

FFS (UK / USA)

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Collaborations, as FFS would have us believe on their debut album, don't work. You start off deferential, and strangely reverential – and eventually, you'll need the Dalai Lama to mediate, between all the patronising, agonising, navel-gazing and differences in work ethic. So when Los Angeles duo Sparks and Glasgow-based quartet Franz Ferdinand decided to record together, it was a flawed and potentially disastrous idea, right? FFS, you couldn't be more wrong! Not only is 'Collaborations Don't Work' one of the star attractions of the self-titled record that sprang from their collective loins but 'FFS' is also one of the strongest albums of either bands' career.

The love of artful corkscrew pop that created a mutual appreciation society kicks off with the lead single 'Johnny Delusional' and its soon-come successor 'Call Girl', though the hooks driving 'Police Encounters', 'So Desu Ne' and 'Piss Off' are no less fabulous and merciless. This dynamic thrill is countered by the subtler charms of 'Dictator's Son' and 'Little Guy From The Suburbs', the haughtier 'The Power Couple' and 'Collaborations Don't Work' itself, a multi-tiered quasi-musical that shows off the compositional ambition and savvy humour that defines 'FFS'. "The real motivation was to make something new, not 'Franz featuring Russell Mael', or 'Sparks with Franz Ferdinand backing them'," declares FF frontman Alex Kapranos, whose intertwining lead vocals with Russell is another of the record's principal thrills, like a male version of the Abba approach.

Produced by John Congleton (St Vincent, Angel Olsen, David Byrne..) at London's RAK Studios, the album 'FFS' only took 15 days to complete, followed by an equally swift mixing session at Congleton's Dallas studio. Different tracks feature different degrees of collaboration, but the end result is pure FFS.

Kimono-era Sparks fans will recognise how 'FFS' restores some of their old 'pop rock' DNA, having been more recently exploring more experimental-expansive avenues such as the musical 'The Seduction Of Ingmar Bergman'. This streamlined beast is no one-off studio project either, but something that both camps are committing to through 2015, starting with some festival appearances and headline shows.

FFS shows will also feature a handful of cherry-picked Sparks and Franz Ferdinand songs too. "We told the guys, we're happy doing any Sparks songs they want - we have a nineteen-album jump on them to start with!" says Russell. "It's exciting for both bands' fans to see us in a new configuration with new material for a new entity."

So in the right hands, collaborations DO work, and beautifully, "The biggest danger of collaboration," Ron concludes, "is that it gets predictable, and that large egos can clash. But none of that happened. It was the opposite. The strength of the two bands is bigger than the sum of the parts."

