**BOSTON MANOR – DATURA BIO**

*Datura*, the new Boston Manor full-length, pushes the limits and stretches the boundaries of the band more than ever before, musically, lyrically, thematically and conceptually. The five-piece – vocalist Henry Cox, lead guitarist Mike Cunniff, rhythm guitarist Ash Wilson, bassist Dan Cunniff and drummer Jordan Pugh – have been firmly building their sonic and thematic identity in recent years. 2018’s *Welcome To The Neighbourhood* was set in a fictionalised version of their hometown of Blackpool, while 2020’s *GLUE* was a powerful reflection of a broken world filtered through Cox’s own cathartic thoughts about and experiences in it. Both albums shifted the needle in terms of Boston Manor’s sound, incorporating synths into their framework and a heavy focus on atmosphere. Coming off the back of last year’s *Desperate Times, Desperate Pleasures* EP, *Datura* takes all that one step further. The first of two parts, this set of songs exists in the dim light between dusk and dawn. It’s a record you don’t just merely listen to, but one – from the moment the sinister opening strains of first song ‘Datura ( dusk )’ begin – you actually inhabit and experience. It’s a record that envelops you, drags you into the dark shadows, leaves you cold, breathless, paranoid.

“We always take the visual aspect of our music seriously,” explains Cox, “and we worked especially hard on that with this record. It all takes place over one night and everything is very neon-lit and shadowy and dark and a little bit noir, and that’s what we were sonically trying to reference a lot of the time. We wanted to expand on the worldbuilding we did with *Welcome To The Neighborhood*, because we felt like that created like a place for the band to exist in. So we really took care and time with these songs to create the perfect gritty, noirish, dark vibe. ‘Nighttime’ is written in big capital letters for this record.”

Although that atmosphere is an extension of what the band have so expertly created before, it’s also the direct and indirect product of what’s happened since *GLUE* came out. Released just a couple of months into the pandemic, there was obviously no real opportunity to tour it at the time. And while there was ample time to write, Boston Manor didn’t do much of that for almost a year. When they finally felt inspired again, the result was *Desperate Times, Desperate Pleasures*, recorded in Brixton with Larry Hibbitt, the Hundred Reasons guitarist/vocalist-turned-producer. So enamoured were the band with that experience that they decided to make *Datura* there with him, too.

“We didn’t really do any writing for almost all of 2020,” says Mike Cunniff, “and that gave us a bit of a reset. Through working with Larry, we found what we felt was the most concentrated essence of Boston Manor. The EP was the perfect jumping off point, and we wanted to carry on doing more of that. It feels a lot more refined – we wanted fewer songs so that we could be a lot more intentional.”

Because Hibbitt’s studio is in London, the band were able to travel there on a regular basis. They started working on the album as soon as they finished *Desperate Times,* *Desperate Pleasures* and recorded it in a few sessions over a period of about six months. “It meant we were able to sit with the tracks,” continues Cunniff, “and make notes or revisions, figure out what the songs are trying to say. We’ve often been a little scared to put pen to paper because we put a lot of pressure on ourselves. There’s a lot to think about – like what an album is going to do for us or what it means – but we’ve never felt more comfortable. These songs were an absolute pleasure to write and record.”

“It was an absolute riot,” chimes in Cox. “Having that luxury of breaking up the recording process a little bit – like doing two weeks, going away on the road and playing shows, and then coming back to record again – allowed us to reflect on the songs, then go back and change what needed to be changed. We were able to figure out how to make the record that we wanted to make.”

They made more than a record, though. They created a universe. That smouldering, ominous title track bleeds into ‘Floodlights On The Square’, a song of despair that reaches anthemic proportions, but which also contains some widescreen, John Carpenter-esque flourishes. The darkness, literally and metaphorically, continues with both ‘Foxglove’ – the album’s crunching, catchy first single, released back in April – and the intense and unrestrained burst of ‘Passenger’, a song that’s both hopeful and energetic but also on the verge of emotional collapse. By comparison, ‘Crocus’ starts off slowly, but builds with intention and energy, before fading out and then into the eerie, rain-laced cyber-punk instrumental ‘Shelter From The Rain’. It might not be a traditional Boston Manor song, but it’s an essential component of this album, and one which takes heavy influence from the video game and movie soundtracks that the members of the band adore.

“Beyond a few on *Welcome To The Neighbourhood,* we haven’t really done many interludes per se,” says Cox. “But I’ve always enjoyed them. This one illustrates how it’s like 4am at that point. It evokes loneliness and despair, but with a small sense of hope in it that things will get better – that the rain will stop and the sun will rise. It brings the listener in and makes them feel like the protagonist within the story. They’re part of what’s happening on the record and can fully immerse themselves into the world we’ve created. And that then takes you into ‘Inertia’, which kind of closes the record. That’s a love song, but it’s about hope for the future as well.”

It only “kind of closes” the record because there’s actually a hidden track after it, one which starts as a future-dystopian instrumental, but which then gives way unexpectedly to birdsong and the break of dawn. That snaps you immediately out of the bleak environment and mood you’ve just been submerged in, one inspired by Cox drinking too much during the height of the pandemic and the dark nights and darker mornings that followed.

“I want people to connect with the themes of this album,” he says. “Not so much in terms of it being so specific to me – although I hope they appreciate the vulnerability in it – but with the view that they can project their own life story onto it. At its core, this is an album about somebody struggling to get control of their life and pull themselves up. I think a lot of people can relate to that, especially in the times that we’re living in at the moment. So as much as I was writing about my problems, I hope people can find solace in it.”

Most of that solace, however, will be found in that second part, once the harrowing night of *Datura* is over. But even though nothing tangible about that second part exists yet, both Cox and Cunniff are incredibly excited about it. “There are going to be musical motifs and nuances on that record that reference this one,” says Cunniff. “We’ve thrown Easter eggs into this record, breadcrumb trails that you can follow that take you to what will be the next record. It’s all hiding in plain sight. We’ve meticulously thought this whole project out, more than anything we’ve done before.”

“It’s definitely the most ambitious record we’ve made,” adds Cox. “But it’s also been a comfortable record. We’ve been very sure about every creative decision we’ve made. Everybody’s been on the same page from the jump, everybody knows the album that we’re making, so even though it’s the most ambitious record, it’s also the most confident we’ve ever sounded musically.”