

## Last Train – III

After naming their first two albums, *Weathering* and *The Big Picture* respectively, the simplicity of the title for Last Train's third record is striking.

The directness of III (trois or three) is more than a hint of the key, primal force behind the album's creation: raw anger. Yet this fury is not the usual release of life pressures – although they no doubt played a part – but instead is the result of a unique creative energy the Alsace natives needed to vent from their systems. Yet this cathartic outpouring has not been allowed to surge unmitigated into their music as III is the result of a meticulous and crafted creative journey that saw them make the album in a crumbling, unheated chateau in the midst of winter.

Formed while still at school together in the 2000s, the now Lyon-based Jean-Noël Scherrer (vocals/guitar), Julien Peultier (guitar), Timothée Gérard (bass) and Antoine Baschung (drums) released their serrated debut in 2017 and its string-laden follow-up in 2019, which not only forged a committed and passionate fanbase around their music but also saw them earn the approval of the likes of Muse, Placebo and the iconic Johnny Hallyday, who all invited Last Train to join them on tour. Having released records via their own label to get things going when they first started, this set-up has evolved into them also making videos and artwork and even running their own touring company – activities they now collaborate on across the music industry and also provide for other artists too – Last Train found themselves free to try something a bit different.

Released in early 2024 and styled as a “soundtrack to a movie that doesn't exist”, the record *Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* was created by the band, composer Fabian Cali and The Mulhouse Symphony Orchestra by reinterpreting and refashioning Last Train's earlier songs into new expansive pieces, ones that embraced space and ambience in opposition to Last Train's usual impact. “The collaboration came about because over the last ten years we've always said we're open to any kind of music, we're music lovers,” explains Scherrer. “Obviously rock music is what we do, but we listen to a lot of ambient music, soundtracks, electronic music and pop. We would always say this, but it wasn't so explicit, so we decided to introduce our own melodies to another musical point of view. It was an interesting exercise, showing that a melody wasn't fixed in just one explicit way.”

A breathtaking and enticing work, however, the band realised *Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* was not a pure Last Train album – it is non-canonical as the sci-fi reboots might put it. “We don't really count it one as our studio album,” grins Peultier, despite the band's pride in the work. “For us, the fact we are four rock musicians – two guitarists, one bassist, one drummer – and we really want to respect that,” agrees Scherrer. “We don't want to cheat with computers or production onstage, we really want to offer a true experience of live music, which is something our albums reflect. *Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* gave us a chance to put that to the side and it was great not to have those limits... but only for a while.” With a renewed focus as a four-piece, as the name suggests III will be the true third Last Train album, not that the freedom found within its not-quite-predecessor did not leave an indelible mark. “As a producer and musician, *Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* was a really tough experience. I really enjoyed doing it, but when it was finally released I was relieved because finally we could play rock n roll music again,” admits Scherrer. “Working on that record gave us a new way to imagine music, but once it was done, we went straight back to the rehearsal room and started making music, just the four of us.”

While perhaps not sharing the complexities of an orchestral collaboration, and boasting a compelling directness in reaction to the musical landscapes they had just created, III still proves to be an album of stunning contrasts, possessing a series of dynamics that shift, twist and turn in ways that will engross as much as an orchestral work can, but in a much more raw and direct manner. It is also a record of righteous anger, because it turns out when you are a band used to pouring your hearts and soul into rock songs and then playing them live every night, when you skip that kind of expression over a period of time *a lot* of feeling builds up.

“We were pissed off!” smiles Peultier of the energy behind III. “I don't know why, but that's how it felt to me.”

"We hadn't toured, so we hadn't played a show for a year-and-a-half, which is something that has never happened with Last Train before because we deeply love playing shows," reasons Scherrer in agreement. "So we were frustrated and full of anger. We were ready for the fight when we came to these songs. I realise looking back we were thinking about live and how we will give these new songs to the audience. How much we will enjoy playing them live was central to the way we composed these songs." Written in a three-month-long burst at their Lyon base, songs for III understandably flowed quickly, something reflected in the passion behind the album's dynamics which range from unconstrained, loud emotional bursts to quieter – sometimes enthralling, sometimes menacing – sections. "It was a pretty fast writing album," confirms Gérard. "When the four of us are in a room it's – I will not say it's magical, but it's easy because we speak the same language because we've been playing together for 15 years."

However, while there was an ease to the writing process, Last Train were keen to ensure they were not overwhelmed or washed out by the outpouring of the emotions that had built up. Firstly, though song ideas came quickly, the band's writing process remained precise and focused. "We'd quickly work out the structure of a song, but then we'd play it a lot, hundreds of times," confirms Gérard. "We don't fight and are pretty nice to each other, but we are not nice to what we write! We are demanding, we go into every detail. We were tough with the songs this time."

Then, once this process was completed, and echoing the contrasts within the tracks, a desire to immerse the anger of III in a conversely clinical setting saw the band adopt a new way of recording. Rather than play together almost live as they had done on their previous records, each part and instrument was recorded in isolation and then reassembled.

"I think the precise way, the clinical approach allowed us to make the songs more angry," suggests Peultier. "There's almost no feeling so it becomes harder. To make people feel and understand this anger, we decided not to play together so we could get straight to the point. It's more intense, maybe even colder, yet when it is all combined you feel it more."

To facilitate this change, Last Train's long-term producer and virtual fifth member, Rémi Gettliffe, suggested something unusual: Why not record the record at a crumbling chateau in the middle of France? Moving themselves and their recording equipment in, the band soon discovered why the building was solely considered a summer retreat. "We've always worked in the studio he has in the old house where he lives, but for a long time, he's been talking about this small castle that his family own, saying we should record there. Usually, we'd go 'no way', but it felt like this was the time to do it," explains Scherrer. "We had to record in December, and the album is cold feeling so it felt right to have a weird experience in this castle. But let me stress, it's not Versailles, there's no heating so in December it was freezing. It was really, really intense!"

It's an atmosphere that pervades the album. Opening with Home, which mixes lightning strike guitars and relentless drums with a simple lament, the mix of raw emotion and violently precise musical energy is both striking and hypnotic, before on The Plan the band breathlessly collides sheer rock power and sweet melodies. Fragile feeling tracks How Does It Feel? and This Is Me Trying, which sit either side of the relentless outburst of All To Blame, step back from the blistering opening pace though neither flinches from the strength of feeling, as they pervasively and intoxicatingly expand. Revenge radiates around a truly warming core – possibly inspired by the diet of pop music the group consumed in their spare moments – before blooming into a haze of chiming guitars, which is quickly followed by One By One's charging urgency. Following the spacey interlude You've Ruined Everything, III comes to a conclusion with I Hate You. Although its languid opening section initially contrasts with the bitter sentiments of the title, there is no danger of Last Train running out of the anger that fuelled the record, as III ends in a blaze of driving music and wild feedback powerful enough to conquer any castle. "It's an intense album but one that really creates something for the audience," concludes Scherrer. "I don't think it is the kind of record where you're just going to say 'yeah, yeah, I like it' but 'that made me feel something!' You will have a reaction to this music, which is what we wanted." III really is the charm.