

ALBUM REVIEW

Versatile shoegazer stares a little too long at his shoes



ANDY BELL
Pinball Wanderer

★★★★★

/ SONIC CATHEDRAL
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Interesting collaborations can't rescue an album lost in a haze

BY **NICOLAJ ROOS** / PHOTO: PEROU, PRESS PHOTO
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It's gotta be a bit of a drag being named Andy Bell. A quick Google search brings up almost nothing but results about Erasure. But that's not the Andy Bell we're dealing with here. Pinball Wanderer has little to do with synthpop and instead draws its primary DNA from indie and shoegaze.

This Andy Bell is a guitarist, bassist, and songwriter who co-founded the shoegaze band Ride, which gained some recognition—mainly in their native UK. They were signed to Creation Records, also home to My Bloody Valentine, and later Oasis and Scottish artist Dot Allison (with whom Bell has collaborated multiple times). Despite limited mainstream exposure, Andy Bell has managed to run with some pretty big names. In the late '90s, he joined Oasis as bassist, and when the band split in 2009, he co-founded Beady Eye with the remaining members (including Liam Gallagher). For trivia points, he also produced Swedish band Weeping Willows.

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Pinball Wanderer leans heavily into shoegaze and slacker indie, with some electronic elements. Andy Bell takes his time—most of the tracks are built around a semi-stoned groove in the same vein as The Verve and The Stone Roses. Fittingly, nearly all of the track titles are written in lowercase. That same low-key approach permeates the music: understated and laid-back. The album is self-produced and includes features from vocalist Dot Allison and Neu! guitarist Michael Rother.

Andy's vocals have a distinctly '90s shoegaze character—hazy, slightly detached, and buried fairly deep in the mix, making the lyrics hard to catch (not that this reviewer minds). If anything, that's part of the genre's charm.

Several tracks take a jammed, improvisational approach. The crisp guitars sound like they're running straight into the board—a texture The Jesus & Mary Chain (and later The Raveonettes) mastered on their early releases.

"Madder Lake Deep" is one of the more successful tracks, with hazy guitars and effects that give it a near-Cocteau Twins vibe.

"Apple Green Ufo" stands out with a runtime of over eight minutes, though it leans perhaps a little too obviously into Stone Roses territory.

True to form, the title track "Pinball Wanderer" is laced with '60s references and could easily pass for a lost Verve demo. Conversely, synths and drum machines play a more prominent—and welcome—role on "The Notes You Never Hear," which hints at early Jean-Michel Jarre. The album also includes "I'm in Love...", a cover of "I'm in Love with a German Film Star," a 1981 minor hit for The Passions—this time with added guitar from Michael Rother.

I appreciate both the genre and the overall diversity of the record. But it also has a prevailing druggy quality. Maybe it's just me—I've never been much into weed or downers—but *Pinball Wanderer* may be a touch too sedate to truly resonate.

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