**Billy Nomates**

***Metalhorse* – released on 16 May 2025 via Invada Records – press biography**

The last year and a half has been a period of extremes for Tor Maries, aka Bristol-based songwriter, producer and multi-instrumentalist Billy Nomates. The tour of her previous album, 2023’s critically acclaimed CACTI, culminated in a Glastonbury performance that received enough misogynistic abuse online for Maries to request that the footage be taken down. In reality, though, that was the least of her worries.

Behind the scenes Maries was in the process of deciding to manage herself, evolving Billy Nomates from a solo project into a band, and looking after her dad, who had entered end of life care with Parkinsons. The following year brought devastating news when her dad died in July. All the while, she was working on her upcoming third album Metalhorse – a change of direction galvanised by the challenges surrounding it, and her favourite body of work to date. “From the second I started working on this album, every other month has brought this massive life shift that has either been weirdly magical and brilliant, or quite the opposite.” Maries says. “What I’m really looking for, now, is something in between.”

Produced by James Trevascus and recorded at Paco Loco in Seville, Metalhorse is the first Billy Nomates album to be made in a studio and with a full band. Enlisting bass player Mandy Clarke (KT Tunstall, The Go! Team) and drummer Liam Chapman (Rozi Plain, BMX Bandits), who round out Billy Nomates live, the trio were booked into Paco Loco just three months after Maries’ dad passed. “We were so close and our bond was music,” she says of their relationship. “That was my safety and protection in the world. Even in the care home, as things were getting worse, I’d visit him and he’d ask me what I was doing. I'd show him the new demos, or I'd have been on the radio or something. It sort of saved everything from being shit, because we had this positive thing to talk about.

“So I was going great guns with the album, and then dad died and really put a spanner in the works, which he'd be very pissed off about,” she laughs. “Which is why I kept going. It really knocked me, but I was like, right, we’re here against the odds anyway. Let's just carry on.”

The day they got to the studio, however, Mandy had her own sudden grief and had to fly home. The others stayed, wondering, “what do we do now?” In the end, Mandy added her bass parts at Invada Studios in Bristol a few weeks later. “I'm so pleased she did that, because I couldn't stand for her to not be on the record having come so far with it,” says Maries. “It’s a positive thing now, for us both.”

In the meantime, Maries luckily had everything demoed with bass lines with the exception of two tracks – “Strange Gift,” which was written in Seville in one night, and “Comedic Timing,” which was written five years ago but left in limbo, as if waiting for its perfect home. So they stayed at Paco Loco and built the album with demo bass. “It was a funny way round of doing it,” says Maries, who typically builds an instrumental out from the rhythm section and uses bass as the backbone for everything. She had already envisaged Metalhorse as a fuller album, exploring blues, folk and piano-driven arrangements that take Billy Nomates’ stark punk sound in a more pastoral direction. But the absence of bass allowed for even more experimentation on top of that, as they made the tracks with “timid demo bass” or without bass entirely.

“It completely changed the sound,” she reflects. “Had the bass been there, we probably would have gone ‘cool, sounds good.’ Since we didn’t have it, we had the chance to look at things from different angles, fill spaces that wouldn’t have been there, and think about adding some strange things in the background... It didn't have to be musical, necessarily, but something that fits with the landscape of what this album *is*.”

Metalhorse is a concept album revolving around the image of a dilapidated fun fair, representing the tumultuousness of life – risk and pleasure, danger and exhilaration. Not wanting to be too prescriptive with the meaning, the world is alluded to through sound rather than described in the lyrics, with the most vivid sensations coming through in the smallest details – a sample of slot machines paying out on stripped-back synth punk track “Nothing Worth Winnin,” canned laughter and applause on the delicate and dreamlike “Comedic Timing,” steam releasing on “Gas,” a motorbike roaring on propulsive heartland rock single “The Test.” If there’s a woozy feel to the album, it’s because they made liberal use of the studio’s Leslie speaker – but only the sound of it rotating, rather than it playing any notes, which generates a subtle “swirling sensation of going round and round.”

“Whether it's real or not is up to the listener, but to me Metalhorse is this crumbling fairground where some rides are nice to get on and some rides aren't,” Maries explains. “That's how life felt for a minute, and it still feels like that a bit now.” To that point, she recently received an MS diagnosis that will take some adapting to.

Some rides are more clearly defined, as on “Nothing Worth Winnin,” a rumination on navigating the turbulence of the music industry. “You get on these rides and you’re like… this ain't fucking built right. Like, should I put my nephew on this?” she laughs. “You arrive into this brilliant place, but if you look too closely you can see the bolts coming off.” Fretting over rental rooms and ticking clocks over a taut interplay of synths, occasionally interrupted by cries of frustration in the background, she concludes it’s better to miss the original target anyway. “At the start I was here trying to shoot to win,” she shrugs. “Now I'm just shooting at the sky.”

Similarly, “Override” opts for endurance in a situation that’s urging you to “do yourself a favour and get out,” while “Gas” burns through falsehoods in search of the truth. The brutal off-kilter blues of “Life’s Unfair” and tender acoustic “Strange Gift” find acceptance and comfort, respectively, in change, which comes at you whether you want it to or not. And, occasionally, the unfair funfair of life will bring you into contact with someone as brave and stupid as you – as on “Dark Horse Friend,” which features The Stranglers frontman Hugh Cornwell in a collaboration that came about so serendipitously it can barely be explained.

When Maries mentioned to James that she was trying to do the verses in the style of Hugh Cornwell, Paco (Metalhorse’s engineer, and owner of Paco Loco) turned around and said that Hugh would be in the studio tomorrow, if they wanted to ask him to be on the track. “This studio is on the south coast of Seville. It's really in the middle of nowhere,” says Maries. “So I was just like, ‘yeah, sure…’, thinking, something can't be right here. Maybe he's thinking of someone else with the same name? And the next day, sure as shit, Hugh Cornwell turns up like, ‘you alright?’” For Maries, whose dad was a massive fan of The Stranglers and bestowed the same love for them upon her, it was a “genuinely mental” moment. “We had ‘Golden Brown’ playing at my dad’s funeral. He was buried in a Stranglers t-shirt. Literally, their back catalogue is my childhood. [Hugh] is such a big, prominent figure in my life. I can’t even explain,” she says. “The whole thing felt like a fever dream.”

That sense of the unexplainable is expressed on lead single “The Test.” The first track written for Metalhorse, it encapsulates the turmoil of the last 18 months and the bewilderment that Billy Nomates is still going in spite of it all. Maries describes it in almost spiritual terms: “It’s working at something against the odds and feeling like someone’s helping you from the other side, and if they see you that’s the test,” she says. “I really feel that when we're playing it live. Like, with everything that's going on, I can't believe this is surviving.”

Metalhorse is a balancing of extremes. Reckoning with loss, material insecurity, and trying to stay true to yourself against an increasingly unpredictable backdrop of global chaos, the scales could easily have tipped towards darkness, but the more Maries has had to weather, the more precious those smaller moments of happiness have become. That sentiment comes through on “Plans,” an explosively simple rock track that Maries envisages as like “getting on the Waltzers at the end of the world.” Combining Billy Nomates’ unique tenacity with the open road liberation of Bruce Springsteen, “Plans” is a love song to love itself. “As I get older, and I've just had this diagnosis, and the world's a fucking mess, the idea of being able to have fun or fall in love with someone is the ultimate rebellion, isn't it?” she says. “It just feels totally radical these days. And it seems to happen less as life gets more complicated. Things are only going to get worse, there’s no point being blue sky about it, but there’s also fun to be found in this two minute whizz around that we all have.”

Metalhorse begs the listener to find their own funfair. It might not be the loss of someone significant, or trying to find a foothold in an industry in crisis, but there will always be things that feel perilous. At the same time, you have to marvel at the lights while they’re still on. “I don't want people to come to Metalhorse and leave feeling unhopeful. There has to be something that keeps you there, or else you’d just get out of the park,” Maries says. Dancing with those feelings of uncertainty and joy, Metalhorse is awash with both pain and perseverance.

“Those Leonard Cohen days might be ahead of me,” she laughs, “but for now there has to be some hope, even if it's not real. You have to tell someone that it's going to be alright.”