

## **Darren Hayes - 'This Delicate Thing We've Made'**

### **Album Review by Alan Bennett Ilagan**

*From the pop pinnacle of his Savage Garden heyday, Darren Hayes has charted his own stellar path through the musical universe, culminating in a new double-album of potent pop electronica and trademark ballads.*

A true artist creates for the sake of creating. It's not based on a desire for commercial success or attention. When faced with the pressure and constrictions of a desperate record label, sometimes it's best to let go and do it all yourself. That's just what Darren Hayes did with his latest creation, 'This Delicate Thing We've Made', a double-album that he wrote and produced, and then released on his own record label, Powdered Sugar.

The new set showcases an edgy electronica imbued with gorgeous melodies, based on a rolling emotional plane, and grounded with a hungry search for truth. Hayes ponders time and space on this ambitious effort that aims for the epic (and largely succeeds) in a project grand in scope and drama. At the center of it all is that voice, which can go from a breathy coo to a high-throttled wail, at times becoming part of the futuristic blips and beeps but never losing its mesmerizing tenderness.

Along with his voice, there is something else that appears on every song here: a Fairlight CMI from 1982. The synthesizer (purchased on eBay) lends an interesting 80's electro-pop sheen to the proceedings, and though it would seem at odds with the earnest songs Hayes has written, the combination works. That talent at crafting a solid piece of pop music has been finely honed here, a talent that first surfaced in the 90's with his part in Australian pop band Savage Garden. Hayes returns, with slightly better results, to the treacly power balladry of those Savage Garden days on tracks like "Sing To Me" and "The Only One", but here they work in a less-polished, not-overproduced way.

He sounds deliberately (and convincingly) like Prince on "Me Myself and (I)" and "Bombs Up in My Face", even if the silly funk of the latter gets lost amid the political muck of the lyrics. His messages find greater resonance when backed with acoustic

simplicity and hand-clapping harmonies as found on “The Great Big Disconnect”, the closing track of the first album.

The collection is at its best when Hayes drops some of the distracting disco flourishes and focuses on the delicacy of this delicate thing he’s made, as when he is carefully crooning the heartbreaking wonder and hopefulness of “Who Would Have Thought?” or slipping effortlessly into a soaring falsetto on a driving anthem like “On the Verge of Something Wonderful.”

Indeed, when things turn delicate on the last half of the second album in gems like “I Just Want You To Love Me” and the sublime “Words”, Hayes’ vocal renderings turn what could have been tired clichés into surprisingly moving moments, transcending the pop of his past and transforming into glorious, shimmering sonic art.

Hayes still has a tendency to get too wordy at times, yet it doesn’t detract too much from the music, and may actually signal a welcome challenge for listeners accustomed to the grammatically-challenged vapid lyrics of today’s pop music.

The expanse of a two-disc set offers substantial space for all of Hayes’ aural wanderings, and for the most part he manages to make the voyage an exciting one. Like many double-albums, this one could use some fine-tuned editing, (an argument might be made that selecting the strongest tracks would have produced a nearly perfect single album), but that may be missing the point, and part of the journey. That trip finally comes together on closing track “The Tuning of Violins” which combines the computer-effects of the present with the classical flourishes of violins - a perfectly-mixed alchemy of past and future, bringing the entire project to melodious culmination.

With ‘This Delicate Thing We’ve Made’, Hayes has conjured a compelling future soundscape, another world and another dimension where artistic expression is gratefully valued, and an emotional journey finds meaning and understanding in the words and melodies of an earnest singer-songwriter.