



THE SISTERS CASADY FIND THEMSELVES IN THE HOUSE OF THEIR DREAMS THROUGH MUSIC

Sierra and Bianca Casady have the same gracefully shaped eyes, the same faint line of hair on the upper lip, the same thin, straight nose. They both favor coffee with honey and half-and-half, which they swear makes the coffee taste like caramel. They are rarely out of each other's company.

Yet for all their present-day closeness, the two sisters who make up CocoRosie — the band's moniker is a combination of two childhood nicknames — once severed ties with one another. Bianca was 10 at the time; Sierra, 12. They can barely remember the reasons anymore. Something about strong personalities, being too different from one another, an acceptance that "we just *were not* friends." They were not on speaking terms again until fall 2002, when Bianca found herself in Paris and called her sister, who was then studying opera at a French conservatory.

"I didn't plan on staying with her," Bianca says, sipping on honeyed coffee in a café in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. "I don't know what happened."

"It was fate," Sierra fills in.

"We started having a good time and I just stayed," Bianca finishes.

In the eight months that the Casady sisters spent in Sierra's tiny Paris apartment, they started making music together for the first time and wound up recording an album, *La Maison De Mon Rêve*, for Touch & Go. Their retelling of how their collaboration began is itself a musical duet of sorts.

SIERRA: We didn't talk about it at all. It was completely ...

BIANCA: But there was that one day ...

S: ... natural.

B: ... that we made a tape, we just recorded a tape on a tape recorder.

S: We hit the "record" button and we did about 12 songs.

B: And we wanted each song to be really distinct from the one before, but there was no planning.

S: We weren't allowed to talk about it. It was like ...

B: And we were drinking ...

S: ... the heat of the moment ...

B: ... champagne ...

S: ... popping champagne bottles all day long.

B: Then I brought home a four-track the next day, and that was it. The album just took two months. It was two solid months of recording in the bathtub, and we did some recording in the south of France.

The resulting songs are plain and wistful, rendered in simple guitar pluckings, blips from electronic toys, thumb pianos, miniature harps, and dripping rainwater. Traditional American musical forms — lullabies, blues, silvery music boxes — are filtered through a gothic sensibility, and the lyrics juxtapose childish prattle and sardonic twists.

The sisters' fragile, sinewy voices court Billie Holiday in one song, Portishead the next.

Bianca and Sierra now share an apartment in Williamsburg's scrappy south side, performing frequently around New York and planning a spring tour that will take them around the United States and Europe. Yet the move to live performance wasn't easy at first. "We didn't know any of our songs when we booked our first show," Bianca says. "We worked really hard, like 18 hours a day. ..."

"... To memorize songs and learn how to perform them," Sierra continues, helping herself to a bite of her sister's chocolate-chip cookie.

"She was whipping me into classical shape, teaching me how to sing. It was almost miserable, so many delirious hours."

Sierra shrugs: all the work was worthwhile, of course. Nobody even needs to say it. — Sara Marcus

The story goes that after years of estrangement, the Casady sisters (Sierra and Bianca) reunited in Paris and concocted *La Maison de Mon Reve* (The House of My Dream). And what a dream it is. CocoRosie mess with meter and measure to create creepy and bewitching soundscapes. Blending trip-hop, jazz and blues loosely led by guitar, piano, flute and weird, ambient sounds (chains, roosters, toys), the duo use their siren voices for sociopolitical rabble-raising. In "Jesus Loves Me," they brazenly channel what sounds like an old black man: "Jesus loves me/But not my wife/Not my nigger friends/Or their nigger lives" (is that the sound of church-collection coins at the end of the song?) And they pull off their own strain of Billie Holiday's "Ain't Nobody's Business" with "By Your Side": "I'd wear your black eyes/Bake you apple pies . . . All I want is to die a housewife." No matter how much living has separated these siblings, it's clear they both still draw outside the lines to fantastic effect. (ROBIN AIGNER)

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COCOROSIE LA MAISON DE MON RÊVE

TOUCH AND GO TG253 CD

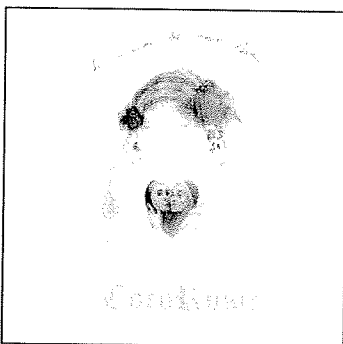
BY MIA CLARKE

Brooklyn duo CocoRosie were recently described by their record label as "tiny field mice singing gospel" and indeed, on tracks such as "By Your Side", sisters Bianca and Sierra Cassady flex their soprano ranges to dizzying extents that border on the comical. Sierra has a background in opera, having studied in Rome, New York and Paris. Bianca has been writing songs since childhood, but the two never collaborated when they were young. Indeed they had broken all contact until a spontaneous meeting in Paris led to eight months sharing a flat in Montmartre, writing and recording *La Maison De Mon Rêve*.

The opening "Terrible Angels" is an intriguing vocal duet supported by Sierra's tenderly plucked acoustic guitar. The lack of a rhythm instrument causes tempos to flutter and the vocals to occasionally slip out of sync with each other. But these small glitches confirm the music's organic quality. Religious issues are addressed, though

tracks such as "Jesus Loves Me" and "Good Friday" sound like they have just as much to do with shaking off the itchy furs of childhood.

With its the inner sleeve photographs of the sisters in pink hairnets, smothered in lip gloss and too much jewellery, its utterly bizarre vocal stylings and Bianca's use of a gold chain belt as a percussive instrument, *La Maison De Mon Rêve* is undeniably peculiar. That CocoRosie's path crosses with a punk rock label like Touch And Go is odder still, but these contradictions only add to the album's allure and bittersweet charm.



CocoRosie
La Maison de Mon Reve
Touch and Go, 2004



CoCoRosie is two eccentric sisters with a taste for banging pots and pans, cheap drum loops, cheaper guitar plucking, and a lot of love for Billie Holiday. This is an album full of what Tom Waits has called "that crumbling beauty" - the street beauty of the wandering woman who praises her own independence while singing the saddest, loneliest love songs to the man who threw her out. The crash of junkyard melodies, swampland field recordings, and feminine mysteries are likely going to make it strangely difficult for CocoRosie to attract listeners, but those of us who get hooked to the brilliant, sleepy-headed poetics and alienated sexuality of CocoRosie aren't going to easily forget this tremendous debut album.

Lee Henderson
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