

Testa Rosa

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Latest Flame Records – August 7

Betty Blexrud-Strigens – Vox/Guitar/Keys
Damian Strigens – Guitar/Drums/Bass/B.Vox
Paul Hancock – Bass/Piano/Guitar/B.Vox

Rock stars, they ain't. Testa Rosa do everything backwards: Practices at 8 AM on weekends, more players at live shows than in the studio, Christmas songs on summer releases, and most importantly, they reach much further back than most for their musical influences. Their humility and unaffectedness are what makes Testa Rosa excellent.

Betty Blexrud-Strigens, Paul Hancock, and Damian Strigens formed Testa Rosa after the break-up of Milwaukee's The Mustn'ts in 2005. The trio's music is some hybrid of Motown, Dusty Springfield, The Sundays, Cocteau Twins, and more; the best of female-fronted pop groups are captured on this album. Betty is the primary songwriter but most often works in collaboration with Paul and Damian. Because they are her words, you can hear the honesty in Betty's voice and in her playing. Paul and Damian are irrefragable as well, creating superior and gorgeous music on drums, piano, bass, and guitar.

The opener on *Testa Rosa*, "Ollie and Delilah," could have easily been written in 1962, but Testa Rosa play it up-tempo, weave in their own touches (even recording a version in German for the album, courtesy of Hancock's translation) and create a tune that'll give a girl a chill down her spine. Beyond just words and music, the themes on this album reinforce its richness: "Arms of a Tree," is a haunting piece with echoing vocals apropos of the subject matter; the song is about a man who builds a home for a bride who never shows up. The pregnant "Weather Underground" is about a girl who leaves a life of privilege for a life as a revolutionary in hiding, only to realize she is still bored.

As veterans of the rock scene (Damian was even the recipient of a late night phone call from Wesley Willis to ask if he liked his rock n roll music), Testa Rosa have put all of their experience and understanding of music on this debut self-titled album, which is due August 7 on Latest Flame Records. You can catch them live on tour this fall as they hit the Midwest and East Coast, and they will also be opening for Mary Timony in June.



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Photo by Darin Zdziarski



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