

“Would you like us to assign someone to worry your mother?”

British band Wet Leg follow up their viral single with an accomplished album

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The British band Wet Leg can aptly be described as an overnight success. Their first single, the infectious and wry “Chaise Longue,” was streamed millions of times after its release last June. The song’s popularity gave momentum to the group’s first tour, which soon included sold-out performances and a slot at the SXSW festival. After Wet Leg released its eponymous debut album on April 8, it reached the top of the UK Albums Chart. The band’s founders never expected this amount of attention.

“When we started Wet Leg, there was a definite, solid decision that it wasn’t going to be a serious band,” lead vocalist Rhian Teasdale told *Rolling Stone*. She and the other principal member, guitarist Hester Chambers, befriended each other at Isle of Wight College. Ten years later, they picked up guitars just for the fun of it. Teasdale, Chambers, and keyboardist Joshua Omead Mobaraki later improvised and recorded “Chaise Longue” for a lark. Today, the band’s admirers include Lorde, Jack White, Dave Grohl and Iggy Pop.

Despite the band’s apparently spontaneous origins and its members’ professed amateurism, *Wet Leg* (2022) does not sound sloppy or tossed off. Rather, it is a reasonably accomplished and professional album that shows intelligence and spark. The band’s sound draws on punk, disco, and 1990s rock (e.g., Belly and Elastica) in almost equal measure. Though the songs are simple, variations in rhythm, tempo, arrangement and mood keep the album interesting and enjoyable throughout. Of all the musicians, Teasdale stands out for her singing. Her techniques range from deadpan recitation to demure falsetto, all of them coated with acid irony.

“Chaise Longue” is based on an insistent eighth-note

rhythm and two chords. It strongly recalls post punk bands like Delta 5. Teasdale delivers the lyrics, some of which sound like playground chants, matter-of-factly. “Mummy, Daddy, look at me. / I went to school and I got a degree.” The latter line soon becomes “... I got a big D.” Teasdale also quotes the movie *Mean Girls* (2004): “Is your muffin buttered? / Would you like us to assign someone to butter your muffin?” She recites the repetitive chorus as if she is simply getting it over with. The non sequiturs, arch vocals and catchy rhythm are great fun. The band’s energy contrasts nicely with Teasdale’s apathy, and the song has a certain innocence despite its irony.

A flanged guitar gives parts of “Angelica” a psychedelic tinge. The song describes a young woman who sounds a lot like the vocal persona that Teasdale adopts throughout the album. She strides into a party and “commands the room,” making snide comments like “I don’t want to listen to your band. / I don’t know why I haven’t left yet.” The lyrics (and delivery) are cheeky and defiant but limited to small-bore social themes.

The band’s second single “Wet Dream,” also included on the album, features a disco beat. Its humor is a bit more open. Teasdale recounts her admirer’s dream of her and his increasingly ludicrous behavior. “You said, ‘Baby, do you want to come home with me? / I’ve got *Buffalo* ’66 on DVD.’” Although this line sounds like mockery of hipsterism, Teasdale told *Rolling Stone* that “I just wanted to get ‘DVD’ into a song, because it’s so funny that no one watches them anymore.” She cultivates a superior, teasing tone, asking the would-be beau what makes him think he’s good enough to fantasize about her.

“Ur Mum” is an insult song that would not have sounded out of place on an album by late ’70s new wave singer Lene Lovich. “I don’t want you to want me. / I need you to forget me,” sings Teasdale, in a nod to ’70s power pop band Cheap Trick. The song shows the band’s unashamed borrowing from various pop culture sources. The results are slight but enjoyable.

A start-stop shuffle beat distinguishes “Oh No.” Sing-song rhymes, all delivered with a poker face, take dead aim at a particular affluent layer of the middle class (“Oh, my God. / Life is hard. / Credit card. / Oh no.”) and its liberal pieties (“You’re so woke. / Diet Coke. / I feel gross. / Oh no.”). The band channels the buzzy guitar and social satire of punk. Teasdale also refers to “People talking about themselves / Or whatever it is that you always talk about,” implying that she is above such behavior.

The slower “Loving You” shows off the band’s willingness to vary its arrangements. It begins with a Roland TR-808 drum machine, which was a staple of early rap, and later incorporates an accordion and synthesized celesta. These seemingly incongruous instruments somehow complement each other on this song of lost love. Teasdale sings in a sweet falsetto, sometimes through partly clenched teeth, and occasionally dropping profanities. Voices join in harmony on the chorus: “I don’t want to have to be friends. / I don’t want to have to pretend. / I don’t want to meet your girlfriend.” Could Teasdale be expressing her feelings for once? Then comes the poison dart: “Hope you choke on your girlfriend.”

The closing song “Too Late Now” seems to provide another glimpse into Teasdale’s state of mind. The insistent bass drum pattern gives the impression of trudging forward with difficulty while a guitar plays high arpeggios. After a few putdowns, Teasdale confesses her self-doubt in a rapid-fire recitation. “Everything is going wrong. / I think I changed my mind again. / I’m not sure if this is the kind of life that I saw myself living.” After dismissing her uncertainty with a joke, she admits that the world is “harrowing.” Her self-destructive response is to drive her car into the sea, perhaps “taking you down with me.”

Wet Leg is a generally admirable effort that suggests the band’s potential to develop. The band’s punk-informed approach brings energy and freshness to the album. They’re also open (or savvy) enough to provide

rhythmic and timbral variety. Teasdale is so canny a singer that her pose seems natural.

But Teasdale’s reflexive irony is also one of the band’s weaknesses. She looks at the world with a raised eyebrow but doesn’t commit herself to a position on it. Trading in acid barbs about superficial matters is one thing, analyzing or criticizing society is another. Teasdale is far from alone in adopting the former approach; it is a longstanding artistic problem. But “Too Late Now” may represent a timid step toward more frank engagement with the world.

Teasdale and Chambers say that they don’t take themselves seriously. If we choose to take that “seriously,” what would their music sound like if they did? *Wet Leg* has already finished recording its second album, although no release date has been set. Time will tell whether success has given them the courage to develop their strengths.



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