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### Close to the Heart: Sally Sparrow & the Old 41 – Never Far From My Mind

 [November 14, 2015](#)  [Valerie Polichar](#)

You can't really go wrong starting an album with a Doctor Who clip. DW's been kind to musicians for years — think of Orbital, or The Timelords' "Doctorin' the Tardis" — but Sally Sparrow & the Old 41 (who also borrowed part of their name from a DW episode) wield it a little differently.

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“Don’t turn your back, don’t look away, and don’t blink.” In the TV episode, it was a dire warning. Here, perhaps, it’s an exhortation not to miss the small things that life (or this thoughtful album) has to offer.

That said, SS41 (as they style themselves), the Atlanta musicians Tim Villegas and Clive Staples, do many things a little differently: They first met by text message. They’re donating all profits from the album to the autism charity ASAN. And the album is roughly classified as “electronic folk” – electronic instruments, sound effects, and electric guitar backing a lovely country-folk feel and heartfelt tunes.



As with any brave juxtaposition of styles, this works in some places more effectively than in others. A standout track in this regard is “Clearly,” where an arpeggiated bounce and dance-floor punch contrasts with gentle vocals and gradual-heartbreak lyrics: “It’s all becoming clear / Watching the curtain tear / It happened in her sleep / All the little lies we keep / Pulling back on the screen door / I can’t handle anymore.” (SS41 don’t stick dogmatically to their new genre – the shimmery, spun-sugar single “Heart of It” owes much to ‘80s New Wave harmonies and ‘90s shoegaze sensibilities.)

The blend between folk and electronica touches the sublime on the final and title track, “Never Far From My Mind.” The structure of the song is classic English folk, the first line of each verse returning to close it out, the chord progressions familiar, lullaby-like. But the fuzzed vocals, sparkling soundscape, and delicate use of the stereo spread moves this piece out of the expected and into something altogether memorable. “You’re never far from my mind,” they sing. “Your eyes linger like whiskey after I close mine.” The lovely album cover art stems from a line in



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this song, “Let’s watch the birds on the wire.” Lush-yet-pastoral synthesizers drop back to a sonic landscape evoking highways and sirens as the song – and the album – strolls to a close.

SS41 (as they style themselves) range lyrically from the subtle and touching to the near-trite. On the soulful “Black Sheep” they hit both within the chorus – “Have I lost? Have I gained? Have I messed it up just the same? Only time and blood remain – can this black sheep turn white again?” Some of the tracks are bumpy, and some arrangements are less balanced than they might have been; but that rough quality can also be a strength. The songs feel loose and alive, with some of the energy of a live performance that’s often missing from electronica.

Sonically, the album could have benefited from a different approach to mastering – there’s a slimness to the sound at times that accentuates a certain crumpled-paper feel to the drums. The richness that mastering can offer is occasionally missing here. That said, the sound remains *interesting*, and that’s something in itself: in a world where “indie” begins to be as mass-market and cookie-cutter as the majors, SS41 stand out. And that may in fact prove the edge they need.

*Never Far From My Mind* is available for pre-order on [iTunes](#) and will be released on Dec. 1; some tracks can also be streamed on [Soundcloud](#). Follow group on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/sallysparrow41>. Visit the official website at <http://www.sallysparrow41.com>

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