

# M83

## *Before the Dawn Heals Us*

Release date: 25 January 2005

*Before the Dawn Heals Us* is the third album from **M83** and essentially the brainchild of **Anthony Gonzalez**, who resides in the seaside town of Antibes, France. Like its two predecessors – the eponymous debut (Gooom, 2001) and its follow up, *Dead Cities, Red Seas & Lost Ghosts* (Mute, July 2004) – it's a huge and epic attempt to use music to transport its audience well beyond their immediate environment. This is a sound that is deliberately colossal like the galaxy the band is named for and a sound that is as likely to recall **Mussorgsky** as **Mogwai**. It soars effortlessly of the ties that bind it to everyday existence and evokes a sense of freedom that can usually only be found in drugs, sex or – for the more pure – meditation. What makes it all the more astonishing is that **M83** have found a way of doing this that hasn't really been tried before.

In the wave of bands that followed **Mogwai** (who themselves were hardly the first to provide epic soundscapes in which their audience could lose themselves) it was the guitar that was king, swathes of effects-laden noise creating an aural opiate haze for rock fans. Across town you could find fans of dance music indulging in similar activities, except that they were losing themselves in machine and pill induced trances. **M83** are arguably the first band to successfully cross that divide, using the kinds of cheap synthesisers that propelled dance music alongside the guitars that they grew up with as fans of **Sonic Youth** and **My Bloody Valentine**. As the influential US website **Pitchforkmedia.com** succinctly summarized of **M83**, “the sounds that have constituted some of the most vapid, hedonistic, and forgettable music of our time have now returned to make us cry.”

If *Dead Cities...* made that reviewer weep *Before the Dawn Heals Us* could have serious consequences for his/her mental health, because it takes the **M83** template and magnifies it tenfold, with the added bonus that the album was unconstrained by the technological shortcomings that previously held the band back. For the first time, Anthony and a variety of other musicians recorded much of the music live. Vocals also play a considerably more significant part than on previous outings, which have been essentially instrumental albums into which vocal samples occasionally and expressively intrude.

What emerges throughout this hour long trip is a fearlessly ambitious work that is free of cynicism and capable of evoking an infinite range of emotions throughout its fifteen tracks. It's the kind of album that sometimes recalls other significant artists, but fleetingly, like fireworks at night that burst open and then disperse silently. You'll still hear **My Bloody Valentine** – a frequent and pleasant comparison even if Anthony never claimed it – but you'll also hear **Can** and **Tangerine Dream**. At times the ghost of **Brian Eno** drifts by or one is reminded of **Vangelis**' memorable *Blade Runner* soundtrack. **Trevor Horn**'s immense production values for many of the albums on ZTT come to mind on occasions, even,

unapologetically, '70s soft and progressive rock. But the cumulative effect of all the different ingredients which subliminally suffuse the **M83** sound is never derivative. Instead such a diverse range of influences enriches their music and the result is something that truly sounds like no one else.

Like *Dead Cities...*, *Before the Dawn Heals Us* contains a number of immediately striking tracks, most notably its first single "**Don't Save Us From The Flames**," a stridently optimistic and uplifting anthem that seems to feature a rogue theremin at its heart, as well as the trademark **M83** sound and beatific choral backing vocals. The elliptically titled "**\*\***" features a cacophony of abrasive e-bowed guitars that drop out dramatically and unexpectedly early on but regain their momentum until they seem relentless. "**Teen Angst**" metamorphoses from its stuttering introduction to a dreamlike ecstasy, before "**A Guitar And A Heart**" – a title that seems to encapsulate **M83** in many ways – and the ten and a half minute "**Lower Your Highlights To Die With The Sun**" bring the album to a close that would overwhelm the most dramatic of Hollywood blockbusters.

But interspersed amongst these dramatic, almost celestial bursts lie more cerebral, peaceful moments like the gorgeous "**Safe**," which floats on a bed of piano, or "**In The Cold I'm Standing**," in which synthesised sounds of almost tubular purity wash across space. "**Let Men Burn Stars**" is almost visually illustrated with the sound of fireworks exploding in the background. "**Farewell/Goodbye**," meanwhile, betrays the band's French roots with a shamelessly sentimental arrangement that recalls soundtrack composer **Francis Lai** (*Bilitis*, *Emmanuelle*). It's not all ethereal rapture, however: the use of spoken word monologues is especially effective at adding atmosphere to certain tracks, most notably the opening "**Moonchild**" and the disturbing "**Car Chase Terror !**" Written by Anthony's brother **Yann Gonzalez** and recorded by American theatre actress **Kate Moran**, these vignettes were inspired by the sci-fi and horror movies that have fascinated the two brothers since their childhood and add yet another dimension to their cinematic soundscapes.

Since the recording of *Dead Cities...*, **M83** have achieved significant acclaim from both the media and the public at large, most notably in their homeland of France, the UK – where their debut show took place at the legendary Victoria & Albert Museum – and most recently North America, where they sold out New York's Bowery Ballroom and LA's Knitting Factory, as well as performing two shows in one night in Chicago when demand for tickets became overwhelming. The album sold considerable amounts there on import until it received an official release in the summer of 2004 from Mute North America. The current line up of **M83** continues to be based around **Anthony Gonzalez**, but **Nicolas Fromageau** – who collaborated with **Gonzalez** on **M83**'s first two albums – has left to pursue his own musical projects (also due for release on Goom). *Before the Dawn Heals Us* was recorded largely by multi-instrumentalist **Gonzalez** himself, with only bass and drum duties handled by others.

Although **Gonzalez** makes no secret of his admiration for **Fromageau**, especially his skills as a guitarist, it's clear that the freedom he found in the studio working alone released a rush of creativity that has resulted in **M83**'s most complete work to date. Fusing different technologies in dramatic fashion, whilst never losing sight of the human warmth that engages us emotionally, this music can be whatever you allow it to be.

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A permanent touring line up for **M83** has now been assembled and undertook its first dates in the US in September 2004: Anthony Gonzalez (guitar, keyboards) / Loïc Maurin (drums) / Stephane Bouvier (bass) / Philippe Thiphaine (guitar)

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