

Aeroplane

You fly with Aeroplane once, you don't forget it. In just three years, the Italian-Belgian duo have established themselves as party-starting DJs, remixers du jour -with their spacious cosmic-disco re-rerubs of Grace Jones (William's Blood), Friendly Fires (Paris) and Sebastien Tellier (Kilometer) - and, via their own piano-sprinkled melancholic beauties like Caramellas, leaders of the nu-disco and Balearica scene. So Aeroplane's debut album, *We Can't Fly*, arrives with sky-high hopes. Now that our appetites have been whetted by those brief, tantalising excursions, what delights await us on their maiden long-haul flight?

Plenty, it turns out. Recorded in Toulouse, Paris, London and Los Angeles, *We Can't Fly* (co-produced by Bertrand Burgalat), is a grown up, dazzlingly accomplished record that showcases not just a passion for stately, soulful disco and early 80s electronica, but a lush and bittersweet set of influences that stretch from Abba and film soundtracks to Floyd, the Stones and the Italian crooners that Vito Deluca's mama played him in his Brussels youth.

Aeroplane is now a one-man operation, Vito having amicably parted company with his bandmate Stephen Fasano. Not that we should be alarmed. "There are worse things in life!" says Vito. "Stephen's gonna do music on his own, I'm gonna do music on my own. I'm the studio guy, he was more the DJ so when the music became more important, the more I was alone in the studio. The future of Aeroplane was this album and I wrote it and played every instrument." The two are still on good terms: "He's picking me up tomorrow at the airport. I'm probably going to produce the stuff he writes in the future and I'm not going to have a word to say about it!"

Flying solo has given Vito the chance to flex his classically trained musical muscles: "We've been put in the dance music category but I'm a songwriter, that's what I know how to do. I wanted to go back to proper pop music, not being forced to do nine-minute tracks so the DJ can mix in before and after." Aeroplane have never been at the mercy of traditional bpm's, and being free of "the dancefloor pressure" has given Vito additional license to slow things down and look around. "I'm at my best at 105bpm," he says. "That's the speed where I make the best music. You can do more, there's more groove, more feeling."

He's not kidding. Take *We Can't Fly*, the languid, showstopping anthem-to-be with which Aeroplane kicked off their landmark 500th Radio 1 Essential Mix at Circus in Liverpool earlier this year. Laying gospel harmonies over Compass Point-era Grace Jones reggae, blissed-out Rimini keyboards and kiddie vocal samples, it's handsome proof that dancability and musicality don't have to be mutually exclusive. It's going to sound rapturous live, when Vito and an expanded on-stage line-up play Aeroplane's first dates later this year.

Being let loose in a proper, bells-and-whistles studio for the first time has been something of an eye-opener. "I've been recording in my bedroom for my entire life so it sounds a million times better," says Vito. "I was totally like a kid in a sweetshop." The results are spectacular - and at times intensely cinematic. The widescreen, string-splashed *Mountains of Moscow* is the soundtrack to the best Eighties blockbuster you've never seen, while *London Bridge and Point of No Return* are mini-epics of spiralling Floydian guitar riffs and plaintive Tangerine Dream synths. "That's my dream actually, writing scores for movies," says Vito. "For me the Rocky soundtrack is at the same level as *Dark Side of the Moon*, it's the same kind of perfection."

Another mighty inspiration was Giorgio Moroder, whose gleaming electronic scores for *Scarface* and *Midnight Express* fed into the vintage disco stylings of *My Enemy* and the propulsive, piano-led *Superstar*, which Vito describes as "Moroder meets Canned Heat". The latter features vocoder vocals from Vito himself, but Moroder was so impressed that he

agreed to lay down the vocals for an alternative version of the track, which will be released later in the year.

Moroder wasn't the only one of Vito's heroes to be recruited. The raucous, razor-blade rock of *I Don't Feel* features the formidable vocals of Merry Clayton, who backed Jagger on Vito's favourite Stones song, *Gimme Shelter*. "There was always this black chick singing at the end and I never knew who she was. I also had this amazing soul-funk record by a girl called Merry Clayton. Then one day they played *Gimme Shelter* on the radio and the DJ explained that it was Merry singing. I lost the plot and said we have to try everything we can to get her." Get her they did, and Clayton wraps her arena-sized lungs around squalling Bowie-ish riffs to impressive effect. "She killed the song, it was amazing."

The roster of guest singers is impeccable. Nicolas Ker, the frontman of French italo-disco outfit *Poni Hoax*, adds a sullen elan to *Fish in the Sky*, an electro torch song worthy of *Human League*, while dream-pop outfit *Au Revoir Simone* breathe delicate harmonies over the woozy ballad *We Fall Over*, and London's Jonathan Jeremiah transforms *Good Riddance* into a low-slung slice of honky-tonk soul.

Perhaps the most ear-catching turn comes from the precocious LA teen-vixen *Sky Ferreira* on *Without Lies*, a cover of a song by the Belgian screen star *Marie Gillain*. The 17 year-old Ferreira takes obvious relish in delivering suggestive lines like "When I eat cake I prefer the cherry". Vito picked her because "we needed a young voice but kind of sexy too. It's like an angel and a demon in the same body."

It's a breathtakingly diverse collection of songs, but what runs through all of them is that wistful *Aeroplane* trademark, what Vito calls "sad happiness". It's something he learned from the Italian pop maestros so beloved of his mum, men like *Lucio Battisti* and *Adriano Celentano*. An exquisite, bittersweet state that's neither overly dark nor simplistically happy. It's the *Aeroplane* way - wake up and smell the kerosene.