Spoon – They Want My Soul Review

**Score: 8.2**

**Album:** *They Want My Soul*

**Artist:** Spoon

**Year:** 2014

**Genre:** Alternative

**Home page teaser (one sentence):** Austin’s Spoon return from the outskirts for their eighth excursion

**Banner quote (from album):** “*Time’s gone inside out. Time gets distorted with this intense gravity*”

**SEO Tags:** Spoon,They Want My Soul,Alternative,Indie Rock,spacey,dance,pop,Austin,Texas,Loma Vista,Dave Fridmann,Joe Chicarelli,

**Conclusive Review:**

It’s a daunting to think that Spoon has been a band for just over twenty years now. Where did that time go, and in the process how many indie rock acts had faded into nomadic obscurity, hopping aboard the last midnight train to play second fiddle with the rest of the hobos and sycophants? On their eight full-length, *They Want My Soul*, time is more than a fleeting concept. It lingers on the edge of every line; keeping a steady rhythm and making even the briefest of incidents carry a pulse. “*Time’s gone inside out/time gets distorted/with this intense gravity”* frontman, Britt Daniel, sings on “Inside Out,” the record’s second and in many ways, most far-out track. Here’s where the unsteady ground shakes more than usual, leaving all those with two legs unsettled, but by no means, unaccustomed to the ride.

 Their past two efforts, 2010’s *Transference* and 2007’s *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, rank among Spoon’s finest work, in terms of songwriting and overall pop flow. *They Want My Soul* shares many similarities with these albums, but carries with it just enough shake and rattle to warrant a necessary head turn. Their first endeavor with second keyboardist, Alex Fishel, the band has certainly adjusted remnants of their morphed sound to equate for his contributions. Synth-heavy and highly beat-driven at times, the ten songs are a near even split between standard five-piece rock band hooks and far fresher territory. Spoon sounds like they always do, which is by no means a bad thing, and yet within the gracious fades and lunar noise comes something of conundrum. Where to from here?

 As with any band, the years in-between records can be quite vital to the chaos that follows. In Spoon’s case, the members have been quite scattered since *Transference*. Daniel’s side project with Wolf Parade’s Dan Boenker, Divine Fits, was worthy of repeat listens, although one couldn’t help but wonder if certain tracks would have sounded better as Spoon songs. Bassist, Rob Pope, reunited with his Get-Up Kids brethren to rehash and capture some shade of emotional youth gone by. Drummer, Jim Eno, maintained a prolific production track record for numerous other bands and yet *They Want My Soul* is the first Spoon record he hasn’t had a direct hand in producing. That task fell first to Joe Chiccarelli and ended on The Flaming Lips’ old standby, Dave Fridmann.

 While Fridmann’s unique ear can be a slippery slope (see the sophomoric efforts of first-time wunderkinds, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah and Tapes and Tapes), his collaboration with indie veterans like Spoon mostly works in the group’s favor. Eclectically diverse and electronically dense, each of the ten tracks breathes quite well on its own, but remains one jagged piece of a sentimental whole. At just under thirty-eight minutes, *They Want My Soul* offers plenty of surprises both sonically and deep within the lyrical foreground. Daniel is far from saying everything that’s on is mind, and yet it’s in that in-between space where the pieces from both mechanical and organic sources learn to live peacefully together.

 This is more than just a rock album or something nearly danceable if the all the squares got nice and buzzed. A step forward in many respects, the two steps back are minor enough to please even the most astute listener. That’s not to say that *They Want My Soul* isn’t ridden with dashes of filler and the occasional rolled eye following an intentional repetition of chords and more importantly lyrics. Daniel drills his point home, whether it’s in the hefty consistency of “The Rent I Pay” or the pragmatic longing of “Do You”. The vast majority of titles are pulled directly from song lyrics, almost as if Spoon is trying just a little too hard to make their music accessible to the average radio derelict, caught between the red light and his dashboard.

 What makes *They Want My Soul* still somehow above these standard practices is the quality of its songs. There’s a little something for everybody, from the lifelong fans still salivating over garage riffs from the underrated *A Series of Sneaks*, down past the hipster snobs turning up the treble on *Girls Can Tell* and *Kill The Moonlight*. Yes, even those who have no idea that Spoon is more than just a utensil could find their bearings in the lapsed grooves of the band’s latest.

 In the watered-down music world, hard-working bands are often brushed aside in favor of what’s news, and let’s face it, unfortunately temporary. Spoon have proved many times over their rare staying power, never hanging on for dear life, but rather standing at a enough of a distance for those in the back to occasionally look up from their cellphone screens and ponder the noises shooting in one ear and out the other. With any luck, these latest cuts will get lost somewhere in-between.

**Track by Track Reviews**

1. The Rent I Pay: Kicking off with the gradual layering of polished riffs, Spoon stands at attention for “The Rent I Pay,” the first single that could stand toe-to-toe with any of their past endeavors. *“I’ve been losing sleep/just nodding sleep”* Daniel croons, and their off to the races. Steady, catchy, consistently dry and carefully precise, the band taps the same well for fresh water, romping through rocky terrain, machetes in hand. Confident from verse to repetitive chorus, it’s easy to remember this track’s name, although it sticks with the listener long past drive-thru window static and bad cellphone reception. Operators and disc jockeys alike couldn’t agree more, and although it may be a bit of a stretch, “The Rent I Pay” is classic Spoon. - 9.5/10
2. Inside Out – Synthesizers blissfully build the atmosphere as the first of many beats follow suit. *Inside Out* represents a clear paradigm shift from the past into the present. Riffing on time and gravity alike, the weight of this track could ease and gently calm any cockpit full of weary travelers. *“I don’t make time for holy rollers/there’s only you I need”* Channeling a mess of soul and spacey clangs, *Inside Out* is a groove unto itself, and at five minutes, the album’s longest track. Enjoy it before another spark reaches the powder keg. - 9.8/10
3. Rainy Taxi – A traditional garage band arrangement from the unrelenting bass line to

Daniel’s high-note fever leading everyone astray. An unsettled mess of piano keys remind the listener of how it feels when an old trick fools them yet again. Lyrically, *Rainy Taxi* is one of the album’s best, paying homage to apocalyptic wastelands and hardened city streets; the unfortunate sting of love and poor-decision making. Battered couples hold hands on a mountain before the bombs, watching everyone reload. It’s easy to find strength with someone in the same unfortunate circumstances and yet the whole shebang rests on whether she stays or goes. Running seems like an inevitable option before the fade out. 9.0/10

1. Do You – Comfortably poppy and melodically sensationalized, *Do You* is a sweet reminder of hooks gone by. Production wise, the background howls and electronic rolls are dense enough to make any headphoned homebody perk up. Underneath the bubble gum residue lies something easily discarded, although likely to stick around. A summertime jam full of quick sentiments and ease, *Do You* acts more like of a segue way to what remains on Side A. It’s a song someone who has never heard Spoon will attach themselves to without a second thought, but those expecting just a notch above will be reminded that this band has taken far greater expeditions into the unknown 7.4/10
2. Knock Knock Knock – A lush beat steers us out of the woods with acoustic strumming and what’s that? Someone whistling us forward in an auto-tuned frenzy. This track builds to one of the best choruses on the record, a vital transition that adequately blends remnants of Spoon’s tender example along with their willingness to bend and indeed break away from the past. There’s an evolution afoot, although certain parties are more responsible than others. *Knock Knock Knock* is a battleground full of distorted guitars clashing with tech-heavy noises from on high. The result makes those in the stands hopeful for the explosions leading up to the finale, if only because they’re far easier to individually focus on. 9.1/10
3. Outlier – Spoon has always been very savvy in their transitions from one track to the next, presenting their listeners with seamless or often times abrupt jumps as if the elevator wire has snapped mid-floor. *Outlier* grooves up from the subsequent dust, but lacks the proper protective headgear. Over four minutes of the same beat paired with similar synth effects and keyboard leads, Daniel and crew maintain their composure, but fail to notice those swimming in the same deep end. Here’s a song that will likely last much longer when played live, if only to give those in the back enough time to elbow their way forward – 6.1/10
4. They Want My Soul – The title track on any album needs more than just the standard frills. *They Want My Soul* is the first time Spoon has gone down the path of naming a song and album the same thing. While less experienced bands could easily falter in this decision, such isn’t the case with this specific audio nugget. Much like the first and third tracks, “They Want My Soul” presents Spoon as the band they’ve always been, from tongue and cheek banter to tambourine chime. The lyrics invoke images of super fan and record exec alike pulling away at the scraps like hungry dogs. While they’re not quite on par with *A Hard Day’s Night* intro, it’s still pleasant to consider the fanatical possibilities - 9.4/10
5. I Just Don’t Understand – The shortest of the bunch at under three-minutes, this gem is a subtle blues romp with clever piano solo and jagged hum on equal playing field. Daniels voice is at its most melancholy, “*When you say that you need me/like the ocean needs sand.*” The man who’s had his soul ripped out and stepped on many times over, still returns for one more soft kick in the head. It’s illogical, unbalanced, but not without merit. “I Just Don’t Understand” is admirable in its naïveté. Sometimes getting hurt makes the subsequent backlash all the more entrancing, even if the sting lasts longer than messages swooned over in 180 seconds or less. 8.7/10
6. Let Me Be Mine – Far more upbeat than its predecessor, “Let Me Be Mine” rolls on a message of contagious optimism. “*Auction off what you love/It will come back sometime/lock it up what you love/and it says let me be mine”*. Accepting the bad parts along with the good, this track is a grounded structure, aware, but not necessarily unforgiving. In terms of sound, *Let Me Be Mine* could use some bulking up. Its basic rock and roll foundation is airy, employing only the core of Spoon’s potential. Even after the proper parts mix in just the right way, it’s not quite enough when compared to perpetual motions on previous tracks. The chorus hits, and it’s easy to forget the problems afoot, despite the circular patch where the electrode plug once was. 8.1/10
7. New York Kiss – Scuffing up muddy ground, this song would be trashy if it wasn’t so sweat. Mixing elements of the album’s best and worst moments, “New York Kiss” fits well into the opposing blend of band versus producers versus audience versus new, old and whatever’s left unmistakably in-between. Daniels homes in on one memory maxed out of proportion, but nevertheless remarkably unique. As last tracks go, “New York Kiss” could learn a lesson from those that came before. The chorus isn’t buried far enough in the ground to prevent it from blowing away at the slightest updraft. As the last cymbals fade, one can’t help but wonder why Spoon didn’t shoot for one to grow on as is the case with many of their previous efforts. Either way, best to move on rather than dwelling on something so insignificant as a kiss, despite the background cityscape. 6.2/10