

Isochronous: leaving time behind - " Piece By Piece"

 By [Johann M. Smith](#)

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The saying: "When America coughs, Britain catches a cold," can be extended to "and South Africa kaks it out". What's referred to as "influences" everywhere else, we often call "that place "they" stole it from." Seether and Nirvana. Fokkof and Alkaline Trio. The Plastics and The Strokes. Be a purist, call it postmodern trite, or blame it on Tweak for overdoing anything by Tom Delonge. It's the skeleton in the closet we drag on the wings of progress. And it's no different with Isochronous, who either love or detest a band called Mew.

According to horology (the science and art of time), a point of balance is "isochronous" when frequency is independent of its completeness. Ironical? Perhaps. I am not so sure, what say you? It's a brain teaser that's as nerdy as the musical abilities of Isochronous, who now have a fourth album to add to their legacy. Entitled "Piece By Piece", it can be described as a 21st-century makeover.



Image by Sean Brand



Sashaying synthesised melodies

In a nutshell, the four-piece band have replaced the "rock" (in rock 'n' roll) with digital desks delivering sashaying synthesised melodies, and dropped the "chronous" to become Iso - translated it means "equal" (or "the same" if you're at all jealous and the Afrikaans translation of "box"). If anything, here's what Iso would like you to know most of all: other than mastering by Lapdust chief Rogan Kelsey, this is their first album they've done completely by themselves. To which they claim: "We believe this is without a doubt our best record yet!"

Nonetheless, what [Madchester](#) is to Britain, Iso is to Pretoria - quintessential indie that's as influential (and inbred) as Fokkoff is in Bellville. They're often labelled as "Kidofdoom with a vocalist", mainly because front man Richard Brokensha co-founded both bands. But Iso is mostly appreciated for what he's managed each time: technicality that trumps three chords, but that's as catchy and easy to hum. But going electro means adding more sugar and with a sweet voice you often end up with condensed milk cupcakes, or in their case, the instant recipe to make Postal Service.

Varying throughout

Fortunately, Richard has dropped the American "R" present in their first and most recognised single, Beauty Queen. Opening track No Fire is a tasteful start to their digital debut: it slowly welcomes their new-found synthetic drone with familiar Isochronous characteristics. But the result is varying throughout. Case and point with follow-up track Give Me A Reason: it ignites instantly with an 80s' Nintendo melody - the kind used to rile-up nerves during a boss stage - and suddenly sort of stops to bounce out Maroon 5 funk, only to jump back into the final alien-war zone on cartridge favourite Contra.

Another example, Count The Hours' (track 11): delightfully resembles The Wild Eyes' Vampire Radio, both vocally and rhythmically, with plodding drums. But lo and behold, morphs and epically bursts into an Adam Lambert drum 'n' bass pop moment complete with reappearing lo-fi Julian Casablanca vocals that rise through the distance.

But then there's something like Everytime (track 7): pure melodic pop, a simple singalong that's powerful and more than the sum of its parts - it comes like a much-needed sorbet cleansing any possibility of a pungent syrupy aftertaste. Even more so with Heaven (track 5), that's simply put: Iso and epic synths on a Biblical scale, real montage-end-of-movie stuff. It's also one of two songs with short reprise tracks on the album (the other being No Fire, track 4).

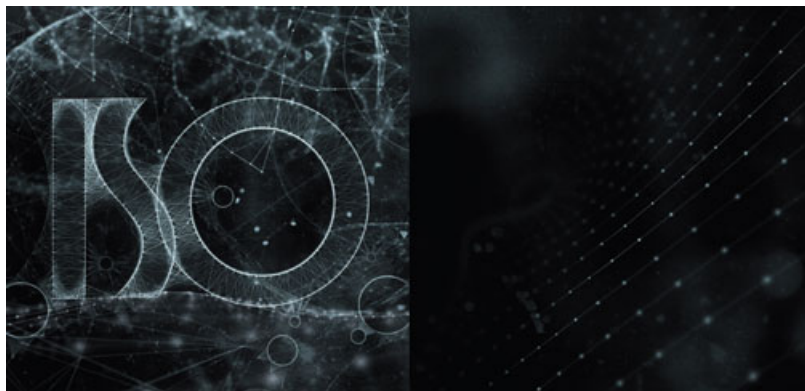
The best

Heaven Reprise (track 9) is still the best - the name already says what you need to know: it's a divine confidence restorer and an opportunity to take a short nicotine breather. A grand piano starts with gentle keys that give way to heavy baritone

minor notes, and that's it. The orchestral magic only lasts for a minute and 12 seconds. Ultimately proving that godliness is reached only through simplicity.

However, what we expect from Iso (always have and always will), is the possibility of creating the new. Unfortunately the old still sounds better. And here they've given it a good bash. Better than most who spelled out their doom by going against the grain and allowing a machine to substitute for the task of human souls. If it hurts to listen to, then don't; at the very least call it a concept album.

On the contrary, a closer inspection of the album artwork (a commendable piece of design by Louis Minaar, of a stark starry night sky that spells out "Iso") might dig up the reminder of a similar album, New Holland's 2009 electro-indie crossover album "Exploded Views". Lest we forget ...



But then again, Iso is not just another indie band that deserves an E for Effort but gets scored a triple F for Forgettable Fickle Failure. They are musicians over and above anything. This won't be their last and it certainly won't be their best - they are, however, on the right path, the one they still need to invent. Here's to wishing them luck in becoming pioneers and treading that fine line between utter kak and profound genius.

isochronous.net

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Johann MSmith is a music journalist turned content hacker. Known as the IDMMAG launch designer, Johann specialises in entertainment, travel and social commentary. Or as he puts it: "I speak as and for companies through social and design."
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