

= Astraea (album) =

Astraea is the third studio album by British mathcore band Rolo Tomassi . It was released on 5 November 2012 in the United Kingdom through Destination Moon , the band 's own record label . In interviews , the band described the composition of the album as being much more accessible and direct than their previous albums , while retaining the technical and experimental elements of their typical sound . The album was produced by Jason Sanderson , the producer of Rolo Tomassi 's first album *Hysterics* . This is the band 's first release with Chris Cayford and Nathan Fairweather in their line @-@ up after the departure of Joseph Thorpe and Joe Nicholson .

The album was recorded in various locations across Nottingham , United Kingdom including James Spence 's house and The Bodega club night venue . This was because the band 's producer , Sanderson had come into contractual issues with the land owner of his recording studio . The album was critically acclaimed , praised for both its increased accessibility , sonic development and the increased use of Eva Spence 's singing . However , the album performed poorly commercially , failing to chart or make significant sales in upon its release .

= = Background = =

Rolo Tomassi only completed one short tour of the United Kingdom in 2011 . They spent all the year preparing for their new album and the creation of Destination Moon , the band 's own record label . They released a compilation CD , *Eternal Youth* , in mid @-@ 2011 to compile selected works from their numerous split EPs , demos and out @-@ of @-@ print extended plays . When asked about leaving Hassle to form their own record label , the band stated " We were questioning what we were doing for our label that we couldn 't do ourselves . We 've always been very proactive with the running of our band and we 've never given away much freedom . " The band announced in early February 2012 that both Joseph Thorpe and Joe Nicholson had left the band . This was because Joe Nicholson wanted to read chemistry at university , while Thorpe 's reasons were related to personal differences . The band replaced both with Chris Cayford , who is the current frontman and former guitarist of No Coast , and Nathan Fairweather , who plays in Brontide , making this the first release with the new line @-@ up .

The title of the album has been cited as having several origins . Some have suggested it gets its name from the Greek goddess of justice Astraea . Another possibility is ASTRAEA , (Autonomous Systems Technology Related Airborne Evaluation & Assessment) an acronym for the development of British unmanned aerial vehicle . The album 's title acted as a reference to the Spence siblings ' admiration for greek mythology and a desire to pick an title that made the album " sound big and like this proper body of work " . James Spence described Astraea and the band 's previous album *Cosmology* as being " really grand titles " .

= = Writing and recording = =

Writing for the album started as early as July 2011 . James Spence also had stated that in that period the band have at least two songs written with the lyrics being self @-@ reflective , a common theme for the band 's music . Around this time as well , Rolo Tomassi expressed interest in working with Anthony Gonzalez or Kurt Ballou respectively of M83 and Converge as producers for the third album . However at the time insufficient progress had been made for them to search for producers . James Spence had said that with this record he wished to experiment with shoegaze , " dreamy keyboard [s] " and utilising more melodic passages . Spence has also commented that " quite progressive synth @-@ based music " such as M83 and the horror film soundtracks *Goblin* have produced acted as influences .

Because all the members were working their band schedule round their jobs they had to practice in basic recording rooms and write and record their own ideas . From this the members listened to each other 's ideas and gave their interpretations and evaluations . Synthesiser player James felt the band produced their best work with this method as they were constantly assessing themselves .

In the writing of previous albums by Rolo Tomassi a majority of the music was written by James and Eva Spence wrote most of the lyrics . For *Astraea* , the band treated it as a collaboration between all five members ; however James and Cayford were the " main brains " . In January 2012 , in an interview with Kerrang ! , Eva Spence confirmed that the band are self @-@ producing their third full @-@ length with Hysterics producer Jason Sanderson . The choice of returning to Sanderson was because he has been a close friend of the band members for a long time . Regarding the sound of the album , she stated that it will be " more direct and heavier " , but also noted that the band " will never shy away from being experimental " . However , James Spence went on record saying that during the actual production of the album the band did not consider themselves as part of the overall production ; rather just having a say in every aspect of the album progress . In April 2012 , the NME did a studio update with on the album with James Spence stating that the band 's writing was " 70 % complete " . He credited how the new members Chris and Nathan " breathed new life " into the band 's writing as the original three members had become " too set in their ways " . The band members have commented that this has made the writing a lot more fun as the band no longer writes a song then learns it . As the band wrote *Astraea* they decided to contrast with their typical style more with the clean and ethereal parts , which led to an increase of Eva 's singing .

They started recording *Astraea* in June at James Spence 's house in Nottingham . They were forced into this situation as Sanderson 's recording studio was taken from him through a contractual issue on the building with the landlord . The recording process was different from previous albums as there was a lot of production and pre @-@ production involved . Sanderson would come to the practice sessions of the bands and make suggestions to the songs and then they would go to record it . The album took three months to record because of band member 's personal commitments , this to James Spence had a positive effect as the members took their time with the music , believing the album was more ? produced ? than previous efforts . James believed Rolo Tomassi had much more of an opportunity to experiment in the studio and try things they had never tried before . However , James had commented that the recording of the album in his house revealed to be a stressful decision . An example of this was were his basement- where all the recording equipment was- flooded due to heavy rainfall . Although nothing got damaged , stagnant water remained and they had to move the guitar cab to his bedroom . They recorded the drums upstairs at The Bodega in Nottingham then Rolo Tomassi then went to James and Eva Spence 's parents house record the vocals , keyboard and pianos .

= = Musical style = =

Much like the band 's previous work *Astraea* is considered primarily as mathcore . This is displayed in the theoretical complexity of their music , such as odd time signatures like 9 / 13 , polyrhythmic drumming and use of dynamics , akin to bands such as Converge , Radiohead and Sigur Rós . Their sound is seen as a " stylistic schism " between " Dillinger Escape Plan @-@ esque tech @-@ metalcore , grandstanding prog rock and modish synthesised pop " and fusing aesthetics from shoegaze , space rock , ambient , black metal , hardcore punk , jazz , pop , progressive rock and techno . The band is noted for their two vocalists who utilise both screaming and singing vocals , and the album is described as featuring more ' clean vocals ' than previous albums . The band 's vocal diversity is said to : " immediately creates a rich and textured sonic world " . Eva has been seen as pushing her vocals " further than ever before , displaying extremity , contrasted with canorous beauty " , with her singing voice being compared to the dream pop stylings of Grimes and Cocteau Twins . When Eva Spence has been asked about the album 's musical approach , is much more ' hard @-@ hitting ' and ' more direct ' than previous albums . She was quoted saying that the album is much more accessible than their previous albums : " You can get your teeth into it much quicker , people who didn 't have patience before with our music before will be into this record . It 's still technical , but we 're using the mathy bits more sparingly . "

The album opens out with ' Howl ' , a grinding , but graceful opener . The song starts with an opening two minutes of intense and spacious drone synthesisers . The following two minutes of the song break into " unrelenting and brutal " mathcore with Eva Spence making her vocal debut with

her " gleefully guttural vocal register " . The song is used as an example of how the band is using more complex , but ' more rewarding ' song structures in their music . ? Ex Luna Scientia ? , the opening single for the album is seen as a more expansive and more melodic song in comparison to their previous work , placing emphasis on Eva Spence ' s singing rather than her trademark ' guttural ' style . Rock Sound reviewer Oliver Robertson used the song as an example for the sonic development of the album as it is " more focused on making each element stand out now , rather than creating simply a cacophony of noise . " The introduction to ' Empiresk ' is seen as being " completely caked in reverb " and ends with a stoner riff . The " sparse piano chords " that open both ' Empiresk ' and ' Prelude II ' , among the atmospheric breaks that are featured on other tracks on the album defy the aggression featured on the rest of Astraea . Songs like ' The Scales of Balance ' , ' Remancer ' and ' Gloam ' are seen as having a familiar style to the Rolo Tomassi ' s previous work . ' Gloam ' , specifically the last half of the song , showcases a " battle between melodic keyboard [s] and screamed vocals with a real sense of urgency and threat . " ' Remancer ' specifically has been considered as almost like Mastodon . The album closes with ' Illuminare ' , a song which Metal Hammer reviewer Merlin Alderslade cites as showing Radiohead and Sigur Rós influences .

Lyrically , Eva Spence credited on how the Astraea was a lot more positive than their previous material due to having time off between tours and being able to relax in the writing process . " I feel happier than I have done in the past few years . I 'm seeing things in a positive light and I hope the lyrics will be more uplifting " In an interview with James Spence about the early writing process and how the lyrics have an essence of self @-@ reflection as a common theme in the band ' s work , " it 's not something people normally look at or focus on ; self @-@ reflection as a theme , but if you ignore what 's happening to you and how it 's making you think about things then I don 't think that 's good . "

= = Release and promotion = =

In early February 2012 , Rolo Tomassi announced the release of a new single : ' Old Mystics ' . ' Old Mystics ' and its B @-@ side ' Mesmerizer ' was written by synthesiser play James Spence in the earliest stages of the Astraea ' s writing , in late 2011 . The single was uploaded to the band ' s Facebook profile to stream for free . They released the single on 26 March . The band announced a few days after releasing " Old Mystics " for streaming that it will most likely not appear on the new album and will just be a stand @-@ alone single as they felt the two songs did not fit onto Astraea . Rolo Tomassi completed their first tour of the year as the main support for Architects on a 14 @-@ date UK tour in April . They used this tour to promote their new single ' Old Mystics ' as well as debut other unrecorded new material from the album , such as songs ' Howl ' and ' Remancer ' . Rolo Tomassi ' s presence on the tour was met with positive reception ; however , reviewers believed the band ' s music was too aggressive and chaotic for fans of Architects . Tim Sewell when writing for The Courier Online said that : " it was apparent that much of the crowd (mostly Architects fans) were left a little confused by singer / shewolf Eva Spence , who flung herself about in front of them screaming . "

The album ' s release date was delayed several times . Kerrang ! magazine initially announced that Astraea was expected to be released in May . But by April the album was then declared as being released in October . On 16 August 2012 , the band issued both the track listing for the album its title , Astraea and unveiled its British release date as 5 November . Before the Astraea ' s release , they completed an October tour of Britain with support from Oathbreaker and Goodtime Boys and then went on to support the album in Europe in November 2012 which , as a tour was 24 shows in 26 days . One music video and one single spawned out of the release of Astraea . The single was ' Ex Luna Scientia ' which was released in September 2012 . The music video was for ' Howl ' and was released in early March 2013 .

The aims of Astraea , in James Spence ' s mind , was to help reach parts of the world they 've been unable to tour , like North America and South @-@ east Asia as well as desiring to tour and support the album all of 2013 . The band learned their studio output was not as easy to re @-@ create live as it was with previous albums . An example was with the song ' Gloam ' as the pedal changes were

too rapid for live performances .

The band completed a small British tour in January 2013 , but in May that year Rolo Tomassi completed another short British tour with Bastions , the band was noted for only costing five pound a ticket for all venues . They picked Bastions as they were aware of them because of their mutual relationship with Holy Roar Records and how their bassist played in Crocus , a band which has played with Rolo Tomassi in the past . Rolo Tomassi 's decision of making the shows of the tour only cost five pound was questioned by interviewer Samantha Booth when writing for The National Student , James replied saying it was for the sake of encouraging people to come see them and because of the high prices of concert tickets . The band has hinted that their touring schedule would go " further afield " than Europe . In September Rolo Tomassi performed on three out of the four dates of the Japanese touring festival Reverberation Festival . In September and October , starting just three days after their Japanese performances Rolo Tomassi completed 13 date tour of Australia with Australian bands Totally Unicorn and Stockades . It is the first time the band has been in the country since 2010 .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical reception = = =

The album received critical acclaim from popular critics . BBC issued a very much favourable review of the album as writer Noel Gardner praised Rolo Tomassi as remaining a " remarkably singular band " three albums into their career . Drowned In Sound writer Pieter Macmillan commented positively on their use of vocals on the album saying " having male and female vocals and the ability to switch from singing to screaming and back again immediately creates a rich and textured sonic world if it ? s done well , as it certainly is here . "

The Fly magazine gave the album a four out of five star rating summarising the album as " blissed @-@ out ecstasy " . New Musical Express writer Barry Nicolson gave the album an 8 out of 10 and drew parallels between the album titles name , being derived from the Greek goddess of justice by concluding his review with " If there is any justice in the world , here ? s an album richly deserving of some . " Metal Hammer reviewers praised the album for its increase in ' clean vocals ' and less disjointed song writing but still being heavy .

John Doran of online magazine The Quietus gave the album a glowing review expecting it to appear in his publications end of year lists , describing it in summary as a triumph : " Rolo Tomassi are miles ahead of the game not just because they are constantly trying to break new ground but also because they have entered a nuclear arms race of progressiveness with their own back catalogue . " Oliver Robertson when writing for Rock Sound magazine gave the album a 7 out of 10 and started his review by praising the band saying " deviating little from the blueprint while making some of the finest mathcore albums of the past few years " . Considering the album as a sign of Rolo Tomassi maturing as a band .

= = = Accolades = = =

The album earned numerous best @-@ of lists in 2012 . Appearing on Rock Sounds top 50 at 47 , The Quietus at number 62 out of 75 , Kerrang ! scored the album at 35 out of 101 and Ourzone at number 22 out of 25

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

Rolo Tomassi

Eva Spence ? lead vocals
James Spence ? synthesizer , vocals
Edward Dutton ? drums
Chris Cayford ? lead guitar
Nathan Fairweather ? bass guitar
Additional personnel
Jason Sanderson ? production