

## **Jefferson Sixty-Six**

We must not let ourselves as listeners fetishise the outré and inaccessible, though it is a popular prejudice, and there are reasons why. If we are offended by the vapidness of music defamed as “easy listening”, it ought to serve as a reminder of the peculiar virtues of artists like Norah Jones or Carole King (and Mozart too) who combine ease of listening with some serious musicianship. For ease of listening, of itself, can be no bad thing, yet the very notion of it raises petty snobbery in the best of us. Jefferson Sixty-Six alas exemplify the reasons why.

Jefferson are led by pianist/vocalist Anna Ditchburn and supported well on drums, synths and occasional guitars and things. Ditchburn can certainly sing, and the band is slickly produced, but it is all frustratingly cautious – not even commercial, that would be excusable – just self-consciously bland.

There is a cloying niceness to this music, something unintended perhaps, but unavowed. The lyrics generally aim to dredge the depths of US Southern life, as a matter of policy, which suggests the lack of a willingness on the part of the musicians to engage with their own emotional and narrative experience, otherwise known as maturity. The suggestion exists elsewhere: it's all so clean and warm in the end it makes selling your “body on the street” sound quite appealing. And a line like “I ain't got a reason why” clearly enunciated in a soft RP accent just feels embarrassing.

The piano's harmonies are cheerfully triadic, the singer's intonation is squeaky-clean. We are not in Alabama; this soundscape was conceived in the soft rolling living rooms of Home Counties England, and wanting of imagination, there it shall stay.

I am sure Jefferson Sixty-Six will do very well. There is a great market for blandness like this, but I can hardly recommend it. Music can be both accessible and engaging, but you have to try a lot harder than this. This is dimmer switch music, prozac for the soul, and we shouldn't take it without a fight. Reader, please: rage, rage against the dimming of the light.

**David Walter Hall**