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### Blissful pop genius: Static in Verona's *Odd Anthem* (2015)

 [September 28, 2015](#)  [Valerie Polichar](#)

*Odd Anthem* comes blasting out of the gate with “Anyone Anymore,” the kind of instantly-addictive hit material that indie and power pop giants can only wish for. With a ‘90s sensibility, “Anyone Anymore” calls to mind Better Than Ezra on “In the Blood,” but the classic Ezra track pales beside the energy here (Better than Better Than!). If you’re not up and dancing, it’s because you’re wearing a seatbelt, and in that case you’re pounding on the steering wheel (easy, tiger...).

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But **Static in Verona** — the astoundingly singly-manned project of talented Chicagoan Rob Merz — is no one-hit wonder, and *Odd Anthem* has more than a few tricks up its sleeve. Standout tracks include the sunlit bliss of “Wait, Wait.” It starts with a burst of vintage video-game sonics, but soon morphs into an electronic-tinged shimmer of harmonies around Merz’s frank, compressed tenor. As if that weren’t enough, it closes with heart-wrenching simple strings that draw from memories of summer nights long ago.

Notwithstanding rich arrangements and catchy tunes, Merz’s lyrics are no afterthought. The album takes its title from the lyrics to “Future Ghosts”: “The odd anthem of your voice echoes in the room. / And carries like a call. / A battle cry at dawn. / Scars left upon your palm.” If they’re occasionally baroque — “Crystal castles fall into shattered prisms in the hall- / Shining spotlights on future fears” (“Shudder to Think”) — they are as often poignant: “I’m trying to forget you forgetting me.” (“Forgetful”)



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Merz's vocal style is firmly rooted in '90s indie rock — you'd be hard pressed not to hear



Blink-

182, Mercury Rev, Smashing Pumpkins — but there are other influences here, from '60s surf music to '80s New Wave, woven into a seamless mix. The push-pull feel of "Future Ghosts" is a contour favored by Jane Siberry, but there's a Beach Boys glory to the harmonies that sends the track soaring; and is that a hint of Sergeant Pepper on "Then A Hush"? "Heavy Hands" calls to mind Beck's "Loser," while one can hear a bit of "Strawberry Fields" in "Forgetful."

But all these influences don't create a scattered soundscape. In fact, the album has a consistent feel and stamp — a signature sound, if you will. Merz describes the process of making the album as having been looser and less carefully planned than prior albums, in the name of creativity; yet this doesn't lead to any lack of tightness or quality. These are polished, compact tunes, arranged for impact, brilliantly produced.

*Odd Anthem* closes with another stellar track, the multi-layered "Alternate Ending," which manages to fuse cinematic organ tones, piano, and industrial textures into a beautiful minute-and-a-half that somehow evokes train platforms and misspoken goodbyes. But no matter. You'll want to start this whole lovely journey again as soon as it ends, ever hopeful.

*Unappreciated Scholars Review Grade: A*

*Odd Anthem* is available on [iTunes](#), [Noisetrade](#) and [Bandcamp](#); tracks can also be streamed on [Soundcloud](#). Follow **Static in Verona** on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/staticinverona>. Visit the official website at <http://staticinverona.com/>

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**[Rob Merz](#)**

September 28, 2015 at 11:29 pm

Thanks for the amazing review! Just wanted the readers to know *Odd Anthem* is name-your-price, even free, on [Bandcamp](http://staticinverona.bandcamp.com) at <http://staticinverona.bandcamp.com>

