

# Empire! Empire! (I Was A Lonely Estate) - What It Takes To Move Forward

by: Eric Loose

Sunny Day Real Estate started the race strong with their early 90's releases Diary and LP2. Generously bringing a distinct sound to the table with their heart-wrenching lyrics, compassionate vocal, and climactic, melancholy guitar lines, the genre of



“Midwestern-emo” was formed. Mineral, The Promise Ring, and the like completed their leg of the race with fervor, adding their own take on the sound. Elsewhere, American Football was softening this distinct aesthetic, but managing to keep this particular team in the race with their pretty, delicate sound and emotional lyrics that related pretty directly to Sunny Day. Please excuse the excessive name-dropping, but Empire! Empire! (I Was A Lonely Estate) and their new release What It Takes To Move Forward is directly relevant to these past experiments into the Midwestern-emo, 90's sound. While it's tempting to call Empire! Empire! a derivative of the aforementioned in the sense of

a child, a nephew to Sunny Day Real Estate perhaps, that doesn't seem to be the case. The similarities are striking, and Empire! Empire!'s greatest strength to many is sure to be called their foremost weakness to others- intentionally or not, there is an undeniable lack of progression from Empire!'s predecessors to What It Takes To Move Forward.

Phew, it feels much better to get that little blemish out of the way. Despite this minor flaw, it's hard to find much else to complain about within What It Takes To Move Forward. From “How To Make Love Stay” to “An Idea Is A Greater Monument Than A Cathedral,” WITTMF performs a delicate balancing act of remaining enthralling, intense, and heartfelt all at once. Pretty melodies and daunting build-ups plague this record, and taken at face value WITTMF is an incredibly solid record. The main attraction has to be the impeccable vocal work by Keith Latinen. Layered vocals and his dynamic soft-loud

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singing reaches incredible feats, just take a listen to “Rally the Troops!...” An intimate experience in itself, every song tells a small, sorrowful story that gives a little glimpse into the psyche of this soon-to-be-not obscure band. Stops and starts, rises and falls, Keith’s voice complements the absolutely gorgeous harmonies perfectly. “It flew out of your mouth, ‘you can drive me anywhere- just drive me anywhere but here.’ Tonight, the length of your neck is a lonely parapet; you are armed to the teeth and looking for a fight,” Keith begins, in short breaths and gasps.

The songwriting is incredibly detailed and elaborate, creating a unique experience. Commonly, it seems as if artists write their lines in broad fashion as to help the listener generate a personal connection. On WITTMF, an opposite method is used, but the effect is much greater. The intricate, personal short stories in every song about love and heartbreak, mostly, add up to an entire experience that you’re dying to absorb, to feel closer to. Even if you don’t find yourself caught up in the little stories, be sure to heed the gems along this journey like, “And already i can't remember the heart was ever aware that the body it kept alive was wearing out, was shutting down, and tonight, when it realized, you gave up, it cried out, ‘Only now, i realize i always knew,” on “An Idea Is A Greater Monument Than A Cathedral.”

Sound a bit pretentious? well, it is. Of course, the song length and unnecessarily long titles at work here are sure to dissuade some new listeners from enjoying this, but it’s definitely their loss. Through repeat listens, it becomes easy to see that not a second on What It Takes To Move Forward is wasteful or unimportant. Much like every facet of the record, it feels as if every piece of every song is an important part at work, all eventually adding up to the larger aesthetic at work here on WITTMF. Don’t let the so-called pretension, whether it’s in the titles, song lengths, or the emotional lyrics, turn you off, WITTMF is certainly an experience to behold.

Engrossing as it is, What It Takes To Move Forward is also a very easy listen. Perhaps it’s the variety on here that facilitates this, but it’s not a record any listener is going to have to “force” themselves to like before they “get” it. The first two tracks, for

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instance, go from a slow burning, soft, emotional listen (“How To Make Love Stay”) to a driving forceful song (“Keep What You Have Built Up Here”) that takes so many dips and turns in both a sense of vocals and melodies that it’s easy to become disoriented. Every song is very dynamic and lively (i.e. “Everything Is Connected”), refusing to get stuck in a rut.

There’s a bit of an indescribable quality at work here, much to Empire! Empire!’s advantage. While every piece of the music can be skillful and competent, rarely does it ever feel as natural and apposite as on What It Takes To Move Forward. The songwriting, the vocals, the guitar work and driving percussion, all of it adds up to a larger, greater aesthetic that’s so rarely achieved so early in a band’s career. Take it however you like, as a progression on the Midwestern-emo sound, simply as a lovable record with beautiful harmonies and movements, or even as a display of great emo vocals and lyrics. But no matter how you take it, What It Takes To Move Forward is a superb record that adds a new leg of interesting material to the race that Sunny Day Real Estate began.

Recommended Tracks:

Keep What You...

Rally the Troops...

An Idea Is A Greater Monument...

Overall Grade: 94% A