘Domino House.’ The name of that track comes from an open-floor design template from Swiss-French architect and modernist pioneer Le Corbusier. “I was thinking about how early modernists strived to change the world with design ideals, to create pure, utopian societies. Which I compare with personal sentiments, and how the core foundation and structure of relationships might ultimately be what makes them impossible.”

Smith admits that numerous *Shook* songs address relationships, with ‘Crushed Pleats’ and ‘Division Of Labour’ inspired by the same romantic parting as ‘Domino House.’ There are moments in these songs that explore the darkest currents of emotional upheaval, from “*if my heart had its will / kill kill kill,*” from ‘Divisions Of Labour,’ to the epic couplet, “*Ain't I a lucky boy / Tremble and retch, insufferable joy,*” from ‘Crushed Pleats.’

‘Pillars And Pyre’ considers contradictions in bigger social structures, like the church and state, and where there might be connections and corruptions between the two. Which may shed some light on the ‘Pillars & Pyre’ video where Smith, who conceived and directed the video, created a singular portrait of a black metal drummer, sporting those potentially eye-gouging gauntlets, thrashing and sweating, drawn out in a dreamy slo-mo. “I like the idea of using juxtaposition, to create new feelings, and to subvert common thought.”

Power and control, tension and release, heavy dialogue (sample bites: *“oh my better half / you cum and plaster crumbles to the floor*” in ‘Shook’, “*I piss blood oh, my cells even flee me / milk to bone in the hope that they keep me*” in ‘Usage’) and a soft landing – *Shook* is a world of emotions and extremes, a compelling and seductive missive, that might reveal itself to be one of this year’s most unique.

ends