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Passion Pit: On the Right Track

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Fresh off the release of the critically-acclaimed second LP, indie-pop royalty Passion Pit brings the dance-ready sound of Gossamer to the stage.

Bro’d out druggies snorted unidentifiable powders from tin cans and were guided to another world by Michael Angelakos’ soaring voice and band of bouncing synths. The sweat weighed down Angelakos’ Greek mop of curls and turned his shirt a deeper shade of purple as he amped the sea of hands a few thousand deep. Then relatively under the radar, Passion Pit made its Lollapalooza debut in an easily overlooked afternoon slot on a side stage with an unmastered EP and freshly released label full-length under its belt.

Two years down the road much has changed: Angelakos’ ‘do has been cut and cropped, a massive pink backdrop of the band’s latest album’s artwork decorates the main stage in Grant Park, and the sea of hands grew to include more than 60,000 individuals despite the band’s uncertain fate merely weeks earlier.

“It was kind of crazy because that came right after our cancellations and we weren’t really sure how we were going to be received,” keyboardist Ian Hultquist says, referring to the band’s return to the stage after abruptly canceling a string of July shows on its 2012 national tour.

Along with the cancellations came a widely-publicized explanation: Frontman Angelakos had been battling bipolar disorder and was committed to a hospital to get help.

“As his friend I’ve gone through the ups and downs with him for almost half a decade already; It’s just kind of another part of the story,” Hultquist says. Despite the then-faltering fate of the tour, the band is back on track and moving ahead at full speed: They appeared on the soundtrack for box office hit “The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part II,” performed album standouts “Take A Walk” and “Carried Away” on “Saturday Night Live” in October and headlined the legendary Madison Square Garden earlier this month.

Gossamer, the band’s second full-length effort, opens on a high note with the surging single “Take A Walk,” one of the earlier releases and more successful singles. It’s one of the most feel-good and light-hearted songs on the release, portraying the current state of the economy and the modern American family rather than Angelakos’ intrapersonal struggles.

“Constant Conversations” offers Angelakos’ effervescent voice floating above a simple, in the outfit’s terms, blend of synths, claps and whoa-oh-ohs and a seemingly hazy filter masking the layers into a whole. The slowed-down track breaks away from the poppy strobe synths of Manners, declaring this album is of a different league and corroborates Angelakos is a creative wunderkind.

Multiple songs on the LP are comprised 80 to 120 tracks, a mathematical and creative conundrum when performing them on stage with five members. It took nearly a month and each member doubling up on instruments—Hultquist alone mans three keyboards and a guitar—for Gossamer to smoothly translate to the stage where “our creative control lands,” Hultquist says. Though Angelakos wrote and performed the recorded album, the remainder of the Cambridge-native outfit—comprised Hultquist, Angelakos, Ayad Al Adhamy, Jeff Apruzzese and Nate Donmoyer—make decisions on the stage, meeting with Angelakos only to perfect the final product. “We make sure everything is being played right and sounding the way it should and that it will work on stage,” Hultquist continues. “And that’s a big deal because that doesn’t always translate. It takes some practice and some experimenting to make sure we get this right.”

A keen ear can note the subtle differences in “Constant Conversations,” “I’ll Be Alright,” and “Live To Tell The Tale,” three songs rearranged for the stage. In fact, “I’ll Be Alright” is a complete departure from the version that appears on Chunk Of Change, the band’s personal-turned-success-vehicle debut EP, but it’s the live song Hultquist is most proud of.

“On My Way” acts as the final scene in this messy love story and it’s the closest to happily-ever-after we’re given. The title’s dizzying introduction and anthemic hook parallel the author’s history; it’s an auditory roller coaster on which Angelakos pleads “We’re both so broken, done long hoping/Is that we’ll stumble upon our love again/Just believe in me, Kristina/All these demons, I can beat ‘em/I’m on my way.”

Despite the sometimes-unstable future of the band, for now it seems all are in a good place. “We’re happy with each other, we hang out all of the time. Things are really good right now,” Hultquist says. Good enough that they packed 2013 with tour dates worldwide, including slots on the Coachella and Lollapalooza Brazil and Chile lineups.

“It feels good; Our sound is actually filling up arenas completely and [the band’s] grown a natural amount,” Hultquist says. “We’re just going to keep this good thing going for as long as possible.”