



## Reviews:

# 'At Hope's Ravine' by Holy Esque: stadium-size rock for bedroom-size thoughts

**Soren Spicknall**  
WIIT STATION MANAGER

Holy Esque is the kind of band that you find yourself forming an opinion of within the first verse you hear. Vocalist Pat Hynes has a growling, all-or-nothing presentation that grabs your attention whether you like it or not, contrasted against a ceaselessly loud and gritty, yet somehow equally polished, soundtrack. This divide is found in plenty of groups (including current post-punk darlings Titus Andronicus and folk rock fixtures Delta Spirit), but rarely does it make an appearance in as catchy a form as on Holy Esque's debut full-length release, "At Hope's Ravine," which drops on the 26th. The Glaswegian group splits the difference equally between Bruce Springsteen and Silversun Pickups, and while they haven't yet quite reached the crowd chorus heights of the former or the emotional density of the latter, they've carved out a niche all their own, informed by dreary U.K. days and shoegaze roots.

"At Hope's Ravine" begins with arguably its least appealing song, "Prism," a confusing sequencing choice that makes a little more sense when you realize that the track would be completely forgettable if it wasn't put first in the collection. "Prism" isn't necessarily a bad composition, but it suffers from a case of overblown production not fit for its melody, something that becomes an issue a few times throughout the LP. The track doesn't have a structure conducive to stadium rock, but is mixed with every element turned up to 11 in a misguided attempt to make it catchier than

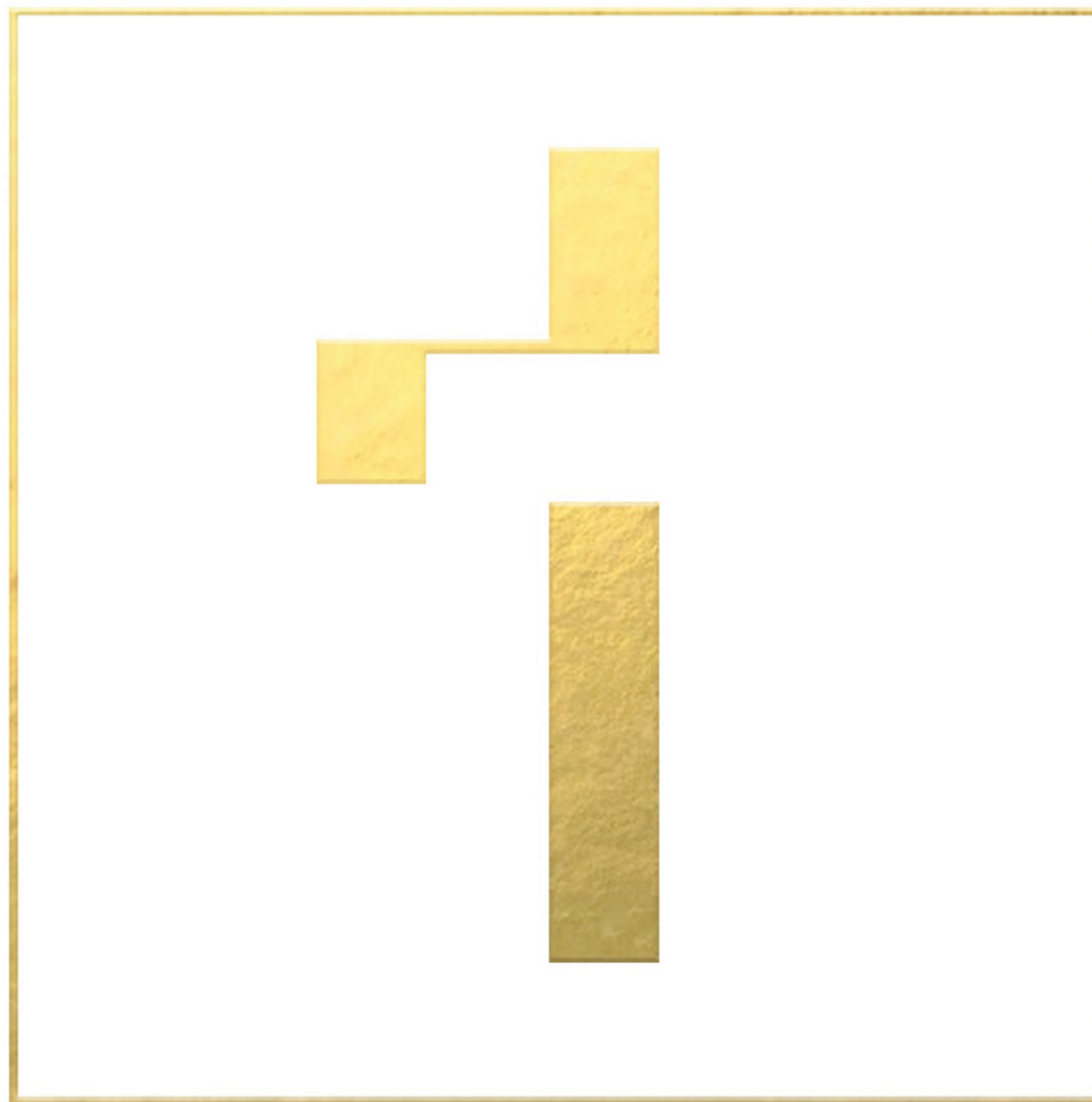


Image courtesy of Holy Esque

it really is. One of Holy Esque's biggest flaws so far as a group has come from struggles with the concept of dynamic contrast, and it's unclear

whether that can be pinned on the band themselves, or on this album's producer.

Luckily, the second and third pieces

on the album both immediately demonstrate why Holy Esque are rising stars in Scotland and abroad; "Rose" begins with a compelling guitar hook that's purely original, something nearly impossible to find in today's rock landscape, and "Hexx" (the album's first single) rises from distortion to an eventual peak rivaling early U2 or Who's Next-era The Who. While detractors will almost certainly point out that neither of these tracks quite match the complexity of either of those referenced artists, it's important to note that Holy Esque is still a very young band. Output of this quality on a first album is often a sign of great things to come, and hopefully that will be the case with this group.

Though the majority of the LP is solid, there are some pieces here and there that make you think that the collection might be better off with a slightly smaller track listing. Because of less impactful pieces like "Covenant (III)" and "St," most listeners won't be paying enough attention by the time the titular, final track rolls around to appreciate its power. And again, none of the less compelling songs on At Hope's Ravine are bad, per say; they simply are much louder than they need be, creating an album environment with few sonic breaks or perceived stylistic differences from song to song. Notably, the late-album track "My Wilderness" seems to have been mixed with some awareness of this problem, and is much better off for it. With a few adjustments or removals, this would be a stellar debut album. In its current state, though, Holy Esque have a little more sonic development to do before they can put out a truly compelling full-length release. 5.5/10

## 'The Asia Project' gives a stunning poetry performance at Hawks Coffeehouse

**Reno Waswil**  
TECHNEWS WRITER

"The Asia Project" is a successful touring performance poetry group consisting of the poet and namesake of the group (who performs under his first name) Asia, and his brother-in-law, Jollan Aurelio, who is a multi-instrumentalist with, as his biography reads, an "uncanny guitar talent," who accompanies him on guitar and effect pedal to add a spacey atmosphere to Asia's art. They are considered one of the leading touring college spoken word poetry acts in the United States performing at an average of 150 colleges a year.

Illinois Tech students had the pleasure of seeing "The Asia Project" perform at last week's Hawks Coffeehouse, which is a bi-weekly Tuesday evening event wherein an artist, usually one of a folk inspired and acoustically minded styling, performs for the student body in the MTCC Welcome Center from 7 to 8 p.m. The attendees of the show are free to relax in the area, possibly to do homework or socialize, drink some of the complimentary coffee,

tea, and hot chocolate available, and survey the assortment of sweet snacks provided.

Due to the nature of the performance that night though--the passion and power of the group; Asia's what can only be described as yelling and crying style of speaking; the loud, synth-y, and hypnotic tone of the guitar accompaniment--it may have been more difficult than usual to pay attention to things other than the artists compared to other more pop and folk sounding acts that tend to be featured at the recurring event.

This week's artist happened to fall in line with a regular sub category of the event called "Poetry and Pancakes," so in addition to the refreshment selection, there was also a full pancake bar, which included maple syrup, fruit preserves, chocolate chips, whipped cream, and of course, four dozen pancakes, which were all gone by the time Sodexo came to pick up the food that night at 9 p.m.

Asia came with an ample amount of pre-prepared promotional material, a script to introduce him with, and an entire media kit, complete with biographies of the group mem-

bers, pictures, and an extensive list of accolades to speak to the quality of his art. To name some of these accolades, Asia has been featured on Home Box Office's (HBO) "Russell Simmon's Def Poetry" and Black Entertainment Television's (BET) "Lyric Cafe," has received first place in poetry competitions Florida Hot Air State Championship and Southern Fried Regional Championship, titles like Performer of the Year by the Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities (APCA), and has performed with artists like KRS-One, Dead Prez, DMN, and Jill Scott.

To speak to the performance, the poetry was heart-wrenching. Asia, as his biography explains, sees his show and his poetry as "an honest and genuine testimony of his life" which includes, most memorably his battle with cancer and the death of his sister and how it affected him and his family. His poetry was both vulnerable and inspiring, and his tendency to get louder and louder as each poem went on was invigorating and moving and could bring the more sensitive observer to tears.

The other of the duo, Aurilio, was

absolutely stunning as well and added as much to the overall performance as the poetry. Thanks to his talent on both guitar and guitar synthesizing equipment along with the expert work and booming sound equipment offered by Alien Sound and Lighting, the backing music came as a wave of airy tone which greatly enhanced the words and gave them an unexpected and amazing force. It became abundantly clear why they are considered such a great act.

For those enticed by this description, for more live intimate artistic performance art, the next Hawks Coffeehouse is planned for March 1, 2016 from 7 to 8 p.m. in the MTCC Welcome Center. This show will feature the musical styling of Justin Young, a Hawaiian guitarist, ukulelist, and keyboardist who is considered a star in the Hawaiian music scene with four number one hits off his 1997 album "Southe You" alone. For the occasion, pineapple upside-down cake bites along with the usual coffee, tea, and hot chocolate will be provided.

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