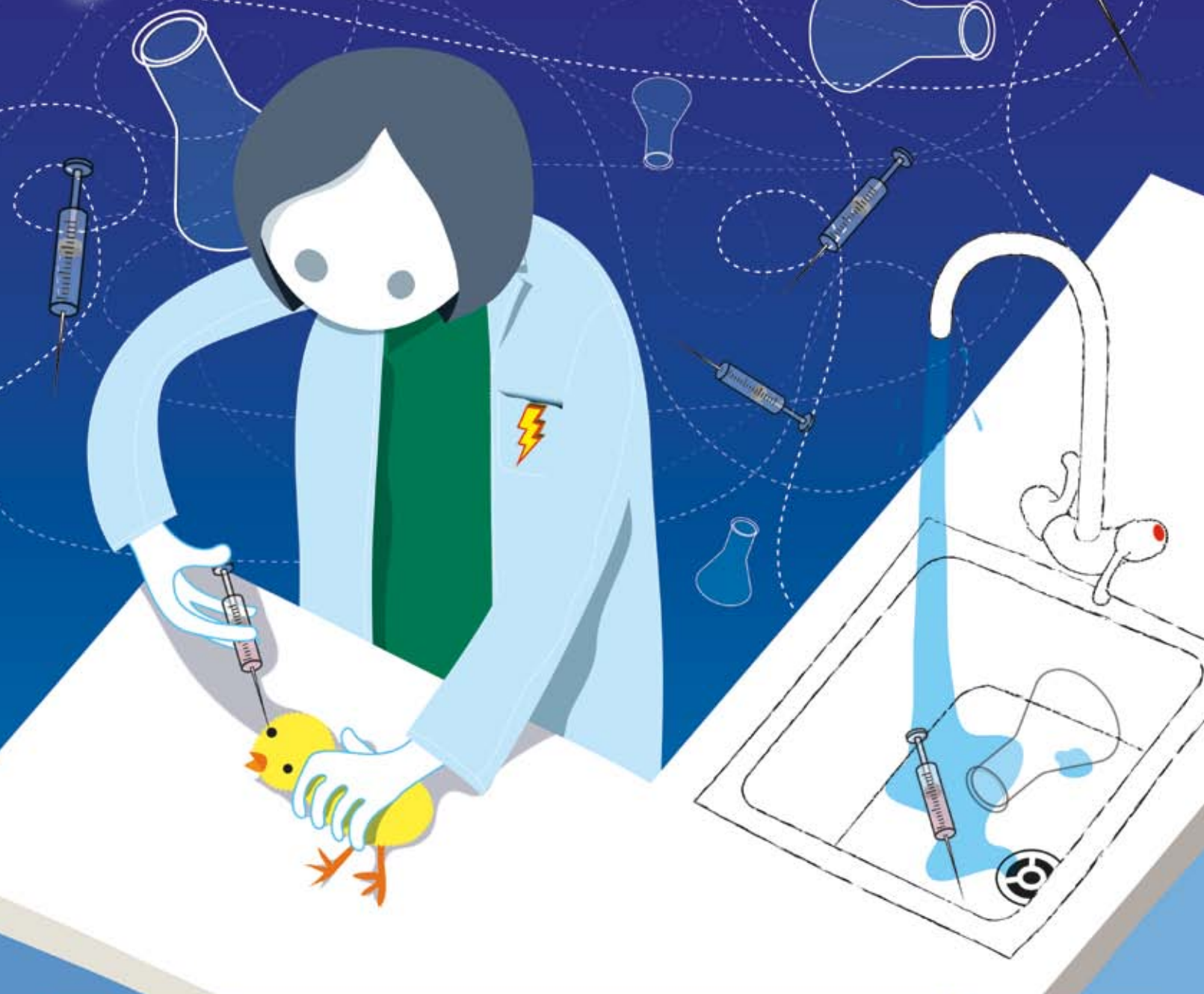


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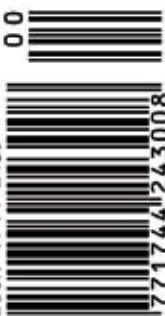


chicks on speed

lightning bolt ooioo spektrum von bondies
cocorosie !!! graham coxon electrelane kaito
sunn o))) the mountain goats klang the pastels

issue zero, june 2004 £2.95

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Photo by A. Schmuckenberg



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'It's bullshit, this notion that kids don't have money. If they really, really want something, then they save'
CHICKS ON SPEED, page 10

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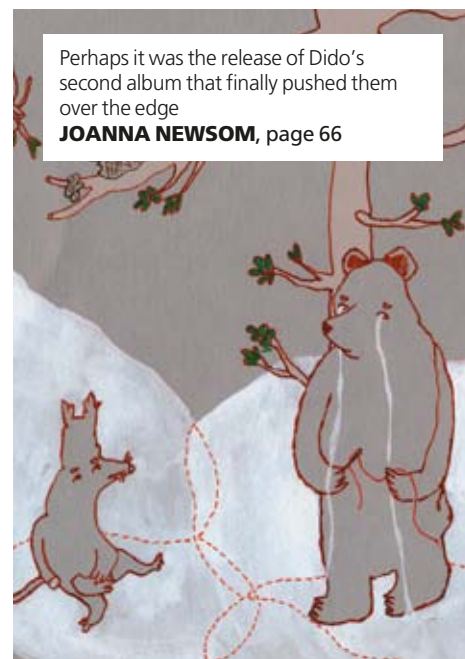
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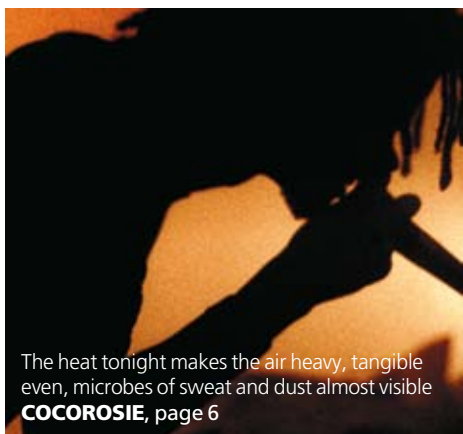
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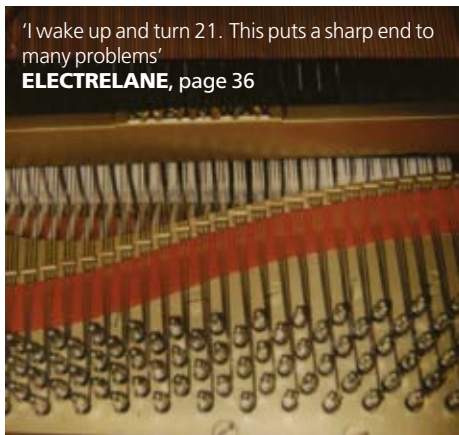
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Perhaps it was the release of Dido's second album that finally pushed them over the edge
JOANNA NEWSOM, page 66



The heat tonight makes the air heavy, tangible even, microbes of sweat and dust almost visible
COCOROSIE, page 6



'I wake up and turn 21. This puts a sharp end to many problems'
ELECTRELANE, page 36



'It was a beautiful New England country folk marijuana peace and love and pot tune'
THURSTON MOORE, page 22

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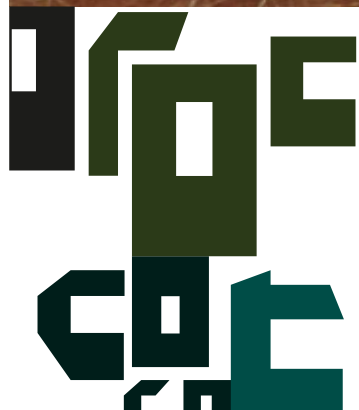
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editorial

'you've always been searching for something'

Friday 26 March

Let me start by explaining something.

Plan B doesn't exist. Not even as a visual concept. There's an ideal, sure. But I haven't even begun to work out what tone the copy should take – full-on enthusiastic, or serious and worthy like *The Wire* perhaps, or aware of its impotence and hence full of soundbites like everyone else, cantankerous like *Private Eye*... full of discourse? Who knows?

Our old magazine *Careless Talk Costs Lives* got onto MTV recently: an interview conducted by two Swedes the same month it disintegrated, the girl looking up at me with something that looked scarily like awe, finishing off my 'I'm Everett True' sentence with, 'and you're a genius'. What was weird was the number of times my performing alter ego The Legend! was shown. Man, I was loving it – it's only taken 20 years for him to get on the small screen.

Plan B, then.

Don't get me wrong. *Plan B* is ready to roll. Just need to get the ads, business and print side sorted out, and we're all set. My new editors suggest some fine ideas. I find our Features Editor intimidating; she's more articulate and passionate than me, which puts me at a disadvantage. Designer Andrew Clare is frighteningly virile (in a passive-aggressive sense). All the ideas thrown up only serve to further confuse my already saturated brain (saturated from meetings with prospective interns, and contributors, and editors).

I think this new team is gonna work out fine.

Indeed, my only worry about the editorial side of *Plan B* is they'll be too much their own people and scorn every last band I love as not being cerebral or soulful enough.

We need to expand the remit we gave ourselves at *Careless Talk* to include *all* the music we love, not just that which is being ignored elsewhere. Obviously, it's all about balance and context, but there's no reason why Kelis and The Streets can't nestle up snugly next to Art Brut and Kaito.

Wednesday 31 March

Travel to London. Our publisher Chris, events manager Anna Marie and I discuss various strategies that don't suck. Yep. You read it right – strategies that don't suck (and that don't lose us loads of money we don't have either). Meet Sarah Bowles, and I'm blown away at how enthused she is to take on the role of photography editor, especially considering how talented she is, and how thankless the job can be. Maybe she won't realise...er... assuming she doesn't read.

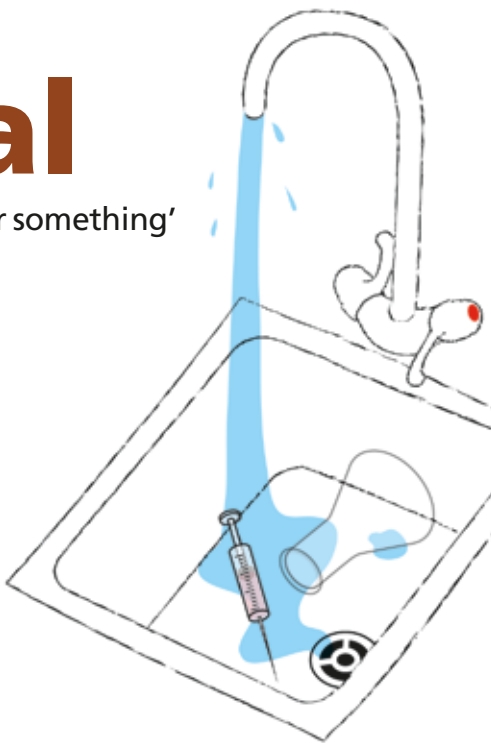
Saturday 3 April

Meet Janine, our music ads manager. I coach her about the launch... We produce a pilot issue mid-June, distributed nationwide, supported by flyers, the website, club nights and hopefully a lecture tour. Once the pilot is out, we contact organisations designed to support ventures like ours and end up with enough funding to launch in earnest in September. We spread the word without once compromising the central vision of the magazine.

What's the central vision? Ah, come on. Surely, you don't need to ask. It's all about the music – and the art and books and film – that we love.

Wednesday 7 April

Current listening: Klang, Heist, Lolita Storm, !!!, Spektrum, DJ Shitmat and Cocorosie.



Thursday 15 April

Man, I'm frustrated with myself. Can't sleep. Too hyped up. Great editorial meeting yesterday. Sarah's photos of Erase Errata kick my ass. Everyone agrees Andrew's provisional cover illo of a lab technician sticking a syringe into a chick's eyeball (*Chicks On Speed*) rocks. Frances suggests that I should interview Spektrum, as I'm the only one old enough to remember the bands they've been compared to (ESG, The Slits, A Certain Ratio) first time round. David's full of great ideas for The Void: small features that aren't dumbass. Chris is having a meeting to see if we can get the interactive media approach happening. But anyway...frustrated.

Haven't slept, and got six meetings in London today – publishing, architecture, finance, news, music, PR and live concert. FUCK!

Saturday 8 May

"Strive for greatness – or at least originality."

I was lecturing to some media students yesterday. After hearing me dismiss *NME* and *Q* as being put together by people embarrassed to be writing about indie music, someone asked what I'm looking for in *Plan B* contributors. I can never think of what to say in these situations. "Be yourself," I replied lamely, well aware that most music criticism is a series of clichés, wrapped up in woolly liberalism and the self-righteousness of the young.

"Your writing should make me wanna rush out and buy – or burn – the discussed artist's records."

Saturday 22 May

Got some posters printed up of the cover to issue zero. Nice blue! Just need some cover lines now...

Thursday 3 June

Final day of proofing before the magazine is sent away to the printer. Realise I ought to write an editorial. How can I convince potential readers and advertisers and investors that this is a magazine not just worthy of their support, but absolutely fucking vital to new music, here and abroad? Read the words! Gasp at the photographs! Swoon at the illustrations! Damn...I don't know.

This is issue zero. The magazine will launch properly in September, in time for the new student year. In the meantime, anyone interested in regular updates, reviews, blogs, subscriptions and features should check out www.planbmag.com. Please drop us a line. We really are interested in your thoughts.

Let's make this precious.

Everett True, Editor-In-Chief

planb
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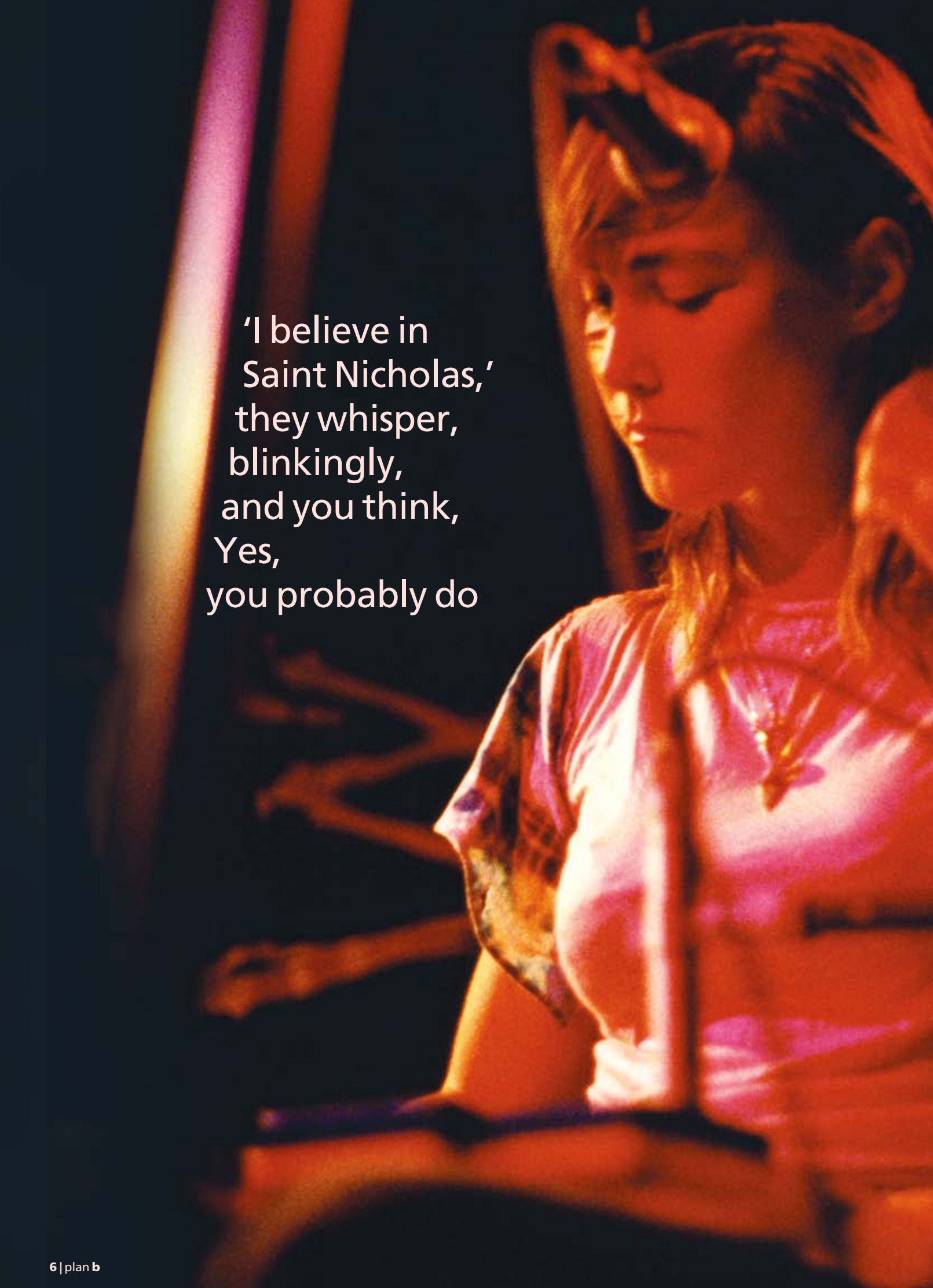
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'I believe in
Saint Nicholas,'
they whisper,
blinkingly,
and you think,
Yes,
you probably do

child's play

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Cocorosie

The Spitz, London E1

I want to believe in impossible things. I want to believe in true love in a cynical world. I want to believe that, yes, Andy Kaufman faked his own death, and has returned from his exile via a weblog (andykaufmanreturns.blogspot.com). And I want to believe in Cocorosie's ability to conjure up the unlikely, sublime wonder of their debut album *La Maison De La Rêve* in the harsh reality of a public gig, no matter how fragile their precious charms, shared softly like secrets between sisters, might be.

The heat tonight makes the air heavy, tangible even, microbes of sweat and dust almost visible, as helpless rotors *whumpwhumpwhump* like a punch-weary boxer 10 feet above us. The kind of oppressively humid conditions that, you imagine, might cause conventional instruments to warp out of tune with crushing regularity; but then tonight is the antithesis of convention, of regularity. For while there are familiar elements in Cocorosie's music, they're channelled in such an unfamiliar manner that they seem as if refracted through a circus mirror: the ghostly echoes of Billie Holliday in Bianca Casady's cracked tones morphed and refashioned, until they're a cocktail of new and old meaning, signifier floating free.

Sierra Casady thoughtfully tugs at the tuning pegs of her guitar, trying to get her strings to chime in time and tune with the raspy microchip belch of a children's toy, a mischievous wink painted on her eyelid in thin marker pen, like sister Bianca's pencil-thin, pen-derived moustache. Crouched behind the sisters, a beat-boxer named Spleen who they picked up in Paris, translates entire symphonies of deck-wreckage and spittle-groove into the mic with startling ease and expertise. A confident smile creeps across Sierra's face, like a conductor tapping his baton upon the lectern, and they begin...

And it's just ravishing. The lo-fi buzz of the album dissipated, all that remains is the beauty of this music, stronger and clearer and just as affecting. For the first couple of songs, people smile wryly at the oddity of the set-up – keyboard, guitar, beat-boxer, box of noisy kiddies' toys – deflected by the novelty. But by the time they get around to the soul-melting 'Good Friday', the sisters' contrasting vocals wisping in and out of

each other, the distractions sink into the background – because the foreground is just so goddamned enchanting.

Sierra is the one with the classical vocal training, the one who can issue forth waves of snowy cool and pristine sound, too perfect to be human, while opening her lips only slightly – the least of effort, for the loveliest of sounds. Bianca is the one whose voice sounds like it was discovered deep in the groove of a discarded shellac 78, pops and cracks and wheezes and rustles all perforating her high-register trill – she sounds like one of those deftly sped-up samples that pepper tracks like Mos Def's 'Ms Fat Booty'. You wonder how conscious that is, that she evokes the context of the source as much as the soul of the source itself, especially when Cocorosie, for all the cerebral baggage that surrounds them, for all the icy cool art-pop image that veils them, are a most soulful proposition.

And you wonder whether the contrast of the two voices is itself a conscious ploy – the way Sierra's creamy, flawless notes unravel into Bianca's crumpled, ecstatic yowl. The interplay is fascinating, the jarring textures dancing in antithesis. And yet, for all the differences, they dance so in synch, so gracefully.

Subtlety is their gift; that's how they can fashion heartbreaking slivers of pseudo-field recorded magic from these unlikely materials, the children's toys, the voices screeing artfully in independent choreography, the rustic, timeless bristle of softly plucked strings woven so smoothly into the rhythmic rasp of lips against a microphone. There really is something magical going on here, in the harmonious collision of all these strange bedfellows.

"I believe in Saint Nicholas," they whisper, blinkingly, and you think, Yes, you probably do. Because there is something naïve and magical about Cocorosie – and something so pure and unique that the only proper response seems to be to swoon, to sigh, to just *appreciate* their surface-odd, substance-sublime wonderfulness, and the unforgettable whimsy and poignancy they can charm out of a production-line child's toy.

Click click whirr. Click click whirr. This is the beating of the mechanical heart, and what vulnerable wonders and unlikely charms lurk within its fleshy turbines. So believe.



practical magic

Words: **Stevie Chick**
Illustration: **Tom Genower**

Graham Coxon just wasn't made for these times. It's OK – the fairies are keeping an eye on him

"I really do see music as something you can be totally yourself within, and not have to lie about who you are, what you are, how you think; once you're inside, listening to a song, you are completely yourself."

Graham Coxon's voice crackles down a phone line, disembodied but still warm, the words tumbling out like an unhurried gush. He has a lot to say, the boy with the frown and the perma-pout: about his new album, *Happiness In Magazines*; about two years of sobriety, following a bout of therapy at The Priory; and, perhaps surprisingly, about fairies.

Surely Graham was your favourite 'Blur', too? Stood near the back, a look of embarrassment unmistakably etched

yourself because you're held back by the social inadequacies you feel. I can see the little ghost of myself as I would've been five years ago, running around and interacting, doing exactly what everyone else is doing. But what everyone else is doing eventually sort of crumbles into this hell of people crying on the stairs or doing allsorts in the loo and arguing."

Deeper than this sense of alienation lies a sense of peace; Graham is coming to terms with many of his demons. Listen to closing number 'Ribbons & Leaves', a tender moment in the vein of Talk Talk, all about the simple piano figure, the space between the notes, the delicate nature of every sound contained therein.

And maturity, I guess.

"Maybe maturity. And in the same way, acceptance: acceptance that I'm an overly romantic freak, and a totally sentimental, soppy person. And being OK with that. In your mid-twenties, sentimentality is sort of sneered at; I always felt I had to hide that, that I was sentimental, that I would save letters – I save all sorts of things, you know – and I'm very superstitious. I do live in a secret world of that. But I don't feel I have to be particularly ashamed of it now."

"It is kind of obvious, how much you need that self-acceptance. It makes you think, what have I been doing for so long? And also you see it in other people, you wonder why people have this white-knuckled need to control everything, why they won't just sit back, give themselves a bit of a better time, and have faith that stuff will be OK in the end anyway. I guess that having faith in the fact that good will happen is a hard thing to believe in."

Maybe you just need that sort of thing proven every now and again.

"It does get proven, though, that's the best thing. Just trying it out a little bit, you get rewarded for not being a loony."

My girlfriend can't wait until she's 30; she senses that many of her anxieties about herself and her place in the world will just begin to fall away.

"It's different for lots of people. For me it required a lot of work, but it did get it all chipped off, away, while I was in the Priory, undergoing some quite extensive therapy. I'd quit drinking before, but I didn't ask for any help, I just stopped. And it took all of one comment at an after-show party, and I was upset enough to go and buy some cigarettes, and go and get drunk. And it was just a silly comment, it needn't have upset me; there was just something inside me waiting for that excuse."

What prompted you deciding, once and for all, to quit drinking?

"There was some pretty reckless behaviour, being utterly drunk and just scaring friends to death. And thinking, if I was capable of that stuff and could just about remember it, then just think about what I *couldn't* remember. It makes you feel like, if you do survive that, all that reckless behaviour, someone must be looking after you. And why not believe that it's the fairies?"

He laughs, as he hears himself, but this isn't a joke. And it's now more than ever that I wish this wasn't a phone interview, because I want to let him know that I'm not snickering as he says all this, like Longfellow Deeds, all vulnerable and honest and a little bit happy. He clears his throat, and begins again.

"I know it sounds stupid, but it's just... I will say fairies and I mean, I guess, that I have felt more connection with the human race, cosmically, than I ever have done. And I know that sounds pretentious and New Age, which I'm not at all. I'm just obsessed with poetics, I guess."

'I guess that having faith in the fact that good will happen is a hard thing to believe in'

across his face as Damon the Drama Student navigated Blur yet another unwise step too far in pursuit of fame, be it the 'Country House' video, or the Oasis bust-up, or some other moment that required his silent subordination. The creative conflict between the two made Blur: Damon's pop impulses and Graham's love of noise and of punk rock situationism clashing and creating electrifying sparks. Blur without Graham? Bleahhh. Damon's ego running aground, unchecked. But Graham without Blur? Very healthy indeed.

I interviewed Graham's friend and hero Billy Childish last year, and one of the punk rock koans he dropped on me was that, "Art should be about authenticity, not originality". It fits Coxon perfectly, his music wearing its influences proudly on its sleeve – The Kinks, new wave, Childish and Robert Wyatt on the latest – while never obscuring Coxon's own voice. *Happiness In Magazines*, while suiting its relatively professional sheen (Coxon has hooked up with Stephen Street, producer of Blur's greatest moments, again, explaining, "I got kind of excited by the songs, and wanted to do them justice. They were saying, 'Graham, don't do to us like you did to those other songs, do a good job with us'") is still the work of a man anxious with a sense of displacement, dysfunction.

The difference is, the Graham Coxon of 2004 is a man coming to terms with that displacement, even embracing it. Check 'No Good Time', perhaps the keenest putdown of the wanker's paradise that is Hoxton, a nightmarish landscape of cocaine eyes, empty conversation and cold souls. An alienation to be proud of, almost.

"I do feel alienated," he admits.

"I don't feel particularly connected to our times. Those energetically charged social situations, where you can't really involve

"It's very hard to record a song about an experience that was absolutely silent," he offers, falteringly. "I was trying to tickle the instruments, hardly touch them. For the last few lines, I was hardly making any noise while singing; the guitar was so quiet in my headphones, it seemed appropriate, respectful. Because the song's about wasted lives, a life in the bin. Yet, at the same time, I was remembering going through my granddad's things, just after he died, and I found all these objects of... No relevance. Well, they had relevance, they had significance. They just didn't have a reference anymore, they were lost things now. They had no owner."

"There's a lot of things about fairies on this record that people haven't seen – maybe shouldn't see – but the song's sort of about believing in fairies. The lyrics about ribbons and leaves and glass, and things being hidden... It's an invocation of magic. With a 'k'. Magick. Not that I'm particularly knowledgeable about such things. I just like to believe in things like that. I find I have to [laughs] believe in things like that."

Just to have something to believe in?

"Not just to have something to believe in. There's a lot of obvious stuff that I can't bring myself to believe in. But I guess that's something about feeling a renewal in myself. I've felt a lot of cynicism fall away over the last couple of years, and a lot of pent-up resentments and anger that eventually I realised wasn't about *anything*, it was a directionless, pointless anger. It would only erupt when I had too much to drink."

"Stopping drinking was the first thing. There's no way I could feel like this just through stopping drinking, though. I stopped drinking for 16 months and didn't feel this way. It's to do with a lot of other studying..."

**'Being underground's OK but you
can still get sponsors, y'know?
Good sponsors'**



cover story gone to seed

Have **Chicks On Speed** saved the world – or even just *our* world?

Words: **Miss AMP**

Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

WHAT I WANT FROM A BAND

They've got to be girls. They've got to be total show-offs. Live, I want: chaos, flair, costume changes, capes, choreographed dance routines; a visual evisceration. I want to come away drenched in sweat and frizzy-haired and damp between the legs.

I want I want I want.

They mustn't play guitars, or if they do, it's as a Joke. They gotta mock the guitar; they gotta smash that phallus. I want face-snapping, whip-lashing, supa-phat beats; cover versions so sharp they bring tears to the eyes. I want: towering pyramids of synths and a wreath of samples tied around my neck and twisting tighter. I want.

I want them to open their performances at feminist music festivals with the words 'We Are Not Feminists'. I want them to shun the label 'girl band'. I want them to fuck around with the stereotypes of what it is to be female, to examine what it means to be valued primarily as a visual object, without getting dragged down in dogma. I want them to paint their faces strange colours or bleach their armpit hair; to knit onstage or hack at their bobbed haircuts, wielding nail-scissors like mental patients. I want.

Chicks On Speed are almost my perfect band. So why are they so damn irritating?

FLASHBACK 2000: HOW I HEARD OF THE CHICKS ON SPEED

I was given a tape. A tape called, *Chicks On Speed – The Unreleases Of The Unreleases*.

Three girls (Melissa Logan, Alex Murray-Leslie, and Kiki Moore) living in Berlin. A Yank, an Aussie, a German; their work scrambled into a 70-minute mix by Vienna sound artists Gerhard Potuznik and Ramon Bauer. The guy who gave me the tape had drawn on the inlay card in biro. *Euro Trash Girl. Dance Of The Floating Pyramid*. He'd written me a little note. "*You are a Euro Trash Girl*," it said.

Most of the tape was unlistenable. There were jingles and glitches. Excerpts of the girls' voices taking the piss out of retted-sounding radio interviewers. Random noise bursts. Screaming. Occasionally, a proper song would rise up from the fug: a shimmery slice of perfect house called 'Glamour Girl'; a cover of Delta 5's 'Mind Your Own Business'; Malaria's 'Kaltes Klares Vasser' with the Chicks' own 'text on the top impressionistically musing on plastic surgery and female body image; and 'Yes I Can!', containing the much-quoted line, "*Fashion victim on the air/Shaved off all my pubic hair/Sometimes people think I'm vermin/Got more faces than Cindy Sherman*."

Frequent use of the pause and fast-forward buttons allowed you to construct your own album from the glitchmessfug. You felt as though you'd won a battle once you'd got to grips with the *Unreleases*. Just as early fanzines deliberately used ransom-note style cut and paste graphics in an attempt to exert control over their audience and keep out those of a 'corporate', anti-

punk mindset who couldn't be bothered to delve deeper, so too did the *Unreleases* function. Listening to the *Unreleases*, you felt that you had won a battle that others less tenacious might scorn to enjoy. You were in the club. You were a Euro Trash Girl.

The Unreleases Of The Unreleases felt like a seething mass of creativity. It felt alive, as though surrounding the perfectly formed songs there were the fragments of millions more songs, just waiting to be magically recreated from their DNA spirals. It felt hideously inspiring, as though by merely *touching* the album, you too might be spun off into a world of glorious, glamorous, magical creativity, where anything might just happen, and probably would.

OTHER STUFF THE CHICKS DID THAT WAS COOL

They didn't *just* release a kickass album. People do that every day. They had also:

- **Run a club** in a place called Seppi Bar in Munich, "Because nothing was happening". They showed slides and their friends' Super-8 movies, played records, had fun, met people.
- **Created a multimedia art project** called *The Box Set*, which was a box containing a cardboard fake record, a T-shirt, a badge, and a poster. "All the merchandising elements of a band, without the band." There was also a tape inside, on which the girls did bad beat-box impressions, pretended to be clever, pouting DJs.

FASHION

Melissa: Our clothes are expensive because it's part of our philosophy that everybody should have a lot of money – it's really shitty that some people are just skimming off until the cream is all gone. Everybody should have enough money to get what they want. It's bullshit, this notion that kids don't have money. If they really, really want something, then they save. We have friends who are these students, they have no money, but then they'll have a 300-euro coat. And we're like, how can you afford that?

Also, we decided that we were not going to have things produced in Thailand. And that's why *It's A Project* priced the way it is. It's handmade in Berlin. It's a crime to sell things cheap – that's what's actually wrong with the world. It only encourages everyone to abuse each other... 'Fashion Rules' is made for the catwalk, and it's also in disdain, and agony, and glorification of the high fashion world.

Alex: It's also about a pissed-off feeling towards the fashion industry: this notion that fashion is so important. It's not very important; there are more

important things in life than fashion. But it's also about a love of fashion. And fashion is also a necessity – if you've got to go onstage, you might as well wear something that makes you feel tough as something that makes you feel weak.

PHILOSOPHY

Melissa: The core of production is more the idea than professionalism. We believe that strongly. It all comes from the idea, and then goes out to music and then graphics. And music can be this intense experience, while graphics is looked on as very low, and fine art seen as really high. But screw those differentiations.

Alex: It's not about craftsmanship, *craftspersonship*. It's about what you select, and how you put it together. If you select a bad sample, a bad sample will make a bad song. Or bad lyrics.

Melissa: It doesn't matter where it comes from, or whether you play it yourself on your violin. It's about how it sounds at the end. This is not a new idea: we've read it in Malaria interviews, that they were also into that. At the



- **Designed their own 'high-fashion' outfits** from leather off-cuts and gaffer tape, and posted the designs on their website, in order that their fans could create their own (thereby theoretically deconstructing the notion of high fashion and exclusivity and the cult of the designer, fact fans – and don't forget, Kiki was working as a stylist at *Vogue* magazine at the time, so this shiznit was subversive and important, non-fashion dudes!).
- **Hosted a trading stall** in Munich, on the internet, and on local cable TV, where people attempted to barter their treasured possessions without the facilitating medium of cash.

There's more, of course, but all of the above were enough for me. As my friend who'd first given me the tape wrote: *"Rather than just let their ideas flow in and out of those conversations laced with phrases like, 'Wouldn't it be great if I did a website all about' and 'Somebody should make a movie that has this', they take the spaces where ideas are hatched, where others fall by the wayside, and bring in their own works-in-progress. They open the possibility for creation, criticism, and dialogue. They motivate others to stop just talking and to start joining. And they enjoy themselves in the process."*

time they were still working with instruments, they didn't have such great technology, but they weren't thinking about their guitars, drums, whatever, they were just thinking, this is what we're gonna do with it, we don't care about playing 'properly'.

Alex: Making mistakes is an important part of creativity.

Melissa: We don't believe in stopping the experimentation and perfecting it, because that's deadening. So to bring it together we collaborate with people who are professionals, because really, that's not so important to us. And sometimes people get mad at us, because they say, well, music is not so important to you. And we say, yes, that's true. Sorry.

FEMINISM

Melissa: The show that we did at Ladyfest, at The Garage [London, 2002], it was a great feeling. Before we got onstage I was a little bit sceptical. There was some poetry happening before us, and this girl was really good at poetry, but she gave me this feeling of like, 'poor me' kind of thing, that women

And all this was presented by a group of Berlin-based pan-European/American/ Australasian attractive females in their late twenties/early thirties – *and they had tunes you could dance to!* Damn, I was convinced, and, back in the day, the world was convinced too. CoS collages and images were plastered across magazines from *The Face* to *NME* to *Nylon* to *Sleaze Nation* to *Oyster*, reclaiming the glossy spaces, replacing the stick-thin models with Boob Monsters and the overpriced designer dresses with frocks made from paper and gaffer tape. They cleaned up *Unreleases* a little, and created a new album from it called *Chicks On Speed Will Save Us All*, and I truly fucking believed that they would.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

In real life, dreams do not come true, and nobody can save you, not even yourself. CoS went on to win international art prizes, tour incessantly and work with various influential producers including Christian Fennesz, Jim O'Rourke, Peter Rehberg, Kreidler and DJ Hell. They opened up an online store called *Chicks On Speed Sell Out*, "Exploiting all the different ways we're going to go commercial"ⁱⁱⁱ. They played at Ladyfest in London in the summer of 2002, a powerful performance during which

Melissa chopped off her long brown hair and flung it into the audience. They set up a record label based in Berlin to release music from bands including Le Tigre, Angie Reed, Dat Politics and Kevin Blechdom. Their music soundtracked catwalks from Seoul to Milan and became a staple of electroclash comps (*Futurism*, Soulwax's mix for Paris fashion store Collette, etc).

In late 2003, a full three years after the first album, they finally released the follow-up, *99c*, and a huge, expensive, coffee-table book called *It's A Project*. And somehow, somewhere – somewhere in-between the bit when I picked up chunks of Melissa's hair off the floor and stuffed it in my purse, intending to "Do something with it" and the last time I saw them live, at the London Mean Fiddler in March 2004 – disillusionment set in.

WHY THE CHICKS SUCKED

Life's been shit for the last week, as I attempt to write part two of this goddamn article, the 'Why The Chicks Sort Of Sucked' bit. Who wants to focus on the bad things? It's so much more fun to think about how happy and exciting things were back in 2000 than to analyse what amounts to a series of sequential disappointments.

sometimes have at Ladyfestivals or whatever. OK, being raped or whatever is fucking shitty, but, the thing is, this victimisation is...the enemy. Being female, being oppressed, getting lower incomes, lower status – that's fucking shitty, but never, ever, ever fucking feel like it. Because that's the downfall.

As soon as we got onstage, it changed. I had prepared a couple of jokes, and gaffer-taped a pair of scissors to my leg. At one point I pulled off the scissors and cut my hair, and threw it into the audience. There's this female cliché that when women are frantic, they chop off their hair. One time my gynaecologist saw I had a new haircut, and she asked if I still had the same boyfriend. I told her that I didn't, and she said, "I thought so. If a woman changes her hair, she changes her life".

It was such an empowering feeling to play with these funny clichés of femaleness at Ladyfest. I didn't know until we got onstage there would be this feeling like, wow, this is *our* space, our territory, we can do whatever the fuck we like. I wore this white dress with red polka dots on it, just jumping up and surfing on the audience. It was really cool. There were these



Fashion Rules?

The Chicks' new book, *It's A Project*, comes wrapped in a graffiti-print canvas totebag and is full of photo collages of the Chicks and collaborators at work and play, interspersed with screeds about fashion and cod-political rants. Sure, the Chicks namecheck John Pilger, author of *The New Rulers Of The World*, but *Project* wears its anti-capitalist sentiment like a logo-ed badge on its lapel. As much as I love fashion, this is capitalism as high art. Just acknowledging that with a wink – screenprinting skirts with Sony and Pentax logos, or defacing *The Face* even when *The Face*'s readers, caught in the hamster wheel of chasing the coolest and newest whatever, were first to pick up on the Chicks – is about as radical as buying a Ché Guevara T-shirt.

However *Project* markets itself, it's too close to the 'mags with bags' that blight every newsagent from London to Glasgow. If you can't be arsed to stump up £3 for a copy of *Elle* because you don't care about spending hundreds of quid on Jimmy Choos to look like some anorexic trust fund chick, lord knows why some sweatshopped PVC holdall will make buying it more attractive.

Like most fashion mags, *Project* is about selling the Chicks' bohemian jetset lifestyle instead of inspiring anyone to make up their own. Granted, *Project*'s giveaways are more enticing – there's a dress you can put together and a poster – and I'm guessing no Indonesian children were shackled to their sewing machines to make any of it. Still, if you've got the £85 for *It's A Project*, why not just get your own cheap canvas tote to scribble on? You'd have enough change to fill it up at the charity shops and toss in a copy of Pilger's book and some Delta 5 singles to boot. Maybe that's the idea: to piss people off so much that they'll say, "Fuck this, I could make something better myself," and then go out and do it. But after seeing Top Shop filled with faux-customised tat for the last few years, I really doubt it.

Emily Bick

'It's a crime to sell things cheap. It only encourages everyone to abuse each other'

Aside from the music, there are three main elements to the CoS ethos – fashion, graphics and art. CoS's live shows are where the disparate elements come together. They're maniacs, these women, smearing their faces and bodies in fluorescent paint till their visages are fucked monstrosities, hacking their hair, falling off speaker stacks, knitting huge fishing nets and pinning them to washing-lines, reading from and tearing up broadsheets, pretending to polish the stage, getting cock-rocking Justin Hawkins-esque boytoys to flail and ultimately fall to the floor dead in the face of the onslaught of 'We Don't Play Guitars' – all against a backdrop of home-produced graphics and videos. BUT. When it's time for the album, we need Quality Product. A live show ultimately only exists as a faded mind-pulse, after all. The album's the thing that lives in the ears and the head unblemished by the passing of time, the artefact by which, ultimately, a band will be judged. So what happened?

They fucked it up. 99c is a slick little album of Proper Pop Songs, all of which adhere to the now-familiar CoS template of synths, stop-starty guitar samples, thumpy beats, shouted anti-consumerist slogans and lyrics of a satirical, snapshot/collage/pastiche nature, but with the lo-fi, scuzzboxy edges

exfoliated to a glossy, overproduced sheen. It's clearly designed as a Trojan horse to carry the Chicks and their ideas into the heart of the mainstream, to MTV Europe and daytime radio airplay. But. They fucked it up. I try not to glaze over as Alex and co explain why. Shenanigans to do with labels and rights meant that the album came out a full year after it was intended to, by which point our ears were familiar with the electroclash stylez and collage po-mo soundbite aesthetics held within.

Electro's heroes were drifting towards the mainstream: Peaches was spread across the Sunday supplements and producing the new Pink album, Scissor Sisters were heading for Number One in the album charts. The world, unable to sit and wait with bated breath for the Chicks' next move, which was to present themselves as available for 'selling out', simply plundered their treasure boxes and moved on. Goldfrapp's graphic designer chiefed CoS's aesthetic styles for the cover of *Black Cherry*; Martine Sitbon and various other fashionistas blatantly ripped off CoS clothing designs, and CoS's attempt to "exploit yourself before it's done to you" began to seem kinda redundant, if not a major case of stable door horse bolted. How, after all, can you sell yourself out when you've already been ripped

off? Is there anything more embarrassing than a failed attempt to infiltrate the mainstream? To gloss yourself up, give yourself up, proffer that glistening sheeny fuckhole, only to find it AIN'T WANTED?

FROM EXPERIMENT INTO THE VOID

My friend and I dissect the Mean Fiddler gig on email. "With the Chicks, I wonder what they could possibly do now? I think they should inject their art=media=music personae into politics and run for an odd municipal position or something. Or maybe one should get an occasional role on a German soap opera. Something to KEEP IT INTERESTING since we are the ADD generation and gaffer tape and homemade dresses and crap clothes aren't doing it for us anymore."

CoS say they have a new album ready to go already, but we're almost halfway through 2004 now and I ain't seen nothing yet. They say the new album will be far less radio-friendly than 99c, more open, experimental, based on jam sessions and outtakes. Really, though, CoS need more than a return to the kindergarten glitchiness of their first release. It's not enough to rail against the hierarchies of the fashion world from behind an asymmetric fringe. We need to be befuddled.

empowering moments, but also these weird moments. It was very schizo.

Alex: But our hostel was kind of ropey. The young girls who organise Ladyfest, I think they think it has to be very low budget, because it's this whole genre, this style... I don't think that's right. We're artists and we've been doing this a long time, and you need the respect that you've earned. You should even be paid more than you might be paid at another gig.

It's such a typical woman thing, you've got to be smaller than the men...being underground's OK but you can still get sponsors, y'know? Good sponsors. Even a company that produces knitting needles, or...

Miss AMP: Sanitary towels?

Alex: Yeah!

Melissa: Oh, that would be fucking cool. Tampax. That would be so cool.



i) I had recently finished running 'Superswops', a cashless shop on Brick Lane, where over the course of three months, we unknowingly attempted the same thing [www.ampnet.co.uk/superswops].

Ultimately, we came away with a renewed respect for cash, because without it, how can you place an arbitrary value on people's personal history? Hey, it's like Enid discovered in the film of *Ghost World* when she has a yard sale and asks a certain price for a dress because she lost her virginity in it, and the person who wants to buy it is like, "So what do I care? I can't buy someone else's memories." CoS reached a similar conclusion: "How do you know the value of things? You don't. People's personal needs are so different. But at least we've explored that," reported Melissa (quoted in Piers Morgan's article in *The Face*, June 2000).

ii) Private email correspondence, 5 August 2000

iii) Alex, interview published in AMP fanzine, summer 2000.

iv) 99 Cents' central conceit, an exploration of the line between art and commerce, is not without its forebears. Many years ago The Who based a whole album around the concept of the 'sell-out', with fabricated adverts appearing between the tracks, while fluorescent fishnet-masked Eighties numpies Sigue Sigue Sputnik went one better by genuinely flogging the space between tracks to advertisers.



SEX

the Von Bondies way

The anatomy of a Detroit love affair; or, why we no longer want to fuck The Von Bondies

Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Ex-Creation Records boss Alan McGee said something about Coldplay and bedwetting a couple of years ago that struck me as so wrong it still haunts me. Something sneering like, "Coldplay make music for bedwetters". If only. *Daniel Johnston* makes music for people who wet the bed – Daniel and Cocorosie and Yoko Ono and The Pastels and Electrelane. You just *know* John Lennon used to wet the bed. Iggy Pop probably still does. Coldplay make music for terminally well-adjusted people to make out and prune the roses to: music as Sixties architecture as chiffon wrap. Cherish the fact you don't fit in, that you're frightened of life and even more terrified of death, that it'll take more than a couple of sniffs of marching powder to help fill the roaring silence inside your head. Cherish your Outsider status. It might be the only thing going for you in this pus-filled, petrifying existence of ours.

Jason Stollsteimer, singer with The Von Bondies is a bedwetter – or if he's not, at least he understands enough to pretend.

FOREPLAY – MILD FLIRTATION

I should explain I hate to do interviews and I try to avoid them as much as possible.

[Band laugh and hold up copy of my previous mag, *Careless Talk Costs Lives*.]

Yeah, well, you obviously haven't read it, cos the only articles I write are about myself.

Jason Stollsteimer: "Nooooo! The Gossip one?"

That's all about me.

[Girls shriek with laughter.]

Yeah, today I'm talking about me. You wanna ask me anything?

Jason: "Where'd you get your start?"

I did a fanzine in the Eighties. A friend asked me to do a column for his fanzine, and I was like, "I can't write". I failed my English O-level. So I wrote about what I hated about music, and what I cared passionately about. A week after the zine came out, 500 copies, the head of a trendy record company screamed at me down the phone at me for 45 minutes.

Jason: "Frightened of your opinion."

Yeah, I was just some punk kid, a screenprinter. I was shocked! Afterwards I was like, this is pretty cool. I'm reaching the

people I want to reach. He can turn the page and ignore my opinion, but I have to listen to his crap music everywhere I go.

Carrie Smith (bass): "In America, the mainstream is horrible right now."

Jason: "Both America and England have their silly 'What's Number One' shows. Steps is horrible. And Cliff Richard! Three weeks at Number One! It's the second worst song in history."

You mean 'The Millennium Prayer', right? That's nasty.

Jason: "It looks like a mall video, with a blue screen with shots of JFK. You can see the glow of his arms. Someone once told me that he was guys' version of Elvis. I dunno... He's clean."

Cliff's from the era of suspiciously gay-looking male stars...you know, all these boys being tutored by a mentor who was clearly fucking them. Not that I'm saying Cliff is gay – heaven forbid!

All right, stop. Manufacture. Elvis. Rock'n'roll. Number ones. Being fucked by the man. The Von Bondies. What's the deal here?

CIGARETTE BREAK

This interview took place in three parts. Some you've just read. That was the 'getting to know you' section. Rock'n'roll stars are crazy, wild, *outsiders*...or like to consider themselves to be. So it's easy to face them off. It's all bullshit. That bit took place last November, in a hotel room near Trafalgar Square – classic corporate setting, Jason made a big play of finding it, "So boring, darling, the *NME* is up next, and I just know they'll want to gossip and not write anything about our music at all", but I noticed he wasn't late for *that* appointment.

I wanted to speak to them for several reasons:

THE MUSIC. The Von Bondies' 2002 debut *Lack Of Communication* is nasty, spiteful and heavy on the wah-wah. Imagine the howling guitars of Mudhoney crossed with a severe sense of claustrophobia, with a little Detroit garage and The Gun Club's swampy blues thrown in. The third album, 2004's *Pawn Shoppe Heart* contains a song about Ben Swank [Soledad Brothers], rips

off The Pixies like everyone else [single, 'C'mon, C'mon'] and wallows in its own muck. All plus points.

CONTEXT: I was writing a book on The White Stripes and Detroit, so I needed to speak to Motor City bands: the band formerly known as The Babykillers seemed particularly well connected. Jack White helped produce *Lack Of Communication*, a fact probably not unconnected to him having once dated guitarist Marcie Bolen.

VANITY: I fancied another brief bite at the corporate apple. Promo CDs come name-encoded now, and – hey – it was either this, The Stranglers or Mike & The Mechanics. And I like my rock not too polished. But don't underestimate my love for certain bands. Same way I wanted to meet Steve Nawara when he was touring with Electric Six, cos he plays with The Detroit Cobras, so I needed to hang with Marcie, ex-Slumber Party. (You don't know who they are? Purchase *Careless Talk Costs Lives* #2, immediately.)

Tell me about Detroit, this mythical city. Does it exist?

Marcie: "Mystical?"

Jason: "Mythical? It's like The Warlocks possessed The Soledad Brothers."

Marcie: "People in the UK compare it to Birmingham. It's very industrial."

Jason: "It's more like Liverpool, cos it's rundown and once was great. The auto industry moved out in the late Seventies. Most kids don't move there to get jobs and find a future. Normally, everyone who lives in Detroit works somewhere in the suburbs, or in a bar if you're our age. I worked at The Magic Stick, the venue where we played, but it wasn't a good job."

The amount of media attention Detroit's gotten in the last couple of years must have changed a lot of things.

Marcie: "All the media is British. As far as music magazines go in America, you've got *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*..."

Jason: "It's very mainstream, and they don't talk about Detroit the way you guys talk about Detroit."

So it hasn't affected your hometown?

Jason: "In terms of labels showing up and stuff like that? Labels have started



Carrie: "I saw one of their first shows [*unlike everyone else then* – Ed]. We all thought Meg was blind cos she kept looking up at the light. She looked like Stevie Wonder, waving her arms around. So it seemed incredible, seeing them on MTV for the first time. It still blows my mind every time I see them on the cover of a magazine – the fact they're so minimal and true to their own music and can get so far."

INTERCOURSE

The second part took place a few nights later, prior to The Von Bondies' appearance at the 100 Club. It was just Jason, his manager and me. Intimate.

My motivation was greed: I needed more material – and my previous liaison had been cut short. I was informed afterwards that the band rarely talk, usually allowing Jason to grab the limelight, as it's what he craves. So our first talk was disproportionate and I wanted more. (I already had Jason pinned down as a fellow bedwetter.)

What's your motivation for making music?

"Depression. Even the catchiest song on our new record has the most depressing lyrics. When I first started making music, I'd never played guitar, I'd never sung in a band. I was going through a bad time and it was better than what I was doing. I was making my problems disappear by drinking. I had some bad days when I didn't think I was going to have another day. A lot of

of fellow Detroit rock'n'roll acolytes The Dirtbombs. Detroit is an even smaller town than Brighton sometimes.

SLOPPY SECONDS

Six months later, April, we meet again at the Concorde 2, Brighton. It's a lovely day for a cycle ride. I want to meet one more time because, still, The Von Bondies music is seedy and strange and (on record) blows with an elephantine grace, howling down the phone lines, and Marcie Bolen had cooked me tacos in Detroit, and wrestled with me in bars. Jason Stollsteimer had gotten himself beaten up by Jack White, and that seemed like good form – I even found myself siding with the pompous little twerp (Jason, not Jack) because I hate bullies more than anything on God's earth, whatever the provocation. We talked about Australia, Japan, masturbation, the allowed angle of erection in Britain, pixels and pubic hair, chocolates and the problem of perspiration. We discussed The Legend!'s performance, supporting Yeah Yeah Yeahs the previous week with an e-flat horn and noise guitar. All seemed fine. Someone suggested I should do a voiceover from the mixing desk, disembodied, between songs. [Marcie: "That would be so awesome. It'd be like *The Wizard Of Oz*."] Jason initially liked the idea, and then looked scared. "You're not gonna get drunk, are you Everett?" Marcie and drummer Don tried to convince him, but he didn't want to run the risk. Rock'n'roll!

POST-COITAL (BITTER) CHOCOLATE

When you play a show, you accept the situation as it is, and react accordingly.

You do not go into band huddles with your manager straight afterwards to discuss whether the bass was loud enough on the final number, whether The Hit Single had one too many refrains, if The Singer's Hair was mussed up enough. You do not walk on stage wearing a Stax T-shirt and pretend you've never heard an indie record in your life, especially when your sound has been almost entirely lifted from the Early Years Of Grunge.

You do not lead the crowd in handclaps.

You do not ask your road crew to check your equipment 15 minutes before you play – even if you're at a goddamn arena, which the Concorde 2 patently is not. It sucks ass and makes half the people present think of The Vines at The Free Butt. And thinking of The Vines is Not A Good Thing.

You don't write kick-ass bluesy rock and then not allow the songs room to breathe – or even suffocate – on stage. You do not have the natural frontperson playing guitar to one side just cos she's female. You do not behave like you're the most wonderful person on earth just because a bunch of students and *NME* (sigh) readers have shelled out daddy's money to see you preen yourself. You do not treat songs, or the audience, or yourself, with respect. You want to be rebellious? Don't imitate The Strokes. And don't *for fuck's sake* be professional. Save proficiency for where it belongs: the sports field.

How can a band sound so similar to Mudhoney and sometimes miss the point so badly?

TWO WEEKS LATER

Disillusionment sets in. Doesn't it always?

'I had some bad days when I didn't think I was going to have another day' – Jason

showing up: mostly Seymour Stein [Von Bondies A&R]."

What's the deal with the Electric Six? They were a great band, then they got a Number Two hit, sacked all the members who made them a great band, and now they suck. It just seems odd.

Carrie: "Yeah, like they'd wanna keep it going and see what happens."

Jason: "Now I go to Detroit and walk into any bar and one of them's gonna be there. The bass-player Steve hit me drink-driving. I was driving home from eating or something, and he hit me, broke my thumbs. Yeah, we got history."

Do you think there are any parallels between Detroit and Seattle?

Jason: "You got the drug problems."

Carrie: "We were making the same comparisons. The White Stripes are the Nirvana."

Marcie: "We're the Tad."

Jason: "We're Mudhoney."

You're totally Mudhoney.

Carrie: "Soundgarden were the Electric Six."

Has it got to the stage where in Seattle, people won't speak Nirvana's name?

Carrie: "People brag about The White Stripes, like 'Yeah, I knew Jack', or like, 'I saw them play way back when...' But then you don't have that whole kind of tragedy associated with Nirvana. No one died..."

Jason: "People still brag about Eminem." Is it weird seeing The White Stripes now?

songwriters go through that, no matter how poppy they sound. A lot of corporate guys – I mean bands – they write a song to get a single. We're writing songs that deal with shit."

What made you turn to music?

"I couldn't paint. If I'd been able to paint, I'd be painting right now."

But what was it about rock music that appealed to you?

"Otis Redding. He didn't have the best voice, but you could hear every emotion he had. His pure emotion... [sings] *'These... arms... of... mine'*, every little mood he sensed. Then you hear Minor Threat do it, and they're a straight edge band. Then I saw Fugazi not so long ago, they're all drinking. So people grow up. So Otis Redding to The Von Bondies. It wasn't The Stooges. It wasn't MC5. I didn't really get into that until this year. It was very new to me, like 'the rock thing'. I was never a Led Zeppelin fan. I wasn't a Beatles or a Rolling Stones fan. I just heard seven or eight different records and that was it. Public Enemy... they had aggression. It wasn't about selling lots of records. That's why I liked a lot of bands that weren't big sellers. Tom Waits is my rock'n'roll icon, just the idea of him as this mysterious guy, doing a lot of interesting, strange things, different kinds of music."

Later that night I threw up on Jason's shoes. Not deliberately, but as a result I was the guest of honour at a dinner (OK, backstage cold cuts) with members



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ooioo

be sure to loop

Words: **Frances May Morgan**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Four Japanese women are running through the Camber Sands car park, wrapped in dresses and blankets and ponchos, straight hair blowing in the east wind. A man holding a child, and another man, holding a camera, follow them. The scene has a hallucinatory, nostalgic quality, like an excerpt from a lost Sixties film about nomads from Saturn visiting an English seaside resort.

I watch, entranced, a filter of foreignness and early-morning tiredness between them and me, before I register the women are OOIOO, and the smallest woman in the beat-up brown leather jacket and ponytail is Yoshimi P-we. I am to interview her soon, and should introduce myself. Instead, I sit back down and keep quiet. The man with the camera lines the band up in front of a red garage door and quickly shoots a few poses. Then they hurry by me again, and the camp is back to its normal self, the greys and blues of buildings and skies; hungover boys in hoodies and jeans.

The interview never happens. Timing and miscommunications keep me sitting in the canteen, while outside the occasional poncho-ed, black-haired figure hurries past. I realise part of me has cast the experience as a quest narrative with all the poignancy of an old science fiction novel and dumb holy grail-search trappings of a psilocybin trip – I must reach this point in the road, I must get to the end of the field, *I must meet this band*.

That urge – to mythologise experience, to create narrative where there is none or

little – is one of the reasons why I'm a writer. Yoshimi, long-term Boredoms member and originator of the all-female quartet, OOIOO, is one of the reasons why I'm a musician. It would be fair to say that she is an ambassador for many things I hold dear in music. That OOIOO are a band who came together by accident doesn't lessen their importance in the slightest.

"A Japanese magazine was going to do a special on me with photographer Takashi Honma, but I didn't want to be in the photo alone, so I decided to make up a fictitious band for the photo session," Yoshimi tells me by email a few weeks later. "After the photo session, I wanted to make this fictitious band into a real one, but there were some people who were playing instruments for the first time. I had a guitar at home that I wanted to try playing, so we all got together and started making sounds. We played so horribly it was incredible. But I felt that there were a lot of possibilities in that session."

Five albums later, Yoshimi's now the only original member of that group left.

But whoever plays with her becomes immediately OOIOO, a phrase that, however you pronounce it (ooeeoo, oh oh eye oh oh, even, as friend used to say, oh oh one oh oh), sounds breathless and excited, both silly and full of meaning. The current line up, playing this rainy mid-afternoon in the upstairs cavern of Camber Sands Pontin's, are *shining*. This might be because they're four beautiful women, playing sparkling guitars and wearing white paper dresses ("...designed by my friend Cosmic Wonder," Yoshimi says. "The outfits made us feel 'new wave'"). But anyone can be pretty and dress in paper and sparkles, and project nothing more than a shabby indie glitz. OOIOO shine because they really play together. They play together so hard that their group spirit is something tangible, something that hangs in the air like laughter or clouds of butterflies.

Live, their playing is not perfect or even that complex – rhythms drift and reconvene – but it's some of the most intensely *musical* playing I've been witness to. The carefree inventiveness and sheer joy in that invention

brings to mind early Soft Machine or the Magic Band, changing tempos and rhythms with scattergun insouciance and skilfully rough edges; psychrock meeting jazz and throwing water-bombs at it.

Imagine Soft Machine as now, as all female, as influenced by the music that hadn't happened yet back then. Imagine their statement 'We did it again' replaced by the sweet suggestion, 'Be sure to loop!' Imagine Neu! in the countryside, backed by a chorus of dryads and squirrels. Imagine *Sowieso* by Cluster sped up and ravaged; imagine Alice Coltrane's 'Los Caballos' punctuated by angelic Japanese birdcalls. Imagine if Hawkwind were beautiful. Imagine Stereolab on ayahuasca. Imagine all of that spun round in a centrifuge until it separates out into its rightful, righteous, *intended* parts and you can pick out the bits that sparkle and shimmer, the bits that are beyond gender, technology and the canon of experimental rock. The important bits.

But trying to describe what OOIOO can sound like is as simple and as complicated as when someone described Boredoms to me as, "Just playing really good drums really fast". OOIOO are, "Just playing pretty space rock really well". Why, then, treat these bands like ambassadors from the true home of music? Partly because in return they offer us unequivocally joyful songs we can dance and smile to. Partly because they're women in a genre in which women have been, surprisingly – or perhaps unsurprisingly,

of the piano. I used to love listening to sounds through cylinders. I always loved music, but I'm just drawn to sound. I can just listen to the sounds of birds, animals, the wind and the rain forever."

Through the stilted frames of translator and email, such truisms tell us little about Yoshimi P-we. Her relationship with natural sound is far more complex and humorous than her words suggest, as a listen to the hypnotic, frenetic nature ramble of *Gold And Green* (2002) and last year's collaboration with Yuka Honda, *Flower With No Color*, will confirm. OOIOO's engagement with nature makes no attempt to align human emotion with nature (as in, the rain equating to sorrow, for example), yet employs cute, synthetic imagery like the pretty birds and turquoise-sounding synths on *Feather Float* and Yoshimi's Aztec wanderer look on the inside sleeve of *Kila Kila Kila*.

Likewise, OOIOO punctuate shamanic chanting with glistening rock power chords; Yoshimi's crystalline, pure vocals are broken up with her instinctive trumpet playing. Although this gives the music a tricksterish, fluid quality, it seems to stem more from an openness to all possibilities than it does from a desire to straddle musical boundaries. They sound in turn charmed and surprised by the sound that's channelled through them and fully in control of it.

Yoshimi's lyrics are a mixture of the oblique and the simplistic, and in some ways



Imagine Neu! in the countryside, backed by a chorus of dryads and squirrels. Imagine Stereolab on ayahuasca

given the covert misogyny of the original psychedelic movement – almost silent, except as ethereal vocalists. Partly because of the attractive, unique ease and looseness with which even the most fucked-up of the Japanese psychedelic groups approach their art. These groups proffer a sparkling, sprawling, knocking-you-to-the-floor embrace rather than a hunched shoulder, a compressed slab of sound. There is always room within it to move around.

When you buy an Acid Mothers T-shirt with the Japanese for 'space' printed upon it, you're not just buying a worn-out hippy cliché; you're buying a description of the music itself, and this is why the hippyish imagery and cartoonish psychedelia of such bands is, somehow, 'allowed' in a way we'd never allow with, say, a British band, unless their tongues were firmly in their cheeks. As, for example, Masami Akita and Keiji Heino fulfil the promise of noise's visceral power, so too do Yamatsuka Eye, Makoto Kawabata and Yoshimi P-we justify their far-out imagery with truly transcendental sound. They make the music that the most cosmic of cover art only depicts, and rarely actualises.

Yoshimi says, "When human beings produce sounds, we sometimes can't help but be shamanic. Especially when we use our voices. This is also true when we play with sounds, when we are immersed and connected by sound."

She continues, "When I was a child, I used to love playing just the black keys

are beyond analysis, often because of the mixture of English and Japanese in which they are sung. Yet the theme of colour, no colour and all colour permeates many songs and titles, and prompts this answer: "I always have certain colours that I'm into. For example I think in terms of, 'This colour is how I feel now'. When I speak with the members of OOIOO, we don't speak in terms of music. We'll often discuss matters in terms of, 'I'm really feeling this colour, but how about you?' kind of thing. When we speak in terms of colour, I can really understand what the other person is thinking. 'Transparent Colour' [a reference to the song 'Anuenue Au'] can mean 'accepting everything around you'."

Such synaesthetic descriptions of a group dynamic would mean little if the band making them sounded like dull blue denim and grey cotton, like the brash colours of stage lights or even the silver and black of amps and mics. Even if they sounded like the colour of flesh and vocal chords and mouths and hands. But the colours of OOIOO's songs are manifest, manifold and dancing like splatters of iridescent paint before my eyes.

As I watch them perform 'On Mani' from *Kila*, with its hypnotic, snake-charmer beat and trumpet fanfare, I couldn't tell you what those colours are. But they are there, for sure. And they are so bright that it's all I can do not to run right towards them, hands outstretched.

Yoshimi doesn't actually fight robots. What she does is far more interesting.

OOIOO

Kila Kila Kila (Thrill Jockey, 2004)
Joined by the excellent Yuka Yoshimura on drums, OOIOO create an earthy, woody, clattery midnight rock picnic of an album that relies more on intricate playing/singing than noise manipulation. Changing time signatures, organ freak-outs, minimal guitar mantras and epic 10-minute build-ups jumble together into the loveliest of free-pop albums, forming a perfect bridge between *Feather Float* and 2002's *Gold And Green*.

OOIOO

Feather Float (Birdman, 2001)
Analogue hummingbirds, kittens stuck in the oscillator, classic Krautrock drum fills, and the ubiquitous vocal refrain makes 'Be Sure To Loop' one of the finest space-rock album openers in existence. But it gets much, much odder, as 'Baby Bamboo From Nose' and 'Frogs And

Sun In A House' nod to Yoshimi's punk/improv side and 'Ring Ring Lee' is unashamed psych-folk...

A gentle masterpiece of joyful disorientation and constant surprise.

Yoshimi And Yuka

Flower With No Color (Ipecac, 2003)
Yoshimi and Yuka (Honda, of Cibo Matto and Buffalo Daughter) recorded the source material for this intriguing mini-epic at the top of a mountain, in a Buddhist temple, surrounded by dogs and 'elegant birds'.

Dreamy, wandering, exquisite free jazz/folk field recordings for when you need some peace and sunlight in your bones.

Boredoms

Vision Creation Newsun (Birdman, 2000)
Super Are (WEA Japan, 1998)
No home should be without these two records.

word painting

Words: **David McNamee**
Photography: **Janine Robinson**

Drug addicts, prostitutes, exiled death metal-obsessed homosexuals... and **The Mountain Goats**



People are collected like things. Memories are shuffled and filed away. Visions, dreams, alternate histories, made-up places and relationships become every bit as tangible and tantalising as fact, and coalesce into fabulous tableaux that unfold like origami petals. This is biography as fiction, apart from when it's the other way round. It's a mental and musical cataloguing of abstracts – gems pulled from muddled minds and pickled for posterity. These are the songs of The Mountain Goats: word-photographer John Darnielle (left) and musical foil Peter Hughes (right).

Throughout the past decade, Darnielle has crafted countless albums of exquisite, unique storytelling. Entire concept albums were written and recorded – roughly and beautifully – on to home cassettes in a matter of days, just bare-boned frenzies of brittle acoustic guitar and John's splendid, careering voice. These were proud and handsome ditties, so exquisitely mannered that one may realistically describe them as 'quaint', with even the most disposable containing what seemed like whole novels and film scripts, dashed onto tape in oblique, over-exuberant spatters of word-paint. Entire tentacled themes would unravel, groping and intertwining with their fellows, almost independently.

The Coroner's Gambit, Darnielle's protracted magnum opus, wasn't reckoned by its creator to be the mini-opera about death it so obviously is until it was almost completed. *All Hail West Texas*, meanwhile, is a scrapbook of light-hearted lost eulogies left mysteriously on always listening answer machines.

After solidifying The Mountain Goats as a two-piece and signing to 4AD, Darnielle produced his most vivid, complete works to date. *Tallahassee* (2002) is a near-flawless unpicking of the fictional, mismatched 'alpha couple' who populated early TMG songs and who finally drag each other into a spiral of glorious mutual devastation. 2004's *We Shall All Be Healed* is the first Mountain Goats release to adopt Darnielle himself as lead character – albeit an 18-year-old Darnielle, stranded in a parade of social outcasts in mid-Eighties Portland, Oregon.

Like his alpha couple, Darnielle imports himself and his pseudo-iconoclast teenage compatriots into a fictionalised narrative framework. Drug addicts, prostitutes, exiled death metal-obsessed homosexuals and could-be geniuses ransacked by mental illness become glittering anti-heroes immortalised incongruously in a 2D cut-out scenery movie with a determinedly unresolved plot. Some stories have new, raging life breathed into them, some characters are laid to rest and respects – if not judgements – are fully delivered.

Perhaps surprisingly, Darnielle feels it wasn't so much the album itself, but his own microsite (www.weshallallbehealed.com) to accompany *We Shall All Be Healed*, where most of the latter work was done, and where "doubtless dead people" were paid tribute to.

How do you contrive yourself and the most hard-to-reconcile period of your life into a fiction? Is it something you could only do to retain objectivity as an artist?

"Yeah, it helps if you don't believe in autobiography!" laughs John Darnielle, some 15 years older, wiser and no less alive.

"When someone starts to write their own story, a process of fictionalisation...uh...*metamorphosis into narrative*, takes place, because, really, narrative is a fiction. There's no such thing as narrative. There's moments and things that happen and they're pretty amorphous and that's pretty scary to us as creatures for some reason. So we impose narrative on things. 'We tell stories in order to live.' A strictly confessional art form would have neither rhyme nor metre and would only be interesting as a clinical experiment." Across a polished dressing room table, dressed smartly in tie-less suit and designer glasses, John looks a lot like an articulate, mannered writer, and not so much like the lost protagonist in his later material. "I try and seem like there's not a lot of artifice, but everything's artifice, so I'm into trying to construct one and then render it invisible."

At points, *We Shall All Be Healed* scans like a *Lost In La Mancha* kind of scenario, where you have these nervy, supercharged young marauders attempting to get this thing made but just going round in circles, not knowing if their own personal movies will ever be fully realised or resolved.

"I like that. That's really good. I mean, because, if you've ever hung out with a lot of junkies, there's something cinematic and

cinematically dramatic about the way they live their lives and perceive things. They do always seem like they're shooting a scene or getting ready to," he laughs. "Drug addicts don't think any of this is real and that anything has lasting consequences. Which, for them, is true, because once a moment passes you can't even recall it. And, almost, you have to will consequences away. And movies are sort of like that. You take the consequences that you need for the next scene and then you leave anything else behind. Even if

'Who doesn't want to be young and fabulous and high?'

you're a really good filmmaker, you pick and choose between what has bearing on the next scene and what doesn't. So..."

The use of perspective is strange. John sings from the perspective of an 18-year-old, but imbued with the knowledge of the person he has become. Nevertheless, Darnielle rejects the notion he uses his art as a process of self-reconciliation.

"That's not what art has been about. My first interest was in doing something good. I do journaling for that. But that's not to say it didn't have a *therapeutic* value. It certainly had that, but it wouldn't be sporting to, in public, do something that you *need* to do personally."

The title *We Shall All Be Healed* is the most obvious signifier that Darnielle attempts to offer his characters redemption of sorts. In the explicit references to visions in 'Palmcorder Yajna' and the album centrepiece, 'Against Pollution' ("*When the last days come/We shall see visions/More vivid than sunsets/Brighter than stars/We will recognise each other/And see ourselves for the first time/The way we really are*"), he sounds like he's breaking the rules, offering his protagonists a glimpse of their future, and trying to tell them that no matter what, everything will be OK.

"The line in 'Against Pollution' is from the Bible," he explains. "From Ecclesiastes. One of my mother's favourite lines. Uh, 'You old men shall see visions, and you young men shall dream dreams'. King James English, it's so amazing. But they're fever dreams, really. Every idea is a vision of sorts when you're either extraordinarily high or this end of coming back down. Every minor idea blossoms into big tableaux in front of you."

Against the odds of his case studies in Tallahassee and the reflections of *We Shall All Be Healed*, John is happily married and, for the purposes of this tour, abstaining from late nights, alcohol, and even caffeine. Only in his affection for the real and unreal populace of his lyrical landscapes is it apparent these insect-strewn basement mattresses and lonely hospital beds are the same ones he dreamed his young life away in. Do you think about that period a lot?

"Yeah. Not as much as I used to. It was a very brief and a weird period. I barely lived through it. I almost died a coupla times. All these experiences you have are difficult to communicate to people. They're also very rich and you learn things about people – good and bad, more good than you'd think. You know, it's like Orpheus' descent into hell. You can't *learn* some stuff without descending! And some of the practical applications of that are really valuable."

It arms you with a perspective that other people might not necessarily have; a component of the human experience they are lacking, and maybe are weaker for. Sometimes, despite everything, you sound like you just can't help the nostalgia.

"Oh yeah!" John laughs. "Of course! Who doesn't want to be young and fabulous and high? Y'know, but I don't have nostalgia for the morning I woke up and I had no idea what day it was. I miss feeling almost completely invulnerable; though I now know that I'm not. But there's something just great about feeling that the only thing that could kill you is yourself if you chose to. There's nobody more *impervious* to damage than somebody who is actively courting damage at all times."





guilty pleasures: **Erase Errata** Photography: Sarah Bowles

'Stars And Stripes Forever' by JP Sousa

Someone whose last name is basically 'so USA' wouldn't publicly top my favourite songwriters, and I dislike saying, or even looking at, the song's title. But when I hear it, I can ignore the associations with blind/under-informed patriotism and consider it strictly aurally. I have to be honest: I'm into this song. I love to hear it loud.

I've heard a marching band perform it. I've heard it over a Victrola. Perhaps the best way I've heard it is in a pizza parlour, performed on an ancient and elaborate pipe organ with mechanical snare drums and cymbals. My elation at the song's spectacle was attributed to the quality of the pizza – very clever. (Jenny)

Celebrity Gossip – US Weekly, Buddyhead

I can't get enough. Why do I care? I don't know. But when I read a really great piece of gossip (the WB network is making a movie about Kurt Cobain, starring the singer from Puddle Of Mudd! *What!?!?*), my heartbeat starts racing, my eyes get big and I start screaming. I try to tell myself it doesn't matter, that there are so many more important things to be reading about – but sometimes I need a fix. I feel bad objectifying these poor people. I know that Whitney Houston has real feelings. But I get so caught up in the sport of it all that it seems like I'm just watching characters evolve.

Did you hear that Bianca from Erase Errata just punctured her saline breast implant while she was trying to help her imprisoned boyfriend escape!?! (Ellie)

Sex And The City

I love, I mean, LOVE *Sex And The City*. The drama, the nasty outfits, the nasty sex, the annoying dialogue... I've been renting video after video after video, watching five to six episodes a night. This has been going on for weeks. Carrie cut her hair! Miranda had a baby! Samantha has a three way! It's all too exciting! And what's embarrassing is that I use their relationship advice in my life. I've turned into one of those fat lonely 40-year-olds with 25 cats. This show makes me feel terrible about myself for liking it, yet I can't stop watching. It's fucked. (Bianca)

the first record I ever bought: **Thurston Moore**



The first record I bought was 'Get Together' by The Youngbloods. They were a stoner hippie group formed by Jesse Colin Young. It was a beautiful New England country folk marijuana peace and love and pot tune that was a massive hit in the USA. It was written by Dino Valenti from Quicksilver Messenger Service; he signed away rights to it when he was imprisoned for marijuana possession. The Youngbloods recorded it and gave the composer

credit to Chet Powers, a name they made up. It supposedly flopped when released in 1967 but became a hit in 1969 when The National Conference Of Christians And Jews distributed it to radio and TV stations to support *Brotherhood Week*.

It was also released by California group We Five in 1965, and their version went to Number 31 in the US charts. Of course, I got that last bit of info from the internet but, regardless, I guess I bought it in 1969 – wow – when I was 11 years old. Actually, I think I had my mom buy it for me. I played it incessantly, of course, though I knew I needed some harder stuff, which I progressively went towards. I always discounted The Youngbloods as one-hit wonders, but later on I became interested in discovering folk music from America and England and realised that The Youngbloods were a real interesting cog. I guess Warner Brothers/Reprise gave Jesse Colin Young carte blanche after the mega success of 'Get Together', and he was allowed to release bands on his own imprint, Raccoon Records. He went on to release over a dozen LPs by completely stoned-out hippie freaks playing jugs and washboards and broken acoustic

guitars – and they were all great (in a way). Here's what they were:

- *Rock Festival*, The Youngbloods, 1970, Raccoon 1
- *For You*, Jeffrey Cain, 1970, Raccoon 2
- *Moonset*, Joe Bauer, 1971, Raccoon 3
- *Ride The Wind*, The Youngbloods, 1971, Raccoon 4
- *What Was, What Is, What Will Be*, Kenny Gill, 1971, Raccoon 5
- *Armchair Boogie*, Michael Hurley, 1971, Raccoon 6
- *High Country*, High Country, 1971, Raccoon 7
- *Crab Tunes*, Noggins, 1971, Raccoon 8
- *Good And Dusty*, The Youngbloods, 1971, Raccoon 9
- *Together*, Jesse Colin Young, 1971, Raccoon 10
- *Dreams*, High Country, 1971, Raccoon 11
- *Whispering Thunder*, Jeffrey Cain, 1972, Raccoon 12
- *Mid-Mountain Ranch*, Banana And The Bunch, 1972, Raccoon 13
- *Hi Fi Snock Uptown*, Michael Hurley, 1972, Raccoon 14
- *High On A Ridgtop*, The Youngbloods, 1972, Raccoon 15

the VOID

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33 New Black

34 Crunk

34 Remote Viewer:
Bangkok

35 Why I Hate
(by) Peter Bagge

86 Why I Love
(by) Ian Svenonius

synergy: Rammellzee selects his fantasy image-sound combination

You know the scene in *Starship Troopers* when the troopers have arrived at the bug planet and are now inside a ravaged fort? The fort's only survivor, its x-Commander, gets taken down by the giant flying yellow/ green insectoid after ranting, "We're all going to die". The surviving Trooper Commander (the tough hard ass) rallies the Troopers as they race up the fort's ramparts to man the guns.

Cue music: synth and kick-drum beginning of 'Jamin Zabar' from *The Bi-Conicals Of The Rammellzee*.

You're looking from point of view of the Troopers as they get to the top of the fort wall and look out to see there's an oncoming onslaught of hundreds, thousands of the giant ground-soldier insectoids pouring over the horizon and rushing towards

the fort. Ensuing frenzy of high calibre multi machine-gun fire, flailing insectoid limbs, claws, mandibles, impaled Troopers and green bug juice flying and dying everywhere around.

Suddenly, there's a terrific crunching and death screams as his torso is pulled apart

The Commander is shouting when the ground beneath him shifts – an insectoid underground has made a trap for the humans, and he's pulled down. With only half his body still above ground he's shooting down

into the hole as more dust, dirt, debris falls and flies up around him.

"Never say Jamin Zabar..."

Synthy edge through chorus, rolls into breakdown.

The stunned Troopers stand around the hole looking down at their stricken Commander, then they pull him back up. Suddenly, there's a terrific crunching and death screams as his torso is pulled apart, and only upper body and head are pulled up. Dying now, he pulls his next in command close and manages to make two last orders: "You are in command now. You know what you gotta do..."

Green noise of insectoid battle takes over. Synths swooping down, double kickbeats running their program...



my favourite song: Jeffrey Lewis



All things bright and beautiful

The Hidden Cameras are so gospel, they should be presenting *Songs Of Praise*



Words: **Alistair Fitchett**
Illustration: **Mr Bingo**

Physical sound is nothing next to essence and feeling

The Hidden Cameras make a joyous gospel Pop noise.

Joyous: The Hidden Cameras make you feel like your heart has skipped a thousand beats and has swollen a hundredfold, is aching to explode in every direction with unbridled love and devotion. The Hidden Cameras infect your feet with dancing

fever, command your body to swing from the highest rooftops or deep inside your basement fortress, whichever or wherever you prefer. The Hidden Cameras make me soar over the valleys beneath Puerta de Penas Blancas, dropping flyers that proclaim "I Have Heard The Voice Of God!"

Gospel: Brian Eno said it, and Dylan Ebdus, via Jonathan Lethem in his rambling, expansive novel *The Fortress Of Solitude* reminds us about it: great Pop needs call and response. Naturally, gospel is all about call and response, is all about testifying love and faith. At their finest (as on the anthemic 'Ban Marriage' single, or 'I Believe In The Good Of Life' from the forthcoming album *Mississauga Goddam*, or the recent *CBC*

Radio Sessions 10-inch) The Hidden Cameras fulfil this need so perfectly. Choir-like backing vocals call that love and faith back to Joel Gibb, the leader of this raggedy band of troubadours. As Gibb puts it: "What I do is organise everything: the songs; the instrumentation; the context in which the music is presented."

In the already mythic days of Hidden Camera yore there could be upwards of 30 of these troubadours on stage, each and every one carried upwards and onwards on their waves of devotion, in turn carrying with them audiences giddy and delirious. Such is the nature of magic, and naturally magic is also at the core of all great Pop. Just go ask The Lovin' Spoonful. Or ask Gibb himself.

"Sure, that is a good way to define pop music. I always try to make something catchy if I am going for a pop approach to things. That can include a call and response pattern, but not necessarily."

Like Lawrence with his 10-year plan for Felt, Gibb recognises the need for myth building in Pop: "Nothing I do is random or outside of my control when it comes to manufacturing The Hidden Cameras. It's about trying to take different approaches to the idea of a pop group and it is definitely about creating a mythology."

Pop noise: The Hidden Cameras make a magnificent Pop Noise, in much the same way that Hurrah! or Biff Bang Pow! made a dynamic Beat Noise in their time. The

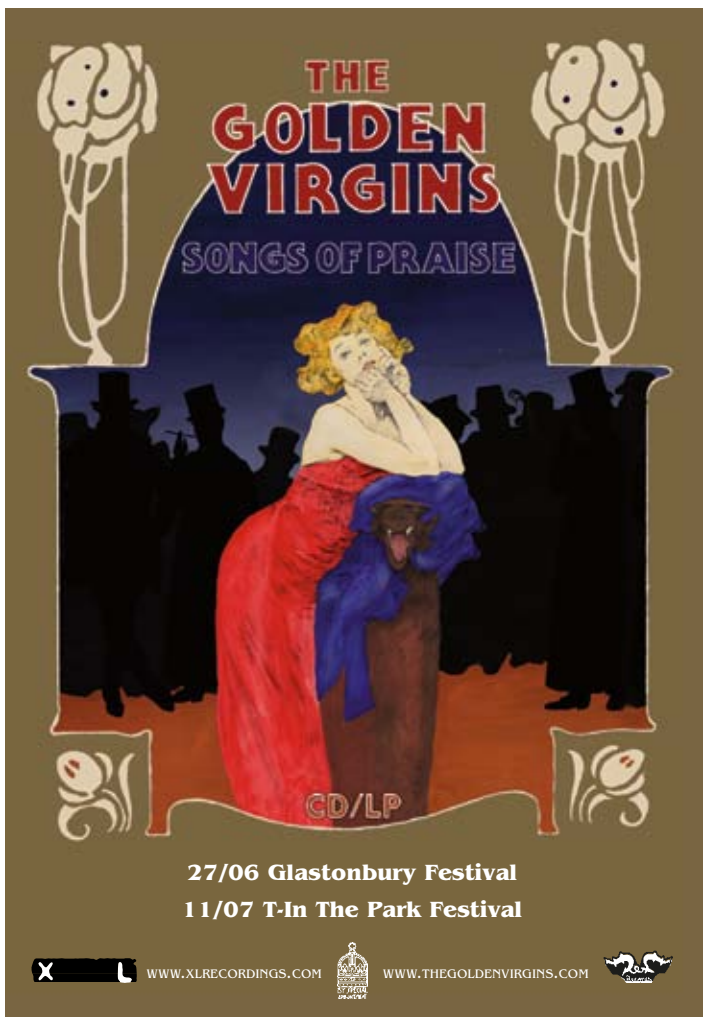
Hidden Cameras make a Pop Noise in the same way that The Creation or The Eyes could kick up a storm, and this regardless of the fact The Hidden Cameras sound nothing like any of those acts in the slightest.

Because as we all know, physical sound is nothing next to essence and feeling.

Of course too, context is all, and The Hidden Cameras make great Pop contextual references, covering the mighty David Kilgour's 'Dunes' for the Rough Trade compilation *Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before*. For old music journalists it was a perfect nod, for those too young to know it should be a sweet nudge in the right direction. These things are important, as is the idea that artists should be in control of their output, should be acutely aware of the process of their art.

"I like the whole process of a pop group. I like writing melodies, and playing drums, and thinking about what strings would play, and the record sleeve and what a record is recorded onto, and how it is mixed, and the video and the press shot, etc. I wouldn't be happy if all I did was sing in a band."

The Hidden Cameras are about so much more than just being a band, than just about music. They understand implicitly the whole jigsaw puzzle of the dream and fit those pieces together with the kind of style, wit and, damn it, great songs that so many other pretenders could not begin to imagine. The Hidden Cameras make a joyous gospel Pop noise. Don't miss it.



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"THIS ALBUM IS ABSURDLY INFECTIOUS" UNCUT 4/5
"A DAZZLING DEBUT, ALL THE BETTER FOR SOUNDING PRETTY MUCH UNLIKE ANYTHING ELSE EVER" TIME 8/10
"AN ODDLY BEAUTIFUL RECORD, THE ALBUM'S TALKING POINT DOWN WITH PRINCE: A MINIMAL SLICE OF PUNK FUNK IS JUST ONE OF SEVERAL TRACKS WHICH SEEM A SPOOLED BEAT AWAY FROM TOP TEN STATUS" TIME OUT
"A REFRESHINGLY UNIQUE, ECLECTIC AND ACCOMPLISHED DEBUT THAT SEAMLESSLY BLENDS FUNK, ELECTRO AND HIP HOP MAKING A SOUND LIKE PRINCE TAKING A COLD SHOWER AND DOING TEMAZAPAM WITH WELLOW GOLD-BRA BECK... END OF YEAR TOP TEN COMPLETERS SHOULD TAKE NOTE: THE FLY
"A DELIGHTFUL DEBUT ALBUM THAT TOTALLY DEFIES CLASSIFICATION, IS IT ELECTRONICA? POP? FUNK? ABSOLUTELY BONKERS? HELL, YES, IT'S ALL OF THE ABOVE AND MORE" JACK
"FUNNY AS A PAIR OF ANDRE 3000'S V-FRONT'S" THE FACE



Words: **David McNamee**
Illustration: **Daryl Waller**

XIU XIU create music as distressed as Jandek singing the homoerotic death ballads of Noel Coward

If you could hate-fuck one person from the mainstream pop charts, who would it be?

"Wow. That is hard to say. I am fascinated by mainstream pop people, almost to the extent that I cannot hate them as they have transcended humanness and become weird artefacts; it would be like hate-fucking the Egyptian section of the Louvre."

Xiu Xiu is songwriter and synth-mangler Jamie Stewart, aided by a parade of misfit musicians culled from the ranks of outsider iconoclasts Deerhoof, Hella, Mr Bungle and others. Four albums in fewer than two years have produced music as distressed and distressing as Jandek singing the homoerotic death ballads of Noel Coward, and as cold and breathtaking as a slow-motion supernova exploding in a mausoleum.

Fabulous Muscles, purportedly the most accessible of Xiu Xiu's oeuvre to date, is a lurid gash of angry realisation in railing, almost formless electronic laments. It was inspired, in Jamie's own words, by "Violence as an expression of power, child molestation, my father's suicide, disgusting, pointless war and trying to have hope for love to exist and persist in the midst of all this, but having doubts that it will." taTu appear on the albums thanks list.

Everything about *Fabulous Muscles* – the retina-scorching neon pink of the cover, the flick-book of death-porn images, the squalls and dashes of electronic noise and voice – indicate that, with Xiu

Xiu,
Jamie is
trying to
create a headspace
where every sensitivity to
real life is magnified, clarified and re-examined. Like
you can only properly assess the world when you've
dashed it to pieces – not by analysis but through
pure *response* – made it into confetti and flung it
into a void of neon pink and black. Do you make
music because human heads lack the capacity
and resources to calculate, absorb and retain
this information in any other way?

"That is an interesting observation, but I would hopefully not be making music as an attempt to remedy a potential human vs media shortcoming. There is very much something to be said for your idea though, insofar as needing to unravel and burn up and over-examine an intense life event in order to absorb it, understand and possibly appreciate it."

Consciously and conscientiously deciding you don't want to be alive anymore, and *not* doing the fucking act, is the most powerful artistic protest against badness, sadness, darkness, mediocrity and acceptance there is. Discuss.

"I think it is the most powerful political, social, moral, artistic, personal, familial, educational, religious, emotional protest that there is. The idea of not giving up OR/AND giving in is THE idea. On the other hand, I can understand why people choose suicide. A little over a year ago my father killed himself and I only miss him and feel hurt that he felt so much hurt he could not take it anymore. Maybe in time I will be mad at his having given up. I am not so sure what to say."

Explain how everyday Jamie differs from the person that you are when you sing.

"For Xiu Xiu songs, the point is not transformation but realisation; playing to un-invert what is happening inside. This is the case with anyone making any kind of art or social work or computer code with the purpose to touch people."

Xiu Xiu's music is like software that has been programmed with all the things you need to be a human being: love, remorse, anger, frustration, desire, grief. But when you install it, it doesn't kill the viruses or make you function better. It glitches and crashes and redirects your thought processes into different, newer areas. It speeds up the way you process information to motherboard-melting degrees, or slows your metabolism and responses down until you're a ticking, floating jellyfish propelled by the tide and left with no communicable defence other than an exposed nervous system sparking off anyone who gets too close.

What are the most interesting, unusual or unexpected events that you are aware of that have been soundtracked or provoked by Xiu Xiu?

"A woman gave me a test tube with a frog vertebrae in it and said it was inspired by having listened to a Xiu Xiu record all summer. She said she caught the frog and boiled it down herself. Then she mailed me a bird's foot in a similar test tube. Later, when we ran into each other at a show, she totally blew me off when I tried to hang out with her."

What did you do with the 30 pairs of bloody panties that the obsessed fan sent to you? Did you wear them over your face and head while you were singing your parts for the album?

"You and I both wish."



mean streets

Words: **Manish Agarwal**
Photography: **Cat Stevens**

The Bronx are adrenalised and paranoid

"We're desperate/Get used to it" – 'We're Desperate', X (1981)

Desperation is a hallmark of LA punk. From first-wave outcasts X, The Dils, Germs and WeirDOS, through the hardcore rage of Black Flag, Circle Jerks, Adolescents and Fear, to contemporary malcontents The Icarus Line and The Bronx, the City of Angels has long produced a virulent, caustic strain of rock'n'roll. The proximity of Hollywood's glamour and glitz seems to provoke an extreme reaction in musicians.

"Well, I live in Hollywood and it fucking sucks," says Bronx guitarist Joby Ford on the phone from Nottingham, where the band he started two years ago with Matt Caughthran (vocals), James Tweedy (bass) and Jorma Vik (drums) are on tour. "People think there's movie stars floating around and everybody's got a nice car, but that's probably five per cent of Los Angeles. The rest is a shithole. If we lived in the Rocky Mountains, our songs probably wouldn't be about the things they're about."

Those songs are dark-humoured blasts of tuneful alienation, tweaking hardcore's adrenalised rush with Stooges swagger and a needling, abrasive complexity that's reminiscent of blistering Rocket From The Crypt spin-offs Drive Like Jehu and Hot Snakes. (Ford and co's first American tour was as support to Rocket; he feels the San Diego veterans are something to aspire to, citing their phenomenal vinyl output and self-sufficient cult status.)

Drugs and disease are recurring themes on The Bronx's eponymous debut LP. 'Heart Attack American' and 'White Tar' depict poverty-frayed nerves and chemically fucked bodies, people running on empty till they hit a brick wall embodied by the desolate hospital lament 'Strobe Life'. Violent

imagery colours personal expression. Legend has it that while the band were making the album – recorded cheaply by ex-Guns N' Roses guitarist Gilby Clarke – a passer-by was shot dead in the street.

"That's not 100 per cent true," remembers Ford, who moved to LA from his native Colorado when he was 17, thanks to a baseball scholarship that enabled him to study graphic design. "Someone got murdered in front of us, but it wasn't outside our studio. It was outside this bar we used to play at."

Is there a lot of violence in LA?

"It's like any other big city. If you're an idiot, you can get yourself into a lot of shit. But if you're not going into places you're not supposed to go, you'll be fine. There's always signs of violence: spotlights over your neighbourhood at night, gunshots in the distance. A buddy of mine in the LAPD has got a fucking machine gun in his trunk."

Unsurprisingly, paranoia is a constant in The Bronx's lexicon. There's the squalid, junk-induced shivers of 'They Will Kill Us All (Without Mercy)', and their raw version of the X classic 'Los Angeles': a third-person portrait of a woman whose resentment towards black and gay people, Jews, Mexicans and 'the idle rich' has simmered to boiling point under the endless California sun.

The latter is one of several old songs the band has revived. Last year's 'La Muerte Viva' EP closed with a righteous holler through 'Private Affair', a withering attack on hipster conformity originally done by Aussie proto-punks The Saints. The Bronx are unashamed music obsessives. Ford studied classical piano and cello as a child; his introduction to pop came through Bob Dylan.

'I live in Hollywood and it fucking sucks'

"We all grew up in families where music was a big deal. There aren't many 18-year-olds now who are going to pick up a Neil Young record. People haven't even heard of The Saints. But that's what music is about to me, discovering something you don't know. Last night, in Manchester, there was an eight-year-old kid who had our really, really limited picture disc. But then I also get idiots fucking with my pedals and knocking the mic into my teeth."

Idiots and punk are a familiar combo, though the guitarist doesn't feel the p-word applies to his group. "Punk to me is sacred. Certain things have to happen... a lot of early punk was based upon angst towards political and sociological things. It wasn't about writing catchy tunes." For The Bronx, punk has come to represent a certain DIY ethic. Although the band are signed to Def Jam, all their releases have come out on their own White Drugs label, distributed by various indies (Wichita in the UK). The major corporation has given them money for equipment... in exchange for nothing.

"I can't believe they agreed to it," says Ford, who negotiated the contract. "We got signed to a label, and that label didn't get to put the record out. Our next record's on Def Jam, but we own our first one. I'd be bummed if I was them."



modern romantic

Words: **Gracelette**
Photography: **Mike Baluk**

Irony is not an option for **Baby Dayliner**

Some phrases have pop music built right in.

"Initially I had a character named Link Swords. I was going to say that it was the Baby Dayliner show with Link Swords doing his thing but that never happened."

Were you seriously going to have Link Swords or did you just make that up?

"No, that's true. It is true. I later used the name for a possible label."

Were you watching a lot of gay porn at the time? It's a very gay porn name.

"The label name became Links Words."

"Yeah. When I started, I was nervous onstage and the performance was initially a very ironic thing. I was hiding behind it. But that quickly became not the case. I started singing more openly, more honestly. Sometimes people will email and ask if I'm being ironic. No, I'm not."

Baby Dayliner belongs to an age where serenades were sung not by lovers but by troubadours, where the cute boy who delivered your wax-sealed love letters may

'Someone [said], "Oh, don't you think that sounds a little gay?"'

That kind of wordplay is a little too smart for me. I just want you to tell me what kind of porn star Link Swords would be. He'd probably just sit there and read you bedtime stories. With a hard-on.

"I thought it was a cool name. Someone pointed that out to me like, 'Oh, don't you think that sounds a little gay?' Like it implies dicks touching."

It really does. It's beautiful.

So some cheek-boned prettyboi from New York decides to call himself Baby Dayliner and starts creating hip hop-descended, synth-heavy party tracks and acoustic disco love songs set to vintage drum machine beats. He plays the violin, the bass guitar, the timpani and pretty much every other instrument you'll hear on his messily soulful debut album *High Hearts And Low Estates*, but replaces them live by crooning and rapping solo over pre-recorded backing tracks. He also styles up the onstage wearing of dark open-necked shirts tucked into elegantly tailored trousers. And a gold chain. Despite all this, irony is not included. Of course I want to know why.

"Someone just listened to the record and he started asking me about the karaoke aspect. But he hadn't seen the show. He said that karaoke would probably be an unfair or a belittling thing to call it."

I don't think that karaoke is belittling "It's usually used as a derogatory term." Well, it shouldn't be.

"At the very least, it's still you singing somebody else's songs with somebody else's music, whereas I'm not doing that."

On paper, Baby Dayliner's music sounds like it should be kitsch karaoke, but it's not. All these horribly superficial disco synthy beats...

"...But the reality is people exposing themselves and singing their hearts out." It's vulnerability.

not have been the cute boy who penned the words inside. I mean, you wouldn't actually develop a crush on beautiful Baby D. You'd just want to grab him by the waist while he was singing and aim him at your lover like a dozen crooning, long-stemmed red roses who've learnt to shake their own booties.

"I wrote these crappy songs when I was 15, I guess. They were just exercises in things that I'd already heard. They were like, 'Hey baby, I love you'. You know, bullshit. I wrote about non-existent relationships."

Were they good ones?

"No, they were all 'Leave me alone', or 'I'm on the phone and you're not home'. That was one of the lyrics that I ripped off from somewhere else. Later, I wanted to explore some big vocabularies. I found it an interesting way to explore language."

Gotta say, though, the dude is still writing lyrics like "Baby, I love you". Yeah, he's also joyfully plundering the urban lexicon and rhyming "nemesi" with "not get kissed", but as much charm lies in his lyrical deployment of phrases more archetypal than stereotypical, the statements that slip unguarded past your hard-learned editing filters of cliché and sentimentality. "I won't forget the way you look tonight," he sings. "I am eternally yours."

What changes as you grow older is not the words but how you say them; your willingness to be vulnerable and quote fresh life into the same old lines. The under-16s can plead naivety, but how can anyone else even say "Baby, I love you" without the echoes of songs they may not even have heard dancing around the edges of their voice? These are the purest sentiments of pop, those spheres of music and language always already intertwined by amateurs. So embrace them.

Some phrases have pop music built right in. And Baby Dayliner is adding his own stylish harmonies to each one.

five minutes with: **THE CRIBS**

Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Grant Peden**

Pop music

Here's what I understand by that term: Jonathan Richman's untainted love for the Fifties; the kids from *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* dressed up as Blondie performing 'One Way Or Another'; Beat Happening's hot chocolate gravedigger blues; The Cribbs performing 'You Were Always The One' and 'What About Me' in front of pirouetting girl fans; Chris Farlowe wishing he was Otis Redding on *Ready Steady Go*, the Ramones of course; The Undertones hearing the Ramones of course; Supergrass hearing The Undertones hearing the Ramones (and so on); Brittany Murphy's panda eyes in *8 Mile*; Sportique's brash post-Wire pizzazz; young, stupid but irresistibly lolloping golden retrievers; Pavement (for a second there); Buzzcocks, early Superchunk, early Ash, early Aztec Camera... the impassioned lost chords of post-TV Personalities London soulsters Comet Gain.

The Cribbs have recorded their self-titled debut album and it's full of fuzz and scuzz and buzz and – man, how ya goin' resist this Mr Po Face, how ya not gonna dig these three Wakefield brothers' groove? Remember the line? The line that always exists. OK. On one side we have Calvin Johnson, The Coral and The Cribbs... and on the other, The Libertines and The Vines. Yes, it's that simple.

The rush of enthusiasm

All the following quotes come courtesy of bassist Gary Jarman. He's the one often seen sporting a Beat Happening *Black Candy* T-shirt. His twin, guitarist Ryan, usually wears a ripped Union Jack. Ross drums.

"None of us were any good at sports. My mum used to have a couple of acoustic guitars. When we got older we bought a couple of electrics, but when we were 10 the house got burgled and we had nothing left except them. It stemmed from there. When we got to college,

we all played in bands with other people but it was always a compromise. Since we got back together, there was no compromise at all – cos we grew up listening to the same records. It was a lot more fun and liberating. It's nice that people like our music. We never expected to take it out the bedroom.

"Pop music should make you dance, and get inside your head. Also, it should be naïve – The Pastels, or Beat Happening. On night drives after shows, I like a bit of Calvin Johnson's solo stuff. It nearly puts the driver to sleep but it's all right for us in the back, with a beer. We like Frank Zappa or the Voidoids, 'Blank Generation'. During the day it's normally more upbeat – Delgados or Teenage Fanclub.

"On our last tour we finally got a guitar stand. I've got a spare bass, Ryan's got three guitars – he breaks about two or three strings every gig, he's so heavy with his Mustang. He gives it so much abuse. It's not an indulgent thing at all. We never use different tunings – they're all exactly the same model. We were getting sick of the five-minute gaps between songs. We're marginally more professional now. I know that people resent it.

"Ryan wears the Union Jack vest. I dunno why. A lot of his favourite bands were British and people used to say we sounded American and that pissed him off a lot. We got it from a fancy dress shop in the Eighties section – he thought it was cool, a bit Mod. We're patriotic musically, but not nationalistically. I prefer my Beat Happening T-shirt: walking around Wakefield it's nice to feel closer to what you're into. Also, it's such a rarity that people cotton onto it straight away – if I saw someone wearing that T-shirt I would definitely introduce myself."

The pay off

From the mouths of babes...





solar power

Words: **Mark Pilkington**
Photography: **Kerry O'Sullivan**

Sunn 0))) generate cthonic landscapes of infestation. Apparently

Everything is shaking. My sinuses are flapping like curtains in a hurricane. People are clinging onto railings, columns, each other – anything solid – in a futile attempt to maintain stability. Ahead, enshrouded in dry ice, I can just make out two hunched, cowed figures on stage. Hardly moving, gleaming guitars held aloft before a 10-foot tower of amps, they are high priests worshipping at a wall of sound. Welcome to the temple of Sunn 0))).

"We like to imagine that when we play we're creating a new space inside the

Neubauten. Their four albums, *00 Void*, *Flight Of The Behemoth*, *White 1* – and, coming this summer, *White 2* – plus their debut 'Sunn EP', are all throbbing, organic machinery, grinding steel and whirling feedback, coloured by stabs of cacophonous instrumentation. It's a listening experience as intense as having your teeth cleaned and as satisfying as clearing several weeks worth of wax out of your ears with a cotton bud.

White 2, the first record to be based purposefully on their live explorations, hears them pushing ever further from their rock roots. Jessamine and Fontanelle's Rex Ritter adds buzzing synth-drones and Attila Csihar provides whispered renderings of ancient Vedic texts, both serving as frontline

down the identities of the instruments, the division between the amplifier, your instrument, the electrical current between them and your body, then the stage and the room, so that everything becomes part of a giant resonating device. It's like your consciousness begins damping down and you descend into a kind of trance, then you have to force your way back out of this valley and up to a point above that, before letting it drop down again."

Oozing like a protoplasmic colossus from the charred remains of the duo's trad doom metal outfit, Burning Witch, Sunn 0))) have largely dispensed with metal's rigid structural trappings, slowing things down to about eight riffs per hour. In doing so they have managed to be fêted by the avant-garde and experimental scenes while retaining the respect of their original fans.

"We came out of the rock scene, but in recent years our audience has diversified. It's a compliment to what we're doing, but it also reflects our own shifts in what we're interested in. Occasionally people get confused and unhappy; maybe they haven't experienced anything outside of the rock/metal structure.

"A friend of mine plays guitar in a brilliant speed metal band in New York, and after we last played here he asked me 'Why don't you guys play some notes and patterns? You've got all this great equipment and nice guitars, but you just make noise.' Well, I can't answer that question – that's not the point, it's not what we're doing. But a lot of those people have followed us through with it. Sometimes the metal association can also drive people away, so it's always nice to have people like Russell Haswell, Autechre and Julian Cope pick up on us too.

"Metal doesn't have to be dumbed down; there are a lot of genius musicians working in there."

'We like to imagine that when we play we're creating a new space inside the existing room'

existing room," says New Yorker Stephen O'Malley, one half of Sunn's molten core, in his softly-spoken Pacific stoner drawl. "When people are inside those soundwaves it's an entirely new place. That's when places become sacred, I think, when they shift like that, and your memory remembers that shift when you return to it." With his partner in grime, Greg Anderson, based 3,000 miles away on the west coast, Sunn certainly know a thing or two about space.

On record the band generate cthonic landscapes of infestation as evocative of the wyrd fictions of HP Lovecraft, William Hope Hodgson and David Lindsay as they are sonic antecedents like Earth, Merzbow, live Throbbing Gristle and early Einstürzende

defences for the more familiar eternal feedback throb. But hearing their sound tamed and compressed through your home hi-fi – or as O'Malley likes to fantasise, your street-shaking, jacked-up car stereo – will do little to prepare you for their live incarnation.

O'Malley and Anderson coax subsonic rumbles from their wall of vintage Sunn amps (as used by The Who and others in the Sixties to get that stadium-filling sound), often bypassing the venue's PA completely. Offstage, you're likely to find Rex Ritter manipulating their output through soft-synths, adding layers of cosmo-mesmeric detail through the venue's own amps.

"Ultimately, we're rethinking how to approach playing in rock venues; breaking



the nothing that is

Words: **Hannah Gregory**
Photography: **Anthony Wallace**

Klang carry minimal musical baggage to explore the spaces between the spaces

My problem is that I overindulge. With words especially. With words, it's all too tempting to use five when one will do, to dance around your subject with lots of pretty, empty phrases, and paraphrases, and para-paraphrases, just to satisfy your pen's hyperactivity, without ever reaching the point. If there was even a point to begin with.

Klang do not share in such excess. Klang are so admirably *minimal*, so concise, they put my word-bingeing to shame. If I stuff my paragraphs with splurges of incoherent

Frustratingly brief, or commendably so? Well, if their terseness gives little to go on in an email interview, it is the making of their music. Without superfluous musical baggage, bare sensitivity is able to shine, as stars in a countryside sky appear brighter in the absence of headlights. Wandering guitar and whispers of synth ricochet off the distant rumble of a delicately played bass, while Donna's searching vocals resound over glassy clunks of percussion. Though Klang claim to be more familiar with Kleenex and Delta 5, and haven't yet tasted the tender brilliance of Young Marble Giants, their twilit sound is strikingly similar.

If you know of the Klang featured on last year's Sonic Mook *Hot Shit* comp, then all

Nineties Riot Grrrl outfit with lots of attitude and menace [*Elastica? Riot Grrrl? Really? – Ed*], but this information is rendered obsolete now she has lost the urge for noise. Keisuke Hiratsuka had drumsticks in his back pocket and his arms full of records when the pair cornered him. This was on a different day, but in the same record shop. I don't know what colour shirt he was wearing. They formed a band, Klang, the word for sound in German.

With Klang, the closer you listen the more you hear. This doesn't mean, though, the more you understand. Sure, they don't give much away, but not because they are trying to be elusive. They don't want to betray themselves, which is perhaps why, when asked about the recording of the album, they say only that they tried to sound "as honest as possible". On the subject of originality they throw out the contradiction, "True originality in essence does exist. But there's only so many notes in a scale".

They claim in part to have planned the sound of their album, but then there's their 10-minute song project, encouraging creation of music without preconceived ideas. If there is a firm unanimity behind their sound, it is the belief it should remain of existential importance, the band masking their vulnerabilities and testing their relationship with silence and noise.

"Music is my daily existence", says Isabel, "but sometimes I need to escape music. I read. I walk. I go on buses."

But what would a world without sound be? "I have a world without sound," says Donna. "It is beautiful."

What unites and divides you? 'Japanese precision, a German heart and a Welsh soul'

adjectives, then Klang hold their index fingers to their lips before uttering three or four hushed sounds that could bare all or give away nothing.

See for yourself:

What do you each bring as an individual to the group, what unites and divides you?

"Japanese precision, a German heart and a Welsh soul."

What pushes you to make music? What do you gain from the processes of playing and creating music?

"An empty bucket. A full bucket."

Catharsis, challenge, reaction, plain entertainment, affirmation of life – what do you regard as the power of music?

"All these things and more."

this talk of unadorned sound might seem foreign. This is not to say they are no longer *Hot Shit*, just that they've tempered the heat and drowned out the noise, so that their canvas is fresh and clear for adaptation. While the Klang you hear on the debut mini-album *No Sound Is Heard* (Blast First) may appear altered – more fragile and private – it is essentially the same Klang, just played back differently, in different weather; in the same city, but at a different postal address. Let's go back to the beginning.

One day, Isabel Waidner and Donna Matthews exchanged numbers in a secondhand record shop. Isabel was wearing a yellow shirt and Donna a grey jumper. Donna used to play in a significant

Klang would like you to send in bits of music you've written and recorded in under 10 minutes, to www.klang.org.uk

you will
obey



C30-C60-C90

Words: Neil Kulkarni

Illustration: Andrew Clare

go nowhere

I found it in my chimney.

I find a lot in my chimney. Sometimes the clumsy pigeons drop their bread and it bounces into our laps. Sometimes spiders big as your hand drop down for a mosey around the living room. This chimney was in my 'office' and eeeh, look at the muck in here. Haven't flicked a duster around in weeks. In a spirit of late-come spring-cleanliness I decided that that pitcher's mound of tapes in my dead fireplace was just too ugly to ignore anymore and I had to shift them.

It wasn't a task I took to with any relish: not only was it punctuated with the odd shrill girlish shriek of panic when a moth flew out or a woodlouse peered from under

I remember taping hip hop for tough lads and sticking Bowie tracks on the end, going home fantasising I'd somehow be turning them my way, problematising their puberty as much as mine, by stealth, as if time would drag us both wanking to the floor.

I remember those blessed years when Coventry Central Library employed some sacredly-disposed lunatic with amazing taste, and every week I'd be taping some new Durutti Column or Nick Drake or Rapeman or Penderecki s/he'd kindly decided to allow the citizens of Cov to borrow. I taught myself about pop from that library. Hurling the tapes into a black binliner a dizzying myriad of blind alleys and launch pads and dead-ends go flying by, the month

totally suited those years when there's too much catching up to do, when your hunger outstrips your time.

Digging my nails into the rubble and dust of the hearth, scooping up armfuls of plastic and cardboard and rattling reels, there were moments where I had to stop, stick on Brothers Like Outlaws or Swirlies or Iris DeMent or Tim Hardin or some Atlantic soul-comp to remind myself of things I'd loved, tapes full of looped beats and bad acoustic guitar I did with two tape-players and a condenser mic at age 14.

Crucially though, all the nostalgia did was make me realise how music was never something I'd simply 'enjoy'. For the joy of every discovery carried with it the painful burden of being that pioneer, alone out on these islands. The more I looked and listened at what I'd filed and piled high the more I thought, *Jesus*, I was such a pseud-fucker. I was so far up my own arse. I listened to an awful lot of this music *just* to look cool, just to service my own endlessly enraptured self-regard. The idea that listening to music can make you attractive always running up against the sad realisation that no one *cares* about shit like that apart from you, y'dumb fuck. Sticking Roland Kirk next to Spacemen 3 and trying to turn the fifth-form centre on and wondering when the fucking Mission fans who made up my school's 'alternative' kids would fucking catch up with me, worrying that I was too far ahead to ever be friends with my 'friends' again.

It's easy to scoff at adolescent arrogance, less easy to realise you're still exactly the same, that you still believe the mysteries of pop will slowly, steadily, somehow become accessible to you and your frighteningly heightened awareness. Including an awareness that a five-year-old Britney fan knows just as much about pop as you. Including an awareness that the moments

I remember making a tape of T Rex hits for the only girl in school who had the stomach to speak to me

the scattered cassettes, it bought back too many goddamn memories. Tapes were everything to me once. Usually skint, somewhat nervous about any shops in which my contemporaries gathered, tapes (of the kind that were killing music) were the primary way in which I enjoyed pop. Such a maligned format but such a spoddish joy: from the sticking on of labels to the writing of tracklistings (I only wrote neat when filling out tape inlays). I remember making a tape of T Rex hits for the only girl in school who had the stomach to speak to me: I spent a whole hour doing each letter a different colour with my 13-colour biro and couldn't understand why she looked at me so tragically when I handed it over.

I listened to nothing but Sonny Rollins, Mikey Dread (God he's good), discovering Miles and The Fall and Prince Far I and The Ink Spots and everyone who's sustained me for the best part of two decades.

With my library ticket, all of history was open to me, and all of it made my future that much more full of possibility, that much more an inevitable disappointment when it came. From the near-incomprehensible public generosity of the library making so much available, there was something almost sacred about tapes, the way you could just *take* these infinities with you and *keep* them, the way you imprinted the legend on each one, the way you created the object that held such possibilities within. Tapes

in which you've managed to con someone into loving you, you've forgotten about how you've stacked your vinyl, what you put on the jukebox, how *wrong* everyone else is. If the tapes that were now disappearing into attic-bound sacks were a reminder of that crucial time where everything that shouldn't matter mattered like fuck, where does that leave me now? Can I slip the moorings of *all that taste* and float free, unconcerned? Can this start being fun, ever?

Or will it always be the frantic effort to clip and prune and ornament that never-finished work of art – yourself? Will you always need to be surrounded by these bits of plastic because they tell you who you aren't (and who you are), tell you where you're not (and where you are), warn you of what you can't be (and what you should want to be)?

Or can all this crumble, could all this tape simply end up wound round the lamppost at the end of your street played by the wind to the bugs? Could your limits be set by yourself rather than so many others? Could *yourself* be something more than simply that space that happens in-between all of these objects? Could you be or will you always simply be suggested by what you own? Can you, finally, now, as you commit your last oh-so-eclectic C120 compilation beyond the drawstring and into the abyss of official junkdom, start being a human being?

God, what a grisly thought. Being so withered as to accept myself. Fucking never. The bags stay downstairs. I throw press releases into the fireplace and clear the air with smoke and the kiss of Alice Coltrane. Pretension must be felt to the bone and kept close like your own skeleton. Without it, you fall apart. That's enough goddamn spring cleaning.



five minutes with: **NEW BLACK**

Words: **Everett True**

Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

The intro

Some situations you want to avoid.

Like going on in front of a half-full Free Butt on a tepid Sunday night in Brighton. Old school grunge band Todd have just torn the world a new asshole – look, there he is, writhing around on the floor with his guitarist, armpit in face, metal guitar and full-scale thrash ricocheting off the nicotine-dampened walls. No one knows who you are: four chirpy, intense, angular Chicago sorts – a welcome boy-girl girl-boy deviation from the usual Albini template – and you've got precisely 13 minutes and 25 seconds before the sound gets pulled, right in the middle of a song.

But what's this? The magnetic tape has had a razorblade applied to it, and fuck me if co-lead singers Liam Kimball and Patti Gran aren't dancing up a tempest of bruised emotion over the choppy guitars, even more frantic than on the debut album *New Black*: pulling taut the face-muscles of noise-shattered punters to 'smile'. Nick Kraska's drums roll smooth and sinuous; Rachel Shindleman's keyboards come over all Fabulous Stains and...hey! This is *fun*. Go-Go's girl pop meets stringent and fiery post- (and pre-) Sleater-Kinney power-dynamics meets lean Illinois attitude.

So why is no one watching?

The band

Patti: Rock'n'roll is in my blood. It's all I have known. Rachel and I were together in a band first. We got along really well as far as writing went. Liam and Nick were in this band together without me. I saw them and absolutely knew I wanted to play with them. I identified with the way Liam played – his energy – and then luckily the guitarist left and I got to take

his place. I black out on stage and become a different person. The minute I get off I'm back to normal.

Liam: When I was eight I climbed a tree and couldn't get down, and my mother had to climb up to get me. That was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I love rock'n'roll so much I don't have any choice. I used to do a lot of fist fighting. I wasn't good at it. I caught a lot of beatings. I'm really good at talking my way into situations.

Nick: I grew up in a family of musicians, in Ann Arbor. When I was 10, I played a school talent show: just my dad and me. We played 'Wipe Out' and 'House Of The Rising Sun'. My favourite New Black song is 'Twisted Lips' – I like the structure and themes that continue throughout the song.

Rachel: My dad was a 'White Album' Beatles guy. He taped 'Goodnight' off the album and I thought it was called 'Rachel's Lullaby'. I went to music school and it really turned me off from music. It was so judgemental. I went to graduate school to become a writer then I moved down to Chicago and met Nick and Liam. The first song I ever wrote was about ice cream. I got cut from the bill for some reason.

The equation

Le Tigre + The B-52s - Greg Norman
Elastica x Erase Errata + Q And Not U <<< New Black



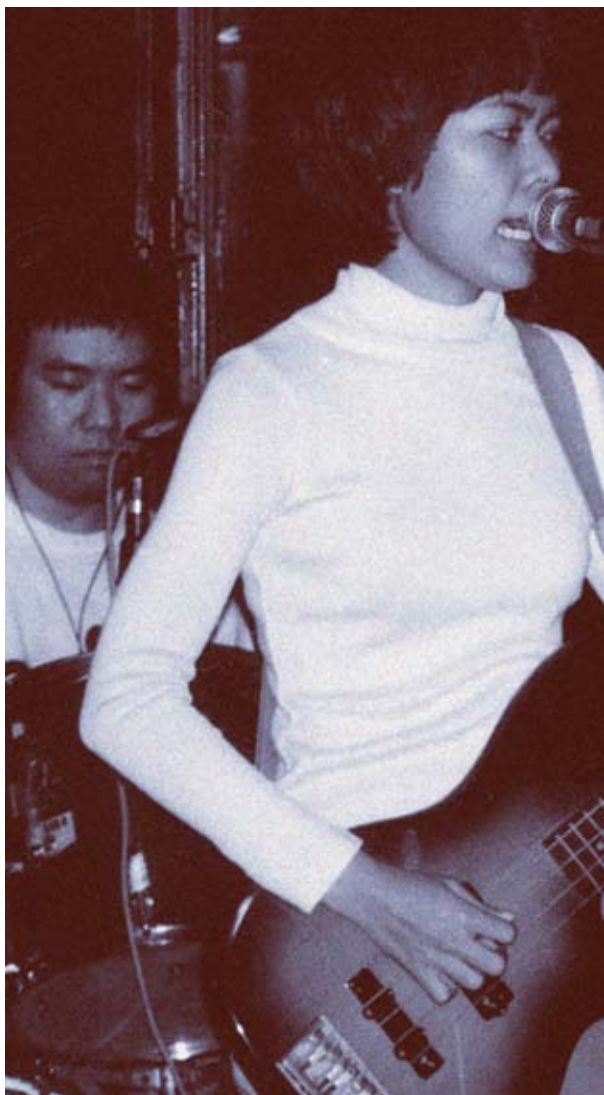
Crunk: the other side

It was pop video as velvet revolution. He's a statue in the middle of a void, some field of laser stars where a disco was, or will be, some day. Only moving to emphasise the music as it shifts under his feet, he redistributes his weight and rides through. Purrs to the top of the charts and parks there, couldn't be easier if he had a valet.

But this Number One hit marks another morph inside r'n'b, another sideways step from its own conventions, another snakelike escapist twist. If 2003 was the year of **R Kelly** and his unstrung, so-right-it-must-be-wrong funk, the clean synths and skittering electro beats of **Usher's** 'Yeah' herald the arrival in this country of a previously obscure and most definitely unfashionable Southern hip hop genre.

It's called **CRUNK**, and began back in 2000 or so, a mutant strain of synth swamp hip-hop tooled and loaded for the clubs above all – a massive, all-enveloping sound that turns the room into an engine chamber, shifts gears up and down like a cave filling up with water. It's all about the dancefloor, that patch of inferno in the centre; part of a culture-wide shift in hip hop and R&B, back to that no future moment when you fuse with the music. Narratives not played out in the streets, but the sacred space where the walls sweat, the bodies melt together and reality is locked outside, a whole weekend away.

Incongruously, **Lil Jon**, the leering, bedreaded maverick who gave the movement its name and



remote viewer:

Words: **Tim Footman**

Bangkok

The main purpose of Bangkok's Goethe Institute is to promote German culture. But they do also stage occasional gigs, and it's here that I see edgy electro-punks **Bear-Garden** deliver a set of simmering ferocity to a crowd that, for the most part, sits on the floor. A few songs in, the organiser asks singer June to get the punters to stand up,

business, looking like The Beatles is a rigid digit to the status quo. Bear-Garden's other influences (Suede, Green Day, Boo Radleys, Elastica) are off the cultural map in a nation that still can't get enough of Hong Kong boy bands (imagine Blue without genitalia, or even nipples). And as for sexual equality, there was an uproar when it was suggested

'It's better to have a uniform. I want to look like The Beatles'

to enable more people to get in. She does so, politely, and everyone obediently stands. A few minutes later, an old lady complains she can't see. So June asks everyone to sit down again. And everyone does.

A couple of nights later, I ask June about this. She giggles at the memory, but doesn't see anything peculiar. There are occasional outbursts of slamming and pogoing at Thai punk gigs, but no gobbing. That's rude.

"So you prefer order and discipline?"

"Sure."

"Is that why your band members wear matching shirts and ties?"

"It's better to have a uniform. I want to look like The Beatles."

Don't laugh. When all the main record companies are controlled by a complacent oligopoly, and much of the broadcast media bears the fingerprints of either the military or the billionaire Prime Minister's family

that women might be allowed to keep their maiden names after marriage. The fact that June comes out sounding like Björk's slightly madder sister is as much a political statement as a musical preference.

In a city where half the population lives hand-to-mouth, and most of the rest get excited at the prospect of Mariah Carey, this is confrontational stuff. Bangkok's indie kids may be comfortably middle-class, and many received Western educations. But simply to challenge the rigid hierarchies of Thai society, where criticism of the monarchy can still get you 15 years in jail, is a brave move. Acts like **Eastbound Downers** (US-style pop punk), **Paradox** (theatrical neo-prog) and **Dub Brainer** (deformed reggae) can seem derivative to Western ears. But, for the most part, they aren't so in thrall to the rock myth that they feel the need to sing in English. The Thai language, with its tonal

of punk disco

Words: **kicking_k**
Illustration: **Phil Elliott**

shape (and produced 'Yeah') claims to have gotten much of his inspiration from punk.

At first, the link is far from obvious: Crunk has none of punk's righteous anger, its alienation or pretension – trading them for a merrily offensive out-of-control hedonism. This is not the Diddified Bling of diamond necklaces and champagne chasers, but strip club lust, a whole-hearted celebration of the meat market. The best definition of 'crunk' is an amalgam of 'crazy and drunk'.

In this, a lineage to feel good disco is much clearer. But listen to the aggression in the chants, the goodtime gangsterisms. Crunk hijacks the machismo of punk abandon: the aim is to make the whole club a mosh pit. No romance, only bodies, fucking, plenty of

anger, a breeding strategy, a macho swagger.

Make no mistake, this is no sub-genre of a sub-genre, no flavour of last month – as part of the Dirty South uprising that has redrawn the rap map in the US, Crunk has all but colonised the hip hop/r'n'b charts lately. And sure, it's unlikely Crunk proper will take root in the UK, but by quarantining the mad dog macho bite and sheathing the pornier obsessions in euphemism and double-entendre, a second wave of Crunkified bass-pop is set to trickle down the charts this Summer (including Britney's 'Boom Boom').

It may never be entirely house-trained, but given a makeover and taught a few tricks, this dirty dawg could soon be the year's fanciest fashion poodle.

NINE CRUNK INFERNOS

Lil Jon & The Eastside Boyz: Get Low

A seismic hit in the States, and unquestioned Crunk anthem to sleazy dancefloor action everywhere. If soul-inflected r'n'b is the sound of seduction, this is the white noise of unreconstructed lust on the prowl.

Youngbloodz: Damn

Michel Foucault claimed being near-fatally knocked down was one of the most pleasurable moments of his life. This is what it felt like. Synths arc surface-to-air like souls above a multiple pile-up, bumper and side-panel percussion.

Trillville: Neva Eva

A song that approximates an overdose, psychotic spirals of repetition and cut-up sample structures submerging, dissolving, ever slower drowning in the deep end.

Lil Jon: Throw It Up

Nail-gunning a classical sample to a hooligan choir, an Old Testament mob taunts its audience before leading them in a chant. Surprising how spiritual profanity can feel in the heat of the moment.

David Banner: Talk To Me

A needling electronic bass squirms through the beats like woodworm.

Meanwhile, Banner's adrenalised verbal assault rolls like a military parade, complete with 24-handgun salute.

The Yin-Yang Twins: Hahn

'Hahn' being the inhuman fucking zombie scream that is the track's butcher's hook. Elsewhere, horrorcore atmospherics are subverted with tweeting Morricone synth lines, before the beats are let off the leash to carpet bomb the chorus.

Usher: Yeah

Unable to cow the backing track with sheer volume, Usher takes a different tack. Bass lines lay low while he works the silences, rocks back on his heels and rides the punches rippling from the bass bin.

TLC: Come Get Some

This comeback track saw Lil Jon exchanging TLC's trademark r'n'b smoothie for a monster truck mud bath. Overlapping bass riffs rasp against each other, neatly set off by clean vox and phasing sci-fi FX.

Lil' Flip: Game Over

If Mario was pimping in the Mushroom Kingdom this Nintendo-aping alcopop paean to The Life would be pumping on his stereo, 24/7.

Why I Hate... my fellow americans

Words: **Peter Bagge**

inflexions that make it sound completely unlike any European tongue, is an uneasy bedfellow to three-chord thrashing.

Maybe this thin streak of waywardness beneath the respectable surface of Thai society isn't so surprising. The kingdom is, after all, 94 per cent Buddhist. And Buddhism isn't really about happiness. It's about shedding oneself of karma, the force that derives from association with the physical world. The ultimate goal is a state of transcendence called nirvana. Since that word is often sloppily applied to some kind of metaphysical paradise in English, many think that Kurt Cobain's appropriation of it was somehow droll and ironic. But nirvana is more accurately the absence of desires, needs, attachments. It takes away grief, but also takes away happiness, because both states tie you to the temporal quasi-reality of karma. You could even argue that Buddhism = punk rock.

Maybe acts like Bear-Garden express the real Thai psyche better than the mincing boy bands wiggling their way across cable TV. After all, the national catchphrase, one you hear after every fuck-up that befalls this funny-peculiar, confusing city, is "mai pen rai". Which translates, pretty much, as "Oh well, whatever, never mind".

As someone once said.

I always hated the way American ex-pats or left-leaning travellers would pander to their European acquaintances by trying to 'out-hate' the USA more than the resentful America Haters they've run into in their travels. So imagine my chagrin at having to admit that ex-pats and foreigners alike can bitch out America all day long and they'll still only be scratching the surface, because ever since 9/11 we've become a Nation of Assholes. Perhaps we've always been latent assholes, but the true test of someone's character is how they respond to a crisis, and the way we've dealt with this particular tragedy is to have one long snot-nosed temper tantrum.

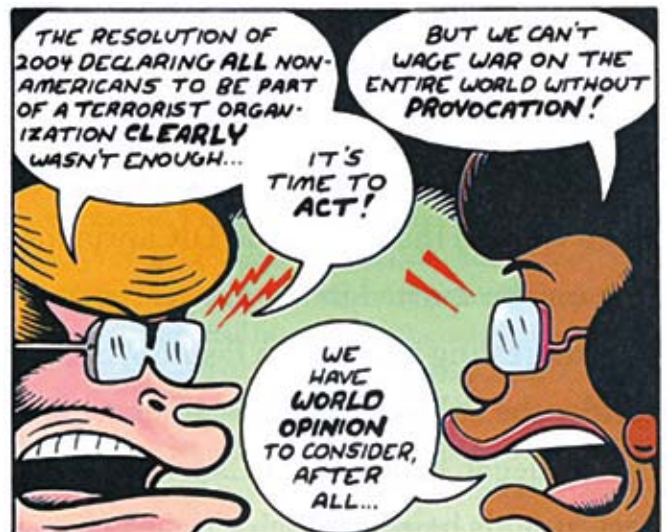
Don't get me wrong, I wanted to get 'the bad guys' too, and if kicking a little ass would help prevent something like that from happening again then so be it. But that didn't mean kicking ANYONE'S ass, and kicking it over and over again, all the while self-righteously assuming that there'll be no hell to pay for such wanton, out-of-control behavior. It'd be easy to blame the Folks In Charge too, but they could've never gotten away with all this crap if the public didn't let them. They

did what we WANTED them to do! And this notion many Europeans have that Americans are naïve and 'misinformed' is bullshit. I'M an American, and I knew we were being lied to. We ALL heard EVERY argument both for and against the so-called Patriot Act, as well as for invading Iraq, but we CHOSE to believe the lies. The reason we believed is simply that we couldn't accept that something *bad* had actually happened to us. We

completely lost our minds. We lost all sense of composure, all ability to keep things in perspective. We lost our cool. We're disgusting.

I hope the US is starting to wake up and GROW up now – now that UNTOLD, IRREPARABLE DAMAGE has been done – but I'm not gonna hold my breath over it. Never in my life I thought I'd ever say this, but right now, at this moment, the USA sucks.

Have a nice day.



Bear-Garden: Mercy Killing (Panda, 2003) www.pandarecords.com



tour diary

Words and photography: **Mia Clarke**

Electrelane

A journal of electrical storms, rock'n'roll poetry and horseback riding

Tuesday March 16 (Austin, TX: SXSW)

Clouds open above Labrador City. Through a tight fist of whisky, fear, and Valium I take cautious glimpses of the snow and ice thousands of feet below. Fir trees break the blankness. Heart pounding, heat rising. If we were to crash now, I could hardly care. The rest of the band sleep to my left and wake only to fiddle with tiny toothpaste tubes or to adjust an inch. Everything feels surreal, tired. I watch *101 Dalmatians* and feel like a kid.

And so to Texas. It's nothing special, not really. Though the cherry trees are surely the prettiest I've ever seen, and the blackbirds here have curiously extravagant tails, middle America is dominated by an uneasy patriotism that is inescapable. A bronze statue of George W Bush – jacket casually thrown over shoulder – dominates the airport. Flags everywhere. Bands everywhere; instruments sliding across the floor in panic and urgency. Knowing smiles are thrown between recognised faces. Kids squabble over guitar cases. We meet our driver for the tour, Peter. He has a tattooed leg and a friendly smile. The sun sets as we hit the freeway leading to cold beer, tacos, and much-needed sleep.

Wednesday March 17 (Austin, TX: SXSW)

The realisation that we have left our lives behind for a month fills the morning with

a warm glow. Worries of space and money shift to another part of the brain. We drive along the highway listening to pop records, hair ruffling in the sunshine and speed. The day passes beside a shallow river until dusk when, suitably, one lone star appears in the crystal pink, perfect sky. Why are the skies so huge here? Everything feels easy and right – funny how little it takes. The evening brings The (International) Noise Conspiracy and The Von Bondies, who are tedious, and Joan Jett And The Blackhearts, who are not.

Saturday March 20 (Austin, TX: SXSW)

I wake up and turn 21. This puts a sharp end to many problems. We drive through the damp countryside, see deer with long eyelashes and healthy limbs, eat apple pies from gas stations, rush the clock. After many wrong turns, we arrive at a ranch in the middle of a mountain range. The sun comes out, and farm cats scurry to lick our feet. A portly man with rotting teeth, Robin, hands us each a horse and we spend the morning trotting and skidding around the mountains looking for coyotes and bear cubs.

Night-time kicks in with support from too many Bloody Marys, and ends in tattoos and tequila shots. We do see The Trachtenburg Family Slideshow Players at some point. Rachel, the band's 10-year-old drummer, is incredible to watch – tiny and smiley behind her huge golden kit.

Sunday March 21 (Springfield, MO)

See a box of puppies in a gas station in Oklahoma, and a used condom and an old lady's nightgown on the floor of our motel room in Missouri. The skies here are huge and terrifying. According to the new issue of *National Geographic*, tornado season is about to kick in – you can feel a wildness and heaviness in the air.

Tuesday March 23 (Chicago, IL)

Anything seems great after an evening in St Louis, and Chicago is no exception. Our show tonight is at the Logan Auditorium – an expansive, expensive building. The interior is beautiful: fuzzy as a peach. There is a long pause between the soundcheck and the performance, so we talk to an old, wet-lipped rock'n'roll poet named Thax Douglas. Thax writes poems for bands based on how the music makes him feel, then reads them to the audience before the show. His poem for us is beautiful.

Thursday March 27 (Winooski, VT)

Drove to Canada through a fierce electrical storm scared shitless, listening to Bill Hicks wisecracking between the rolls of thunder. Toronto was great: a fairy-lit metropolis of high buildings and high hopes. I am endeared to Canadians: they are, as a rule, healthy and optimistic.

Montreal appeared to be somewhat overrated, but it's easy to be flippant when you don't have time to discover the truth.



'We spend the morning trotting and skidding around the mountains looking for coyotes and bear cubs'

Tonight, it's Winooski – clean and middle-class. It feels like a toytown. Coming back into the US is a nightmare: dogs set on the van, private interrogations, men with snappy leather gloves and power complexes...the worrying release of boredom and general retentiveness.

Saturday 29 March (Providence, RI)

Tonight is our last show supporting Ted Leo And The Pharmacists, who have become more and more amazing as each night passes. The heady combination of so many good times and vodka cranberries have nailed these songs to our hearts and memories. There's one song in particular, 'Timorous Me', that drives me crazy – the way the drums and guitar work together. It's hard to say goodbye at the best of times.

Thursday 1 April (NYC, NY)

A great Glaswegian band called Sons And Daughters support us at the Knitting Factory this evening. The show is sold out and goes well; we celebrate in the suitable manner. The following days bring walks in Central Park...new friends, new places...a radio session in Hoboken...all-night bars (a truly wonderful practice)...tears in SoHo...madmen...handshakes on Spring Street...the worst show ever in Brooklyn (no space to play and feeling like a wolf in a cage)...much laughter...and a feeling of never wanting to return home.

Monday 5 April (Seattle, WA)

Seattle is inspiring and beautiful. We buy fish and poetry, and wander the streets. See a sausage dog on a motorbike, ears spinning in the wind, its tiny paws balancing on the handlebars. The show is strange and fun. Steve Van Zandt from The E Street band is there, but leaves before our encore of [Bruce Springsteen's] 'I'm On Fire', which is something that should probably be seen as a relief.

Friday 9 April (Los Angeles, CA)

Last night's show in San Francisco sold out, and we are happy to learn that tonight's gig at Spaceland is too.

Last time we played here it was to about 20 people, so it's a pretty weird experience to be on the other side of the world, watching people sing along to Verity's lyrics and call out for songs. I have to stop myself from laughing, but in a good way. Afterwards, Rachel shocks the room with her pool-playing prowess: she can whip anybody's ass in all fields of recreational sport, including gymnastics.

Saturday 10 April (San Diego, CA)

I love going to San Diego. The drive down from LA is always sparkingly pretty and sunshine-soaked; glossy lakes and rickety housing occasionally breaking the ocean view. The air is so sweet and sticky, it never fails to fuel you with a hedonistic rush, which probably has much to do with being

so close to Tijuana. The Casbah is situated right next to San Diego airport (rumoured to be one of the worst in the US). It's a thrill to watch the planes from the top floor of a high-rise car park: their metal bellies barely skim the buildings as they awkwardly drop to land.

Sunday 11 April (Hollywood, CA)

It's funny what you can find to do in a Sunset Strip Super-8 motel, if so inclined.





Load Records

Words: Anil Bawa

Throw too many facts at a beautiful thing and it withers away. Doubly beautiful things disappear altogether in an audible puff of disappointment. It's in our nature to tamper, I guess, but too many beautiful things are ruined by facts. Yet more are ruined by words. Sound is ruined by both.

You know: I couldn't care less if none of you ever hear the words 'Load Records' again. That's just it, Kim Hiorthøy and Rune Kristoffersen got it right, money will ruin everything. Money and facts. I really don't need to share this; we all have our

own routes to special things and who am I to spell one out – how brash is that? How fucking insane is that, using words to spell out routes to beautiful things that can't be spelt?

I'm simply telling you the way it is, and it's like this: Load are the only true 21st Century music producers that require no digital enhancement. You only need them analogue: just the valves, the amps, the skins, the strings and some electrons. That single fact is so immense it's beyond science. It's a maxim. Or a tautology, or something. It could

even trump the Kantian first principle for the first time in centuries, if only I knew what it was. It does, above all things, serve as antidote to my recurring lapses of faith; the persistent feeling that rock music is caught in a fatal cross-volley of historical references, and that the guitar is going nowhere without DSP.

Load is new. It's simple like that. This sound is new. Didn't exist before. It takes someone like **StormAndStress** to make all the right mistakes. This time around you've got a whole label's worth

the eye of the storm

Words: **Louis Pattison**
Photography: **Sanna Charles**

Lightning Bolt create extreme weather

Camber Sands Holiday Centre
Saturday March 27, 9.30pm

Somewhere behind this crush of bodies, this bramble of human arms and legs, Lightning Bolt are playing their first show on British soil. Set up on the floor by the sound desk, their own groaning home-built rig of speakers towering like a monolith behind them, the only thing that stands between the frantic whirlwind of sound that is 'Dracula Mountain' and the seismic movement of bodies that sweeps at random through the thousand-strong crowd are a handful of security guards bent sideways against the crush.

To my right, a man is climbing the ersatz castle ramparts of a Pontin's gift shop to get a better view. I see Brian Chippendale for only a moment, perched above the tumult on his drumkit like a brine-drenched King Canute, vainly trying to repel the wave of humanity that threatens to overwhelm him. His words are barked out, then consumed into a shrill, high-pitched roar of feedback: "Move back! Please move back!" Then he slips from my view, lands back in his stool, and the avalanche recommences.

Blissful noise fills the hot, humid air. Greet the dawn of the Wonderful Rainbow.

Lightning Bolt sound primitive – there's kind of a caveman aesthetic at work. Is that intentional?

Brian Chippendale: "It's just the way we are, pretty simple. We have pretty basic tools."

It's the imagery you use. 'Ride The Skies', 'Wonderful Rainbow'... It's –

"Childish?"

No, not exactly. More *primal*, as opposed to intellectual.

"Yeah. I guess everyone has role models in life. People you strive to be like. But it seems more exciting to me to try to model

The art world would call it 'naïf'. But then again, the art world is full of slipstreaming fuckwits

yourself on, say, a storm. To try and transcend. When I'm playing, there are definitely times where I'm thinking, 'If I can drum and spin fast enough, a weird magical being will appear, or a door will open up and all these elves will run out'. Some magical thing could happen. I feel like we're trying to pull out shared things, to try to pull something more nature-orientated out of ourselves when we play."

Why do you set up in the audience? Is it about breaking down the boundaries between artist and audience? Or is just a whites-of-their-eyes thing?

"It kind of began from just being so sick of going to shows. You go to the same club all the time, and all the bands look the same, and they all sound the same because they're translated through the PA by the same sound guy who has certain things he or she likes to do.

"We decided we really had to get out of this tight loop. We wanted to be able to walk into a room and decide how we wanted to design it, decide where we wanted to be, to sound the way we wanted to sound. Plus mixing in with people is fun too. We're sort of like a warehouse party band. [Brightly] We're a party band!"

Camber Sands Holiday Centre
Sunday March 28, midday

At an hour when most of Camber Sands' weekend inhabitants are frying bacon, Brian Gibson and Brian Chippendale are crouched

on the paving outside their chalet, frantically tightening screws and applying gaffer tape. Their kit is a weird hotchpotch of garden-shed invention: Gibson's bass, the high G strung with a guitar string for full frequency-straddling range; Chippendale's green cloth mask, worn to secure a customised microphone built from an old phone earpiece into his mouth; a drumkit comprised simply of metal-rimmed snare, pockmarked cymbal, two battle-scarred floor toms, and a multi-coloured bass drum.

A small, expectant crowd has gathered on the grass – but the second that Brian Gibson breaks into the two-note fanfare of 'Ride The Skies', amplified to a sky-shaking roar, the trickle of curious faces becomes an exodus. Chippendale is a maelstrom of motion, trainer spasming on the kick drum like a hummingbird's heartbeat, arms jack-hammering out staccato rhythms of delirious, jazzman complexity, lumps smashed from the cymbal and a gabble of devilish gibberish spewing from his jester voice box.

Ten minutes is all they get: the Camber constabulary are at the gate, site security are at the plug sockets, and Rye rolls over and goes back to sleep, dreaming of neon-coloured tsunamis crashing against the shoreline.

Where did you learn to drum like that?

"I started in '89, maybe. I was in a high school band, there was a guitarist and

of it. Sure, you've got GSL and all, but this, this stock of audio brut, is something else: every release an artful perversion of 'underground' music tradition, a urine stain on the insanely complex genealogy that hinders the American underground scene, with so many clever sub-genres for so many dumb people. Above all, it makes you want to expire on the dancefloor, kissing the air in an all-inclusive ritual to all the things that never happen, spreading, in all directions.

Swallow, don't spit. Let's get one thing straight. Load Records will be Famous When Dead. Their music made me poke my head out of all the bleeps/clicks/cuts/glitches I had it dunked in. Its simple magnitude snapped me out of my Schaffelfieber. It made me sit up and think:!

Which is what your brain thinks when it doesn't know what to think, because it's totally clueless unto the newness of this very new thing.

Now for some facts.

Ben McOsker: Load Records label-head. Looks: like a tall Joe 90. Sounds: soft-spoken, unassuming. Likes: techie Teutonic dub of Basic Channel ilk. Owns: the only lime-green business card I've seen in my life. Is currently: drinking a can of Stella and squinting in the line of my flash.

I just picked up this digital camera a day ago and I'm messing with the presets and trying to get the facts, to no avail. Maybe I'm not asking right or something, all the while trying to hide the cultural lag that saw me pick up on Load in about 2001.

I'd really like to know how long you've done this for, Ben, this relentless pursuit of the most crucial guitar music known to man? "Oh, like 11 years – it's our anniversary, 11 years, and time for another beer, let's celebrate."

You want discographies? All you'll get here is some masking tape and scissors if you're lucky. All I'll say is this: mid-Nineties homemade noise Americana, awkward boys in basement scenes, atonal boom-box anthems and aural cannibalism.

Load do 'extreme' music, whatever that means. But it's not aggressive. Even the 'metal' acts, like **Sightings**, drag on a lurid palette of *Saved By The Bell* intentions, rather than the habitual greyscale of the atonal sludge/noise/metal/industrial scenes, swinging the output more towards Acid than



'This is called, "Throw George Bush In A Pit And Cover Him With Boiling Oil"'

bassist, and my friend and I both wanted to sing. We flipped a coin and I lost. So I had to play drums."

It turned out OK, then.

"Yeah. I'm really glad I lost that fuckin' bet. I dunno, I practise a lot. I try to play every day, an hour, an hour-and-a-half."

You don't have a conventional sense of rhythm.

"I'm kind of all over the place. Maybe it's playing with just one other person for so long. Brian, he's sort of the tight part of it; I'm the loose part, I guess. Maybe it's just playing by myself a lot. I have this ability where I just...spill out. But I feel like straight drumming is harder than spill drumming. I need to focus and try to play some straight beats once in a while. Like, Ratt beats, or Judas Priest. That stuff's *hard*."

Some facts: Lightning Bolt formed in Providence, Rhode Island back in 1995. They began as a three-piece, but that was never their destiny; vocalist Hashim Bharoocha left to join New York hardcore deconstructionists Black Dice before the

group put down their first official recording, and there seemed to be no need to fill the gap. Since then, Lightning Bolt have recorded a triumvirate of awesome albums for Providence's Load Records, and toured every trash-can rock venue in the United States, as captured on live DVD *The Power Of Salad And Milkshake*. Brian Chippendale, a comic-book artist, is the talkative one. Brian Gibson, a sometime video game designer, is less so.

What sort of scene existed around Providence when Lightning Bolt formed?

"We started when we were still at Rhode Island School of Design. There were a bunch of other bands coming through. Les Savy Fav were a year below us, Black Dice a couple of years younger still. We were just a college party band, really.

"When we left school, it was like the freaky art school people ran into the rock scene in town, and there was this weird joining of forces – all this off-the-wall, cartoon-ish, costume-wearing stuff playing right next to this real rocking straight stuff.

Providence became a really rich place to play for a while. It still is, but there's been a couple of heydays. There were places to stay – we stayed in this big warehouse..."

Fort Thunder?

"Yeah. Our house for six years."

What was it – a squat?

"No, rented space. But it was cheap, and it was big – 8,000 square feet – really big. It started out with four of us, but graduated up to 14 of us. We had shows once a month, or so – we practised there all the time, this band Forcefield practised there, people came and went – we had all kinds of bands come through. It was a real focal point. But everyone got evicted, that got torn down, so things have recently moved to another part of town.

"There are seven small warehouse places to play. But I actually got evicted from that a couple of months back. The fire inspectors are out on the prowl. The warehouses are all zoned for business, so we've been living in these places illegally. They've been chasing us around, and it's sorta a pain in the neck."

It says on the Load Records website that the new album's going to be called *Frenzy*. Sounds like the definitive Lightning Bolt title.

"Maybe – the website's sorta jumped the gun on that one. We're working on this whole kind of improvisational session – we've got 10 hours of tapes that we're going through. We're either going to take stuff from that, or we're going to take some stuff from some home recordings.

"*Frenzy* is basically going to be some of the craziest stuff that we can do. It's going to be an experiment. [Laughs] It's going to be a *mess*."

BBC Maida Vale Studios

Wednesday March 31, 11.30pm

A live session for John Peel. Mogwai, Erase Errata, and Part Chimp gather on the balcony. BBC producers hand out earplugs. Drumsticks splinter on the rim of the snare drum, shards of timber ricocheting off like detritus from a wood-chipper. Backs cricked, bodies drenched in water. Chippendale: "This is our *Fraggle Rock* cowboy song. It's called, 'Throw George Bush In A Pit And Cover Him With Boiling Oil'."

All the best party bands have a party political broadcast.

For more information

www.loadrecords.com

www.pitchforkmedia.com/interviews/m/mcosker_ben-03

Noise. It's pure CMYK: embedded on my psyche like glittering gems in a Technicolor hallucination, its back catalogue of jewel cases conceal countless plug'n'play odes to the art of the gut, the amateur-as-career-path ethos. Genres reconstituted, reconfigured, chewed up and spat out by a new primitive Americana sound that shifts on this hyped psych second coming I keep hearing about.

The art world would call it 'naïf'. But then again, the art world is full of slipstreaming fuckwits. And Black Dice.

These wired recordings slap with the immediacy of a slap, the shiny discs invariably taken to making things LOUD. LOUDER, even, because the only way of doing things is by amplifying them till you're inside them and sound becomes a beautiful,

irrefutable, fact. It just *is*. Like some Donald Judd piece, or a Microsoft Powerpoint Venn diagram that demonstrates once and for all that NOISE and FUN are not mutually exclusive. You could mount a defence case on it. Now leave it alone.

I have this friend, Sheikh, he's the node through which all my good fortune in music flows. He keeps German dub-tech records boxed in his closet – takes them out on special occasions. It's not some *High Fidelity* dross, it's magical industrial design and it should be cherished. He's friends with Ben McOsker, and they share this fascination, this Basic Channel fetish.

Those dub-techno records just sound like submarine radars to me. But Load possesses that fetish quality for me. It took me three whole weeks

to dare spin the **Necronomicon** record, the packaging was so good. I'm not sure I can even talk about **Lightning Bolt's** *Wonderful Rainbow*, and the pink sleeve of **THEUSAISAMONSTER's** *Tasheyana Compost* is a wonder to behold. Oh, and **Friends Forever**, with that beautiful homage to the serene Denver Broncos painted on the back, that nearly broke my heart – not to mention the whole Minutemen colouring book massacre spattered over **Mr California & The State Police's** *Audio Hallucinations* or **Pink And Brown's** touching epitaphs.

And then there's **Neon Hunk** and Sightings and **Noxagt**... the list goes on.

Dig for yourselves. But once on the dancefloor: swallow, don't spit. The Venn diagram demands it

Band Red
Out Now
CD / LP

kaito



LIVE
JUNE

17th, Norwich Waterfront with Magoo
21st, Birmingham Academy with Radio 4
22nd, London, 93 Feet East with Radio 4

JULY

22nd, Bath Moles Club
24th, Truck Festival,
Hill Farm, Steventon, Oxfordshire

'Thank Fuck for Kaito' **NME**
'Delicious' **Kerrang**
'Most vital, feral 30mins of
music in a long time...
quite stunning' **MOJO**

kaito.co.uk

mute.com

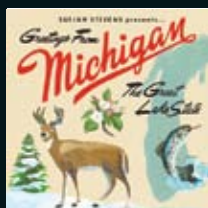


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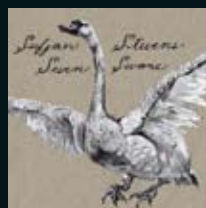
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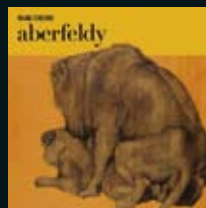
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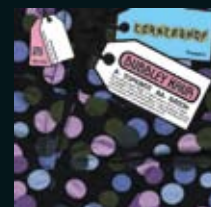
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Ass-wiggling, big dongs, punk boy porn and onstage fellatio: the filthy perv-rap sensation **Gravy Train!!!** discuss humping speaker stacks with enormous boners and making out with magazine editors

Words: **Miss AMP**

Photography: **Rebecca Chalkley**



I thought I was just watching a gig but apparently I have totally just died and gone to heaven. Someone must've cracked open my brain while I was asleep and looked inside at the file marked *Stuff That Is Empirically Cool*, If You Are A Woman, Or At Least, A Woman Who Is Me, Since I Can't Speak For All Women And Wouldn't Fucking Want To Because Then All Women Would Be Lazy Slack Ginger Sluts Who Are Incapable of Getting Anywhere On Time. Here is what they dragged out:

Stuff that is empirically cool #1: *Skinny white gayboys (like Hunx) who are beautiful. I mean, I'm pretty fucking sure the whole world agrees with me on this one, except, y'know, twats from the Deep South and people who are dead.*

Stuff that is empirically cool #2: *Mexican chicks (like Funx) that can do the splits. 'Nuff said.*

Stuff that is empirically cool #3: *Girls (like Chunx) with dyed red hair who are overweight in all the right places. Y'know, hips that could knock*

if you chuck in a few aerobics-based dance routines and a whole bunch of fake ass-rapings and genuine ass-wiggles to accompany it.

So I'm thinking, damn, heaven's pretty cool after all, but then God's all like, "No, AMP, you're not in heaven, you're in Brighton, can't you see all those girls with hair slides and their toes turned in? You think Brighton is heaven? It ain't, lady. Nope, you're at a Gravy Train!!! gig, like two years after you first wrote about them in the first issue of *Careless Talk*, so you'd better just calm the fuck down and get on with interviewing them, 'k?" So, the very next day, that is what I gone done did.

What's a 'gravy train'?

Chunx: It's when a girl gets real excited, and makes vaginal secretions in her underwear.

Hunx: Yeah. And then, there's a dog food in America called Gravy Train, so when we first started, we'd get huge bags of it, and throw it at people.

So, Hunx, are you still at beauty school?

Hunx: Nope. I finished! It was fucking great. The best thing was the fights! One time, these girls were fighting, and they were about to get arrested for it. So this girl faked a miscarriage so she wouldn't have to go to jail. She got taken away on a stretcher and everything, grabbing her stomach, yelling, 'Ohhhh! Ohhhh! My baybeeee!!!!!!'. Then she came back four hours later, waving, really happy, like, 'hiii-iii-ii!' It was really cool.

And you held dance try-outs for three days to find your new dancer?

Chunx: Yes! And we're going to release them one day, on our rockumentary! We have them on video. We just sat there holding a video camera, and got people to come in and dance around to a song. Pretty nasty.

Why'd you go for Junx? What did he have that was special?

Chunx: You saw the show, right? I think it's pretty self-explanatory.

Hunx: He has, like, the best ass ever.

down buildings, tits that'll take your eyes out, lips to suckstart a Lexus and leave enough sticky red on the rim to subsequently form a small sculpture of a pig wearing a garland of roses.

Stuff that is empirically cool #4: *Black dudes (like Junx) with perfect asses who are perfectly happy to shake them in your face for, like, two hours without stopping, until a fine sheen of sweat slides across their skin and down the backs of their trembling thighs and they decide to go hump the speaker stack with an enormous boner instead.*

Stuff that is empirically cool #5: *Music that sounds like JJ Fad and L'Trimm (like Gravy Train!!!), especially*

'I play guitar, but I'm also a screamin' disco queen' – Junx



Hunx, are you still doing your magazine, *Puberty Strike*?

Hunx: No, *Puberty Strike* is finished. I'm doing a new mag now. It's called *Fag School*. It'll have punk rock bands and gayboy porno and stuff.

And when did you first realise you were a 'flaming homo'?

Hunx: After I met Chunx.

What was so special about her?

Hunx: She was beautiful and funny, but even she couldn't change me.

Chunx: But my vagina smelled!

Hunx: And her vagina smelled.

Your vagina smelled like what?

Chunx: It smelled like *shit*!

Hunx: She was wiping the wrong way.

Chunx: I was. I went to the doctor and found out.

Didn't your mum teach you the right way to wipe?

Chunx: I don't remember anyone teaching me! They just threw a roll of toilet paper at me, and let me get on with it. I try to do it right but I've been doing it wrong for 22 years...it's hard.

Funx: So, you went to the doctor's because of the smell?

Chunx: No, I went to the doctor's because I had a UTI [urinary tract infection]. And they asked me which way I wiped, and...it's like, bacteria from the ass.

[At this point, the soundmen start doing some *really fucking loud* soundchecks, rendering any further conversation impossible. Luckily, I bump into Gravy Train!!!'s fabulously faggy dancer, Junx, on the stairs.]

Hello, Junx! You're pretty hott, huh? How many people have you made out with on this tour?

Junx: There was this boy named Stephen from Nottingham, who has a boyfriend named Paul. And me and Stephen, we didn't make out really, but I was just lying there next to him, and he was like, I have a boyfriend, but then he totally *caressed* me! Then I met his boyfriend and his boyfriend was totally

hott for the entire band, so I think I could have got a threesome. I rimmed this boy in the bathroom, we did dick stuff, er, I made out with Everett True...

Lol, yeah, he told me you were a really good kisser.

Junx: I *am* a really good kisser! I wasn't expecting Everett True to be as good as he was, but he totally delivered. He wanted my body *soooo bad*. And then, uh, there was a couple of other boys last night...it's kinda jumbled.

So you've done pretty well.

Junx: I think so. Of course, I've been trying to make out with the boy who's been driving us around, but he's not into it. He's really upset about the whole Everett True thing.

What, jealous?

Junx: Not so much jealous...more disgusted. But that's cool. Everett is not the ugliest guy I've made out with by a long way. I've never made out with an ugly dude. He's probably not even the oldest. The oldest is 54. It's true.

So, you won the Gravy Train!!! dance try-outs?

Junx: Yeah... but, I didn't *really* win the try-outs. I mean, me and Hunx go back quite a long way, and we were in this band called Panty Raid...I play guitar, but I'm also a screamin' disco queen, and when Gravy Train!!! comes a-calling, you gotta answer the call.

The PR told me that at the London gig you were humping the speaker-stack with a boner...

Junx: [claps hands over mouth, gasps] Uhhhhh! I definitely will be too drunk to get one tonight!

You didn't get one last night either. Not that I was looking. Well actually I was looking, because the PR girl had told me, and I was like, hm, don't see no wood down there.

Junx: Nooo...wood is usually only for special occasions. For the boys in the front...it depends on whatever they're doing to help me out.

So, what's the most outrageous thing you've ever done onstage?

Junx: You know Zeigenbok Kopf [straight guys from San Francisco who

pretend to be hardcore German homosexuals and have songs about darkrooms and fisting]? I was dancing with them once, and I actually sucked John's cock. Onstage. Everyone was really enraged about it.

What...to completion?

Junx: Not to completion, no one would let me. Like the second I got the cock out everyone was like, *oh my god!* I mean, of course, John is straight, but hello, gay German brothers? That shit's hilarious! So the crowd was mainly straight, and I don't think they would have sat there while I did it to completion.

So, nothing like that's ever happened to you? No cute boys in the front row have ever started getting jiggy with you onstage?

Junx: Most of the boys at the gigs are a little bit afraid of me. It's rubbish.

You are quite in their faces.

Junx: Not when I walk away!

Then your ass is in their faces!

Junx: Heh!

Hunx was saying you have the most beautiful arse in the world.

Junx: [whoops] Actually, he has the biggest dong. Oh my god, it is pretty fucking nuts. He's all smiles, like he's a sweet boy...you'd never think that he was totally packing heat but *he is*.

And you're appearing in Hunx's new magazine?

Junx: *Fag School*? Yeah...there'll be punk boy porno, Hunx shot it, I starred...

Hunx is beautiful isn't he? He knows it, but still. Last night when he took his clothes off I was like, look at that beautiful body.

Junx: He is! He is! He totally pulls the hottest boys I know! I totally admire him! He's like my best friend. I love that fucking kid. He's a big part of my life. It's like, Hunx was blessed with the dong, Chunx was blessed with the boobs, I was blessed with the ass, and Funx? She's just like the most talented person on earth. Plus she can do the splits. Fuck yeah. Hey, listen, nice meeting you. I gotta warm up. I need to start getting drunk. Friendster me, yeah?



Kaito

Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Steve Gullick**

vs the new Morrissey album

i) Daniel Johnston's fragile song pays semi-autobiographical tribute to 'The Friendly Ghost' of children's cartoons. He, too, was scared, and desperate for friends.

ii) *You Are The Quarry* (Attack).

People underestimate.

People laugh at the wrong parts of 'Casper'. People still care about Morrissey and the fact he's releasing his first album for eight years¹. This makes him relevant, whether you or I like it or not. People care, because for the generation reared on The Smiths, Morrissey is forever present,

reminding them of mortality and back when they *really* cared. It is an event, this release. And Kaito... Sure. This Norwich boy-girl quartet is as relevant as anything else cluttering up my desk. They're very 2004. Right? You wait 25 years and right on cue, the rock revisionists claim they liked female-led music all along. Guitars howl and scree,

and music acts as a rollercoaster ride of alcohol and sentiment. Wait a minute...

"I'm Nikki Colk, I sing and play guitar in Kaito, and I've gotta tell a story now? Oh shit. OK. I started singing because I was right in the middle of the country and I had no bicycle, no car, all I had was a horse, so



I used to walk around on the horse and sing. No one could hear me singing."

I always felt The Smiths usurped the place talented females such as Nikki Colk, and Lesley Woods from The Au Pairs, and them out of Malaria, should have occupied through the drab mid-Eighties. The Smiths' guitars echoed what went before. The lyrics wallowed in misery, a product of the environment – rain, Manchester – whereas you feel if you could pin Nikki's smiling, sharp features down long enough to figure out what she and fellow Kaito-ite Gemma Cullingford are wailing about, it wouldn't make you despair. Except with exasperation. Isn't that an improvement? Not only do the guitars jar and scrap, but Nikki and Gemma act their age. Yet so does Morrissey. It's just that his audience doesn't want him to be any older than 17, otherwise they'll have to face up to the fact they are too.

"I didn't try to sound like anyone else cos the sounds I was singing were awful," Nikki laughs.

The Smiths made music for the wannabe reclusive obsessive. I say wannabe, because

true recluses never give in to popular taste, however enticing. Kaito, too – and their music is also claustrophobic, fragile, a lot of noise and bluster, but you just know that's present because of nerves (and it's fun).

"I'm an obsessive when it comes to the band," Ms Colk continues. "It starts because you wanna have some direction behind what you wanna do, and then you realise you're good at it, and it just flows out. I've never been taught how to play. Singing and playing guitar are both used as vehicles of sound. It probably sounds odd to other people, but that's all I need."

Kaito are from Norwich. This strikes me as important, beyond even context. It's probably the reason their sound has been filed by www.allmusic.com as, "Whimsical, Bittersweet, Quirky, Naïve, Playful, Energetic", and why it took even me until 2002, and their seven-track EP 'Montigola Underground' (Devil In The Woods), to discover them. LA. Wales. Edinburgh. Chelmsford. All seem so much more understandable than Norwich, somehow. Or maybe it took them a while to mix the

post-Bis playfulness with a more stubborn, wayward, post-Erase Errata feel...

"I don't find silence awkward," Nikki explains. "I can't not be doing something. I feel useless if I don't do anything."

The new Morrissey album doesn't disappoint *if that's what you're after*. It's a beery, comforting wink of a companion. It swirls. It swings. It casts vaguely acidic backwards glances at politics, and girls, and America, and his fans. The songtitles are so devilishly Mozzer: 'How Can Anybody Possibly Know How I Feel', 'The World Is Full Of Crashing Bores', 'I Have Forgiven Jesus'. There's a nice putdown of 'men in uniform', and plenty of larking around...and so it's a letdown. Would've been nice to lose the suit and genial Grouchy Old Man inflexions.

The new Kaito album, *Band Red* (Blast First) *does* disappoint – and hence doesn't. Don't read me wrong here. It's great: abrasive, discursive, reflexive, witty and full of Everett True musical reference points (my favourite kind). Being lazy, I wanted another 11 songs that repeated previous single 'Go'

iii) Late Seventies Rough Trade band driven to reform briefly in the mid-Nineties by Kurt Cobain's love for their music. Seems odd that just one fan should affect a group so deeply. He never got to see the reunion anyway. I did, and was reminded of why they split originally – they turned into hippies and sucked. Their first two albums, however, are such damn fun – a riot of violin, squeals and abrasion. Atonal heartrending vocal harmony began here for me, on songs like 'The Void' and 'Adventures Close To Home'.

or the Quickspace-style 'Fresno Song'. This, I didn't get. Kaito have moved on (slogging your way across America for a few years will see to that): no longer childish, still yelping with pleasure. The live adrenalin kicks in second song, the shout-y single 'Should I', and doesn't let up till the neatly named comedown finale '3AM'. Bastards.

Nah. Not really.

Name?

"Gemma Cullingford."

Position?

"Bass player, and backing vocals – I try."

Your story?

"I started off with the recorder, like everyone else, and went on to the flute. I'd

"I was at that age, 13 or 14, when I was beginning to think about who I was. Maybe I got into The Lemonheads. My mum played guitar when she was pregnant with me, so perhaps there's some connection."

How would you describe yourself?

"I'm a bit paranoid."

Do you smoke dope all the time?

"I drink and, um..." Gemma coughs.

What's your motivation for being here?

"I don't look like a true performer, but I do enjoy it. Maybe it gives me some kind of identity. When I'm doing band stuff I feel like I belong to a certain community that I never felt part of just doing a job. I'm quite shy in work scenarios, and people can't understand how I can get on stage and

Motörhead to The Specials and Motown. It wasn't until I left that I discovered music. That's quite special – a real identity. It's nice you don't have to justify to anyone or yourself why you listen to something."

How would you describe Kaito?

"Kaito offer quite a few things. It's got melody, and it's got noise. It's got great rhythm. It's not trying to achieve anything except for itself. It has songs of high energy. Sometimes we're so tired it's hard to work out why they are high energy."

Saw some video footage of Chicks On Speed in Europe 2003, and was astounded at how similar they looked and sounded to The Raincoats, 1979ⁱⁱ. Life is cyclical. To the best of my knowledge, however, The Raincoats weren't particularly big fans of corporate sponsorship, and prided themselves on a certain shabby individuality that many ex-underground heads scorn as self-defeating.

CoS may look and sound like The Raincoats' barroom, bathroom clatter and zing, but it's Kaito who capture their *spirit*.

"I'm Dieta Quantrill, known as Dee to everybody except my parents. I drum and do a bit of singing. When I was a kid, I liked to hit things rhythmically. My younger brother started drumming, so I had to try and outdo him. He was in a band until recently."

As good as Kaito?

"Well... no. Almost."

When you first started drumming, who were you looking to?

"Guns N' Roses, and AC/DC."

You used to hit things hard?

"I did, yeah. The first group I was in was a real shoegazing band, like The Sundays, but I wanted to be in Faith No More."

How would you describe yourself?

"Contradictory. I'm very organised in my head, but it manifests itself quite messily. I leave a trail of mess. I'm motivated but laidback. I procrastinate a lot."

What motivates you?

"Just wanting to get to a decent age and being able to not look back on a life I've wasted."

How old are you now?

"30, so I'm probably there! No offence."

OK. I'm going to say this one more time for the benefit of the Jason Stollsteimer hiding inside us, and let it go. *Spontaneity is at the heart of all great rock'n'roll*. Kaito are structured, sure, but they've left themselves plenty of room to be creative.

Dee: "It's nice having a bad show."

Nikki: "It depends on confidence. If I'm not so sure, I can't play well."

But no one's going to know you're fucking up except yourselves. You should do a few quieter ones. Get the lighters out.

Dee: "We do fresh stuff which is always fun. We translate what we do constantly."

Nikki: "It can be bizarre sometimes..."

Dee: "...just like pots and pans, and lots of unusual rhythm stuff, at work."

Did you used to do cover versions?

Nikki: "No. We've done one cover from *Girls In The Garage*^{iv}, but..."

Gemma: "It's not very interesting."

What do you think about on stage?

Dee: "The cats, the bats and cats... fucking hell, I can't hear what's happening. Are the monitors on? There's water on the snare drum!"

play bass when I can't talk very well among people who are doing different things and have different lives to me."

Do you still work?

"No, I quit a couple of months ago. I was a waitress."

There's a new album that makes me howl with pleasure, and it belongs to neither Morrissey nor Kaito. The former is too restricted by demand and its uneasy mix of irony and romance; the latter suffers from comparison to the quartet's live set. In that, it keeps good company. Nirvana, The Birthday Party, The Slits, The Poison Girls... No decent live band can hope to compare in a blurred studio snapshot.

No. That honour belongs to Scatter's *Surprising Sing Stupendous Love* (Pickled Egg), for its breadth of vision and freestyle delirium, and the way the Eastern chant-song and trumpets blaring in cacophonous harmony recall Ed Kuepper's plucky early Eighties post-Saints experiment, The Laughing Clowns. That is, until the John Coltrane influences kick in and I howl again, but with anger.

Didn't I suffer enough in my twenties?

Name?

"Dave Lake. Plays guitar and screams. When we were annoying kids, we'd go for drives in the car and make annoying drum noises. Our house was five miles from anywhere, so my world was basically this farm where I lived. I never saw any other kids until I went to primary school. We had to create our own entertainment."

"I didn't start playing guitar until I was in my early twenties. I think noise is interesting, rather than notes. I used to hate guitars cos it was just solos. They'd bore me to tears. Then I realised you didn't have to play solos or notes or anything. The reason the band works well is we all have a similar ethic. We don't try to sound like anything."

How would you describe yourself?

"Up and down. I'm quite amazed that I'm able to chase this dream when I'm 36."

Are you 36?

"Yeah. So every time, it's like... amazed. I hated school. All I was into was motorcycle racing. All my mates were into music, from



iv) Killer series of compilations of Shangri-La's/Spector-inspired Nuggets-style Sixties girl garage groups.

get really excited singing Christmas carols in the cathedral, giggling and stuff. I danced as well, even though I'm not very energetic."

What dancing did you do?

"Ballet, tap. But I never seemed to get anywhere, and I started getting quite tubby, so I gave up. One day I decided I'd had enough playing the flute, and I saw this ad in my classroom, saying 'Do you want to learn guitar?' And I was like, 'Yeah, I do'."

What kind of guitar did they teach you?

"Just a few chords here and there. I'd ask them to work out songs for me."

What cover versions?

"Oh, it's too embarrassing. The Levellers and Suede. I was 14, and it was '94."

What made you want to play guitar?

JAGJAGUWAR

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CD/LP (*July release*)

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MINUS STORY
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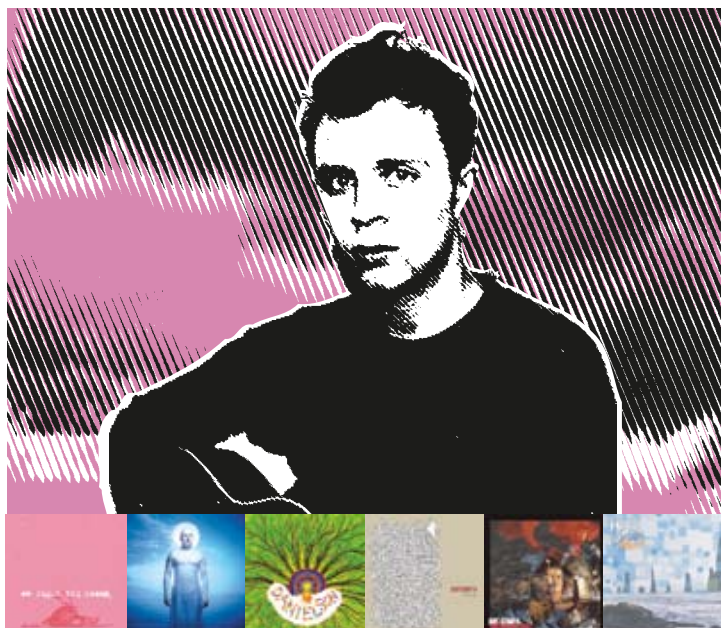
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The Mae Shi



shoplifting





better living through Pastelism

The later chapters of **The Pastels** story
– the Nineties and beyond

Words: **Jon Dale**

Photography (Katrina): **Stuart Reidman**

Photography (Stephen): **Drew Farrell**

"Include some history," the editor said. History? And I've got, what, under 2,000 words? Not bloody likely.

The history *is* important; you should all trace it yourselves. Kids get their minds blown by Orange Juice, start writing nervous, energetic pop songs. The Pastels are proclaimed as progenitors of C86, shambling, twee, and indie, each of which they easily transcend with each leap and bound, each new record, each cipher of pop wisdom. Naturally stylish and non-dogmatically *punk* in attitude, the band dissolves in 1989 (anything to avoid stagnation), eventually re-grouping with a world-beating line-up: Stephen Pastel, Annabel Wright (Aggi), and Katrina Mitchell. The trio release three heavyweight singles on Paperhouse ('Speeding Motorcycle', 'Thru Your Heart', and 'Thank You For Being You') before the righteous Domino label adopt the band for good and back two of the Nineties' greatest pop records – *Mobile Safari* and *Illumination*. Followed by *Illuminati*, a remix album that, to these ears' n' eyes, is the perfect culmination of Pastel Phase One: all the Friends Of Pastelism under one banner of love.

I should have asked Stephen Pastel about the *Illuminati* project (check the inference: secret wisdom, coincidence and magic, crazed and wild nights.) But, as it happens, we find ourselves fairly close to the action. You want to know about The

Pastels' music? It's never just about music anyway. As a Pastels fan you're sympathetic to the *dynamic* body of ideas that the Pastel trio carry with them. The dynamism of Pastel thought is that it lets like-minded souls flock together. Beat Happening, My Bloody Valentine, Jesus And Mary Chain, Galaxie 500, Teenage Fanclub, Telstar Ponies, Shop Assistants, The Vaselines, the early years for Stephen's 53rd & 3rd imprint, Stephen and Katrina's Geographic label... Common goals and idiosyncratic style. There is a body of ideas, carried by Stephen, Katrina and Aggi, which resonates with their fans and followers and peers.

Stephen Pastel's voice is shadowed by international phoneline distortion, sounding even more laconic and carefully paced than usual. "I think, especially when the group core became myself and Annabel and Katrina... we were really self-critical in a way The Pastels had never been before. We tried to achieve a real consistency through what we did in terms of music and in terms of how the sleeves were, in terms of how we met people, in terms of how we promoted other music. The Pastels has always been about being inclusive; it's very anti-elitist."

Pastel music built slowly over the early Nineties. On 1991's 'Thru Your Heart' EP, it was as though they'd finally discovered how to make romance blossom through their devotional pop songs' lamp-lit contours. On 'My Heart's My Badge', you can hear Stephen straining for the right

notes, but the song's fiercely emotional impact transcends his vocal limitations. Another simple truth: a good idea performed with an awareness of limitations is always better than the million-dollar bad idea.

On 1994's *Mobile Safari*, The Pastels eulogised their home city of Glasgow, but in a way Pastels music is always about Glasgow – a vision of Glasgow, a *version* of Glasgow. I've never been to the Magic City (more's the pity) but through Pastels music you can sense the mood of the town: 'G12 Nights' as an image of street lights trailing off into the distance; 'Worlds Of Possibility' playing paean to the original motivators Orange Juice and their impact on the city's dreaming. Stephen is a little cautious about the romance of Glasgow, reflecting that "It never becomes too honeyed or something. There's just enough darkness that infects everything, and there is room to pursue a slightly romantic vision which will come across in the sound."

But it took 1997's *Illumination* to melt The Pastels' music into womb-like fluid-pop, introspective and wraith-like, de-centred songs of romance, elegy and eulogy. 'The Hits Hurt' pays tribute to Albert Ayler, and 'Unfair Kind Of Fame' does the same for Ed Wood; closing track 'Mechanised' laments the dehumanisation of modern life. When I first listened to *Illumination* I remember thinking, This is some of the bravest music I've heard. It wasn't typical

Pastel music; it brought in all of these outside influences: Bill Wells' jazz stylings, Dean Wareham's star-lit bursts of guitar... Perhaps it's the way these ears work, but it felt like a natural successor to My Bloody Valentine's *Loveless*, an absolutely singular document, one that maintains its own world while reaching out to communicate with everyone who wants to listen. One that's going to reverberate far beyond its own decade. A record with heavy implications.

Stephen is very cautious about the comparison. "Well, *Loveless* is a masterpiece and *Illumination* isn't. But there's something inspiring about *Illumination* and probably a lot of people think of us as non-musicians, even though that's really far from true. We weren't maestros, and still are far from, but it indicated the possibilities that exist for people who are not the most gifted musicians." Perhaps their position as 'not maestros' helped The Pastels, made things looser, more open. On *Illumination* it was as if they had dropped their song structures into reflective pools of some impossibly glorious liquid, watching the songs disperse from their core, and dissolve into waves of sweet, rich fog. Pop music seen through a glazed window, pop music that glowed, pop music *with ambition*.

"It was a really ambitious record for us. There are two or three things that I think were really fantastic on that record and that

The Pastels finally reappeared in 2003 with their soundtrack to David MacKenzie's supernatural thriller *The Last Great Wilderness*. *Illumination*'s polymorphous charm was expanded upon: pop music caught in a fluid rush of angel-sigh sound. The record was all about veiled knowledge, incident, and atmosphere – at least until Jarvis Cocker climbed on board, in character as an abstract Lothario for 'I Picked A Flower', generally viewed the most atypical piece of Pastel pop yet documented. Truth be known, it was a bit like a filthy update of 1991's 'Speeding Motorcycle', but hardly anyone bothers to look back more than a decade.

The Last Great Wilderness sounded very small, full of music that was carefully nurtured into the world, allowed to slowly unfurl. Stephen concurs. "It's not about minimalism, that isn't The Pastels, but I often hear something that's so small and in a way I really... That piece of music by Nuno Canavaro is so important to me now, and I'm trying to find out how you can do something that's so small and so affecting. That's probably almost exactly where The Pastels are just now." Perhaps it's more about a piece of music working by inference, a subtle kind of seduction. Some of the best music of recent times – The Pastels, Maher Shalal Hash Baz, Tape, Movietone, Fursaxa – is all about miniature moments, snapping small melodies into place and watching them spool and loop

This is more than just music. It's about the way art affects your everyday life

I'm really, really proud of. The track 'Cycle' that Annabel sings, is such a fantastic lyric, and I didn't know what she was doing, we just had the whole piece evolving, and that was incredible. *Mobile Safari* feels like our first record or something, and it's very raw. [But] yeah, with *Illumination*, we achieved some real moments that were very close to our intention. With *Illumination*, I realised what our sound should be. We can make a better record than that, but I think we all felt very proud of that record, the three of us, and also a lot of people that had played on it. Yeah, it's a record we're proud of."

As a Pastels fan you get used to *waiting*. After the 1998 remix project *Illuminati*, things went silent on The Pastels front. Two years later, though, Stephen and Katrina broke cover with their Geographic label. So far they've released some of the wildest and most compassionate music of the past decade: Maher Shalal Hash Baz, Bill Wells, Nagisa Ni Te, International Airport, Eugene Kelly... Label business seemed to absorb band energies. There were whispered words about new songs, one called 'Secret Music', coincidentally the name of an unrecorded National Park song as well. Such is the respect with which the Pastels are held in Glasgow that the National Park crew changed their song's name to 'Secret Songs'. Stephen and Katrina are as much curators as they are musicians. Curators, collators and collaborators, all about community and communication.

like old 8mm film reels; music that doesn't try to knock you down with its very self, but which welcomes the listener gently.

It's really beautiful when a piece of music doesn't feel the need to impose itself upon you. Stephen agrees, before shifting focus. "Most of the music I've really loved in my life, I've felt immediately in some way challenged by it, things like Television Personalities and Beat Happening and My Bloody Valentine, to know if it was even good or not on the first listen. For music like ours, a lot of people will always probably feel in some way challenged by it. Not feel up to the challenge, but maybe by moving towards something that's a bit more neutral or something. Maybe there's a way of just, you can have your colour but it's, people, you know... People maybe don't... I'm not really sure of what I'm trying to say, I think I'm becoming a bit lost."

Before we end our conversation, Stephen quietly acknowledges: "Groups shouldn't overestimate their importance, but I think we've definitely been a dot in the map, and we've been lit up at some points." Lit up, like a beacon, from a non-mechanised lighthouse.

This is more than just music. It's about the way art affects your everyday life, how a chance encounter can send you travelling down a subtly different path. About devotion and dedication, healthy self-criticism. And about beauty, now and always; always about beauty.

The Pastels' early albums



1987 *Up For A Bit With The Pastels* (LP Glass 1987/CD, Oscar 1990/CD, Paperhouse 1991)

A mere five years after the release of their first single, The Pastels finally release their album debut, an instant independent classic which sneers at the critics who dismiss them as twee with a barrage of guitar-driven, three-minute pop wonders, notably 'I'm Alright With You' and 'Automatically Yours', and lyrics as soulful as they are sussed. No 'Truck Train Tractor' – so what? They'd already moved beyond.

1988 *Suck On The Pastels*

(compilation, LP/CD, Creation)
Twee? Fey? Shambolic? Yeah, suck on this, cutie: early, exuberant singles from 1983 to 1985, plus a BBC session featuring a stellar, seven-minute extended version of 'Baby Honey' (the third to appear on an album in two years, but it's just too good to pass up). Stephen comes clean on the liner notes about the slackness and arrogance of the band in those years; fans breathe a sigh of relief that they can stop looking for ridiculous rare single/Creation compilation tracks 'Something Going On', 'Million Tears' and 'I Wonder Why'.

1989 *Sittin' Pretty* (LP/CD, Chapter 22)

"They're jokers, but I'm not laughing." Holy Moly! Barbed insults fly at Pastels detractors among a 10-track dose of nothing less than glam-pop-rock'n'roll that tells it like it is, nowhere more sharply than on the rumbling, yowling 'Ditch The Fool'. Ex-Shop Assistants' guitarist David Keegan and Vaselines man Eugene Kelly swell the ranks to make it a Scottish supergroup of sorts; Martin Hayward and Bernice bow out soon afterwards, and Brian Superstar a year later. Pop fact: 'Nothing To Be Done' resurfaces on the soundtrack of the film of Irvine Welsh's *The Acid House* in 1998.

1993 *Truckload Of Trouble*

(compilation, 2LP/CD, Paperhouse)
Still the best introduction to The Pastels, a smorgasbord of sounds from 1986 to 1993 covering Pastels old-style and new (Aggi on bass, Katrina Mitchell on drums), tipping the hat to the past and paving the way for subsequent maverick musical explorations. Indie dancefloor favourite 'Truck Train Tractor' finally makes it onto the LP, as does the gleefully baroque 'Comin' Through', while the Hugh Masekela-inspired soul instrumental of 'Kitted Out' connects the dots between the passion-fuelled underground faiths of northern soul and indie alike.

Katrina Howat



a little bit of rain

Words: **Sophie Harris**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

When Banhart sings,
it's as if he's *tasting* the words.
Cheeks twinge,
eyebrows undulate,
head lifts

Devendra Banhart The Water Rats, London

Sellotaped to the wall outside The Water Rats is a big bit of paper, which says (double underlining) 'TOTALLY SOLD OUT', then, 'SORRY'...

Well. Given that Devendra Banhart is now touring his second album proper – the celebratory, musky evensongs of *Rejoicing In The Hands Of The Golden Empress* (XL) – and being justly celebrated himself, it seems a little strange that this London show should find him playing a rather quaint theatre pub. Of course, it's packed, everyone craning and straining to get a glimpse of Banhart; and even perched on the balls of your feet, you can only just see down to the tip of his beard.

Draped in a red woollen poncho, Banhart settles himself on a cushion, on a blanket, thrown over a very large metal cage. "It's a metaphor!" he declares, rather nervously, before launching speedily into his first number, a couple of lyrics tumbling out of his mouth, jumbled, too much of a mouthful even for him. But watch a little closer, just *watch* how he delivers it, fidgets and all. When Banhart sings, it's as if he's *tasting* the words. Cheeks twinge, eyebrows undulate, head lifts. One minute he's baring his magnificent teeth, like a dog in a play fight turned nasty – the next his eyes are wide, like a kid sucking his thumb and finding a particularly good flavour.

The throng inches and squishes forward even more, mesmerised, cos watching Devendra sing is akin to watching Veruca Salt in *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*: you can see how dangerous the sweeties are, but you still want to taste 'em. And sure enough, as he warms up, we warm up; the squat, balding guy to my left is bobbing back and forth with his head thrown back, eyes closed. Five separate lines of sweat trickle down his face and glisten in the amber glow. Hairstyles wilt gently in the breezeless air.

'The Body Breaks' follows, its tentative guitar plucks pitched somewhere between Solomon's 'Song Of Songs' and Leonard Cohen's 'Hey That's No Way To Say Goodbye', all drowsy truth and hot-hearted insight: "*The body stays and the body moves on/And I'd really rather not dwell on when yours will be gone*". And it's kinda marvellous, given the artists Banhart so clearly adores (Donovan, Nick Drake, Karen Dalton), that there's not a trace of singer-songwriter *knowingness* about him, no glum reverence from the crowd. "The poncho must go!" he grins, "though it's my protective shawl," he says, whipping it off and inviting Vetiver's Andy Cabic onstage for some gauzy duets, Cabic's voice silky and sweet to Banhart's deliciously sour cat's lick.

As the air-con finally starts up with a heavy judder, Banhart plays sad song 'Autumn's Child',

and it hangs in the saturated air so that, just for a moment, everyone's sodden through with the song's dewy, pale melancholy. A boy wipes the sweat on his chin on the collar of his jumper. The song ends too soon, to thick applause.

Bowing out with Fred Neil's quiet little heartbreaker 'A Little Bit Of Rain', Devendra takes to his feet at last, without guitar, nostrils flared; as he sings, his eyes are scanning and searching, his hands plucking at the air with exaggerated grace. It's wildly moving. Ridiculous, gorgeous. A final sway, he spreads his arms and curtsies. "Goodnight," he says, picking his way offstage daintily to the screech of whistles and clapping.

Tottering out, I remember asking Devendra to tell me a joke, a couple of weeks back in an interview. It went:

Knock Knock
Who's there?
Devendra Banhart
Devendra Banhart who?
That's showbusiness!

Funny. The last stragglers totter onto the streets of Kings Cross, giddy from the wildness of Banhart's songs, practically steaming now, in the cool air. A kid is pointing to the sold-out sign on the wall. Devendra Banhart Who? You've got to be joking.

Avenue D Electrogogo, London

DADDY! MAKE ME BE A LESBIAN! NOW!

I'm such a wannabe lezza. Like now, I couldn't be feeling much more lezzerban if I tried. These women are THE APOTHEOSIS OF PERFECTION and I want to dive the fuck right in. Head fucking first up the fat one's cunt. Hey don't blame me! The stage is at

the right height! Their skirts are too short! The one in the silver dress, her ass cheeks ripple so delightfully! They look like a plastic bag full of water, and I want to go papple-papple-papple on them with my fingertips ALL DAY! And she's bending over and shaking it shake shake shaking it in my FACE, and, she's even got the same pink and black stripy knickers from Top Shop that I

have! We're, like, cunt twins! It's fate. Does she look like a slut? All together – uh-huh!

Shut up. Avenue D. Two young ladies from where else but NYC, rapping over some fantastically scuzzy tape-recorder Casio electrobeats, but don't hold that against them. Hold something else against them, puhlease. Are you a wussy emo boy? Then shut up and stick it in! Stick it in! Come stick

it in! That's what they command in their first song, and anyone who's ever got jiggy wit a guilt-ridden 23-year-old boy in a relationship will sympathise with that attitude, fo shiz. The following tirade of songs are just as bumptious and exhilarating as their titles suggest: '2D 2F', 'Donkey Punch', 'Do I Look Like A Slut?', 'Orgasmatron', and 'Punk Rock'. Yowsa!

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DJ/Rupture

The Venue, Triptych, Edinburgh

I want to write this review in a bootleg style, by sampling other reviews with information from the internet and splicing them together – and in no way because I’m too wasted and angry to take in more than vague impressions. No way at all. Although, at the end of four days of Triptych, it should be understood that Edinburgh’s experimental music fans are drained and spinning. Our endurance is tested to the limit tonight, because on a bill with John Peel and some old reggae dude (Dr Alimantado) are the stars of San Francisco label Tigerbeat6. Excellent.

DJ/Rupture (aka Jace Clayton of Madrid via the US) uses three turntables to mix everything from ambient soundscapes to Indian folk, but not in a tasteful world music way. He gives us an education in all things vinyl – but this is one evil teacher, building up slowly and then pummelling us outright. The familiar (Kelis) is heard next to obscure reggae; old school hip hop graduates into the more chart-friendly. And all of this set to

a backdrop of hard breaks and deliberately dirty mixing. He delivers with the attitude of the serious music fan – but also with fun. It’s disposable and historical, stolen and original.

It’s music for individuals – and, of course, we’re all so individual here...

Amy Liptrout

Gonzales Trash, London

Tonight is incredible – the single spotlight; the piano; the silent reverence in a trendy discotheque, 100-odd people sitting on their arses on a grubby floor for the return of The Entertainer himself, to play a piano concert without any vocals – but how to capture the feeling in words? Here’s what I scrawled on the back of four Travelcards.

Near darkness; Chilly hunched over piano. Bright green shirt – Kermit delusions? Reminiscent of Weimar-era Berlin – no topless Nazi girls though – clearly an oversight. Outrageously smug look on his face – no change there. He treated us to a swift tinkle on the ivories at his farewell show last year, but this is a fully-formed outpouring

upon keys. A touch of the Morrisseys in his self-satisfaction? And in those broad, manly shoulders. Am I an idiot for not knowing what this one is? Jazzy. Classic. Gershwin?

Man next to me is talking about taking too many drugs when he was 17. *Hush*. His girlfriend is far too good for him, btw. Everything is from memory, no sheet music – a whisper of ‘Take Me To Broadway’, the seated masses clapping along. Stuff the crowd knows... hurrah!

Now ‘Maniac’ from *Flashdance*?! Genius. Sounds utterly beautiful – first time for everything. Intense, you can hear nails tapping hard on the keys. He’d be brilliant in a typing pool. ‘Shameless Eyes’... best it’s ever been. ‘Another One Bites The Dust’... right hand ballet-dances across the keys. Fluid, flowing. Freddie Mercury most likely giving him a thumbs-up, if he’s not still spinning after that Queen musical. Chilly finishes with, ‘The greatest song ever written’ – ‘How Deep Is Your Love?’ Resist the urge to whip out my lighter.

Gonzales – still the man.

Leonie Cooper

Leafcutter John

The Cube, Bristol

Leafcutter John has a laptop but he tells us to think of forests. He brings out a triangle and some tiny little cymbals, and turns them into a noise to beat you around the head with. He samples children crying out for their parents. The bass creeps through the floor, up your trouser leg and into your pants. I’m not sure I like it there. And he seemed like such a nice boy. Leafcutter John smiles the whole time, but the set has become twitchy and not a little sinister. Rather than forests, I see abandoned factories and evil scientists.

And then, and then! Halfway through the set, he leaves the stage and re-emerges wearing nothing on top but a satin bra stuffed with pointy machines. The points scream like dying robots when he brushes his magnets up against them, and the audience is stunned. For the first time, he looks a bit afraid, and confides in us that the tits didn’t go down too well in Berlin. But it’s the best worst Madonna drag act: camp, utterly unexpected and a beautiful departure from every other grim electronics act you’ve seen – this is laptop science with a sense of humour. The Leafcutter starts smiling again. So does everyone else.

Alex Van Vliet

Múm

The Old Market, Hove

Now you stand up. Múm appear lost on stage, occasionally staggering into a microphone that they perhaps mistake for a telephone connecting to a loved one. They call out monosyllabically, squinting into the dark.

Múm’s presence on stage is that of ice sculptures: precious and delicate, inevitably to thaw graciously from existence. The singer looks as fragile as a Tim Burton mannequin – barely able to breathe, never mind carry an accordion that sits like a cast-iron corset. Her voice escapes like a slow puncture, high-pitched emissions as something squeezes her diaphragm into submission. So why do you now stand up? I need to sit down. At some point during ‘The Ghosts You Draw On My Back’ my heart shatters. I want to stop the clocks to record this moment of submersion,

but then it’s lost with the rest as guitars shimmer like mandolins, before drums crash and clatter into tumbling machinery.

Jonathan Falcone

Numbers

Liars Club, Nottingham

Numbers sure don’t waste no time. Three notes into their first track, ‘Disease’, and the crowd is a mass of writhing bodies and brandished elbows. I knew it was going to be like this. At least, I hoped it was going to be like this. I needn’t have fretted. This is Liars Club: they do things differently here.

And so it begins. There is no pretension. There is no choice between involvement and passive observation. There is no need for forced performance or onstage theatrics. Because Numbers in their purest form, just themselves, their instruments and their lyrics about buying and selling, panicking and partying, are enough to make you dance. *Everyone* dance. The crowd move like robots, only more enraptured and impulsive, involuntarily volatile kinetics breeding off frantic conjunctions of sound.

Numbers have got a bug. They may claim it’s in the air you breathe but, truly, it’s their disease, and everybody here is revelling in and feeding off this insane virus. It’s as though every soul has succumbed to a fit of paranoiac release; every neurosis you ever owned is spat out into the air tonight, every insecurity and bad memory erased. Seconds, songs, semitones skip by, each track a compression of febrile guitar and schizoid cymbal patterns. The incredible dynamism concentrates around Indra Dunis and her drums, the guitar and keyboard successively bouncing off her immovable beats.

‘I can do anything I want,’ she chants, which is completely true. At the moment, she appears indestructible. Tonight, Numbers have created a three-sided polygon of primary-coloured sound, so unpredictably frenetic that there is no foreseeing where each track might begin and end. In their own words, the room is on fire, ‘*Hot Fire!*’, and anyone who can’t withstand the heat had better stop pretending to be so cool. This is winning without even participating, endorphin release without the workout, ecstasy without the Ecstasy.

Hannah Gregory

The Pipettes

ICA, London

I’m all sick and excited and my heart is racing as the drums roll and the keys surge and it’s all because I’m hoping the scrum of big city folk and big city reviewers, here with all their cynicism and expectation, catch the same bug that I got, the bug that’s forced me to see this band play three times in the last four days. Because their Marquis De Sade/Shangri-La’s inflected songs have infiltrated my musical subconscious to such an extent that I found a tube full of people staring at me, having involuntarily sung, ‘*Simon says, ‘You should get on your knees!’ Simon says, ‘You’ve got to beg me please!’/Cos if you don’t do what I say, we can’t have any fun*’ without realising I’d done so on the way here tonight.

‘Welcome The Pipettes,’ shouts half of the suited percussion duo, and on twirl three polka-dotted beauties, the final pieces in this glorious jigsaw of suited urchins, science



Photography: Anthony Wallace

The Fiery Furnaces

Carling Academy, Birmingham

Fiery Furnaces singer Eleanor Friedberger has the slenderest hips and tightest jeans I’ve ever seen, looking more like an androgynous Patti Smith than Smith herself. I can’t listen to the music for at least five minutes – then I come to and realise they’re ace. One of the guitarists is pogoing like a bastard and pursing his lips like he’s trying to contain a seizure. The other guitarist is a virtuoso multi-instrumentalist, playing a fairground theme on a Hammond organ the size of a bus. Intensely magical, even if most of the songs feel like a strange carousel experience that gets dizzier by the second.

Like a feral Throwing Muses doing bluesy ska, the Furnaces are significantly edgier in the flesh than on record. The music is so infectious I shut everything else out. There’s a cleverly manipulated energy flowing from songs like ‘Tropical Ice-Land’, and you get a sense of the music evolving as it is played in *onelongpassagewithnopauses*. Sounds deviate and implode into themselves like physical music being smeared over glass, or someone playing waltzer melodies backwards.

The way Friedberger doesn’t break or stop for breath is incredible, even though you think she might fall apart at any second. I don’t usually take notice of lyrics, but these are Tom Lehrer-humorous, the semi-political schtick amplifying the already surreal fairground tinge. Afterwards, there are sweat patches under her armpits and yet it all seems so effortless.

After that, Franz Ferdinand are functional. They begin like a train, with a massive Orange Juice/early Simple Minds/Fall vibe. Ten minutes in, I begin thinking about the piece of leftover pizza in the fridge. Nothing sparkles. Nick McCarthy’s guitar is strapped up way too high and he dances like a goon. I can’t override that. They play the songs from the album, but there’s no tension, no awe. It happens in a one-dimensional blur.

Maybe I had too much expectation. Or maybe it was just The Fiery Furnaces set the level way too high.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

malleus maleficarum

Words: **Frances Morgan**
Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

Like Lightning Bolt,
Liars tap into an insect world,
a spirit world,
a private world
of regimented chaos



Liars **The Mean Fiddler, London**

Saw Liars two years ago, uncomfortable on a big stage. They looked sharp and they played sharp. I liked it a lot. They looked itchy-scratchy and they played like their hands were tensed into claws. It was *hot*; they were so repressed you could almost smell it. They played tight-muscled dancing songs, seemingly to themselves.

Now Angus Andrew's at home on the big stage, pacing it in a headscarf and nurse dress. The drummer seems to be wearing his pants and a gold tunic thing, like a member of Imagination, although it's hard to see. They own this platform, but like sinewy demons, not like rock wankers who've turned safe and narcissistic.

From upstairs Liars look like specimens, like an exhibit at a bad performance art show. Downstairs we can feel their heat, and Angus has discarded the headscarf and uniform for a vest with silver lightning on it. He shouts that he is the boy, she is the girl, he is the bear, "*We are the army who see through the red haze of blood,*" words steaming out through crunched-up guitar and digital distortion, as our bodies loosen and fill with that fizzy possibility of being able to dance for hours

— and dance fully as well, not pose and strut; dance like you're dying, slave to the elements and undercurrents, dirt under your skin and mystery injuries the next day.

But Liars are playing to an indie crowd at a venue with a strange curfew. They introduce songs, play them, stop. This isn't Beltane night in a bone-strewn cave, or even a sticky-floored party in a railway arch that you stumble out of into a turquoise dawn, having broken your new boots creating freeform synth improv on stage and Art Ensemble/Can-induced elemental drunk havoc on the makeshift dancefloor. So why is the night filled with these possibilities, these echoes of the party-world of Below?

It's all about concentration. A guitarist who turns to synth, sample and extra drums with ease. A drummer whose thundering rolls are not thrashy-loud, but *roundly* so, creating space, not compressing it and beating it into submission. Percussive vocals. The use of dissonance in the committed way that convinces you (and you should be convinced) that dissonance is a scale in itself. This sense of pure, unforgiving loss in music combined with the promise of headache hedonism is rivalled only by recent Lightning Bolt shows,

where we leant close in and felt the white heat of discipline. Like Lightning Bolt, Liars tap into an insect world, a spirit world, a private world of regimented chaos.

Afterwards I meet a friend and I describe the gig as occult punk rock. You can't have an occult punk rock group with three people, he says. Oh, my friend. You do not need a scale model of Stonehenge and a chorus of succubi. You do not need Genesis fucking P-Orridge. You don't even need Stephen O'Malley on guitar.

You just need to dance, and without your self-conscious indie shoes, all you !!! fans. You need to dance, surrounded by squeals and chants and crunching bones and real space, all you 'space' rockers. Dance like you ate a mandrake root and never heard Throbbing Gristle or Can's 'Halleluwah'.

"You like cowbell?" laughs Angus, before drowning said instrument in a well of analogue scree and digital glossolalia.

Yeah, drown that cowbell. Drown it like a witch. Liars are making true avant-garde party music. Next time they should play somewhere you can pass out next to the kickdrum, sinking your nails into someone you just met, challenging them to a psychic fight.

boffins and crazed rhythm makers, whose 10 members' combined age is the same as The Darkness'. 'ABC', a tune which four days ago belted The Garage's drunken crowd into a whoopin', hollerin' and dancing frenzy, tonight just makes the older Tuesday night art crowd nod their heads and smile to themselves with looks of, "I'm really fucking enjoying this, but I'm trying not to show it".

The band don't seem to care — this is their fifth gig, and here they are supporting one of their heroes (Holly Golightly), dancing, flirting and enjoying the thrills of playing addictive Sixties girl beat to a crowd of cynics. And three tunes in, holy shit, people are dancing to a band they've never heard of before. The little shuffles and

shoulder moves have given way to couples in each other's arms swaying, laughing, having a good time and the loners looking at each other and smiling, nodding their heads like racing horses. My stomach finally quells and I realise this band could do the same to any crowd they find themselves in front of.

Eamon Hamilton

Jonathan Richman **Islington Academy, London**

Oh Jonathan, you're my one-boy boy band matinee idol. It's always the Fifties with you. Rock'n'roll has hit town and we're sneaking out to the drive-in music hall and there's you, with that face and those big wide eyes. And when you dance

in that bar mitzvah-schmendrik way, I know that you know that I know what dancing is, and it *is* me you're looking to for reassurance, isn't it?

On stage, it's just Jonathan on his guitar and his stern friend Tommy on the drums. Sometimes, he doesn't play his guitar because it's more fun to dance with it, treating it like an elusive lover (albeit one wrapped in blue gaffer tape). Because Jonathan knows good love, and tonight he teaches us his lessons. In 'Her Mystery Not Of High-Heels And Eyesshadow', it's that it's more important for young lovers to share late-night colours than make-up secrets. Or in 'Couples Must Argue,' that it's important for sweethearts to let all that frustration out.

The screeching lady monologue during 'Let Her Go Into The Darkness' includes both Hebrew and Arabic, and I start thinking about how everybody loves and everybody screams just the same. Jonathan doesn't need thoughts such as mine, though. 'That Summer Feeling' is too damn gorgeous to taint with interpretations. This is a man who looks like he's never done a bad deed in his life. At the end, he packs up his guitar in a battered case, puts on his plaid shirt and wanders out with a little bemused wave. Off to take the innocent Fifties rock'n'roll beat drive-in to another corner of the cynical modern world.

We need you, Jonathan.
Charlie Phillips

take back the stadiums

Words: **Gracelette**
Photography: **Anthony Wallace**

'The magic energy of this cloak
is nebulous. Nobody knows it'



Les Savy Fav/The Hold Steady **Islington Academy, London**

I am gimp girl. I shake my pearl bracelets in the air like broken manacles. I slap my palms flat against my belt buckle. My head shakes from side to side. My spine remembers how to make it happen. I used to wear little white boots and red bandanas, back when the old men with their Harleys moved the way I'm moving now. I clap my hands and they tingle because the blood is *elsewhere*. The Hold Steady – what have you done?

A bassist who blows classy smoke circles into clouds of dry ice. A frontman who is often without mic, as if he fully expects the packed venue to know every line he is singing by heart and shout them back at him. An actual lead guitarist. The Hold Steady are the perfect stadium rock band, only without the jaded cynicism you're supposed to pick up along the way. Few people have caught on yet. They will.

Because no way is this a gig. This is a *concert*.

Les Savy Fav, also a stadium rock band of sorts, have a person called Tim. He does all sorts of wacky things, like making multiple onstage costume changes and running around the floor with the audience, who seem impressed. This makes me feel like Eeyore.

Because the wild Les Savy Fav live experience comes off as deliberately contrived to distract us from the fact this band have no songs, just a lot of noisy punk rock mess. Not once does a certain drum pattern or a particular riff herald the thrill of a new number kicking in.

The weird part is this: I can't help but get caught up in the stadium rock rush. The reaction of the crowd is overwhelming. Hands in the air clapalongs take place *en masse* beneath bright white stacks of light, and the big coloured lightbulbs roll around in their sockets as if, in Tim, they've finally found the lover they deserve. If he shouted, "Can you hear me, London?" we'd shout right back, but instead he makes us guess the magic energy of his cloak before revealing that, "The magic energy of this cloak is nebulous. Nobody knows it."

Damn straight. Nobody knows. But you'll get closest to the secret in the moments when he forgets the props and just fucking dances, arms flailing like a five-year-old punk rock ballerina in a chocolate-stained pink tutu. Therein lies real spontaneity. You don't rehearse that kind of dancing. You don't sit at home and think about how cool it would be if you got up and danced like that. You just do it. And when you can carry a few thousand people right along with you, it really doesn't matter if you have no songs.

One day we'll reclaim the grassy verges of Milton Keynes Bowl from the jaded concepts of *making it big*. You won't pass out under a tree, seeking refuge from the box set hits. You'll start thousand-strong Mexican waves and make your floppy hair go whoosh! I write from the future and I say – forget the dancefloors. We're ready to take back the stadiums.

Random System Festival **Oslo, Norway**

I am inside Oslo's Parkteatret only five minutes when a Norwegian music journalist tells me, "The extremes thrive in Norway. Metal, jazz, electronic noise are the extremes of music."

Tonight there are two performances by Jazzkammer, Lasse Marhaug and John Hegre, best known for their album *Timex* (2000). The first performance is not live, but rather features video artists HC Gilje's footage of urban Japan synced exactly to the development of Jazzkammer's arrhythmic electronic noises. One way Jazzkammer illustrate the 'extreme' is to suddenly cease all sound when the video cuts to a zebra crossing. In silence, the audience watches an aerial view of a flowing pattern of people crossing these black-and-white lines.

The rest of the festival takes place in Blå. On Saturday there is a children's concert with Aeron and Alejandra, a duo of sound artists and the creators of the Lucky Kitchen label, whose mission statement declares. They play sounds to the children and get them to guess

what they are hearing – one is the noise of an almond being cracked open. The children begin to understand that one sound can have more than one source, and everybody gets almonds to take home.

www.randomsystem.org

Barry Kavanagh

Starbase 109 **The Verge, London**

It's an odd experience to stumble into a gig, and notice practically the entire crowd scrutinising your face, waiting to see your reaction to what's going on onstage. And an even odder one when you turn your head and notice that the stage has been hijacked by mannequins wearing miners' helmets, surrounded by remnants of the industrial revolution: cogs, pistons, mangles and sundry other items. These rusty machines are actually working, and have steam pumping out of them in time with the music.

The figures aren't actually mannequins, it later turns out, but two men from Widnes called Montarg and Krayon. Bet they got

teased at school. Their music has definite shades of Kraftwerk, but combined with shimmering electro synth sounds, disco beats, Bontempi-style plinky-plonks and deadpan humour.

And what lyrics! "*Have you checked the filter on the vacuum cleaner?/It isn't working any more*" ('Vacuum Cleaner'); "*My favourite subject was biology/We dissected worms, you know, and little frogs/Someone threw an eyeball at me, hit me in the face, I didn't like it very much*" ('Biology').

A friend turns to me and says, "If you were in a band, this would be it."

Robin Wilks

Super Furry Animals **Tramway, Triptych, Glasgow**

Presentation has always been a Super Furry Animals strong point: the blue techno tank, the inflatable hamsters, and, most recently, those yeti costumes. Having killed off the yetis at a London gig in April, the Super Furry Animals who step onto stage in Glasgow are their regular, unassuming selves. Apart from Gruff – he

sports an oversized gold Power Rangers helmet. To either side of the stage, enormous cackling Gruff heads bob around the video screens, rising from the spurting model volcanoes, threatening to devour the crowd in their gaping maws.

The Quo-tastic 'Rings Around The World' and 'Golden Retriever' are all very nice, but this is Triptych, so we expect something different. And as Gruff announces, "Tonight, we will play *Mwng* in its entirety," our expectations are met. But it's not just the charming Welsh-language songs that surprise – 'Some Things Come From Nothing' is awesome, all head-nodding beats, sleepy vocals and wiggly worm synths.

I miss 'Motherfokker', complete with Goldie Lookin' Chain doing their comedy Welsh rap thing on the video screen. And I miss a brutal sounding closing trio of 'Night Vision', early B-side 'Calimero', and 'The Man Don't Give A Fuck'. It's too bad, because with these techno-punk monsters, the Furies remain the most thrilling band on this, or any other, planet.

Stewart Smith

girls talk

Words: **Chris Ballard**Photography (Shystie): **Cat Stevens**

'Turn The Page' opens,
the beat as exciting
as secret sex,
and three thousand
bodies melt

The Streets/Shystie Brixton Academy, London

Don't mention girls. It's the theme of the evening. How relationships fuck you up, and how, once burnt, you're still so willing to jump back into the fire. Finding out that the girl you're in love with is still besotted with her ex. And he's standing next to you, and she never looks at *you* that way. It's enough to make you cut your hair, lose some weight, and wish you were 10 years younger.

Ignore that rule for Shystie, though. An impish, kinetic Hackney MC, she's about to release a delightful debut that redraws the map for the new wave of East London MCs by the sheer virtue of its assured femininity in a subculture of machismo. Tonight, she's flanked by two rappers without a trace of her charisma, her machine-gun cadence, clean and lucid on record, is submerged in the mix. There are nods to the past (a wicked, cheeky snippet of 'Push It', the retro-riff of

'7 Nation Army' condensed into a supreme splurge of garishly dirty low-end), but 'Step Bac' and 'One Wish' are modern UK pop in all its glory. Super-produced, bass-heavy, radiant: Shystie's making a savage statement of intent.

And so to The Streets. A huge green laser show scans across the venue like radar. 'Turn The Page' opens, the beat as exciting as secret sex, and three thousand bodies melt. The question of how to recreate the narrative of *A Grand Don't Come For Free* is ignored. With the rash of hyperbole that's surrounded *A Grand...*, it's been forgotten that *Original Pirate Material* is superior, reflected by the balance of this greatest hits set. The communal crush of being here, of *moments* remembered and returned to is enough. Although sometimes too much: 'It's Too Late' brings tears to eyes, realisations that moving on can leave you empty.

"Don't mention girls," barks Skinner, turning to his band. He could be so lucky, having built his

career around shaping semi-fictions that gracefully trace post-teen relationships (with people, but also with pop, drugs, money) in all their messy glory.

There's always been a delicious cartoon element to Skinner, but the construct – laddish braggadocio fused with an unnatural ability to resurrect micro-observations from the realms of cliché – is rendered more tangible when your heart's being sucked into your mouth. The only letdowns are the Chas'N'Dave-do-'Parklife' of 'Fit But You Know It', and the way the off-key live drums on 'Weak Become Heroes' blunt the irrepressible house beat of the original. That's more than made up for by 'Blinded By The Lights' and 'Could Well Be In': stunning, post-rave mini-dramas, the music too sumptuous to do anything but surrender.

Too close for comfort, tonight was too impressive to deny. Just don't mention girls ever again.



Broken Spindles
fulfilled/complete



The Good Life
Lovers Need Lawyers



NOW IT'S OVERHEAD
Fall Back Open



Albums

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dance dance evolution

Words: **David McNamee**
 Illustration: **Andrew Clare**

!!!**Louden Up Now (Warp)**

Dance. Dance. Destroy. Dance.

1971-73

- **The Angry Brigade bomb a BBC van shortly before the Miss World contest**
- **Neu! – ‘Hallogallo’**

This music is weightless. Dance to it with an empty stomach and a head brimming with sensation and your feet won't ever touch the ground.

- **Kool & The Gang – ‘Funky Stuff’**
- **2:49-3:39:** The point where the rhythm falls away and the sound starts *spiralling*. A slow, circular descent into stasis funk. A melted locked groove that !!! smear across their limbs like deep heat. A thought experiment probing into what would happen if you isolated the ‘momentum’ gene in funk, slowed its metabolism to a world-turning pace and allowed it to revolve forever into the void.

1974-75

- **JP Sartre visits Andreas Baader in prison**
- **KC & The Sunshine Band – ‘Get Down Tonight’**
- **4:31-5:14:** The ascent. Step-laddered by sheet metal guitar that sounds like it's being played on broken guitars by broken hands and then smashed into pieces in the mix – a useless, electric squall of white noise interference. Punk as punctuation in a meta-manifesto with no discernible punchline. Towards the end, as Nic spouts peyote-clouded soundbite revelations, you can hear the stereo-panned guitars actually *coming up*.

1976

- **Ulrike Meinhof commits suicide in jail**
- **Can – ‘I Want More’**
- **7:36-8:12:** ‘Pardon My Freedom’, a clumsy as fuck labelling for a disingenuous flirtation with political

insurrection, a title that works superbly *on every level*. For the chorus every instrument, including the vocal (“*Like I give a FUCK/ Like I give a SHIT...*”) seems to be being used as percussion, and the percussion, in the absence of artillery, is unloaded in staccato salvos. Apart from that braincell-scratching electric eel sine wave of acid-synth, coiling itself around and sliding through a maze of music it burns out your resistance transmitters and amps up the adrenaline until you're susceptible to every shift in the political climate. It's electrode torture used to heighten awareness and promote liberation. *It stings your head*.

1979

- **PiL – ‘Death Disco’**
- John Lydon took his mother's death and cast it in white hot sheet metal funk. This was dancing with death as its impetus; this was deathless disco. Inconsolable, angry disco that absorbs the form purely because it can only find its true expression in dancing. When there's no one to fight, no one to blame but the uselessness of mortality and the feeble, flailing constitution of the human body. There is no loving embrace here.
- **The Slits – ‘I Heard It Through The Grapevine’**
- **James Chance – ‘Contort Yourself’**
- **11:27-13:30:** War breaks out. Synths, guitars and assorted percussion variously assuming the roles of lasers, sniper rifles and orchestrated frag grenades. We're all dancing and !!! are the drill marshals. By now it's starting to sink in, *Louden Up Now* is a pantomime of terrorism, abstracted through sound. The ironic part is that it *works*: as long as we're dancing, we're the foot soldiers in the revolution. The ironic part is that there is no revolution. !!!'s terrorism is as chic and ignorant as the Red Army Faction. Dancing can be used for deadlier things than looking cool. Dancing is a way to absorb music, literally, into each fibre of your body, to get *closer* to it than simply listening to it. Every second of *Louden Up Now* is fluid with *movement*.

1983

- **Laid Back – ‘White Horse’**
- **31:11-31:14:** “*We came to respire/ You came to pespire*”. Man, the lyrics to this album *suck*. They're just beautiful. Taken as a tiny snapshot of *Louden Up Now*'s lifespan you hear, circling

underneath, repetitive patterns of cheek-chewing Ritalin disco. Layers, levels and platforms of *small sound* performing myriad interlocking autocratic functions: shards of percussion glancing off each other, an oscillating keyboard patch catching the ball, spinning it and dropping it onto the trigger-lever of bass. A complete, functioning musical micro-system not only mimicking the flimsy, ticking-away construction of the human body but *made from it*.

1984

- **EBN-OZN ‘AEIOU Sometimes’**
- The death of cool. Doing stuff not because it looks cool, or because it is cool, but because it *makes you feel cool*, thereby *becoming* cool in the process
- **Talking Heads – ‘Stop Making Sense’**
- **36:50-45:52:** The swagger is unmistakable. Ugly, wrong-shape people, a breeding ground for acne and bitterness, taking to the dancefloor in an act nothing short of revenge. The sneers are so laboured, the groove so ridiculously elongated, that only the gangliest goons could stretch their limbs to it and not collapse into impossible Twister tangles. Travolta as a Trojan horse. The scenesters dance and die.

1998-2003

- **Dance Dance Revolution hits arcades**
- **The World Trade Centre is destroyed in an Al-Qaida-planned attack**
- **Giuliani bans dancing**
- **!!! – ‘Me & Guiliani Down By The Schoolyard’**
- **45:53-48:22:** There is no kitsch here. The past is received, transmitted and transgressed. This is music charged with improbabilities and as such the priapic, quivering exclamation mark tripling itself in spirals and oscilloscope waves of the band's handle, all over the cover of *Louden Up Now* is so much appropriate than a question mark. It sounds like it would be an utter psychic impossibility had it arrived, pirouetting gracelessly, at either end of this exact moment. Yesterday it didn't exist, tomorrow it'll be deader than disco.

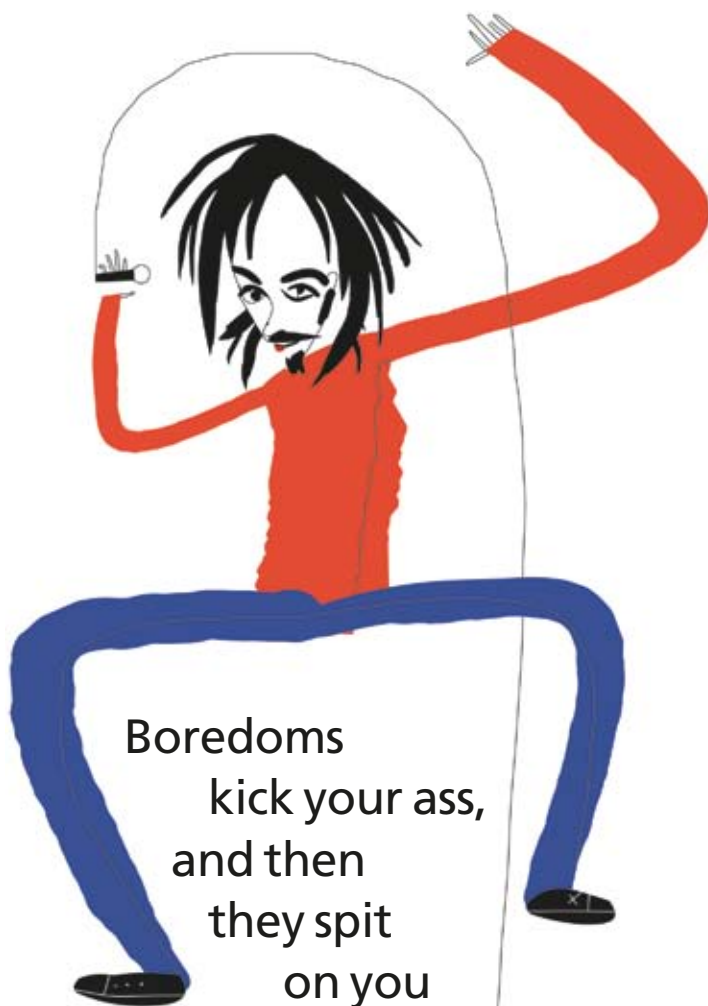
2004

- **!!! – Louden Up Now**
- **0:00-53:03:** The Now. Destroy. Destroy. Dance. Destroy.

so funny it hurts

Words: **Mia Clarke**

Illustration: **Charles Redmond**



Boredoms
kick your ass,
and then
they spit
on you

Boredoms

Onanie Bomb Meets The Sex Pistols

Pop Tatari

Chocolate Synthesizer (all Very Friendly)

Based in Osaka, Japan, Boredoms have been creating their intense, sharp-edged noise rock since the mid-Eighties. Though the group's rhythm section has undergone various alterations over the years, the main core has always consisted of founding members Yamatsuka Eye (vocals) and Tabata Mara (guitar), who wrote, recorded, mixed and mastered Boredoms' debut EP, 'Anal By Anal', on one blisteringly hot summer's day in 1986.

Liberally taking slices from US hardcore punk tradition, *Onanie Bomb Meets The Sex Pistols* is a compilation of the group's first two Japanese releases. It shows that, from the start, the band were interested in creating fiercely chaotic assaults that could simultaneously be funny and confrontational – similar in style to their main influence at the time, Butthole Surfers. The band's impenetrable noise outbursts and sequences of communal belching were hardly accessible to the main market – who couldn't work out whether the band were smiling or baring their teeth – but the group still made significant impact on the Japanese underground.

Pop Tatari (1992) was Boredoms' first release on a major label, WEA Japan. Miraculously, the group were presented with a contract that allowed them complete creative control over their music. The release of *Pop Tatari* signalled a new beginning: their off-kilter weirdness reached larger audiences, and they began collaborating with artists such as John Zorn and Sonic Youth, which helped throw the net a little wider still. These aggressive, enchanting noise attacks are wickedly seductive – a tense, acidic mess of broken notes, death wails, and the fricative clap of dry lips smacking to the rhythms of the drumkits. 'I Am Cola' is particularly arresting: a brutal guitar riff splits Yoshimi P-We's childish screams in oddly timed breaks, and her drum assault slices with knifelike precision beside fellow drummer ATR's fierce kick and snare – similar in force and style to Slayer's Dave Lombardo.

The closest reference point to this album is the Fantômas/Melvins live improv album, *Millennium Monsterwork*, which employs a similar free-reign structural aesthetic combined with warped metal riffs, thumping toms, and guttural war cries.

Chocolate Synthesizer (1995) is a slightly more focused affair, but it's by no means an easier listen. It's the sonic equivalent of breast-stroking into the ocean and enduring the worst cramp of your life while your friends are waving at you from the shore with sticky ice-cream grins and sunburnt noses. It's tough, sure. Painful, even. But it's the sound of a band not content with merely pushing the boundaries of rock music – a band who want to fuck it up from the core and tear it apart atom by atom. For that reason, it's the sweetest sound in the world.

Boredoms are a beautiful, wild, lofty punk rock band – one of the best. They kick your ass, and then they spit on you. They are defiant, complex, bratty, illuminating and unique. But it's their sense of humour that really digs and tickles: they are just brilliantly, bizarrely hilarious – of all the artists in Japan's thriving noise community, you can't help feeling that Boredoms must be having the most fun. There they are, always one step ahead of the game, twisting and shimmying through the decades – without once throwing a glance backwards at the cacophony of jumbled notes and stinging shards of sound that they leave trembling in their wake.

A Girl Called Eddy A Girl Called Eddy (Anti-)

A Girl Called Eddy is a girl called Erin from New Jersey who writes songs to fill the hole her late mother left behind. Produced by Pulp's Richard Hawley, this eponymous debut lurks in dimly-lit *This Is Hardcore* territory. It exists in the perpetually smoky cinema of songwriting. Mancini, Bacharach and Legrand flicker in her imagination. Her songs are informed by a romanticised, stained-velvet past; her voice carries sweet echoes of Dusty Springfield and Sandy Shaw. Densely orchestrated yet personal, reverberant and felt.

Tim Chipping

A Hawk And A Hacksaw A Hawk And A Hacksaw (Leaf)

Having relocated to rural France, ex-Neutral Milk Hotel drummer turned experimental one-man band Jeremy Barnes apparently ingested *Don Quixote* by way of inspiration. The ecstatic Holy Fool archetype is accordingly whipped

up by this fever dream of sound-collage and multi-layered instrumentation.

A kind of deranged Gallic gothic presides, evoking among other things the intricate dementia of Carl Stalling, as Swanee whistles and febrile honks and squeals pop out, and accordion, calliope and smashed pianos call *Twilight Zone*/*Looney Tunes* mutants spiralling up through the freakshow floorboards. Throughout, a sampled and warped menagerie – cats, dogs, frogs, chickens, geese, insects – purrs and chirrups across the soundscapes.

Sometimes, the lurching dissonance jars or wears, but the sheer omni-directional drama, and kinship to Kurt Weill and a boneyard operatic Tom Waits, win out. **James Papademetrie**

Applied Communications Africa Baby, Yeah Yeah Yeah (Discos Mariscos)

Unable to do anything new, unable to get interested by whatever noise he makes, *Applied Communications* – some guy called Max Wood – takes to Har Mar

Superstar like Malkmus took to The Fall. This is squelchy, homemade electro, with Pavement lyrics and an occasional string interlude, recorded badly. It's a throw-it-down-the-pan attitude; lo-fi if lo-fi was an insult. The nasal 'rapping' is particularly off-putting and the smug, self-satisfied tint to the whole thing grates. It's an incitement to apathy.

Jim Cassius

Ativin Night Mute (Secretly Canadian)

There are very few bands that truly prick your psyche. Godspeed's darkscapes do it, and elements of this album do it too, as murky black guitar crescendos creep under your skin with the fluency and impact of a stealth bomber. As a reminder of death's inevitability, these relentless, repetitive Slint-esque dirges leave nowhere to hide, but it's the synthetic doom that makes these gothic folk tales so engagingly morose, so totally visceral. *Night Mute* is supposedly a direct tribute to the horror genre and, although it is a

little like a recurring nightmare, there's never a sense that you won't wake up before something really bad happens.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

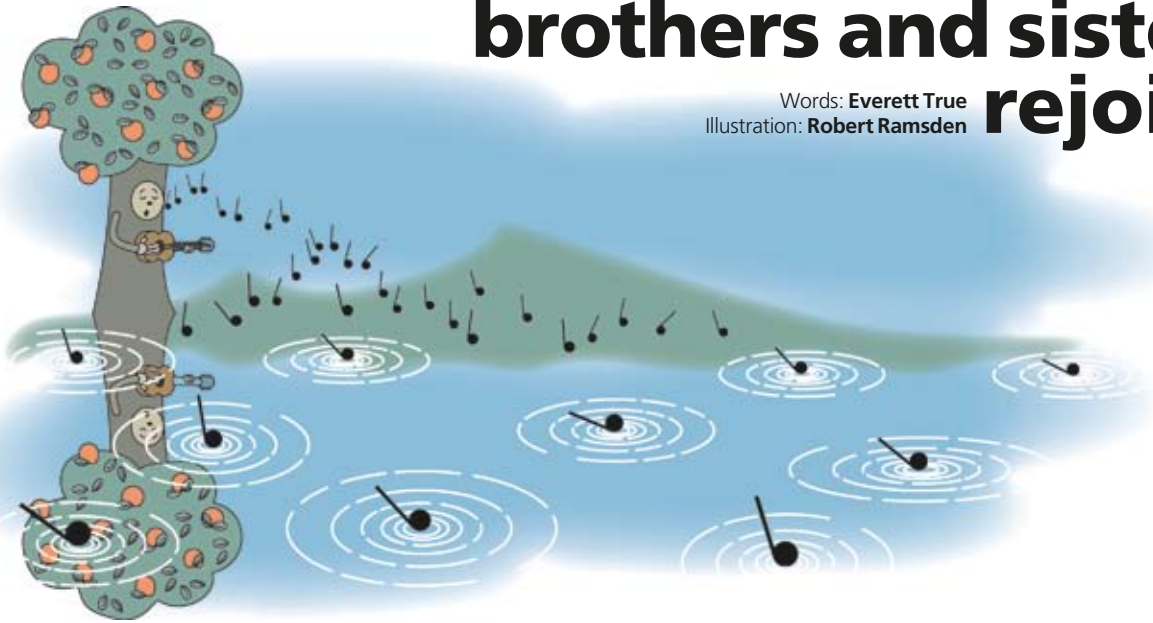
Azita Life On The Fly (Drag City)

On her second solo album, former Scissor Girls and Bride Of No No leader Azita Youssefi continues her exploration of Seventies piano-driven jazz pop. The soft, sprawling melodies and Steely Dan inflections sound like soundtracks to ropery old American TV movies. Still, there's some good stuff here, like the syncopated piano of 'Wasn't In The Bargain' or staccato brass and agitated feel of 'Just Joker Blues'. It's Azita's vocal and lyrical detail that stands out, depicting the minutiae of her kaleidoscopic world. Imagine Norah Jones doing Lydia Lunch, or Neneh Cherry aping Joni Mitchell.

Sometimes the whole thing spews over into dullard jazz wank: arranging complex ideas into simple song structures doesn't always work, and the omnipresent twilight

brothers and sisters, rejoice!

Words: **Everett True**
Illustration: **Robert Ramsden**



Br Danielson **Brother Is To Son (Secretly Canadian)**

Daniel Smith's first album since The Danielson Famile's extraordinarily uplifting *Fetch The Compass Kids* (2001) doesn't deviate much from the folksy-indie Christian familial blueprint. New Jersey family members – four siblings, a wife, several friends, daughter Lily, dad Lenny, Sufjan Stevens on banjo – lend support. Lyrics challenge conventional societal norms: consumerism, campfire trumpets, cookin' in the kitchen, Christianity... And, of course, that's partly where the fascination of Br Danielson's clan lies. Sure, Christian ideals have infused country, folk, metal – but Pavement/Brian Eno-influenced intimate Outsider Rock? Hardly. It's always nice to hear surreal juxtaposition. Daniel was last seen on these shores dressed up as a 12-foot 'singing tree'. He ain't gonna start compromising his beliefs now.

Musically, Daniel is as fascinating as ever: rambling, provocative and astringent like an Appalachian King Missile. Pianos tumble. Jew's harp twangs. Banjo plucks. Choirs praise. Thankfully, he's calmed down his tendency to squeal like a pig when he gets excited: although the lengthy 'Sweet Sweeps' (which contains the eye-opening couplet "*Sweet psalmist David is playing the harp for the Lord and crowns are all falling for you*") does veer worryingly towards porcine paroxysms in its triumphal revivalist air, even with a simple rolling piano motif.

The opening 'Things Against Stuff' is far stronger, despite self-conscious kookiness: a good old-fashioned childish romp in the style of Half-Japanese, advising us that "*There's two kinds of*

fun/Things Vs Stuff can not get along/Which side are you on" – lyrics are scrawled in primary felttip colours, emphasising Daniel's belief that adults could do well to recapture the wonder one felt as a child. Even more interesting is the refined 'Perennial Wine' with its echoes of The Beta Band, and the stunning centrepiece, the Robert Fripp-esque 'Hammers Sitting Still', Daniel's wife Elin acting as the guardian angel, advising him it's OK to sing about workplace trivialities, not just life in broad brushstrokes.

Indeed, it's only when Daniel loses himself in the personal that he really connects. In this, he mirrors many of the finest political commentators in pop: out-and-out sloganeering sits uneasily with

home, rediscovering The Bible and how to be a child again.

"That's certainly true. There are reoccurring themes of returning to childhood, based on an intimate relationship with God, and coming back to a place where all your questions are answered."

A lot of your songs have a strong playground feel. Fair comment?

"There's some of that, yeah, in the instruments.

I'm realising now the chords are quite dark, but because the instrumentation is like that, it combines into an intensity that I really like."

Childhood is darker than people remember it.

"Yeah, so maybe that's the feeling to me."

Rambling, provocative and astringent like an Appalachian King Missile

music, because nothing exists outside context. But the same also applies to songs that only deal in love and cliché, which is why Diana Ross' finest moment is 'Love Child', The Temptations' is the latchkey kid of 'Papa Was A Rolling Stone' and Quasi hit paydirt on 'White Devil's Dream', the tear-soaked condemnation of Bush and Blair. God is in the small details. 'Physician Heal Yourself', Daniel advises elsewhere, on a gently strummed number. Many of his peers could do well to take his advice.

Everett True talks to Daniel Smith

ET: I remember reading that you were driven to form The Danielson Famile after returning

Presentation is a strong element of The Danielson Famile live – right?

"The singing tree is the visual reminder of fruit being thrown out as the songs are being performed. The same with the doctors and nurses uniforms, it's a visual reminder of the healing we believe is taking place."

Do you see parallels between your music and The Shaggs?

"We're more influenced by Sonic Youth. Also, I like the way Tom Waits picks an instrument according to the song. I like picking the fewest instruments possible. I like open space. But without a doubt, Bob Dylan is the most important influence on me."

piano is like scattering too many hundreds and thousands on your ice cream.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

Baby Dayliner

High Hearts And Low Estate (Southern)

They said he was theatrical, a low rent Tom Jones crooning to booty-shaking beats. And where low rent goes, we obediently follow. But a word of advice: irony is a delicate skill, it requires precision and depth beyond a couple of extended metaphors (of the love = baseball kind). Quite a few of the mainstream hip hop artists ridiculed in 'Hoodlums In The Hit Parade' are doing a better job at taking the piss out of the 'industry', themselves.

And if you're gonna revive past styles, there are better choices in the HMV bargain bin than Heaven 17 and Baby Bird. Lastly, to do successful mock electro-cabaret you have to be either drop dead gorgeous – God's gift to the gay community with tons of shimmering makeup – or Har Mar Superstar. There's no safe in-between hetero option.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Comets On Fire

Field Recordings From The Sun (Sweet Nothing)

The simple musical equation re: Comets On Fire is Mudhoney (blues riffology fed through Eighties underground rock spirit)

and High Rise (your best friend's Blue Cheer tape dubbed way into the red).

I spent a long time trying to convince myself that, almost two years on, *Field Recordings From The Sun* had somehow been made redundant, but I couldn't find any records that had followed through on its ability to turn one sad man's simple equation into amphetamine-charged rock music so engorged of its own spirit it sounds like Lemmy's wart taking the first trip on the high-speed cosmos elevator. Comets On Fire also play games of cross-reference, starting the record with the bong-beam of crop circle drum troupes, and dropping Six Organs Of Admittance leader Ben Chasny in the middle of the record to spool an acoustic guitar

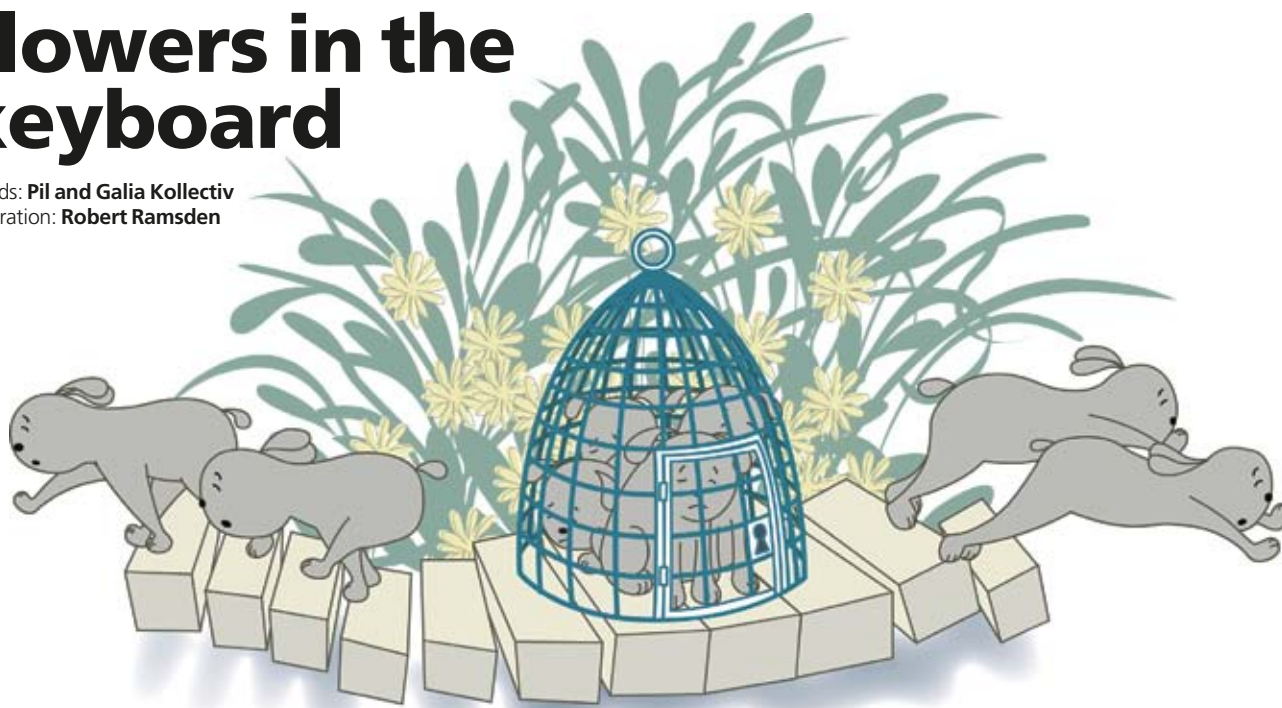
monody; their ability to ruffle their music through pan-generic method avoids the monomania that curses so many well-intentioned rock records. (Is there anything more non-rock than *good intentions*?) The band's power player, though, is Noel Harmonson, fully dedicated to echoplex and oscillation art, whose presence is as gloriously uncomplicated and right on as Tommy Hall's oneiric jug, or Allen Ravestine's primitivist electronics squalls.

Field Recordings crosses rock and avant-garde spirit-capture with volume and distortion so over the top its very presence causes transfiguration: a blinding flash of light.

Jon Dale

flowers in the keyboard

Words: **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**
Illustration: **Robert Ramsden**



DAT Politics

Go Pets Go (Chicks on Speed)

"We have to let forms, colours, words, sounds grow and then explain them," wrote arch-dadaist Jean Arp in 1938. The songs of DAT Politics do just that, evolving from simple melodies, sometimes just the smallest of sounds, into little symphonies. An infinite universe springs around the little man inside your phone, who whistles a ringtone every time it rings.

"We have to let legs, wings, hands grow and then let them fly, sing, form, manifest themselves," continues Arp. And DAT Politics let their pet songs grow wild, flapping tiny digital wings, singing in funny little voices, accidentally hitting colourful computer keys. In 'Cat Polk', a broken alarm chip morphs into a backwards toy symphony. In 'Micro Rainbow', the sad chirp of an electric frog becomes the theme tune from *The Bridge On The River Kwai*, whistled by Playmobile cowboys and Indians. It's not surprising that DAT Politics dedicated their

new album to pets. This class of living creatures exist as a hybrid of the organic and the artificial, between the first domesticated wolf (probably Siegfried and Roy's) and the poodle dyed green on the front page of your friendly neighbourhood tabloid. This is the natural habitat of DAT Politics, where electronic music is not a hymn to artificiality

for such order. They know that organisms thrive on mutation, on the glitches in the program that ensure new morphologies are created and destroyed with arbitrary reliability. They don't just jam the machines – they smear them with jam, making them sticky. In this new microfrontier it's impossible to predict what will happen next. Kevin

DAT Politics let their pet songs grow wild, flapping tiny digital wings

and technological alienation but a symbiotic virus that infects trumpets and banjos and peanuts.

"I don't draw up a plan first as if I were dealing with a timetable, a calculation or a war." Too much music is like a timetable or a war, predictable beats, predictable breaks, making Saturday night's infantrymen dance to the nightclub beat of a drum that is all function, no play. DAT Politics have no use

Blechdom might hop by in the shape of a marsupial robot, her banjo sticking out of her pouch. Papa Smurf might recover from his post-Ibiza depression. Flowers might grow inside your keyboard. An Alsatian librarian might find a way to play football according to the Dewey decimal system.

"The art of stars, flowers, forms, colours is part of the infinite."

Devendra Banhart

Rejoicing In The Hands (XL)

One step on from the minimal home-taped hiss of his debut, Banhart's supernatural voice(s) and heart-wrenching fretwork are augmented now, if only minimally, by some strings and a piano, leaving space for extraneous birdsong and insect chatter as well as a short, subtle duet with Vashti Bunyan.

The regular falsetto wobble still invites T Rex comparisons, but there's an alternating stash of oddball inflections, croaks and yelps that trill, croon and wobble across these songs; seraphic one minute and brimming with lysergic menace the next.

Admittedly, titles like 'Tit Smoking In The Temple Of Artesan Mimicry' may reasonably elicit a Stoned Whimsy Alert, but each luscious and bewitching episode, whether a giddy psych-folk cascade, crystalline blues or an intricately woven toy-town country coda, is more than enough to reassert this as an alien, truly Outsider talent brimming with bittersweet strangeness and wonder.

James Papademetrie

Call And Response

Winds Take No Shape (Badman)

This is one of those gorgeously understated CD inlays with a handmade feel, the merest insignia of colour and the minimal aesthetic of some independent design studio. You know as soon as you open out the cover that you're destined to love this. KLANG!!! How wrong can you be? It's like Stereolab tuned into The Mamas And Papas and stripped away all their interesting Gallic touches and Farfisas to leave fluffy ether. Right now, a black-holed stupor would be more interesting. My back feels like some bastard stuck a spear up my arse and the last thing I need to do is listen to this knitting music. Still, great sleeve.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

Boom Bip

Corymb (Lex)

If you were the 'weirdo' at your school the answer to the question, "What music do you like?" could always be relished. "I like stuff you've never heard of," you'd shout.

"I am weird!" But the lines are blurred now. Everyone is either weird or has some weird at home in a drawer. The iPod has simplified things. "I listen to this," can now be your response as you jam those thief-attracting white earphones into their grisly holes and subject them to your noises. Portable proof of weirdness.

Boom Bip's Bryan Hollon plays with noises and uses terms like 'rinsing' to form songs that sound tailor-made for those little Apple boxes. *Corymb* is a stop-gap remix and teaser album from the artist who scored the Lloyds TSB advert with horses on a roof. His songs are personal and small and weird – but not in any extreme sense that could earn you points playing *Top Trumps*.

Tim Chipping

Graham Coxon

Happiness In Magazines (Transcopic)

Despite his protestations about having moved on, Graham Coxon will never escape Blur. To all intents and purposes, this is Blur. 'Bittersweet Bundle Of Misery' is basically 'Coffee And TV', and there are

too many times when Coxon's voice transmogrifies into Damon Albarn's half-chirrupy drawl.

Happiness In Magazines was never going to be seminal. Inaugural single 'Freakin' Out' could be the best tune The Buzzcocks never wrote. Coxon claims to have been influenced by Split Enz and The Ruts on this – chuck in The Fall while you're at it – but the standout track is 'Are You Ready', with its Scott Walker-ish swirl and reverberating Morricone twang. It doesn't really sound like Blur. 'Don't Be A Stranger' is great too. It sounds remarkably like Blur.

If you're trying to be brighter, bolder and (whisper it) more commercial (and it appears he is) then you've got to be consistent. The clutch of three-chord stiffies at the beginning of the album give no indication of the incisively choppy and gorgeously reflective stuff later on. Stephen Sweet – who produced the first five Blur albums – also got roped in here, and his involvement visibly emphasises the lack of progress.

Talk about a fucking safety net.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

unmusic

Words: **Taylor Parkes**
Illustration: **John Bagnall**

Brian Eno

Here Come The Warm Jets

Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)

Another Green World

Before & After Science (all Virgin)

Eno's first four solo albums are potent landmarks because they are so *unmusical*. Eno took pride in a lack of instrumental skill. His early tinkering with texture reveal his faith in sound itself, not some facile concept of 'communication', as pop music's fundamental strength. If co-conspirator John Cale was an instinctive musician who saw rock in a naturally occurring space between the cerebral and the Wagnerian, Eno's approach was at once more studied and more irreverent.

This is why writing about Eno feels peculiar. The ambiguity of his work seems to invite interpretation, but it's a siren song at best. You'll only discover information about yourself, not Brian Eno, his motives or methods. You can examine his introduction of mathematical and philosophical principles to the mysterious or *mystical* composition process of rock's Victorian artist mentality. But you'll only repeat facts freely available elsewhere.

You can try meeting the music on its own terms, dissolving into hypersubjectivity. Any hack musician can moan that critical analysis of his work is irrelevant, since the true nature of a sound only reveals itself at the precise point of contact with each individual listener. But Eno music is specifically *made* that way. It's like a joke; clearly and cleverly constructed, yet pointless to pick apart.

Remastering Eno must also be a peculiar task. How to draw out the detail without upsetting the balance? New listeners to early Eno have often been puzzled by rockcrit's assurance that these records represent a new route for popular music, a sound without a focal point, a selection of simultaneous events competing for attention, subverting the hierarchical, top-down construction of modern music. In fact, many have just heard the surface.

Simon Heyworth has our thanks for a truly astonishing remastering job. *Here Come The Warm Jets* jumps and flickers now with information, two million points of light. And the latticed guitars and naughty wheelspins on 'The Paw-Paw Negro Blowtorch' sound like a different take. Here, the 27 piano overdubs stacked onto the surface of 'On Some Faraway Beach' aren't boom-boom Spector-ism, but a swelling riptide.

Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy) was a baffling suite of songs, semi-connected by the theme of improbable espionage in Maoist China. Sweeter and simpler than *Warm Jets*, it was also more opaque and irreducible. Take what you like from this picture puzzle, you're left wondering what it wants from you.

Another Green World was Eno's entry into ambient music. Initially his kingdom, it later became a set of drained ruins. Here, it's ambient because it *respects*, and interacts with, space and silence, rather than trying to copy or outdo it. *Another Green World* tints the air with a suggestion of drama and feeling. Robert Fripp's lead guitar does



Here Come The Warm Jets jumps and flickers now with information, two million points of light

remarkable things without ever drawing attention to itself, then falls silent and draws attention to the space where it used to be. Eno allows the stupendous grotesqueries of the past to deflate. Collapsed, they form stranger, vaguer, still more intriguing patterns, as I suspect he suspected.

Before And After Science underwhelms. The lyrics, still gnomic, seem happier to play silly semantic games than prod or tickle. The music feels like a sidestep. The machine-tooled clatter lacks

thrust and impact. The ambient adventure splashes around, replicating Tim Buckley's smacked-out vibraphone world ('Julie With...'), or covering harmonic ground familiar to those Eno had influenced, like Tangerine Dream and Cluster.

Pop music, through its own complacency, has given up asking questions like 'where are we?' or 'where are we going?' An alternative lies in this era of Eno, where there are only answers. To which questions? Nobody knows.

Decompose

Taking Things Apart (Unschool)

When I discovered that Wauvenfold's 'Clip' was made entirely out of sounds produced from one camera, a little window of possibility opened in my mind and I spent many happy hours staring at various small objects wondering what

symphonies lay within. Caleb Mueller applied this idea to an entire album.

'Scrabble', for instance, is composed entirely of sounds produced in a game of Scrabble between Mueller and his wife, the click and rattle of squares placed on the board. The resulting track is a rhythmic barrage similar in intensity and metallic

strength to Autechre's *Confield* LP. It's not an easy listen, but who'd have thought a game of Scrabble could produce such a fearsome sound bombardment?

Tracks such as 'Matchsticks' and 'Toy DJ Playset' continue the assault while 'Speech' is composed of the ramblings of everyone's favourite warmonger. A calm eventually

does descend however and 'Headphones' is a quiet, crackling respite.

In *Taking Things Apart*, Caleb has rebuilt his found sound into strange new forms, proving that imagination is the most vital addition you can make to your laptop's specs.

Rich Hopkins

winter disco

Words: **Jon Dale**
Illustration: **Till Thomas**



Junior Boys

Last Exit (Kin)

The sheer weight of words and discourse surrounding Junior Boys makes it almost impossible to clear a space in your head for their music to do its work. Everything is overdetermined.

We know their coordinates. Dem 2 meets David Sylvian's 'Bamboo Houses'; the next in line after John Foxx, The Associates, and The Blue Nile, roughed up by Timbaland's rhythm science. Knowledge upon knowledge. The meeting place between two-step, electropop, r'n'b, dreampop. We're all wise to that. And we know their immediate effect: a comforting chill, a kiss in the dreamhouse, viscous liquid forming droplet patterns.

Last Exit is pop music caught in perpetual shatter, walking on gilded splinters. Junior Boys subject their rhythms to all sorts of complications and stutter devices, like the crinkled distortions between the gaps of 'Teach Me Not To Fight'. The convolutions in 'High Come Down', where a drum machine spasms out of time, seem almost wrong. Then there's the texture and grain of their music, wraithlike phrases take on unreasonable portent, huge and cavernous, while counter melodies play on hollowed-out, glistening tones. Imagine The Associates' 'White Car In Germany' or Siouxsie's *Dreamhouse*, the way the music sounded humid, dense, almost stifling and suffocating, like you were gasping for air. Now imagine the after-effect, when the surfaces of songs are slick with damp, your body held in cold sweat.

Junior Boys feed into that continuum. But then there's 'Under The Sun', where Junior Boys turn motorik. The song gathers momentum through repetition of a simple meditation ("sweet one, sweet one, under the sun"). It's song as endless horizon. The simple ticking of a stolen drum pattern is made compulsive by a buried yelp that barely surfaces from beneath every second beat. A child's clutch of guitar chords are repeated, hanging from the roof of the singer's mouth (his voice a little stifled, lips stuck together, dry and consumed). Imagine a housebound Giorgio Moroder, head full of Durutti Column and Insides' records, making hypnotic, introverted winter disco.

Last Exit muddles decades, but perfectly. 2004 = 1982 (humid pop) + 1997 (two-step glory) + 1976 (disco noir) + some kind of future music just heard out of earshot. Junior Boys make true that distant potentiality. A new audition.

A comforting chill,
a kiss in the dreamhouse,
viscous liquid forming droplet patterns

Dressy Bessy

Dressy Bessy (Track And Field)

For ones seemingly so shy, they certainly shot their seed far and wide. Sarah Records, that is – the coy fops' imprint of choice in the Eighties. Carrying their genes are Denver's terribly titled quartet Dressy Bessy. The plaything of Apples In Stereo guitarist John Hill, DB are as palatable as bubblegum can get, with neither an immediate nor long-lasting taste, but rather an annoying tingling sensation that refuses to wash away easily. And here, they're easier to stomach than ever, possessed by the nagging vocals of Tammy Ealon, like Kim Deal giving mouth-to-mouth to arch popsters Felt.

Sarah is dead; long live her offspring.

Ian Fletcher

Ella Guru

The First Album (Banana)

Ella Guru have enough members to man the Mersey grid, with a combined volume to trouble the hearing of a forest mouse. Be thankful, for these royalty cheque

minimalists *revel* in creating the most delicate of noises. Like Lambchop's *Is A Woman*, Ella Guru mute the speakers without ever compromising the record's tensions, emotions and sheer gut-turning impact. 'Insects' beams in the sound of lullaby-humming glow-worms, buffers it with a disjointed rhythmic slither and reaches a climax that's barely existent. It's not all quite so hushed. There are wisps of voodoo country, rickety death pop, lilting post-rock, swooning pedal steels and soulful interplay between John Yates and Kate Walsh's breathed vocals.

This is a record carved out of clouds. A record designed to float unnoticed through your window at night... and then deafen you with its impact.

Tim Jonze

Felix Da Housecat

Devin Dazzle And The Neon Fever (Rykodisc)

Having spent 2003 pimping electro-lite remixes to would-be bandwagonettes, the cat that popularised a movement with

Kittenz And Thee Glitz returns with a cool, calculating, user-friendly follow-up to give it a battery charge. And now, with the inclusion of his girl band (the aptly-named Glamorama) his Eurodisco is accessorised with punky appliqué – the alienation of 'Shower Scene' ripened into aggression.

Elsewhere, he explores the edges of mid-tempo techno, which – as anyone who's ever preened on an electroclash dancefloor will tell you – is the optimum speed and style for posing approximately in time with the music. This is not negation masquerading as progression, nor was supposed to be. This is not a bold new dancefloor dawn. This is a record for tonight that doesn't care about tomorrow. This is an *entente cordiale*, bringing together rock fed through a binary filter, the instant nostalgia of French house and long-suppressed acid euphoria. In a genre that trades on cynicism, irony and beautiful surfaces, a vocoder intoning, "I want to be human, human, human..." as electronic fanfares rocket behind is a welcome blast of artificial light.

kicking_k

Jason Forrest/Donna Summer

The Unrelenting Songs Of The 1979 Post Disco Crash (Sonig)

What is there to criticise when faced with a record by someone who hasn't created anything at all? Recent years have seen a host of commercially available mix tapes but, much as Jason Forrest (inexplicably and blasphemously aka Donna Summer) claims to be a DJ (he may even be an *artist*), on this evidence, he's merely a mix-tape maker. Only he can't resist dicking around with the disco hits and Seventies rock records contained within this album. Stopping and starting and looping and filtering and creating nothing but tedium.

The only reason any of us *couldn't* make an album exactly like this is because we wouldn't want to. The beats are never consistent enough to move to and the pervading wackiness induces nausea.

Cliff Richard once said, "Fuck art, let's dance." Una Stubbs replied, "Good idea, but I can't dance to this shit. Let's steal a bus."

Tim Chipping

David Grubbs**A Guess At The Riddle (Fatcat)**

The songs on *A Guess At The Riddle* are initially a bit like a paint colour chart – although their names sound appealing, the little squares of colour are too obscure and compact to be able to appreciate. But on repeat inspection, these squares turn out to be tiny windows, through which you can see dark forests, the ‘raw’ ocean, rainstorms, and confused humans grappling with existential questions.

The album opens with what seems like a quick and easy escape from a dilemma: “I’ll choose next... whatever’s next... the nearest stopping place” (“Knight Errant”) before moving on to more considered, and vexed, responses. ‘One Way Out Of The Maze’ consists of a list of possible solutions to this mysterious problem. Meanwhile, Grubbs veers from quietly rumpled guitar riffs through angry electronic squalls to mournful piano chords.

The album’s highlight, ‘Hurricane Season’, has shades of both The Third Wave and Arto Lindsay, with rippling minor key piano chords and a stark refrain. It ends with what sounds like a string quartet dragged through an electronic mangle, leaving the ominous ‘Coda (Breathing)’ to bring the album to an apt conclusion, as quiet electronic notes hum over the whistle of wind through factory machinery at night.

Robin Wilks

Havergal**Elettricità (Secretly Canadian)**

This is a beautiful, fragile and wounded hybrid of dustbowl melancholia, chiming acoustics and stuttering electronics, as faultless, stately and sad as a blood-red autumnal sundown. In which the expert, wrenching, sonorous single note is polished and spun within drifting chunks of beatbox and sparse piano. In which cues are taken and applied to these wonderful, thick, half-sung confessionals of loneliness, awe and displacement (Steve Reich’s joyous angular codas, *Tiger Mountain* Eno’s flower girl backing singers and gentle handclaps, the womb-warm guitar drone of Movietone, Labradford, Durutti Column, even).

Picture Terry Riley, Harold Budd and an early Factory supergroup jamming in Nashville. One to make you glow.

James Papademetrie

Headset**Space Settings (Scape)**

Part hip hop, part electronica, part freeform jazz, *Space Settings* is the soundtrack to a cyborg’s wildest dream. Headset is a producer supergroup: Allen Avanesian and Jimmy Tamborello take charge, while MCs like Non-GENETIC, Metalogic and Rocmon drop rhymes over their skewed sounds. Every track is otherworldly brilliance, but Lady Dragon’s whiplash Japanese rap on ‘Grasping Claw’ will leave you breathless. After flow that crisp, English rap suddenly seems pointless, superseded. Until Beans (ex-Anti-Pop Consortium) bounces in for his customarily angular ‘Jaw Modulation’ – “grabbing the mic with no fingers” – to restore your faith in your own language.

An album to invade your headspace.

Dita di Prima



torn and frayed

Words: **Frances May Morgan**

Charalambides Photography: **Joe Tunis**

There’s nothing melts my heart like lap steel played so woozy you can almost see the musician swaying in circles over the instrument. Hell, I once built a time machine on Hampstead Heath and fell asleep on a Roland Juno 6. I don’t sleep a lot, but I sure don’t live in the waking world that much either.

I’ve been dispensing with precision, blurring the edges because that’s where I live, where the edges are blurred. Got to thinking some of us are precision people and some of us were born to splurge, scatter and fall. (Oh, check me out, here I go again, Carrie

sheet, and it’s a love song too, that’s the best thing. The longest love song I can think of right now, it’s as if she’s pulling love out into long, fraying, faded, mildewing ribbons, tearing it up and scattering it like a thousand ripped up letters into the wind. And this sounds sad, as well it might, but it also sounds inevitable, as well it is.

Out of favour with love as a concept, I’m well disposed to it in song, maybe *because* I’m out of favour with it as a concept. (Stop theorising, you fucking *journalist*. Go listen to the sound of your

She’s pulling love out into long, fraying, faded, mildewing ribbons, tearing it up and scattering it like a thousand ripped up letters into the wind

Bradshaw with a Faust box set.) I wouldn’t feel right if I wasn’t a bit frayed, if my clothes weren’t a little fucked, if my nails ever got clean. Precision music excites me; it’s like *real* music, the science that music really *is*, and I got my kicks this week with Arthur Russell and Florian Hecker and **Pan Sonic**’s amazing new magnum opus *Kesto* (deserving of a whole page of code to itself), no question, those moments when I was my own feeling complete, completely me, completely at the mercy. But frayed music, sliding around, spacious, on-the-brink tunings, notes as long as lungs will allow, and questionable amounts of everything? It’s fair to say this is actually the shape of, if not my joy, certainly my pleasure.

I love that phrase, what’s your pleasure? As in, what are you having? It’s so sweet, and so loaded. Right now my pleasure is **Charalambides’** *Joy Shapes*. It’s less restrained and therefore less satisfying than *Unknown Spin* (2003), but in its excess it glimmers with fluid, frustrating languor, like ‘The Lotus-Eaters’, the Tennyson poem about the land where it seemed always afternoon. The bluegrass-serialist-music box twang and clang of ‘Stroke’ dances like fireflies, and on the title track, Christina Carter’s voice is a perfectly delicate sprawl above a watery channel of guitar. It’s almost like a ‘real’ song unravelled and laid out like an endless

own heartbeat in your ears or something.) Or, at least, I’m well disposed to musical expressions of joy and universal good, good times that are hard-won and fought, mixing experimentation with emotion and reaching out for some kinda truth. That’s what I mean by love. Not all that stupid boy-girl crap.

Scatter’s *Surprising Sing Stupendous Love* (Pickled Egg) is, luckily, what it says. *Almost*. A Glasgow collective of varying size, who rush at early Seventies collective-style folk-jazz with great enthusiasm and loose skill. Their version of Sun Ra’s ‘Adventure Equation’ is an inspired choice, bubbling with a true sense of the power of free music.

Their own compositions, too, visit late Sixties folk, Zorn’s nu-klezmer, Cardew’s scatch-orchestra avant-garde, Seventies British radical spoken word, Joseph Byrd & The Field Hippies’ anything goes multitudinous commune psychedelia, and full-tilt freak out cosmic rock, without ever landing on any of those planets long enough to get bored or learn how to do it ‘properly’. They eat the enchanted stem, sure, but unlike Tennyson’s lotus-eating sailors, they can still hear the sound of the sea and they’re itching to go someplace else almost as soon as they come ashore, tribal shuffle beats zigzagging them through the waves; frayed sails flapping in the breeze.



Words: **Shane Moritz**
Illustration: **Phil Elliott**

After trawling inside a freshly discarded absinthe bottle for an inordinate length of time, a hornet staggered out, made its ascension, buzzed around, grew sleepy, passed out, plummeted down several stories and eventually landed on Abe's eye where it deployed its stinger.

Blinded and in serious pain, Abe groped around the high school parking lot, stumbling into several mid-size cars. He shrieked and then poked. The sting obviously didn't agree with Abe and indeed, if it hadn't been for Nurse Chapman's prompt action, Abe would have been a goner.

As the music played, he envisaged sun-blackened clouds swallowing birds

A bulging deformation, not unlike an unripened green capsicum, formed over Abe's right eye.

Sometime after 10am, his mother, a dayshift DJ for community radio, collected him. Peering from his puffy eye as they drove off, Abe noticed a duo dressed in black, progressing towards campus. They were carting big, heavy, black bags with grim looks on their faces. Abe muttered something, but his mother was too busy listening to **Pipas**, an East London duo named after the salty shell of a sunflower seed. **Pipas** had a new EP out ('Bitter Club' on Matinee) and it was playing on the car stereo. Abe's mother often got didactic on his ass and here it was no different.

"Pipas," she began. "Pipas are a literary jewel suitable for reflective moments during either rain or shine". Goodness, she was interminable. Still he did appreciate how the soft voices, digital beats, acoustic guitars and sumptuous semi-orchestra

produced a slinky European backdrop for the listener to swallow like the sweetest, bitter pill.

"Were you harassing hornets?" his mother asked as they pulled into the driveway.

"No mother, I was just walking."

They said their goodbyes and the mother reversed out of the drive, on her way back to the station. The weedy 15-year-old retired to the study to listen to discs his mother had left scattered about the house. He played the self-titled debut from Melbourne sexual vandals **Your Wedding Night** (Trifekta). Seven songs about getting satisfaction

brandished by slippery tongues, off-kilter beats, buzzing bass lines, and luscious, un-ladylike guitar licks that contracted and expanded ecstatically like stretchable elastic. The high-spirited, contagious come-on's excited young Abe, while the communicable choruses, catchy call and responses and lascivious lyrics were so seductive they must be lies, he thought, rather cynically.

Next he put on a CD from a Finnish fellow named **Markku Peltola** called **Buster Keatonin Ratsutilalla** (Klangbad). The man from Aki Kaurismäki's movie *The Man Without A Past* produces a work that proves he does have a past, a musical one, replete with drunken choirs, reggae tempos, gypsy jangles and a wistful violin at loss over the demise of silent film. Through the discrete union of these musical forms a delightful comic pathos is revealed – a characteristic shared by Buster Keaton himself.

Early on in **Minus Story's** third LP, *The Captain Is Dead, Let The Drum Corpse Dance* (JagJaguwar) a creepy forethought re-emerged in Abe's mind. He recalled the students he saw walking towards campus and his dreadful premonition. What if a massacre was about to occur?

As the music played, he envisaged sun-blackened clouds swallowing birds, strangulated voices tangling words and tribal beats engulfing turds. The music was an ostentatious excursion into pop grotesquerie, bearing the occasional frightening impulse, navigated by a combustible beat. The music often

eschewed song form or melody for the curious need to be apocalyptic. It was quite frivolously mad, thought Abe. That said, he cited many sweet broken melodies and also some rare, folk grooves.

In order to achieve the pungent orchestral mood on display, **Minus Story** had created a 'wall of crap' production sound and, with that, attracted (like flies) all manner of studio detritus, glazing it in fuzz and filth. As a result the CD delivers everything but the stench. Yet, as the title neatly suggests, this was a percussion piece, a rather macabre undertaking – a dance with death. The drums endeavour to move the earth and they do. By track two, the percussionist gives the guitar-player a premature burial.

Proud to be unclean, **Minus Story** acknowledge that these are unsanitary times necessary for dark adventures, wandering through vast fields of fucked up-ness.

The Hold Steady

The Hold Steady Almost Killed Me (French Kiss)

A magnificently bratty reaction against NYC art rock, punk funk, and anything that doesn't involve lots of beer, jukebox karaoke singalongs to Meatloaf, and sliding gleefully on your knees across dancefloors, this genius record had me laughing out loud and dancing before breakfast as I finally remembered *why* I spent the Nineties loving dodgy glam metal and big-haired cock rock.

Killer beautiful lines like, "*My name is Corey/I'm really into hardcore/People call me Hardcore*" are way too sharply observed to be anti-intellectual but, however sly and knowing, the drunken musical nods to Poison and Aerosmith work a little too fucking well for there to be any suggestion of smug parody either.

It's music like this that makes me such a bad friend to call in an emotional crisis. Forget comfort food and sympathy, just stick this record on. And, if you're still miserable, then you're way too fucked up for me to be dealing with anyway.

Gracelette

John Wilkes Boozie

Five Pillars Of Soul (kill rock stars)

Five energetic young puppies search high and low for the living embodiment of soul. They decide upon five individuals – Mario Van Peebles, Patty Hearst, Albert Ayler, Yoko Ono and Marc Bolan – and record five EPs dedicated to channelling the potent energy of the five pillars.

Spewing forth an abrasive white boy garage scree that is inflected with the high-pitched exultations of the fevered soul preacher, the mantra is "*Music as noise, noise as music*". Mario sticks it to the man, Marc Bolan makes them want to fuck, Patty and the SLA teach them how to sing "*Death to the fascist insect that preys on the lives of the people*", while Yoko and Albert instil a spirit of adventure and experimentation that pushes their stomping noise out of the heaving mire of relentless retro garage punk.

There's a genuinely weird edge to the racket; choral singalongs, free jazz wig-outs and synthesiser spasms bubbling under the surface. Also included is an 8,000-word essay on the five pillars in the hope of knocking some sense into the listener. Intelligent and invigorating? Hot damn!

Rich Hopkins

Simon Joyner

Lost With The Lights On (JagJaguwar)

Like Nick Cave guzzling a Lambchop in a monsoon of Leonard Cohen weepies, Simon Joyner is the longstanding doomed poet of Nebraska. Against an acoustic backdrop peppered with pedal-steel, Joyner fumbles lines such as "*When you're disgusting, when you're lonely, when the armchair deserves your company*", penned with a biro never more dark. On 'Blue', with his Dylan-esque slur all a-quiver, he sounds almost suicidal, surrounded by too many pills, unpaid bills and niggling bellyaches. Best served: bottle slowly slipping from the grasp, head filled with fading memories, and shadows sliding across the walls.

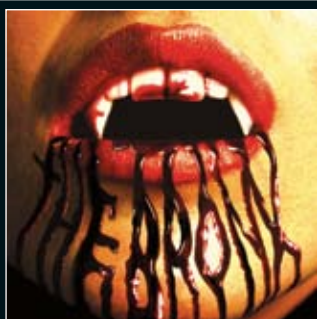
Nine LPs in, Joyner never changes. His misery deserves your company.

Ian Fletcher

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patchwork lunacy

Words: **Tim Jonze**

Illustration: **Lindsay Wright**



Joanna Newsom

The Milk-Eyed Mender (Drag City)

Perhaps it was the release of Dido's second album that finally pushed them over the edge. Or maybe it's the fact David Gray continues to exist. We can't be sure, but it's clear that some poor soul just couldn't face a future where acoustic singer-songwriters were nothing more than pale imitations of bad buskers with flea-ridden genitals. That's why they broke into the international water

on some bizarre, post-Leary commune and force-fed a strict diet of twigs and LSD-shakes.

The Milk-Eyed Mender is a fantasy record, in every sense. If you Google 'Joanna Newsom', you'll be fed tales of how she's a 21-year-old harpist from Nevada City, but that's no fun. Far better to let her music prey on your imagination until you're convinced she's the daughter of warped forest pixies who've feasted on so many mushrooms

creepy and further haunted by trickling harp.

For all its oddness, this record is as much about romance as surrealism. Joanna is clearly in love with the endless possibilities in each passing instance. Tantalised by the myriad opportunities that can be applied to each note, it often feels like she hasn't decided how to sing until the moment when she does.

Yes, "I killed my dinner with Karate kick" is a lyric that only Frank

Phrases are teased and contorted, stretched and unravelled until the words curdle delightfully in her mouth

supplies, made a beeline for the pipes that serve singer-songwriters (you can't prove they don't exist) and laced them with what medical professionals term 'some seriously strong mind-funk'.

Later that day and – ta da! – we've got Regina Spektor, Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom; a bunch of quirky-something, freakazoid songwriters who sound like they were raised

that they didn't notice Drag City bugging their campfire singalongs.

Like her peers, Joanna approaches each pluck and strum with the innocence of a two-year-old. Phrases are teased and contorted, stretched and unravelled until the words curdle delightfully in her mouth. When finally granted oxygen, they float out wrapped in her wicked-witch/kiddie-tantrum voice. And what a voice, deliciously

Bruno could ever relate to. And, true, you can't listen to it all in one go without wanting to stick needles through rag dolls of your loved ones. But if you allow your mind time to adjust to its charms, there's a lifetime of patchwork lunacy to explore.

And when Joanna's brigade finally get their way and cast a spell powerful enough to turn Damien Rice into a daffodil, we'll all rejoice.

Klang

No Sound Is Heard (Blast First)

Just as its title promises, having listened to *No Sound Is Heard* 15 times, I have yet to hear anything at all. Live, Klang (fronted by Elastica's Donna Matthews) are an agreeably chunky Krautrock lite – like a Duplo to Can's Lego Technics. But at a gig you can feel the drums vibrate your bones and coax you into feeling something. Presumably aiming for some Teutonic ideal of clinical sparseness, Klang have produced a novel form of

post-rock muzak. It's as though somebody arrived at the studio with a few scraps of ideas, and through some administrative foul-up this ended up accidentally *being* the record.

Robin Wilks

The Lilys

The Lilys (Shellshock)

Inserting a definite article could perhaps been seen as a desperate attempt to distance themselves from the loopy Apples In Stereo vibe of their six-year-old

Levi's theme 'A Nanny In Manhattan'. Listening to this record, it sounds like the curse has been lifted. 'Precollecion' is sung Robert Pollard-style and streaked with bending psychedelica, the riffs of 'The Perception Room' chop against a rising suggestion of Associates, while 'Catherine (Let A Positive)' and 'Will My Lord Be Gardening' are *Isn't Anything*-era MBV. Founding member Kurt Heasley is a thieving magpie, but it is theft that results in great entertainment.

Olav Bjortomt

Jimmy Martin

Don't Cry To Me (Thrill Jockey)

Roughly righting a thousand wrongs in the name of country music, *Don't Cry To Me* ranks as the strangest of all Thrill Jockey's many strange releases. Now 76, and undergoing treatment for bladder cancer, Jimmy Martin is the chirpy outlaw of bluegrass. This is the soundtrack to the film of his life, featuring 10 new songs, many of them captured live with his Sunny Mountain Boys crew. It's a place where dark humour is the key, unlocking the hearts of ladies in the front row like Johnny Cash opening the door to his demons. Admittedly, there are times here when you wish your ears were as way out west as Martin's, but somewhere amid the chimes, singalongs and violins, lies the spirit of one true dude, drenched with a cunning charm your average indie-boy rockers would struggle to even recognise.

"Losing you might be the best thing yet," Martin suggests. Not just yet, Jimmy. Not just yet, thanks.

Ian Fletcher

Merchandise

Lo-Tech Solutions To Hi-Tech Problems (Cityscape)

A misguided hack once claimed Merchandise were like, "An early incarnation of the Human League if they'd fired Phil Oakey and replaced him with Mark E Smith". Nothing could be further from the truth – this is more like a lethargic China Crisis fluffily under-produced by Pram with a bit of Boards of Canada thrown in for contemporary measure. Surprisingly, it isn't shit. Except for the sixth-form lyrics ("I had to turn to alchemy to coin the words you're needy of..."). Such a blatant lack of irony only proves to be a minor distraction.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

Mixel Pixel

Rainbow Panda (Mental Monkey)

Mixel Pixel's sound has been described as, "Electronic, punky, paranoid and half-Japanese; an overall by-product of growing up in the Eighties". Sure, there were Commodore 64's wonderful 8-bit creations and Transformers, A-ha, Metallica and Sonic Youth. But somehow, back then, most people around us seemed to listen to Led Zeppelin, watch re-runs of *Happy Days* and have hippie hairdos. The Eighties, in fact, never existed before 1994. It's people like Mixel Pixel who invented them as a blend of indie, SID chips, gothic synth pop, underground comics and Converse All-Stars. And we must thank them, because we need the Eighties to be a colourful, lonely lo-fi bedroom collage and not an easily digestible ironic Hollywood remake.

Recorded over three years, *Rainbow Panda* encompasses many styles without ever committing to a retro period recreation. Epic Psychedelic Furs style crooning gives way to intimately goofy scribbles, Casio beats collide with scratchy guitars. This is how the Eighties should've been.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Juana Molina

Segundo (Domino)

Juana Molina is a comic and TV star turned electronic folk Goddess. *Segundo*

Fire Engines**On Fire Stickers (Creeping Bent)**

Boredom or Fire Engines, you can't have both. That was the clarion call of a gang of sharp Edinburgh punks as the Seventies stuttered into the Eighties.

Fire Engines made the most infectious dance music ever, were the masters of background music made for active living, creating madcap instrumentals with occasional yelps of fiery passion piercing the heart like Kryptonite crystals falling from the skies. They made the greatest debut single ever in 'Get Up And Use Me', complete with the greatest false start ever ("Keep going," shouts their manager from the wings...and oh they did!). They made the greatest mini album ever in *Lubricate Your Living Room* and another of the greatest singles of all time with 'Candyskin'/'Meat Whiplash' which was all frantic strings and guitars clashing in an obsessive Pop Art heaven. They gave title to the greatest fanzine ever in *Hungry Beat* and played live sets of 15 minutes, something that prompted The Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia to comment to Paul Morley, "One of our guitar solos last longer than that!" Well, exactly. They lasted for just a few incendiary years and then split, leaving only magnificent fragments and myths to filter down through the years to influence a new breed.

Part of that legend is now fuelled by Creeping Bent with this release of archive recordings of Fire Engines (no 'the', because that would be boring): three tracks recorded at Valentinos in 1981, plus three songs recorded at the first ever gig at Leith Community Centre, Edinburgh, 1980. That they are the kind of treasures you dream of unearthing should go without saying. Boredom or Fire Engines, you can't have both. As true today as it's always been. www.creepingbent.org for more info.

Alistair Fitchett

was originally released in her homeland of Argentina in 2000.

If the interface between song and modern sound processing tends toward disinterred forms and awkward secret handshakes, Molina accesses the wistful wisdom of the folk song and easily slides it up against the topology of the hard drive. A soft focus approach to melody adroitly evades the clumsy handling of many of her peers, underscored by the field recordings and pools of buzzing tones Molina playfully scrawls over her shape-shifting songs.

The accent suggests neu-Tropicalia, but Molina trades the psychedelic excess of Brazilian surrealist-pop for an intimate, whispered take on the song. It's introverted and yet full of charm and play, and slightly bolshy in its own underhand manner.

Jon Dale

The Monolith**Here Comes The Monolith (Fortune)**

This is breezy powerpop from San Francisco. The shimmering guitars and lush harmonies in fact remind me of driving around the city's steep hills with four friends, enjoying the sunshine and watching the blue sky fly pass, criss-crossed with tram and telephone wires. There are flickers of Sixties pop, but this Monolith is sleek, shiny and new with added synthesisers and a bubbling horn section. '10 x Infinity' has a melody and hook so strong that it will stop at nothing to reach the centre of your heart. Sunshine pop at its most beguiling.

Rich Hopkins

Nina Nastasia**Dogs (Touch And Go)**

Nina Nastasia's debut album *Dogs* has been, to quote Van Dyke Parks, "*Lost and gone and unknown for a long long time*": since 1999, when it was released with sumptuous packaging in a limited edition of you've-not-got-one. The songs of *Dogs* are equal to anything on her rightfully gushed over follow-up *The Blackened Air*, lighter and shyer than last year's opinion-splitting *Road To Ruin*.

Kennan Gudjonsson's chocolate-rich arrangements of viola and double bass are sometimes Badalamenti, sometimes Bad Seeds, always fireplace warm. Without traditional structure, Nina's songs chase their tales of everyday magic through dreams, sandboxes and rain.

Tim Chipping

AC Newman**The Slow Wonder (Matador)**

AC Newman, beloved across the ocean as one of The New Pornographers will sadly find no purchase in this harsh, enclosed land, but not for want of trying. But then everything is so lily-livered you ask, What is the point of this record? Apart from the beautifully dazed 'Come Crash' and 'The Town Halo' with cello-scrub and some distant '20th Century Boy' chorus girls, everything else is inconsequential. AC has a yen for the pretty things in life, and this is the prettiest wallpaper you can possibly get for your summer room. That, by the way, is a bad thing.

Olav Bjortomt

Noxagt**The Iron Point (Load)**

If there was ever a band I wanted to cause trouble with and play some caustic violin for, it would be Noxagt. And not just because at least one of them looks like the archetypal Hot Norwegian Man, no. Look, if music is my boyfriend, which it is, then Noxagt's music is filthy, with a hard-handed momentum that playflights you into a corner and onto the floor. Truly irresistible, in other words.

Turning It Down Since 2001 (2003) introduced Noxagt as prime Nordic string-pillagers with a dumbass sense of humour (songtitles included 'Manhood Lessons' and 'Cockburn'). The sound was low-down and raw; inevitably, the follow-up is somewhat cleaner. There's still plenty to thrash about to, but right from the outset – opener 'Naked In France' showing a new complexity, even as Nils Erga's viola winds its trademark barbed wire coils around your legs – there's a greater depth of field to the sonic template.

They even give a nod to their country's folk music, with Erga's grandfather, Hagbard Heien, contributing vocals on traditional song 'Kling No Klokka'. This refinement culminates in closing track 'Regions Of May', an elegant, elegiac epic that recalls Popol Vuh's finer moments (yes, I did say 'Popol Vuh' and 'finer'. You got a problem with that?). Perhaps future recordings will see Erga taking up the Hardanger fiddle, with guest appearances from Nils Økland; there's always been a strangely haunting, woodland quality to their sound that runs like an earthy seam beneath its initial, bulldozing impact and the more that seam is mined the more fascinating Noxagt could become.

One of the more interesting bands from the Load roster, and certainly the one with the most obviously musical motives (as opposed to just fucking shit up and eating their own sick, like Friends Forever), The Iron Point shows that Noxagt's elemental fuck-metal has lost none of its spiralling sleaze: it still wrestles you down and fucks you around in dark, bad, places; it winds you up tight. But now it also turns you to face the clean north wind, your eyes watering and your lungs full of fresh air.

Frances May Morgan

The New Year**The End Is Near (Touch And Go)**

Laconic and a little rugged, not unlike Lee Marvin at his louisiest, The New Year make music both haggard and hypnotic, showing surprising finesse patrolling life's shadier corners. Boozy vocals burn faintly behind a spidery diffusion of blissed-out guitars. Lyrics attempt to escape the knots that tangle up inside when you either find yourself at a really lame party or when death places a call while you're out, only to learn later – he's calling back.

At recurring junctures, a note from a wayward melody hangs in the air for a cool eternity, set adrift among dead autumn leaves, only to reappear in a Seventies lounge where two brothers, Matt and Bubba, once dreamt of gold. They did this so you can experience the song as it was intended, in

quiet Texas seclusion, where presidents go to die.

Shane Moritz

Of Montreal**Satanic Panic In The Attic (Polyvinyl)**

Of Montreal singer Kevin Barnes has been tinkering alone in his house and has emerged with this sugary splurge of psychedelic pop. The occasional awkward stab at electronics aside, he seems to be on a pointless search for a midpoint between The Beach Boys' *Sunflower* and 'The White Album' (The Beatles). But such carping is senseless when faced with tunes as delicious as 'Disconnect The Dots', whose "Oooooooooooh la la la's" turn me into a dizzy toddler, or 'Climb The Ladder', a dreamy Dennis Wilson-style ballad. For the most part, *Satanic Panic In The Attic* resonates with the hazy euphoria of a summer's day.

Robin Wilks

Pale Horse And Rider**Moody Pike (Agenda)**

This second album from Brooklyn's Pale Horse And Rider *sounds* lovely. Paul Oldham's spacious mix brings out a languid country rock sound reminiscent of Neil Young or Uncle Tupelo. Head Rider, Jon De Rosa, with that catch at the back of his throat, sounds like a manlier Jeff Tweedy; Marc Gartman has a fragile tenor well suited to lonely boy roots rock.

Sadly, their songwriting is not in the same league – several tracks drift by in a fug of wearied harmonies and weeping pedal steel. Alcoholic love song 'Annabelle' is undoubtedly *pretty*, but buff it up and it wouldn't sound out of place on *Dawson's Creek*. The New Orleans marching band rhythm of 'Weight Of My Soul' is an interesting sidestep – a shame it's lost to a repetitive blues rock dirge. New recruit Marc Gartman has a surer melodic touch, and both 'Quarters' and 'Winter Slides' are melancholy gems, graced by the band's most sensitive playing.

Stewart Smith

PJ Harvey**Uh Huh Her (Island)**

Polly Harvey. This is her seventh album.

It's better than her sixth, 2001's set of NYC travel diaries, *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea* – which, rather ridiculously, won the Dorset songstress the Mercury Music Prize (perhaps because it had taken the organisers eight years to come to terms with the sophisticated, minimal brilliance of her second album, 1993's Steve Albini-produced *Rid Of Me*). It's better because it's more personal – Polly has always done personal brilliantly, as opposed to imitating Cave or Dylan or other male icons. "*Your lips taste of poison*," she spits on the opening 'The Life And Death Of Mr Badmouth', and you just know this is gonna be an old-fashioned venom-fest.

It's better because it's far more erratic – 'Who The Fuck?' is pure Yeah Yeahs flipside spittle (not necessarily a good thing), the self-immolating 'The Pocket Knife' borrows a handful of acoustic chords from The Velvet Underground and makes good use of them, the moody 'The Slow Drug' recalls the gothic swagger of Siouxsie And The Banshees, 'Cat On The Wall' threatens to implode under the weight of its distorted blues riff. Polly is always more vital when pushing boundaries – witness her debut album, *Dry*, a record so startling she'll forever be judged against its emotion-laden (and never trite) grooves. Witness 1998's challenging fifth: the Flood-produced *Is This Desire?* Witness the range of vision and disparate styles on *Uh Huh Her*.

I'd feared that, after witnessing her back-to-basics performance at the Eden Project – where the lady proved she still has too much reverence for her own past – this record might simply have contained grey echoes of teenage Polly as she struggled to find a new way forward. I needn't have worried. This is a *wicked* return to form. Guess it won't win any prizes, though.

Everett Truce

under soap city

Words: **Chris Ballard**
Illustration: **Lucy Bailey**

Various Artists Grime (Rephlex)

Distinct from the Wiley-led eski sound comes a further fissure of post-UK Garage noise. There is some crossover (Dizzee Rascal's favourite DJ, Slimzee, is now a full-on supporter) but this is more bass-heavy, more skanked-out and danceable than its East London sibling. It's also older, less raw and less indebted to MCs that spit lyrics about taking "arms house to your mum's house." Both are thrilling signifiers of what the UK's digital underclass is doing when their teachers aren't looking.

And with *Grime*, you can understand why Rinse FM and Aphex Twin's Rephlex label are so enthusiastic. An hour-long comp consisting of three unmixed, instrumental EPs from Manchester's MarkOne, North London's Slaughter Mob and Croydon's Plasticman, it combines the energy and attention to destruction that The Bug made so infectious on *Pressure* with a muscular grip on your synapses.

This is not easy listening. It's more like nuclear war. Defiantly masculine in its pounding insistence, its paranoid persistence, this is music that sounds like industrial panic and post-millennial desire – as played by dreamers from shithole postcodes suffused with the neurosis and vision so important to transcending the casual cool that pollutes the metropolis. The imagery it evokes is as blank and ominous as the paperclip silver of the cover; the letters of 'GRIME' spelt out like multiple threats, multiple promises...

MarkOne makes anti-rave anthems, metal machine music formed from titanium-tipped breakbeats. 'Stargate 92' blends *Champion Sounds* depth charges with tricky samples. 'Raindance' takes gaseous diva samples, a gorgeous piano riff that's like playing drums on china cups, and pushes it all towards something euphoric.

Plasticman is somewhat flatter, although the 'Doom's Night' wub-wub bass and snakecharmer sound of 'Camel Ride' is prettiness so brutal it's undeniable. But the purple-black bruises of 'Industrial Graft' and the so-funkless-it's-funky 'The Music' irresistibly reach terminal velocity – and then never stop to think about the consequences.



These are beat poets scoring JG Ballard short stories with cheap synths and computer keyboards

It's Slaughter Mob, however, who steal the show. They revel in lethal injections of throbbing low-end theory. 'Dub Weapon' is supple and gymnastic. Chants are buried in the mix like Brixton soundsystem MCs just out of earshot. 'Fireweaver' utilises to maximum effect the phased-out dub sounds of kindred spirits, Horsepower Productions. 'Black Hole' opens up a vortex of kaleidoscopic rays.

These are beat poets scoring JG Ballard short stories with cheap synths and computer keyboards, Cabaret Voltaire raised on Zed Bias 12-inches, late night pirate radio and PS2 sessions. And *Grime* depicts a cold future now. You wouldn't necessarily want to live there, but it's somewhere you're compelled to go.

Peace Burial At Sea This Is Such A Quiet Town (Captains Of Industry)

A reissue of this Tyneside trio's largely ignored 2003 debut – with one sleazy added track – *This Is Such A Quiet Town* is a crushing crescendo of entralling quiet/loud dynamics. Like... Trail Of Dead sharply arousing Mogwai, PBAS drench a menacingly taut tone with gut-wrenching peaks, swiftly followed by forbidding troughs, with occasional N-movie synth horror overtures, all lorded over by the possessed Black Francis-esque yelp of Jonny Longrigg. True, there's many a heavy hand of others hanging here, and PBAS are less convincing when they lurk in those lengthy shadows. Yet it's also true that when these festering boils of angst explode, all their debts to others are dealt swift aural thrashings.

Ian Fletcher

Pedro The Lion Achilles' Heel (Jade Tree)

Renowned for his odes to alcohol and abusive Southern hobos, David Bazan's

expressions of degenerate affection make for endearing listening. But this release fails to develop on his past glories, reverting back to the self-contained pop format of *It's Hard To Find A Friend* rather than his later emo-folk concept albums, and failing to match the naïve brilliance of that *Friend's* 'Big Truck'. This album starts and ends in clumped drudgery. There's no denying that in 'I Do' the whining works, as oafish pleas for love melt the heart with a melodic sensitivity that shines through its own heavy-handedness.

There are moments of genius, but there's little to please the futurists.

Jonathan Falcone

Pilot Balloon Ghostly Good Cheer (Ghostly International)

Three am, the middle of nowhere. You're sleepwalking across a moonlit wood, hair snagging on tangled silver branches, feet slippery with dew. In the distance you hear a ghostly drone, a fragmented Badalamenti-esque dreamscape. You freeze. You wake with a start. Silhouetted

against the trees, you can just make out a ghostly figure creeping towards you. The scream dies in your throat. You try to run but you can't. You're rooted, vines circling your ankles, while the ragged gossamer shape weaves closer and closer. This is all Pilot Balloon's fault. This is celestial hypno-hop for the brooding paranoid.

Dita di Prima

Pink Grease This Is For Real (Mute)

Pink G-R-Ease are here to "Make you sweat" because sometimes, like life, music is stupid and fun. And it gusts through, accelerating everything inside and out, the electric shock applied to the muscle, the dance that infects the dancer, and sends them into the lowdown dirty rapture we call fever.

So, don't buy this record if you don't like the following: "1, 2, 3, 4!", muscle beats, animal shrieks, drunken cheerleaders, drag act pretension, graffiti wit and wisdom, French kisses, fake orgasms, "drums, drums...synthesiser", rhythmic grunts, guitar hand blur, handclaps, sax stabs,

radiophonic space noise, good and bad jokes, songs that accelerate from verse to chorus, call-and-response, disco falsetto, neon flowers, indoor fireworks, and regular satisfying climaxes.

Learn from the G.R.E.A.S.E: dance like you mean it, and make mistakes while you still can.

kicking_k

Pitchtuner Spiny Lure (Doxa)

Here's another German electro band, with a *de rigueur* Japanese girl, making Eighties synth-disco and pretending it's for the masses. And they're fucking brilliant. The album makes me want to be Kylie, so I can get these people to remix me to the top. See, this is all that hipster-clash played with the biggest europop grin. When they say disco, they mean Isaac Hayes and soul guitar as well as glitterballs and dancing to stay alive. And when they say soul guitar they mean Sterling Morrison and the tambourine from 'Dancing Queen'. Sure, it's backwards, but only in the way The Beatles playing Chuck Berry was

backwards. They make my keyboard seem like a dancefloor and my monitor, MTV.

Jim Cassius

RJD2

Since We Last Spoke (Def Jux)

A long time ago, in a galaxy far away, DJ Shadow's all-but-perfect *Endtroducing* made a pretty good case for a sample-centric future of music. Thing is, it was so fully realised, it all but shut down the sub-genre. RJD2 was the latest student to take on the master, and if you checked the hype around his debut, 'Deadringer', you'd think he'd managed to force a draw. But it soon became apparent that, while D2 possessed undeniable talent, it was facing the wrong way. Reverence for tradition, for history, is no bad thing. But when artists concentrate all their energies on emulating others' past glories, styles ossify and musical lineage flatlines.

There's not a track on this album that doesn't show D2's pretty awesome talent, that wouldn't reward repeated listens. But there's never the kind of style-shattering giant leap that will finally grant him escape velocity from Shadow's shadow.

kicking_k

The Secret Machines

Now Here Is Nowhere (679)

Dammit, I can't damn this. It should be easy. Fucksake, they commit the quirky sin of referencing Pink Floyd, and the disturbing mistake of sounding like they mean it. The guitars chug. Voices rise as one at the chorus, a soda fountain of Eighties overproduction, non-specific lyrics hinting at disaster, reducing politics to symbolism like a drive time Godspeed.

Then the pulsing guitars of 'Nowhere Again' cut in, and it fills every crack in my attention with an angel dust haze, sounding for all the world like 'Lola' rewritten by Interpol, racing forward. "Oooooooooour liiives!" they harmonise, sainted Muppets, "eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeraased!" And oh, the easy beauty of 'Pharaoh's Daughter', Television streamlined for the mainstream. A million guitars overtake each other on the way to your heart, whether you like it or not.

kicking_k

Slowblow

Slowblow (Mobile)

Like their compatriots Múm and Sigur Ros, Icelandic duo Slowblow have an eerily enigmatic touch that hugs the heart strings. Among an analogue orchestra of home-recorded hums, hisses and handclaps, they urge musical boxes to rub up against soft mechanics, spawning folk pop that often barely raises itself above that of a whisper. Then Múm's Kristin Anna Valtysdottir weeps angelic tears over four songs, and you're transported to higher places entirely.

Ian Fletcher

Sodastream

A Minor Revival (Fortuna Pop!)

Karl Smith and Pete Cohen love their double-bass. Here, it's everywhere; the scrub of heavy string bringing to mind grim Mike Leigh scenes of domestic despair; shades of grey coating every damp-rotted surface. Even the twee ingénues of Scottish pop would balk at these Aussies' overuse. But when the

Sonic Youth

Sonic Nurse (Geffen)

It's Sonic Youth. It comforts. It cajoles. It caresses. It's classic rock. It contains all those little Sonic Youth signifiers (laconic drawl, confident and orchestrated guitars, rolling drums, distorted amps, minimalist chords) that so endear them to a generation brought up on cultural signposts like Karen Carpenter's anorexia and the windswept landscapes of Death Valley. It's not Lightning Bolt or Noxagt. It doesn't howl in fury – indeed, it's difficult to recall a time when Sonic Youth did, such is their longevity. There again, that's not its purpose.

We need *Sonic Nurse*, for the reasons implicit in the title: nothing strange, nothing alienating, it's a balm for aging alt-rockers' tired limbs. There are any number of places you can turn to in 2004 for your noise and anger and abrasion, but only the very existence of Sonic Youth validates a whole aesthetic – underground culture, basically. They're the art-rock AC/DC or a less cheesy

tempo is upped, the cloying modesty is lifted, and a feeble light shines through. However, hope is soon rendered vain, and whether Sodastream have a grip that is anything other than icy is questionable.

Olav Bjortomt

Solvent

Apples And Synthesizers (Ghostly International)

Fellow workers! The revolutionary sound committee would like to recommend this new recording from the brave members of the international movement for the liberation of the exploited proletariat. Our comrades overseas have managed to create a slice of Disco Nouveau faithful to the ideals of pure futuristic expression that were first gathered here in the seminal manifesto *On The Aesthetic Quality Of Retro Dark-Wave*. This recording will be a welcome addition to factories' cafeterias and state-approved discotheques.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Team Shadatek

Burnerism (Warp)

This is an awesome utilisation of channelled cacophony and cyclopean boom-box obesity, joyous in its out and out pummelling and dismemberment of the obvious. So sweating, pig-grunt bass lines slug it out with distressed harmonium squeals, strangled brass, and shrieking electro-Sasquatch farts. Hinting now and then at the subatomic nano-goo delirium of Autechre and their ilk, *Burnerism* is a retching up of hip hop tropes into multi-layered dimensions of synapse-trashing dislocation seldom explored since Mark Stewart learned to 'Cope With Cowardice'.

James Papademetrie

Tibi Lubin

I Don't See You As A Dead Girl (Rev-Ola)

The Rev-Ola label is rightly renowned for being a source of unearthed treasures, but its gloriously eccentric label boss Joe Foster is also tirelessly searching for New, and he's discovered a real delight in Glasgow girl group Tibi Lubin. Tibi Lubin marry the breathy French aesthetic of Claudine Longet to a sparse backing that recalls the delights of The Marine Girls, Young Marble Giants and Slumber Party.

It all makes for a gentle sound that hides razorblades in its folds; like being seduced

Rolling Stones. They're permanent, staid, a bedrock for all the other music to ebb and flow across. It's like having an extreme fashion designer always bedecked in black.

There was a minor hiccup a few years back in 1999 when some bastard stole all their effects pedals and amplifiers, and the NYC band were forced to reinvent themselves: come up with a mellower sound and abrasion, on the killer triumvirate, NYC *Ghosts & Flowers*, *Goodbye 20th Century* and *Murray Street*, where they also picked up 'vibes' man Jim O'Rourke as their first new member in two decades. But now we're back to business as usual – refining and honing down the sound that Lee, Thurston, Kim and Steve captured so colourfully on 1988's *Daydream Nation* (which is not their finest record anyway). So 'Pattern Recognition' is 'Bull In The Heather' (1993), 'Dripping Dream' is very *Sister* (1987) and the Kim Gordon number is the Kim Gordon number.

Business as usual – and thank Kurt for that.

Everett True

into sleep with promises of hidden pleasures only to experience surrealist dreams of Joseph Cornell assemblages come to life – dead-eyed birds and limbless dolls singing lullabies of death and loss.

Alistair Fitchett

Trademark

Want More (Truck)

Trademark are boffins. They grew up together and probably played with Technical Lego. *Want More* is a set of experiments designed to produce a formula for love: singer Oliver, his voice swooping and boyishly pretty, sounds rational in his pursuit of it. You can't hurry love, or science. Behind him, in matching white lab coats, Stuart and Paul have

assembled tools they trust: Casio, Yamaha, Korg... Their sound is soft, kind; controlled to facilitate understanding.

Trademark are staking their reputation on love being found in the pure pop song; taking on the work abandoned in the early Eighties by Vince Clarke when he left the institute of Depeche Mode (in association with the Kraftwerk tests carried out by Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark).

On stage, they have been known to demonstrate how love is like a sine wave, using a flip chart and diagrams. On record, they prove that love is a pain in the heart. Though in desperate need of funding, and far from a conclusion, the early results are highly promising.

Tim Chipping



Misplaced Music

Summer 2004

Adrian Crowley - A Northern Country CD

Beautiful songs of heartbreak and loss, Adrian Crowley's third album is reminiscent of James Yorkston, Smog, Red House Painters or Low. We loved his last album (recorded by Steve Albini) and this one is even better.

"Quite simply perfect." *Loose Today*

VA - Misplaced Pets CD

Featuring exclusive tracks from Sufjan Stevens, Hood, Pedro, Remote Viewer, Empress, Vibracathedral Orchestra, Alesha Roberts, Haverhill, and 12 others. A compilation to aid two Leeds-based animal rescue charities - Whitehall Dog Rescue and Leeds Animal Rescue Centre.

Still available: Empress - Tea for Two 7", Hood - Singles Compiled 2xCD, Simon Joyner/Two Dollar Guitar split 7", Dakota Suleidano split 7", Hood - Compilations 1990-2002 CD, Charlie Parr - Criminals & Sinners CD. Distributed by Cargo UK.

www.misplacedmusic.co.uk
3 Hillthorpe Road / Pudsey / Leeds / LS28 8ND / United Kingdom

Autumn 2004

Time For Rodeo - So Toxic CD5

A year late but who's counting? Clinic and Sex Clark Five meet in a swampy to fi folk pop explosion. Some say they're reminded of Super Furry Animals, Beta Band and The Poies.

Charlie Parr - King Earl CD

Incredible new music from Charlie Parr. Lo-fi folk-blues from Duluth, Minnesota that has been compared to Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, Doc Boggs and Nick Drake.

"Even Charlie's foot coming down on the floor boards screams with more soul and life than most anything - past or future."
Alan Sparhawk, Low

What more can we say?

the true report

Words: **Everett True**
Illustration: **Vincent Vanoli**

The new **The Boy Least Likely To** single 'Fur Soft As Fur' (Karmalio) is a sprightly little thing that burbles and whistles happily itself – like *Finding Nemo* as directed by Jacques Tati, or Teenage Fanclub shorn of any allusions to adulthood. It puts me in a happy mood, cos I too am "scared of the countryside".

My upbeat mood continues through the **Scout Niblett** single, a cover of Althea & Donna's gorgeous 1976 Number One reggae hit 'Uptown Top Ranking' (Too Pure) – the very essence of pop music distilled, quiet now someone may be listening – and my *fifth* copy of **Hello Goodbye's** *Heart Attack* (Racing Junior). I have no idea why I should've received this, one year on, but I'm glad I have cos it allows me to slip into a sordid fantasy involving breathless female Norwegian Huggy Bear/ Girlfrendo fans wearing 'Black Kneehighs'. Bearing in mind my advancing years, this kinda makes me the Outsider equivalent of Terry Wogan on *Eurovision*. But that ain't so bad – he's *funny*!

These past few weeks, I can't get enough of Jonathan. It must be summer again. The bonus tracks on 1979's *Back In Your Life* – 'Oh Carol', a gentle 'Astral Plane', 'Hospital', and a *double chocolate malted* sweet cover of 'Chapel Of Love' – cause me to bounce round the kitchen like I'm on pogo sticks. Jonathan's sweet, perplexed adlibs between songs about his brand new shirt, the wonderful series of fake endings to 'Ice Cream Man', the sunburst of the life-affirming 'The Morning Of Our Lives' (all from 1977's *Modern Lovers 'Live'*)... everything he touches, he touches with passion, purity and an undefiled love for rock'n'roll in its truest sense (Fifties bobby-soxers and letter sweaters) that remains undiminished by passing decades. It's surely no coincidence that these most recent reissues from Sanctuary have heralded the advent of summer: my happiness is trebled upon playing these records to interns unfamiliar with **Jonathan Richman**, yet fans of The Pastels, Belle & Sebastian, Morrissey...*rock'n'roll itself*... Man, I envy these kids. They have a whole new world of wonderment waiting to be discovered.

Sanctuary have also been making me immensely happy – and my wife intensely unhappy – by continuing to reissue **The Fall's** back catalogue at an unreasonably fast rate. Trust me, you need All the Step Forward/ Rough Trade stuff, but *50,000 Fall Fans Can't Be Wrong* – two CDs, 39 Golden Greats – ain't a bad jumping-off point. Sonic Youth may well



These past few weeks, I can't get enough of Jonathan. It must be summer again

validate the entire US underground aesthetic, but we've got The Fall – which is why we're so much more fucked-up than Americans.

Jody Wildgoose (Lovely White Teeth, Sketchbook) confuses me and this is good: a talented Sheffield boy interpreting the works of Captain Beefheart, Syd Barrett and The Beatles with a kaftan in one hand, and a broken 4-track and Dictaphone in the other. Imagine if Guy from Entrance joined The Coral...

There's a new **Gin Palace** single out ('Things I Used To Love About You', Artrock). Forget the teen movie title, this is rage and fury and spite and laughter and thunder... and yet doesn't come close to capturing the RAFASALAT of The Gin Palace live. In this, they keep good company: Membranes and The Birthday Party also never managed to capture their live fury on vinyl. If they ever do, though – whoa! Watch out mama!

Dirge recorded 'Phone' after, "A shitty Christmas party, when our friend Lois woke up with a hangover and said, 'I've got a strange silence in my head'". Their 'Fountain EP' (www.autresdirections.net/inmusic) is intriguing, spooky – download their music for free at the website.

MJ Hibbett & The Validators recall both the laconic political commentary of ancient Midlands

beat poets Yeah Yeah Noh and populist student banter of Art Brut. Pluses, both – and they've got a genius website. *Shed Anthems* (Sorted) is chirpy, cute, incisive and irresistibly irritating. Hey, if Mike Skinner can make it big imitating Chas N' Dave, there's no reason why Mr Hibbett can't do the same, reviving the spirit of The Nightingales.

Trencher distinguished themselves by out Locusting The Locust (brevity, loudness) at The Free Butt. Their *When Dracula Thinks 'Look At Me'* (www.trencher.tk) is nasty, brutal, frantic and makes my head hurt in several places I didn't know existed. It's great but I never wanna hear them play live again, OK?

Give me the stone-cold 13th Floor Elevators groove of **The Starlite Desperation's** *Violate A Sundae* (Sweet Nothing) – like the stoner swamp-rock of The Von Bondies, only 4 Real – and we'll say no more. Louder! Turn it up louder! I can still hear myself type!

Time to g...oh wait. **Skill 7 Stamina 12**. This arty London quartet's debut, *Robotics With Strings* (Junior Aspirin) mixes the playful funk of mid-Seventies Can with the post-punk funk of A Certain Ratio and This Heat... They're also a ringer for Bristol's Mooz.

That's it. I'm outta here!

Various

Children Of Mu (Planet Mu)

Mike Paradinas' curio cabinet of spiny wrong-beat miscreants has often lurked in the shadows of its sibling colossi Warp and Rephlex. Now and again, however, the Planet Mu arsenal is brandished via compilations such as this, and this double-headed beast is stuffed to the rabid chops with oddball treats.

There's much to make the ears gladly bleed here, but it's neatly punctuated throughout; Joseph Nothing's 'Piazza Of Tomorrow' is an achingly beautiful construction and there's a nod towards languid post-rock from Frog Pocket and Weaver001 as well as Leafcutter John's surprising flourish of acid Americana. Some of the superficially gentler moments aren't without their queasy undercurrents. The Gasman's spectral 'Immodium' is a hypnotic exercise in encroaching darkness and swirling, ill-defined unease. Elsewhere, abrasive scattershot monsters such as Shitmat's 'Shopliftin' Gabba' and Chevrone's 'Swimmin' Lessons' vindicate the high-end esoteric electronic artists' (The Bug, Squarepusher *et al*) recent reconfiguration of the previously untouchable ("Nosebleed? Fuck off!") foundations of hardcore rave.

James Papademetrie

Various

New York Soul (Unisex)

Those for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia wish us to carry cards, similar to the kidney donor, declaring under what circumstances we would like an assisted death.

Underneath the options for persistent vegetative state, terminal illness and receding hairline, I should like to add the following:

If my stomach is obscuring my genitals.

If you can hear me breathing through my nose.

If I buy trainers from the market.

If Sanjeev Bhaskar makes me laugh.

If I ever start enjoying anything described as 'soul' that is really jazz-tinged, jejune, slightly funky, vaguely hip hop, muzak.

New York Soul, the third in a state and genre-themed series of compilations, professes to have assembled the rightful inheritors of Jerry Wexler's Atlantic records legacy via the orchestral disco of Salsoul to the politically conscious Rawkus (co-founded, bizarrely, by Rupert Murdoch's son). They haven't. It's mostly horrible. Too many new *Badus* and old Angie Stones, trying to sound 'heavy' yet ending up like The Brand New Heavies. Make out music for people far too clean to have sex. Mellow is not an emotion. Kill me now.

Tim Chipping

Vocokesh

The Tenth Corner (Strange Attractors)

Vocokesh are diverse but progressive, *not prog*, in their lysergic flourishes. This being resolutely space rock circa 1973, it comes replete with varying degrees of aptitude, the troughs of which are hard to ignore in these evolved times. This foetid, paisley locked groove raggedness would be fine if it were limited to the global lightshow slipcase and bad-trip cartoon psychosis that permeates throughout, but once we're past the pleasingly

beyond year one

The Saints

All Times Through Paradise (EMI 4-CD box set)

Words: David Nichols

Illustration: Marcus Oakley



To hell with 'influence' in music history. Some of my favourite records are not, and never have been, influential. Or, at the very least, the nature of their influence has been hidden and strange.

The Saints. There was no band like The Saints before. There was no band like The Saints after. Even the band, The Saints, continuing under the stewardship of Chris Bailey and still sometimes making good records, is not anything like *these* Saints. They were a spontaneously generated piece of geographically unexpected strangeness, as were Pere Ubu or The Clean. They almost *had* to happen, arising from a genuinely working class area of Brisbane (the post-war housing estate, Inala) in the early Seventies.

The Saints made a single of their song '(I'm) Stranded' and EMI signed them. They recorded three albums, each better than the last. *(I'm) Stranded* (1977) is a stomping classic with some hits. *Eternally Yours* (1978) had some really shitty songs like 'Orstralia' and that fucking 'International Robots' with the idiot computer alien voices. But the rest was magic. 'Know Your Product'

This is music of the future.

The future yet to come

was the best Jagger-Richard composition ever, and they didn't even write it (very much).

Their rough diamond quality had gone by *Prehistoric Sounds* (1978). The title is perhaps a reference to punk making 1977 'year one' and the music within being more 'rootsy'. The title is the only bad thing about the album because this is music of the future. The future yet to come. 'Everything's Fine', 'Swing For The Crime' and 'All Times Through Paradise' are three songs your grotesque existence has always needed.

Kuepper-Bailey worked because they kept each other in check. When Bailey did Saints albums on his own starting with the great *Monkey Puzzle*, he initially had Ed Kuepper's ghost on his shoulder parroting 'that's corny' whenever he tried to sing or write like Richard Clapton. Kuepper launched straight into the killer Laughing Clowns and was never haunted by Bailey's ghost except when people said he couldn't sing.

Read this through one eye. In what kind of milieu did The Saints exist? They made more sense in Brisbane, which needed them, than London, where people are sad. But neither place really wanted them. The Saints weren't into 'year one'. They collected from the past and they cared about what they did. They weren't just making a fart-in-a-lift statement like so many of their contemporaries and that's why their late Seventies material still sounds so impressive and attractive.

Read this through your other eye. *They knew what they were doing* and why. They weren't burying the corpse of rock like Throbbing Gristle. They were creating new life from its disassembled parts, and if that failed, they had some good ideas for the headstone.

This 4-CD collection includes a previously unreleased live set recorded in London, 26/11/77, and any number of bonus tracks, including several versions of the Greatest Riff Ever ('This Perfect Day'). There's a fine Ed Kuepper interview at <http://www.brella.org/sandpebbles/tarantula.html>.

malevolent scene-setting atmospherics we're pitched repeatedly into the same epically undisciplined abyss.

"Cosmic's fine," Current 93's David Tibet remarked recently, "but it's difficult to do really well." And, on the strength of this, one can only agree. Tupperware drum sounds and Youth Club studio production values do not an epic Lovecraftian space trip make. Despite the heroically transcendental wig-out whorls of vaguely Oriental fuzz, Stygian reverb and crushed-velvet analogue burble, we're left firmly on the outside here looking in on an extended sixth-form microdot jam, fidgeting uncomfortably and waiting for our cab home.

James Papademetrie

War Against Sleep

Messages (Fire)

Recorded by songwriter Duncan Fleming with various Bristol musicians over the last seven years, this is a remarkable example of British eccentricity.

Complex string arrangements, a grimy organ soundtrack and the odd snatch of orgasmic moaning all enhance these mesmerising, lo-grade proceedings

— sometimes this is like Magnetic Fields at the wrong speed. Trust me, this is good.

In this prologue to the war against sleep, everything is centred around the lugubrious mysteries of the dark — trying to get into someone's pants and failing, death, the insomniac's longing for morning, delusions of love. The brief interlude of 'Again Love Smashes Up My Mind' sounds like a chipper Costello and for a few fleeting moments you're the champion of the world, before the tortured ballads continue and smother you with their morphine-like ennui.

The fight will never be won. Absorbed in the night, 'Messages' drawls around your head, feeding your inexorable dreams with its wonderfully shabby brilliance.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

Bill Wells, Stefan Schneider, Annie Whitehead And Barbara Morgenstern

Pick Up Sticks (Leaf)

With collaborative experiments such as this, restraint is an essential: much can be wasted when too many ideas jostle for space on one record. But even compared with the introverted sounds of Wells'

debut, *Also In White*, this mini-album is restrained.

Wells' fragmented samples murmur alongside the sparse trombone riffs of Annie Whitehead (who's played with everyone from Evan Parker to Robert Wyatt), bass and synth from Stefan Schneider (Kreidler, To Rococo Rot, Mapstation) and occasional keyboards from Morgenstern. But the true appeal of *Pick Up Sticks* lies in the rich melancholy that percolates subtly through these abstract electronic textures, haunting the listener long after the record has finished.

Robin Wilks

Richard Youngs

River Through Howling Sky (Jagjaguwar)

With a single lick and wordless cry, Youngs expresses more than the entire lyrical output of most bands. His voice may break at any moment, as might his strings; potency is attained via a few simple guitar/voice phrases.

The broken connections and endless sustains were mocked by friends when I first played his debut Jagjaguwar album *May*.

They laughed nervously out of shock, turned it into a disdain I genuinely wanted to punch them for. Now I pity their ignorance.

Again, the 'songs' seem improvised, and the 'metre' is liberal, the sudden stops as important as the eruptions — Loren Mazzacane Connors if he could be bothered to attempt the most basic level of structure. 'Fountain Of Light' hangs an ambient chime backdrop against a pulsing bass and lightning interruptions, 'Blossom' stumbles darkly across bleak terrain, unresolved electronics slide in the background, leaving little to hold on to, with wails of "*Earth is moving very fast*". 'Sky Is Upon You' is all fucked echo and drone, harmonium sounds and clang, Jackie O Motherfucker if they were playing for their lunches rather than sheer indulgence.

River Through Howling Sky. It still engages with the rural landscape, yet calls into play all the disjunctions and shattering forces of modernity, the inner void of the postmodern human, lost for words within beauty, or screaming over its defilement.

Michard Reltzer



rainbow rising high

Spurred on by giant bulldozers and masturbatory lychees,

Spektrum are instigating orgasmic temples of music on the dancefloor

Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Remember that kaleidoscope toy you used to hold up to your eye?

It was a cardboard tube with multicoloured bits of sparkle and a couple of mirrors at the end. Shake it, and a new fly image would appear, mutate and then realign, evolving constantly. It's like the music that young London-based quartet Spektrum create: notes and rhythms stretching and resizing to accommodate the latest focal point.

This shit is *fluid*.

"The stage this band is at is that we fly out to a different city every weekend – Madrid, Germany, Paris, Zurich..." Spektrum sounds man Gabriel looks over to where singer Lola is lounging in a Soho pub. "She gets the best girls. Girls practically rape her on stage. What about that girl in Madrid? Or that girl that was swaying around with her like horses..."

"That was orgasmic!" exclaims the singer.

"She was like a man. Men can dance faster and they're supposed to lead, aren't they? It was nice to dance with a girl that was being a man."

"Lola made the first move by titty-flashing the audience halfway through the gig," explains drummer Isaac. "That woman, she was flinging her around like a windmill."

"Don't!" Lola exclaims.

three backroom boys, all bronzed and unshaven and receptive (like disco never happened!).

Genuflect, damn you.

Spektrum's music is worrying and slightly alien, yet simultaneously familial. Names spring from my loins (or pen, whatever is nearer): New Age Steppers' graceful 12-inch single 'My Love', Grace Jones when she wasn't being too damn Teutonic, Kelis and her warm milkshake, the mindfuck heaviness and solid groove of Pil's *Metal Box*, the potential explicit in every feedback over-laden groove of This Heat, Neneh Cherry, of course, but I already mentioned her (she sang with New Age Steppers), 23 Skidoo... whatever. You know that when you have to mention so many names to describe a band they're definitely individual.

"I won't force it out for no one," states Lola.

"Everyone says, 'Oh, you should be able to sing really big' and I'm like, 'Yeah, gimme a microphone that's got good sound, and it will come out easy.' I got a bit of a fiery temperament, but I'm all right."

"In Paris," she continues, "the audience were like [claps her hands]. All the way through they were like 'Yeah yeah yeah!' and I was like, 'You're mad! There is no 'yeah yeah yeah' involved here. You're lying!' We've got this song 'Lychee Juice' about

Isaac Tucker (drums, additional programming, vocals). He's tall, super-friendly, been in Top 10 bands in his native New Zealand but grew frustrated at selling only 1,000 records. First record purchased? Twisted Sister.

"I grew up in a radical hippy commune on the North Island. There were all these mining companies coming in, so one time my dad chained my sisters and me to the front-end loader of a gigantic bulldozer. The police were beating our parents up in front of us, and we were in the local newspaper, little naked hippie kids with snot running down our noses. I'd watch my father's band rehearse, smoking away. He taught me so much about music – Chaka Kahn, Miles Davis, Bob Marley, Grace Jones and Arthur Baker."

Teia Williams (bass, vocals). He's quiet, the boy in the hood. "I also grew up in New Zealand. My father played guitar for a jazz band. I saw Pink Floyd live when I was 13, and pushed my way upfront so I could concentrate on the bass player. A couple of years later, I joined a country band."

And, of course, there's Lola – Lola Olafisoye (vocals, attitude). Laidback today, but certainly seems like she could be trouble. Gets to a gig, asks the promoter where the hash is. Used to be a big



'I won't force it out for no one'

Japan and Duran Duran fan – semi-stalker schoolgirl type. Been round people's houses, that sort of thing.

"I'm from Islington and Hackney. When I was little, I broke a vase of my mother's and she put pepper in my eyes. My childhood was a little bit turbulent and traumatic. But it's OK. That's what made me do what I am going to do now. Why did I start singing? I'm having a flashback of seeing Debbie Harry in a bikini singing 'Denis Denis'."

"Lola has mellowed out a lot since I met her four years ago," reveals Gabriel. "She's less fiery, especially now people know about the band. Last summer, we nearly broke up. We had some mad arguments. It was just stress, because we all really believed in what we were doing. It came from the frustration of making music that people said was so good yet there was nothing happening."

"She's a powerful character," the drummer adds. "Her family is from Nigeria and she's one of these people who, if she were there, would be a witch doctor or something."

Spektrum songs are elastic – malleable, tricky and full of vocal delights that only become apparent through repetition. Lola's lyrics are indecipherable, because the pleasure she derives from cajoling the rhythm subsumes the words under a playful hiss, a feline purr.

"We improvise a fair amount," says Isaac. "Sometimes we'll leave open passages so we can control what we are doing. Which is important especially when a song is working so you can get that extra minute."

You see? It all comes back to the music.

And Spektrum's music is *fun*.

"We all get kinda excited," Isaac continues.

"The three boys in the band, you see," elucidates Lola, "are all quite good-looking. They all go off and do their stuff, while I just drink a little bit and pass out somewhere. Boys don't come up to me."

It all comes back to the music.

Dislocated funk. Laidback loops of dub-infused torpor infect playful vocals (or vice versa). Minimal four-on-the-floor rhythms and punky breakbeats recall Ladbroke Grove tearaways circa 1979. Blues self-doubt infuses songs about dry humping. Witches. Bitches. Curtained glitches. Dancefloor fillers hark back to when band names were punctuation marks, and white boys briefly invented a new non-r'n'b rhythm: psychotic, paralytic and spasmodic. How many sides does a musical prism have? Light creeps in and distorts; the angles of vision keep changing. It's 2004 and I'm racing through Soho Square in the rain, drunk on one pint of cheap lager, laughing balefully at the sheer volume of drabness around me. It's 2004 and I'm hiding in leather armchairs in hipster dance record stores, head spinning from small type and 12-inch remixes (like punk never happened!). It's 2004, and I wanna proclaim a new religion again: worship at the temple of Lola's wicked p-funk voice with her

masturbation and the process of giving birth – masturbation, fornication, gestation... Because it's quite sexual and because the gig was difficult, Gabe was like, 'Do that song'. But I didn't want to fake masturbation."

How can you fake masturbation? That's like playing chess with oneself.

"Masturbation is already like a fake," laughs Isaac. "So it would be a double fake."

Worship at the temple of the dancefloor. *Enter The... Spektrum*. That's the name of this young London quartet's debut album.

C'mon! Enter the fucking Spektrum, dudes!

There are four aspects to the prism – four components, equal yet different.

Gabriel Olegavich (synths, sounds, programming, vocals). He's classically trained, a livewire of ideas, former clinical depressive, and veteran of school bands.

"When I was at primary school," he says, "in Blackheath, southeast London, we'd walk round the playground making up songs. We made up a band called Syntax Error based on the electropop of the age – Kraftwerk and computers. We made an album and took photos of each other, did interviews, posing and stuff."

Art Marrs attacks!

Interview: **Everett True**Illustrations: **Stella Marrs**, cards designed by **Sean Tejaratchi**

Olympian performance artist Miranda July once wrote, “Everyone in the Northwest knows there wouldn’t have been Riot Grrrl without **Stella Marrs**”. Stella is an inspiration to many of us, not just in the Pacific Northwest. She’s been making a living from creating witty, informed postcards for two decades now: some tackle power dynamics between the sexes and society’s expectations of women, some deal with environmental issues head on, and some have pictures of cute cats. Most feel subversive, because the strong socio- and politico- messages are framed by familiar graphics: often drawing from America’s strong sense of self-satisfaction, created during the Fifties, centred round the domestic myth of the nuclear family.



Why did I want to interview Stella and not a more obvious media figure for the pilot issue of *Plan B*? It’s because Olympia, WA – above any place in America – is dear to me, it contains many friends and values that I cherish: an innocence, sure, but also a series of solutions at how to circumnavigate the demands mainstream society (and even harsher, *American corporations*) place upon us. It contains the Kill Rock Stars label, and YoYo studios, and Stella’s husband Al Larsen, and Dub Narcotic studios and Calvin Johnson, and oh so many things that make me happy to be alive. I’ve drunk from fountains in Olympia. I’ve had big snowball fights and made snow angels in Olympia.

And central to all this is Stella Marrs. For me, she personifies Olympia.

ET: What’s the attraction of Olympia? Do you feel it enables you to follow your own path more than living in Seattle, or LA or Dublin would? You once created a project called Girl City –

“Did Girl City really happen? Did I really stand on the sidewalk with my broke and bored girlfriends and say, ‘Hey Judy! Let’s rent this storefront and spray paint Girl City on the window in pink! It’ll be our clubhouse for making events and developing product lines. It will be our space to have fun and make something.’ This was in a still hippie culture that viewed this act as un-feminist treason. And just like making stone soup we had a car wash and took that money and gave it to the landlord as rent for the weekend.

“I had this one basic idea about the whole project – that if girls could make things and see themselves reflected in what they made, and then trade it for money, that could be a window to empowerment about alternatives for economic survival. Because if you get to live outside the normal system you just might have a chance for a different vision, which could mean ultimately an alternative voice.”

Why would those actions be viewed as un-feminist treason? I thought the whole point of hippie culture was to step outside the mainstream and create alternatives for oneself. Or had it long since degenerated?

“This is when the hippies were the Olympia mainstream, but still thought of themselves as alternative, and really hated spray paint and glitter because that implied punk, which implied vandalism to our more conservative landlord males.”

Do you feel Girl City has come to fruition where you live?

“Well, I love that Ladyfest initially happened in Olympia, and that there was a consciousness about documenting all of the meetings developing it, and posting them on the web to serve as a blueprint for other Ladyfests. The whole trajectory of envisioning, organizing, working through the bazillion problems that come up, and concluding a project can only test character and assumptions about community.”

Why have you chosen the medium of postcards to work within?

“After college, I made hundreds of different paintings, products, and events. I never put my name on anything during that period. I preferred to think of it all as some sort of warm up exercise for what I was really going to do. I settled on using my name on the back of postcards because I realised I better accept this medium by the default since I could afford to start manufacturing it, it was endlessly a challenge to come up with a new design for each image, it could be educational, and I could travel and sell it on public transportation because it was small and I didn’t have a car.”

Is it possible to make a living out of creating postcards?

“I wonder how to answer that. Is it possible to make a living selling bubblegum? I am 20 years into this. When I think back at how it took every possible late night, and bit of luck, never accepting no as an answer, and the efforts of many brilliant people contributing, I realise that all that work, that type of perseverance could have been applied to anything and probably have succeeded. Do you really want to work that hard to make a living selling bubblegum? But here is the other critical ‘lucky’ piece of being in business. I have had the amazing good fortune of working with Sean Tejaratchi who is a graphic punk genius.”

I love the bubblegum analogy. I guess I’m just surprised people make a living from anything... even more so when they’re part of a corporate system.

You’re probably one of the few people I know who understands the differentiation between Riot Grrrl and its present-day equivalent as perceived by the mainstream, and the alternative lifestyle that is actually on offer.

“Jerry, what do you think the difference between Riot Grrrl and its present-day equivalent, as perceived by the mainstream, is?”

What I’m referring to is the way the mainstream media will strip back everything



Media

74 ART: Stella Marrs
+ *Shhh...*

76 COMICS: Peanuts
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to its most obvious, identifiable components – and this doesn't just apply to Riot Grrrl, it works right across the system. I strongly suspect that within the circles I move, Riot Grrrl was seen as a moment in time, rather than part of an ongoing lifestyle and approach to everyday situations, and furthermore it is identified almost solely with a musical approach and way of working within one tiny artistic sphere.

What is your motivation?

"I went through basic training in the US military at age 17 for six weeks and then was 'honourably' discharged. I was there for the same reason that 99 per cent of the women in my platoon were – they had nowhere to go, no other economic or personal options for survival. Basic training is a brutally destructive force to human will and cultivating any sense of personal responsibility to an individual vision. Which is the whole point of basic, to erase your sense of self to make you a part of the killing machine. To make sure that all soldiers will first and foremost blindly FOLLOW THEIR CHAIN OF COMMAND. Witnessing the efficiency and scale of this organization set up a reaction in me where I realised that ANY ACT OF CONSTRUCTION was in itself of HUGE VALUE."

How flexible is your path?

"I'd like to think there was still some flexibility – which there must be since process is what excites me. Right now, I am looking at the past with this perspective of what happened in a 20-year unit of time. I realise how lucky I was with the ability to focus on certain goals in one place, and achieve them. So I am thinking about that time unit and trying to imagine what the next one could accomplish."

Name me five of your favourite people, with some reasons please.

"Obviously, Eleanor Roosevelt and Malcolm X are great inspirations. Then German artist Joseph Beuys has been a touchstone for a long time. Planting 7,000 oak trees as an art act. Being fired from the Art University he taught at and starting a free school in the parking lot across the street. Buckminster Fuller is someone we all need to remember about as we rut ever deeper into concrete. His thought processes were so envisioning of the future that in a 1965 *New Yorker* there is an interview with him where he is describing the internet and how it will transform society. But I need an alive and active heroine for NOW!

"Luckily, there is someone named Suzanne Lacy – an artist with a body of work about feminism and community and communication, and perception alteration. I read the most amazing essay she wrote about the goals of Buddhism and how those ideas are present currently in art activism. The essay is called 'Not fast enough, looking at engagement'. It's at www.artandbuddhism.org/papers/wp4_sl.html."

Please tell me about some of your recent art projects.

"I have this slide show/lecture I put together to deconstruct how we think of our omni-toxic world around us and all the poison present in trying to function normally. I show through old seductive advertisements how we were sold 'safe' products that had never been tested. The purchasing public are the guinea pigs. We are now witnessing the fallout with 'allergies', a cancer culture, serious fertility problems and unexplainable autism explosion. I'm talking about mainstream dish detergent and bathroom deodoriser here."

You choose to use cats as a symbol of opposition and resistance. What is it about the feline form that inspires you that way?

"I don't choose cats because I like them so much (although I do love my cat – she's a really, really good cat!). Cats star in the postcards because generally their sales numbers do better than other cards. Making sure I print a few hits every time lets me pay for the cards that have narrower markets."

So cats are more subversive than other cultural signifiers?

"Cats are cute, dude."

Could you talk me through a couple of your favourite pieces of art?

"Here is one: I love to think of Joseph Beuys coming to New York in 1974 and living at the Rene Blode Gallery with a coyote for a week. It was a piece called, 'I like America and America likes me.' He had his staff and was wrapped in a wool blanket coexisting with the coyote in the gallery for a week. Just imagine – the coyote is checking you out – you are breathing – the coyote is breathing – who goes to sleep first? Who wakes up? How do you understand yourself and the other?"

"Beuys viewed the work as, 'An attempt to understand the complexities of interdependence between nature and culture, and as a step toward ecological sustainability'."

"My cards and other products are available on my website www.stellamarrs.com. I would like to talk on US college campuses, 2004-5. Please contact me."



Shhh...

Victoria & Albert Museum, London, to August 30, 2004, £5 (£4, £3 concs)

Music and art: connecting the two isn't such an out there idea. Neither exist in a vacuum. Each inspire the other. Besides which, we've been soundtracking the rest of our lives for years with Walkmans, iPods, ghettobusters, our own imaginations.

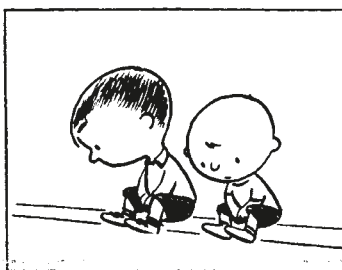
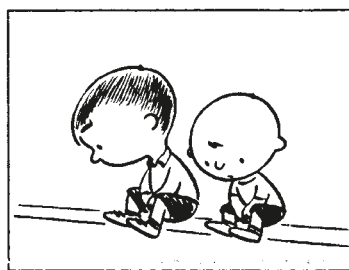
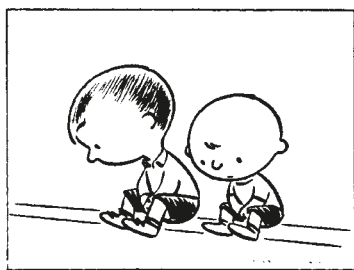
Here, those connections work together through a mix of art and music names that includes venerable leftfielders and a smattering of names further out on the cult radar: Britart's Gillian Wearing, Jane and Louise Wilson (*pictured*) and Jeremy Deller (also co-creator of the folk art archive); composer Simon Fisher Turner; ex-Talking Heads frontman/polymath guru David Byrne; Cocteau Twins' Elizabeth Fraser; Roots Manuva; psych-dance musician Cornelius; future-pop architect Faultline and soul/funk radical Leila.

Visitors tour the museum with an MP3 player, listening to sounds inspired by existing spaces. Turner uses sounds from other countries, the Wilsons use the sounds of children playing, Byrne includes a mobile phone ringing, and Cornelius uses Personal Surround Technology, allowing the sounds to 'move around your head'. It's a sensurround experience, adding a forward-looking dimension to existing artefacts, an experience that pulses with ideas. But that's part of the frustration, too: why no new names? Why not the public creating their own responses? Endless possibilities – the addition of an open competition to fill the 11th space with the aural pleasure of your choice shows that hopefully this is just the start.

Katrina Howat

Comics lil' folks

Words: Everett True

An appreciation of **Charles M Schulz**

It isn't far from the truth to say that *Peanuts* was the first signifier of popular culture that my generation encountered, growing up in the Sixties. It was also our first glimpse into the world of the self-absorbed, everyday American. Before *Peanuts*, the concept of children in comic strips having personalities was unheard of. Children were simple, attention-grabbing creatures – the pathos and one-dimensional humour of Nancy and Little Orphan Annie, the slapstick banter of the Katzenjammer Kids. When United Features first syndicated *Peanuts* (on October 2, 1950) teenagers had barely been invented, the post-war depression was just lifting. The initial strips reflected this – kids being nasty to other kids, ending with a conventional punchline. Yet there was something weird even in those early outings, initially called *L'il Folks*. (Schulz hated *Peanuts* as a title.) These characters had feelings.

Over the next decade, its creator Charles Schulz developed his characters into the names that are now known around the Western world. The neurotic Charlie Brown, the bullying Lucy and her too-smart-for-his-own-good kid brother Linus, the

Beethoven-loving Schroeder...and, of course, Charlie Brown's dog, the Walter Mitty-esque Snoopy. By the time the Sixties began, the *Peanuts* gang had its own fully-formed set of neuroses and fears. All of which were very much indicative of American kids growing up in the shadow of the bomb and the Cuban missile crisis.

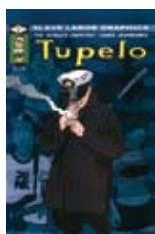
This never concerned me when I was younger, though. I simply liked the jokes, the cartoon aesthetics and straightforwardness of the humour.

I loved it when Charlie Brown would rush up to kick the football, and Lucy would pull it away at the last moment. He never learnt, but never lost hope either that one day he would get to kick that elusive spheroid into touch. I loved it when Snoopy would go on his flights of fancy over the skies of Europe during World War 1, his battle-cry "Curse You, Red Baron!" ringing in my ears. I loved the kite-eating tree, Lucy's psychologist booth, Linus' battles with his blanket-hating grandma, Charlie Brown's unrequited love for the little red-headed girl. And who could resist his baseball team, more concerned with discussing philosophy than hitting a homer.

I loved *Peanuts* for its humanity. The eternally youthful characters suffered the same problems as myself. What schoolchild – or office worker, or president – couldn't identify with Charlie Brown and his constant failures? As Lucy shouted in frustration after another victory achieved through underhand tactics: "You're no fun even to beat, Charlie Brown... Beating you is like beating nothing!"

Schulz wasn't saying it was OK to be Charlie Brown. That would have run contrary to the whole American ethos of loving a winner, and loving competition. Charlie Brown never competed, not even on his baseball mound. He was only up there because he thought that was how normal kids behaved. All Schulz was saying was that there are Charlie Browns everywhere inside us – and that sometimes underdogs can be lovable too.

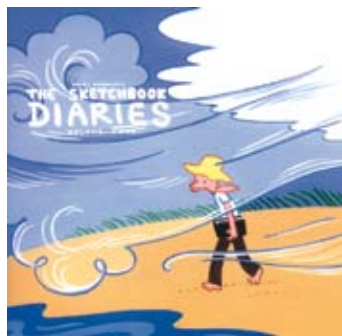
Fantagraphics are shortly to begin reissuing the entire 50-year run of *The Complete Peanuts*. Beautiful covers, rare interviews, indexes... the works. The first volume, *1950-1952*, is out now. Discover Charlie Brown's roots, long before he entered the lexicon. www.fantagraphics.com



Tupelo
(Matt DeGennaro/
Phil Elliott;
Slave Labor)

Tupelo is a graphic novel centred round the exploits of 'the world's first junkie superhero'

Captain Tupelo and the almost legendary, certainly forgotten 1977 Greenwich Village, NYC punk band Famous Monsters. Imagine the paranoia and bleak, minimalist lines of *Watchmen* with a little Iggy Pop thrown in. The action is sometimes confusing and hard to follow, but the accompanying self-mythologising press kit and free CD – a grainy, scratchy, raw-assed gem, somewhat akin to a feral Only Ones – are super-fine. www.elliott-design.com



**The Sketchbook Diaries
Volume 4**

(James Kochalka, Top Shelf)

James is a rock star. James has strange dreams. James likes cycling for a while with his partner. James doesn't like to shave. James has a strange kitty.



James tries to make sure he writes and draws a square comic strip a day. James' writing (and artistic) style are delightfully understated, incisive – with a few simple brushstrokes, Mr Kochalka says more than most manage in a couple of days. These diaries have resulted in a Harvey nomination, and rightly so. www.topshelfcomix.com

Van Helsing's Night Off
(Nicolas Mahler, Top Shelf)

Van Helsing is equal parts non-sequential silent horror movie spoof, *bandes dessinées* stripped back to its bones and the deadpan slapstick of *Mad* magazine's classic *Spy Vs Spy* saga: gentle, warm humour – childish and vaguely surreal like Richard Brautigan and filmmaker Jacques Tati's best work, never mean-spirited. www.topshelfcomix.com

**The Comics Journal Special
Edition Volume 4**
(Fantagraphics)

**The Comics Journal Library
Volume 3: R. Crumb**

(edit. Milo George, Fantagraphics)
We here at *Plan B* are so in awe of these publications: the crispness of the colours, the cleanness of the paper, the insight of the discussion, the quality of the art and lavish

attention to detail. They are without peer: and if ever we thought of delving into the world of comics' criticism on a full-time basis, we'd give up immediately, faced with these as rivals. *The Comics Journal* is the in-house publication of Seattle's Fantagraphics, and about a year back made the transition from cheap A4 trade sheet (albeit with superior writing) to...THIS! My God, it's like the *Art Forum* or *Loose Lips Sink Ships* of the comics world, only even more so. The colour repro on *The Simpsons* feature (*Special Edition*) alone has reduced our designer to tears. Enough salivating already...

Vol 4 features conversations with four generations of cartoonists: Al Hirschfeld, the venerable New York political and children's commentator Jules Feiffer, Art Spiegelman (the man behind the *Maus*) and Chris Ware (he behind this era's most affecting comic strip, *Jimmy Corrigan*) plus an entire section in the back devoted to 31 international cartoonists and 'The Shock Of Recognition'. Wonderful!

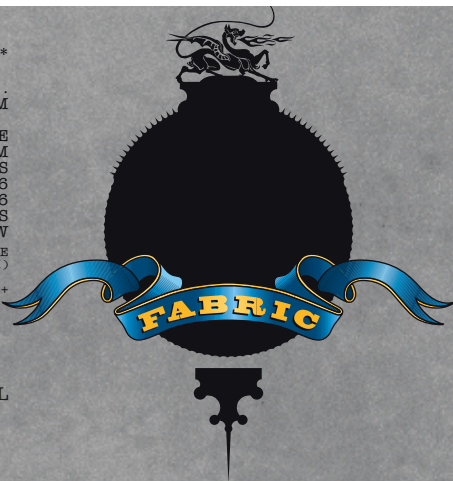
The Crumb tome, meanwhile, features a rounded picture of the retiring American's usual vaudeville genius, drawing on old interviews and work, and features more than a smattering of smut and fine art. Excellent. www.fantagraphics.com

* *

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Competition

The Spitz has offered to give one Plan B reader a full month's virtual season ticket, giving the holder a guest list spot for every gig taking place in July. For a chance to win this ticket, simply send an email to spitz@planbmag.com stating the correct answer to the following question:

Q: In which famous market is The Spitz Venue, Gallery, Bar and Bistro situated?

The Spitz Venue, with its fiercely eclectic and varied booking policy, is a true beacon of musical independence. Situated halfway between bohemian Brick Lane and pinstripe Liverpool Street, it's a bastion of creativity over commercialism - a hotbed of musical passion in its most honest form. Over the coming months, the venue will host hobo blues, shadowy electronica, avant-folk, everything else in between plus some other stuff nearby.

www.spitz.co.uk



A.S. Dragon

Gemma Ray

Babyhead



The Spitz is a Dandelion Trust Project. Charity No: 328159. Company No: 2908971. www.dandeliontrust.org

Calendar

June/July at The Spitz Venue

Jun	16	Regina Spektor + Caramel Jack + Jason McNiff
Wed	17	A.S. Dragon + I Love UFO + The Gemma Ray Ritual
Thu	18	House of Rhythm + Photomoto + Dharma Rain
Fri	19	Maroon Town Brazilian Summer Carnival + The Fabrics + Che
Sat	20	Spitz TV: They Came From the Stars: I Saw Them + They Came From The Sea
Sun	23	Accidental Records Presents Club Max Mara
Wed	24	Not the Same Old Blues Crap + Seasick Steve
Thu	27	Anti-Glastonbury: The Sons of Silence + Sculpture + schroedersound
Sun	04	R2B
Mon	05	BJ Cole + Special Guests
Tue	06	Trevor Warren + Erika & Solo
Wed	07	City of London Festival
Thu	08	City of London Festival
Fri	09	City of London Festival
Sat	10	David Thomas & two pale boys + Manuela & The Music Makers
Sun	11	Jazz4Peace + Yussuf + Avivit
Tue	13	Jony Ilier
Fri	16	Funkitus + Heala Selecta
Sat	17	Sonic Gurus + Dust 21
Sun	18	Spitz TV: The Gemma Ray Ritual + 6 Toes + Dogboy + Ray
Mon	19	Piney Gir + Anat Ben-David
Wed	21	Go Lem System + Babyhead
Thu	22	Radio Mondiale
Fri	23	Knorn Presents...
Sat	24	Penny Black Music Night
Mon	26	Sonic Boom + The Birds (Acid Mothers Temple) + Amp
Wed	28	5 'O' Clock Heroes + Part Chimp
Thu	29	Jaune Tojours + support
Fri	30	Wide Open Cage
Sat	31	Brave Captain + Weevil + Her Space Holiday

The Spitz often receives late bookings. To ensure that you receive the most up to date information, visit our website at www.spitz.co.uk

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Film away from the pulsebeat

Words: Mark Pilkington

Fifty-four Japanese schoolgirls descend into a Tokyo subway station, laughing and chatting to each other and on mobile phones. They line up along the platform edge and hold hands. The train approaches and, as one, the girls jump into its path.

So opens DV porno director Sion Sono's debut feature, *Jisatsu Sakuru* (*Suicide Circle*), among the more bizarre manifestations of the recent Japanese horror cinema eruption. Although both tread the path laid by the success of the *Ringu* (*Ring*) cycle, *Suicide Circle* and Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Kairo* (*Pulse*) are far more complex, challenging and disturbing than most of their contemporaries, not least because they reflect genuine and distressing issues in a culture experiencing another painful metamorphosis.

Suicide Circle begins as a murder mystery and by its end mutates into something as bizarre as the deaths investigated by its detective protagonists, and just as impossible to categorise. A string of teenagers and adults kill themselves suddenly. We are provided with several clues, all drawn from contemporary Japanese culture: the victims all seem to have had the same tattoo, which has been cut from their skin before their deaths and stitched into long rolls by some unseen hand; all have been visitors to a mysterious website; allusions are made to a prepubescent J-Pop girl group, Desert, Dessert or Dessret (it changes throughout the film).

Just as we seem to be getting somewhere, the film breaks down into a garish collision between Pasolini's *Salo* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. And then it's over. This sudden dog-leg into non-sequitur and abstraction is frustrating, but has been read by some viewers as reflecting the bafflement that Japan's older generation feels towards its children.

Suicide, certainly, is no mystery to a nation that saw over 30,000 people taking their own lives each year between 1998 and 2003, several of them, in a bizarre reflection of Sono's film, dying together after meeting on the Internet. As Japan's economy continues to struggle, so its citizens are increasingly alienated by their present and uncertain of their



It's the reek of unremitting despair and isolation that ultimately seeps into your bones

future. While some choose to die, others simply withdraw into a hermetic online existence. These *hikikomori* (estimated to number about one million, many in their teens) refuse to leave their homes, even their rooms, and communicate only through the net. Most enter this self-imposed isolation for a matter of weeks or months, although extreme cases have seen them vanish for over a year.

Kurosawa's *Pulse* is a chilling examination of the *hikikomori* phenomenon. A bleak, 21st Century tale of supernatural technology, it's part ghost story, part apocalyptic nightmare. *Pulse* depicts a series of disappearances, all connected to an internet site, in which the vanished leave behind only a spectral atom bomb shadow of their former selves. The mystery unfolds slowly, almost lethargically, as the film's characters discover a website at its centre

— literally a portal — that provides an otherworldly alternative to the pain of continued existence. Although its horrors are ostensibly supernatural, it's the reek of unremitting despair and isolation that ultimately seeps into your bones as its increasingly desperate protagonists wander hopelessly through empty grey-blue landscapes.

While it's unlikely that *Suicide Circle* will get any kind of release in the UK, *Pulse* has been slated for a *Ring*-style US remake, although a projected Wes Craven version has apparently stalled indefinitely. Representing twin peaks of Japan's current horror revival, both film deserve audiences in the West.

Kairo (*Pulse*), Japan, 2002. Dir: Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Jisatsu Sakuru (*Suicide Circle*, *Suicide Club*), Japan, 2001. Dir: Sion Sono



DIG!

This is a film you have to see. Not because it won a grand jury prize at the Sundance Festival. Not because it's about the rise of The Dandy Warhols (and the contrasting depicted 'fall' of their former friends, the Brian Jonestown Massacre). Not because it's got Peter Hayes (onetime BJM member), or Genesis P-Orridge talking about how those two are the only bands he's wanted to see live in recent years, or Bomp's legendary head Greg Shaw. Not because Harry Dean Stanton pops up at one point, singing at a scuzzy BJM house party while the Warhols soak in a fancy hottub with David La Chappelle across town. Not even because Ondi Timoner's largely lo-fi film, shot over several years from 1996 to 2003, captures the bitching, the infighting (verbal and physical), the drugs and the Sixties-inspired music of underground West Coast America.

You have to see this film because it's about how a talented, prolific and independent musician — BJM founder, songwriter and leader Anton Newcombe, likened here variously to Bob Dylan and Lennon And McCartney — battles against the corporate machine. The perspective is skewed in favour of portraying Anton as a self-destructive genius, a mystic visionary who sabotages record deals, recording sessions, the band, and his own life — all true, but it's the Warhols who come out of it worse, as the Courtney Taylor smugly narrates the growing fame of 'the most well-adjusted band in America'.

Anton might be messed up, but he's no fool, and while the Warhols get screwed ("We should have been smarter," says Courtney, tellingly) and become a 'cartoon', BJM manage to become a DIY success: recording and releasing records at a rate few can keep up with, and touring America,

Europe and Japan. Anton, despite all the misfortunes, band break-ups, heroin habits and arrests for drug possession and assault, keeps going on his own terms.

Back when the Warhols blew half-a-million on the video for 'Not If You Were The Last Junkie On Earth', they used the post-party wreckage of the BJM house for a photo shoot. Without telling BJM first. In turn, BJM recorded 'Not If You Were The Last Dandy On Earth'. Relations between the bands deteriorated, but Anton's shining moment came when he turned up at the Warhols' CMJ showcase in New York on rollerskates, and gave out copies of the 'Last Dandy' 12-inch to bemused Capitol executives and Warhols alike. Freak? Jerk? Courtney Taylor still thinks Anton's a genius and, despite its flaws, this is one of the most amazing rock'n'roll films ever. www.digthemovie.com
Katrina Howat

Games outside the Xbox

Words: **Kieron Gillen**

"Is there such a thing," mailed the Deputy Editor, "as *outsider video games*?" I lean back from my keyboard and just don't know where to start.

Video games are the ultimate in outsider popular cultural forms. At the most primal level, to play a game is to reject the entire universe in an act of

It's the cultural form that never, ever gets you laid. How outsider do you want?

Approach gaming fans with the question of 'outsider' games and they'll draw you a line between the hardcore devotees and the 'casual'. 'Real' gamers play 'real' games, and the herd chew contentedly on whatever cud Electronic Arts shovel into their mouths...but this dichotomy isn't anything like outsider pop. It's the direct equivalent of the muso indie fans' rejection of the mainstream in favour of their own equally predictable joys. If anyone is seriously going to argue that this week's latest shooting game is in some way a higher form of entertainment than the life-aping homunculus-forms of the multi-million selling *The Sims*, they're just going to appear grotesquely stupid.

You've got to dig a little deeper to find the outsiders in this outsider form. If you were trying to show people outsider games, you'd have to include any of the following: Japanese dating fetish games. Continuing attempts to push the 2D shooter past the hyperbolic curve into

some fourth dimension where death = infinity. The emulators acting as archivists, making sure any ancient game remains preserved and playable. Game auteurs like Jeff Minter, living in isolated Wales, trying to find the Lost Chord via the means of lysergics and old Williams Arcade Games' Zen holocausts. Hermits forming radical communities in social, pacifistic video games. Australians making protest games about police brutality and detention camps. Even online pirates extorting money – real money – from their fellows. The interactive fiction people finding ways, through text adventures, to make literature fluid and...well, an entire universe no one knows about, born of beloved fanatics too brave and stupid to stop trying to make games to fit their preconceptions. How was I meant to sum all that up?

Easy. "Yes." A couple of hours later, the reply squeezes itself into my inbox: "Want to write a monthly column for *Plan B* about them?"

I smile, stand up, turn off the Wiley LP and turn Bobby Conn up loud.

Video games are the cultural form that never gets you laid

solipsism, subsuming your identity into a digital hallucination. You look at the world, see what it's got to offer and reject it. More so at the societal level, video games are the lowest cultural form. You don't impress anyone by sidling up to someone in a club and informing them, "Q2DM1 – great fucking level!"



THERE (PC) **There Team**

If you've ever typed a 'colon, bracket' to smile then you'll know that real-time text chat is somewhat lacking compared with the intricacies of face-to-face interaction. The online multi-player game awkwardly called *There* is an evolution of emoticons, as far removed from smileys as finger-painting is from Pollock.

In *There*, you are a three-dimensional character, an avatar, with everything customised to suit your taste: facial features, skin colour and body shape. Your avatar inhabits a cartoon-shaded world of eternally sunny beaches, sky cities and moonlit deserts. The virtual Levis cost extra. Real-world cash extra.

But who the fuck would pay hard-earned cash for 'virtual jeans'? *There* brings with it all of the nuances, judgements and intricacies an inherently social exercise entails. The items that adorn your avatar are symbols, semantic units every bit as potent as the badge on your real-life trainers or the colours of your real-life football team.

Real money is exchanged for Therebucks, which are exchanged for goods and services. From the various modes of transportation to the clothes on your virtual back, they all take their toll on your virtual wallet. There exists to make the purest consumer out of you, a customer of ideas.

Always Black



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR **(Xbox. Alt format: PC)** **Ion Storm/Eidos**

Action versus inaction is an endlessly fascinating dichotomy. Shakespeare worked this theme with moderate success. What do you do, what don't you, why don't you do it, why should you? Many games aren't about that. Many games are all 'when do you?' or 'how do you?' *Deus Ex: IW* asks for a little something back, and it's that umbilical cord of interaction between you and the machine that takes *Deus Ex* and makes it into one big game of cause and effect.

Shoot to kill, sneak for the thrill. There are moral choices, there are choices about how much action you want. You like guns? Great. You like hooking up with sleazy businessmen in dystopian nightclubs? No? You like guns? Use them. Or don't.

Your actions dilute or concentrate certain aspects of the game, tailoring it to your mould. They doesn't always do it well – some choices make only tiny tears in the narrative tapestry. But perhaps the most fascinating thing is that for the multitude of choices you face, it's still a claustrophobic flipbook image of real life. Which makes the sense of freedom, in all its lucidity, so palpable and manoeuvrable – all the more fascinating. We have a long way to go.

To be or not to be? Finally, it's the question.

David Matheson



Manhunt (PC. Alt format: PS2, Xbox) **Rockstar North/Rockstar**

The Minister used to be a practising serial killer, but no longer. He's long since graduated to the real thing. No more going to boring tutorials about how to bore a hole in a particularly thick brow, or sitting through lectures about transsexual genital mutilation for him. No teacher's going to mark Drill-cock! down for his unconventional slaughtering technique now.

Occasionally, though, he likes to go back to the time when he still had to do dry runs on wet work, and hence is overjoyed to find *Grand Theft Auto's* author's latest video game desecration, *Manhunt*, finally making its way to the PC. Although it was released on the consoles months ago, The Minister had yet to play it, as he's physiologically incapable of having truck with anything related to the word 'console'. Thankfully, no hugs here – just beheadings.

Manhunt places you as a serial killer forced to hunt down assorted bastards of the modern world (Nazis/rednecks/Jet fans) and kill them, on film, for your snuff-addicted sponsor. This is offensive. We do not just sneak up on our foes! We take pride in frontal assaults, too.

Bar this stealthy slur, however, the Minister clearly has no choice but to approve of a game where lobbing a severed skull is a prime tactic.

Minister Drill-cock!



DVD this is hardcore

Words: Jon Dale

Redd Kross are reissuing their classic, trashy Eighties Super-8 films on DVD.

Director **Dave Markey** describes their making

People tell me they're into hardcore and I laugh my ass off. Sometimes they say that emo = hardcore = the grand continuum, that if you start with Black Flag and Minor Threat you end with the fucking Blood Brothers.

Let me set out the parameters of the dissertation:

a) Redd Kross are the greatest rock band to ever walk this Earth.

b) Redd Kross' *Born Innocent*, recorded when the band were circa 13 years old and you were still trying to figure out what sex was, is the greatest hardcore record ever made.

My hardcore continuum would be Minor Threat then Redd Kross then The Circle Jerks and then there's a huge, gaping hole until Harry Pussy snuffed out the torch once and for all in the late Nineties. And you want to see Redd Kross in hardcore action? There's always *The Slog Movie*, directed by Dave Markey, featuring several wild minutes of teenage Kross

action – Jeff and Steve McDonald, my rock gods. And then there's Markey's *Macaroni And Me*. There's also their ongoing work with Allison Anders, and if I gave my heart to Jeff McDonald it was when he played a sleazy DJ trying to pick up young girls. And, of course, the McDonald brothers appeared in *Spirit Of '76*. Remember?

My old housemate, James, shares these views. We used to repeatedly watch his old fuzzy copy of the second Redd Kross film *Lovedolls Superstar*. Coupled with *Beyond The Valley Of The Dolls*, it taught us everything we needed to know about high trash cinema. The *Lovedolls*, three teenage runaways named Bunny, Kitty and Patch, were the Eighties underground's version of the Carrie Nations. The two films of the Redd Kross/Dave Markey conspiracy, *Desperate Teenage Lovedolls* and *Lovedolls Superstar*,

represent the perfect culmination of the Redd Kross aesthetic – hardcore, punk, glam, and teen pop; pop star idealism; hero worship; the music industry and dream machine; and sleaze city. James and I drank it in like the eager young pups we were.

And now the *Lovedolls* films are being bumped to DVD. There's something thrilling about the reassuringly non-pro visual fidelity of the *Lovedolls* series, shot on Super-8, making their way onto the new 'supreme quality' format. Kind of like dumping a shitty handheld tape recorder bedroom jam onto DAT tape and then firing it out into space.

The films represent some of the McDonalds' earliest acting turns and are particularly fine. You get to watch Jeff McDonald (aka Carl Celery) possessed by a Gene Simmons doll, and Steve McDonald's transformation from hippie cult follower Rainbow Tremaine to leader of hardcore act

Anarchy 6 (the performance of 'Slam, Spit, Cut Your Hair, Kill Your Mom' has real holy-grail potential). All that, and guest appearances from Sky Saxon of The Seeds, and Jello Biafra as president of the United States.

At the time I was unaware of Dave Markey's genius and thought the McDonald brothers were the masterminds. Markey's history is a complex funnel of visual splendour unto itself (this is the cat that directed the phenomenal 1991: *The Year Punk Broke*) so I fired some email questions his way. Here's what he had to say.

Redd Kross seemed ahead of their time, vis-à-vis pure rock moves coming from underground aesthetics. What was it about the original timeframe of the *Lovedolls* films that demanded their existence?

"Redd Kross were responsible for Seventies retro. They were doing it



Survival Research Laboratories: Ten Years of Robotic Mayhem (via musicvideodistributors.com, \$19.95)

Whirling teeth on a metal giraffe neck chomp down on a dead cow filled with congealed yoghurt and cream cheese; a sheep carcass strapped to an upright mattress is attacked by a remote control trolley carrying a giant pair of claws and a harpoon gun, before being thrown into a screaming Broadway theatre audience; a multi-chambered sound cannon fires endless rounds into a polite Danish audience as a giant meat-mermaid is lowered into a bubbling vat of cheese...

Welcome to the world of Survival Research Laboratories, without doubt the purest and most extreme expression of Eighties 'industrial' culture, currently celebrating a quarter century of carnage. SRL build mechanical robot monsters that grind, grasp and crush anything in their way – houses, cars, sculptures, dead animals and, usually, each other – to a soundtrack of screams, sirens, laughter and, of course, roaring flame.

The DVD contains several of their early films and performances as well as a funny and insightful documentary about their 1988 European tour, in which demented genius Mark Pauline and others on the crew explain what the hell it is they're doing. Performance titles like 'A Scenic Harvest From The Kingdom Of Pain' and 'A Bitter Message Of Hopeless Grief' give you some idea of their philosophical perspective.

If you haven't seen SRL in action before, then prepare to have your eyes melted from their sockets.

It's operatic, robotic anarcho-futurism that's decadent, spectacular and really bloody dangerous.

Mark Pilkington



The two *Lovedolls* films represent the perfect culmination of the Redd Kross aesthetic – hardcore, punk, glam, and teen pop; pop star idealism; hero worship; the music industry and dream machine; and sleaze city

when *nobody* understood. As much as I cannot stand retro anything, at the time it was funny. They were doing it in the height of all-too-serious 1-2-3-4 hardcore – they also brought in elements of glam, psychedelic and Sixties punk to the LA scene.”

How did you work with the McDonald brothers? Did you have much input into script; was it more fluid; and were there set roles for collaboration?

“We were already well into the first *Lovedolls* film before Steven and Jeff came in. Jeff just had a cameo that was shot in one afternoon. Steven had a much bigger part, and he did a fair amount of improvising on top of the lines we gave him. We completely winged it on the first film, truth be told. There was a lot more preparation for *Lovedolls Superstar*, in which Jeff and Steven share the writing credit with myself and Jennifer [Schwartz], as they both had a lot

more to do with their characters. We worked together very easily, and it was always a lot of fun.”

I'd always wanted the *Lovedolls* films to be reissued on DVD. What is it about 2004 that makes their reissue pertinent; and is it a kick to transfer Super-8 cinema to the 'hi-qual' format?

“It's just that the technology is now affordable. All the original film I own is well preserved, and once you get it into the digital realm you can do anything to it. I just try and get it to look and sound good, that was always the complaint with Super-8 film, especially the sound. I have been waiting for this day for a long time. You can shoot and edit a film on your home PC, re-master the sound on Pro-Tools. Everyone should be making movies. It's great these films are being preserved and redistributed on DVD. They stand a good chance of getting to a larger audience.”

A Miserable Nation Obsessed With The Past... (www.ankst.net)

Gasp, as Ectogram indulge their fantasies of gore and woodland elves to surreal, psychotic and disturbing psychedelic music. Groan, as Wendykurk relive their adolescent dreams of being in a baby doll/nu metal band *in their very own bedroom*. Cheer, as the mighty Datblygu don a Stetson and proof that they can out-FSK FSK even. Tremble, as Zabrinksi take you the verge of beyond. Clap, as MC Mabon sings...and it's all free! Free, I tell ya.

Plastic Donkey # 1 (walshaj@tcd.ie, £5)

It's a DVD zine! Whoa. It's got an interview with a fellow, name of Keith Moss, who loves his local record store, The Strangleberries recorded in near darkness, two videos from the chirpy and lovable Dudley Corporation, and the patented World Indie School Top 5, featuring three bands transformed

into mathematical equations and put through the plastic grinder. Every street should have one.

This Is Circumstantial Evidence (www.threeoneg.com)

The film is grainy. The live footage is loud, extreme, sweaty – the sound-fuck fury of Jenny Piccolo and rather disposable Cattle Decapitation, the razor-poised edginess of The Locust, the Teutonic free-jazz surge of Swing Kids, the brutal banter of The Blood Brothers. This is *hardcore* San Diego hardcore: a public exhibition of wanking, countless drum solos, fine live where you can lose yourself within the volume, but purgatory on record. Tellingly, there's only one female present in *nine* bands: Love Life's Katrina Ford, who sings like a man anyway. Strange that hardcore should still be so confused with punk, when it contains none of its freewheeling spirit. Finest band? Orthrelm, easy. **Everett True**

50pbadges.com



50pbadges.com



Pirate Radio

Words: **Chris Ballard**
Illustrator: **Vincent Vanoli**



"I don't give head but I give head butts/Punch in the guts for calling me a slut" – Lady Fury

In 1965, Postmaster General Tony Benn said "the future will not exist" for offshore pirates. Yet, nearly 40 years later in London, their modern equivalents often outnumber their legitimate counterparts, and give major opportunities for teenage girls to speak their minds about sexual issues. In a sense, though, Benn was correct: new legal powers and the emergence of Radio 1 soon brought on a hasty shutdown of the first post-war radio stations to represent youth culture. But all that caused was the

of witty, quickfire, often ridiculously young MCs. Their lyrics range from cartoon violence and genius teen girl backchat to explanations of why Maxwell sold his story of having blazing sex with Jamelia in the back of his Merc. In a car park. And then watched *Gladiator* on his newly installed DVD player. Meanwhile, 13-year-old Ashman, whose name is all over my local bus stop in black felt tip pen, sighs: "Remember when I first stepped in the scene I was only six and was still very keen". It works because of their desire, the repartee with their listeners and each other, because of the music – but also because it's pop

The fewer copies of a track, the better

eventual burgeoning of inner city stations from the Eighties, defined increasingly by the reduced locus of low-powered FM signals.

And now, localisation is more prevalent than ever, especially in the semantic minefield of the London pirate scene. Although to the uninitiated they sound broadly similar, west London's Jon E Cash calls his music 'sublow', east London's Wiley, 'eskibeat': it's an attempt to secure your destiny in a scene defined by its exclusivity and newness. The fewer copies of a hot new track, the better. If a record played on the London pirates ever gets a commercial release, it's inevitably at least 18 months after it was first played out on dubplate, by which time everyone's forgotten it existed in the first place. No matter: it just means that you have to move quicker.

Led by Maxwell D, formerly of Wiley's legendary Pay As U Go Cartel, South London's Musketeers ply the 'muskiesound', a frantic fusion of bashment, grimy beats, and a host

as schoolyard soap opera, with more hilariously brutal honesty than you'll get on *The OC* and *Around The World In 80 Raves* combined. And who doesn't want to be party to that?

Musketeers, 99.3FM/
9nine3.com, Tuesdays 10pm-12am

FURTHER LISTENING

Slimzee – Rinse 100.3FM/
rinsefm.com. Sundays 3-5pm.
The most important pirate DJ of the past decade now plays exclusive breakbeats, grime and FWD>> dubplates. Occasional super-special guest MCs.

N.A.S.T.Y. – Déjà Vu 92.3FM.
Mondays 6-8pm. Not as hard as they'd like to think (it stands for Natural Artistic Sounds Touching You). Features the cream of the current MC crop, including future-stars Kano and Sharky Major.

Plasticman – Rinse 100.3FM/
rinsefm.com. Fridays 7-9pm.
Croydon's finest, pushing the now Rephlex-affiliated FWD>> breakbeat sound.

Blogs

Words: **kicking_k**

A whole new media layer is opening up

In a couple of years, we won't be reading magazines at all. In a couple of years, magazines will just be exercises in nostalgia, flipbook tombstones – cold downloads and last week's news, pirate remixes already a couple of generations old. While you're out of the house, your home station will be sniffing round virtual Kingston, Berlin, NY, wherever, sneaking into record biz sites and exchanging file-sharing info kisses with other remote systems, before sucking the bitstream down to your desktop. But until the Brave New Scary Dawn, we'll have to make do with other meatsacks. Be strong. We may be a few years shy of AI – but we do have music bloggers. And they're the Next Best Thing.

A whole new media layer is opening up – a network of bedroom enthusiasts who bow down to no editorial policy but the well-educated whims

of their own tastes, free of corporate husbandry. The means of production are basic: a home computer, free software, free webspace and user-friendly publishing sites. Never have we had such access to so many others' thoughts, feelings and lives – in realtime, or near as. Most music blogs are not diaries in the confessional mode, but very few escape the pull of their author's personality, and the variations in taste, content and design are endless.

www.newflux.blogspot.com is solidly informative and serves as both alarm clock and listening-post. Downloadable content ranges pretty freely from indie though electroclash, hip hop and unclassifiable cult radio. Elsewhere, Simon Reynolds' Blissblog (www.blissout.blogspot.com) proves that the blog format is compatible with, and at least the equal of, print media. It's self-indulgent, sure – with an

academic slant – but even Reynolds' more random musings are worth absorbing. www.catchdubs.com represents the buzzier, breezier instant-scrabbop, news round up format, a dot-to-dot hyperlink safari around the global pop cultural block. The best way to go beyond and explore further is via the links that litter each page. Take a mystery click.

Now that digitised music has floated free of consumer culture, bloggers are the necessary complement to what could otherwise become a data sprawl. And by placing word of mouth and peer-to-peer back at the top of the info pyramid, corporate promo departments are facing a guerrilla culture that owes them no favours. Bloggers are not being paid. Music is their obsession. And if you don't agree with what they're saying, well, sign up and start representing. Like a Dead Kennedy once said: Don't hate the media. Become the media.

If you want to witness the virtual wonder of bloggers in their social setting, hit the forums. There is no music too obscure (or too mainstream), no detail too inconsequential, for dissection. Forums like I Love Music (ilx.wh3rd.net) are where the subculture thinks aloud – ideas before they harden into opinions, opinions before they harden into dogma.

Internet

Words: Katrina Howat

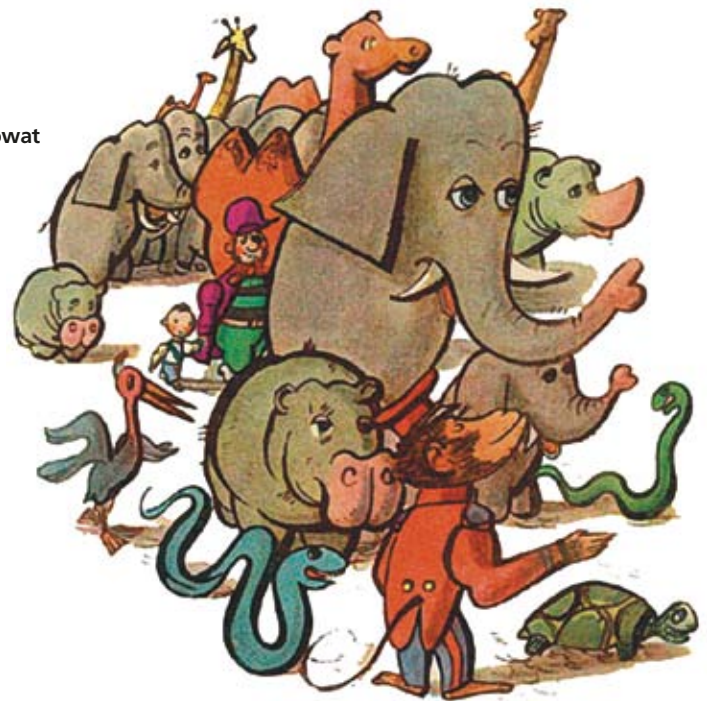
Culture Jammer's Encyclopaedia

In an world where everything is possible, but not everything to be believed, Dave Gross' non-ad funded portal continues to offer those looking online for radical mischief, subversive tips and tricks, or unabashed Mondo Bizarro inspiration

expressing alternative ideas but basically, it's activist questioning using the power of play. Be naughty and learn; learn to be naughty. www.sniggle.net

Alternative Nation

Less alternative underground-style and more alternative MTV cartoon



Be naughty and learn; learn to be naughty

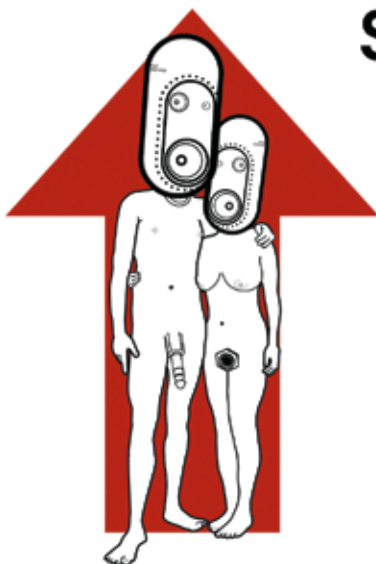
and entertainment alike, a mammoth leaping off point into the cultural fringes. Guerrilla hackers looking to arm the homeless, the true story of drug-sniffing dogs or witch hunts, Church Of The Sub-Genius religious unorthodoxy, the Barbie Liberation Organisation, the hoax of The Clam (a made-up venereal disease more notorious than the *Brass Eye* cake-drug hoax), guides to counterfeiting, billboard sabotage, links to pages about William Burroughs and Patty Hearst, Jello Biafra and the Barbie Liberation Organisation (yes – BLO for short) pranksters, scamsters, spoofers and impostors from PT Barnum to Negativland (the latter of whom, and not Adbusters, coined the phrase culture jamming)...hundreds and hundreds of pages about flouting societal norms. Gross, a former IT worker turned 'full-time troublemaker' pulls it all together under the title of sniggle; performance-related ways of

style (from BMX-ing to tattoos, indie to doom metal – get the props, fit in, don't think) the Alternative Nation has, nevertheless created its own network of souls who support their own scenes and connect with each other by putting up information about bands and tours, venues and labels, band equipment, with added forums for comics and making films, *The Simpsons* and *Buff*, spiritualism and techie queries, junk and more nonsense.

There's something addictive about this kind of format, and it's not just getting drawn into discussions about what kind of film you'd be if you were a film (www.soul-source.net does similar with the soul scene, though better). So, to paraphrase the late yippie Abbie Hoffman, steal this site, change that horrible metallic grey background to white, and go forth and multiply the possibilities. www.alternativenation.net

This Is Miroslav Sasek

Miroslav Sasek is a forgotten treasure of the illustrative world, whose career high in the Sixties saw his work published on both sides of the Atlantic, printed as postcards, made into films and even dishtowels, only to disappear into charity store cultdom. St Martin's Press in New York has been cunning enough to spot the growing market for the Czech-born artist's books and illustrations on eBay, and has just republished two of his beautifully illustrated children's guides to cities around the world, but this is the first website to be devoted to Sasek, and does so in fine style by aping the clean-cut, jazzy, Fifties look of his books. You can learn more about his life and work, read a rare interview with the man himself and keep up with news about the latest Sasek collectable discoveries, whether new or old. Or you can simply enjoy the visual delight that is the slideshow of Sasek drawings. This is a doorway into a Jacques Tati-like cartoon world of witty detail and gentle national caricatures, from Texans in big cowboy hats to Italians on scooters; the gallery show that never was, now made real online. www.miroslavsasek.com



SuperSonic

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Thursday 22nd July - Tickets £7 8.30pm - 11.30 pm

capsule & friends present: Q NOT U (Dischord). BULLET UNION. NOISE NOISE ALORE

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capsule vs friends

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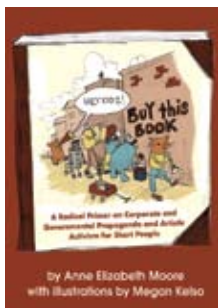
Books

Words: **Katrina Howat**

Alessandro Boffa
You're An Animal, Viskovitz
 (Canongate, £6.99)
 Lovers of Italo Calvino, Franz Kafka and Aesop's *Fables* come closer: because the first collection of tales from Boffa, a Moscow-born trained biologist turned author, is just as much an otherworldly gem.

Boffa's hero Viskovitz is a metamorphic love questor, pursuing his true love Ljuba in their various animal incarnations throughout 20 sweetly clever tales that, though set in the animal world, are always about us. As a dormouse, he dreams of her, as a parrot he struggles to communicate with her, as a worm he has to battle being, well, a worm, as well as having a small penis, as a Mojave Desert scorpion he becomes the fastest tail in the west but sabotages his own happiness each time because of – what else? – the sting in the tail. Surrealism and metaphor allow Boffa to play around with the stereotypes of the animal world and explore the human condition, but his rapid-fire chapters are also filled with humour about the inevitable pitfalls of love: unrequited passion, mismatched personalities (or, in this case, species), betrayal, jealousy and death. "I asked my mother 'what was daddy like?' Crunchy, a bit salty, high in fibre." www.canongate.net

Try also: Italo Calvino: *Cosmicomics* (Picador), Jim Dodge: *Fup* (Canongate)



Anne Elizabeth Moore
Hey Kidz! Buy This Book: A Radical Primer On Corporate And Governmental Propaganda And Artistic Activism For Short People
 (Soft Skull, \$11.95)

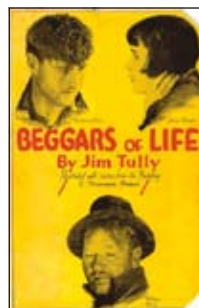
OK, alarm bells, of the patronising, earnest, total smarmy kind, are ringing. Impossible, I know, to imagine that a guide to subverting the mainstream establishment could be promoted or even sold as an educational tool in this country, but just how much more bizarre is it that that's exactly where *Hey Kidz* is published in America? And where, despite the reactionary forces of Dubya, it might actually succeed. Moore has written for *The Onion* and *Punk Planet* among many other independent publications online and on, so she has the attitude right but, more than that, she knows how to balance her approach. Informative, entertaining and pretty damn inspiring for adults too, Moore provides nuts and bolts 'how to' tips on activist practicals – posters, meetings, marches – but also outlines the realities of just how the worlds of power politics, advertising and media use youth, and how youth can use those worlds in return. And all in a mere 120 pages of punchy, no-nonsense prose. Empowering? Revolutionary? At least it's a start. www.softskull.com

Try also: *The Radical Reader* edited by Timothy McCarthy and John MacMillan (The New Press)

Jim Tully

Beggars Of Life: A Hobo Autobiography
 (AK Press, £10)

If there's poetic justice, then it's seeing this slab of outsider history finally republished. Tully's story of living as a train-riding itinerant outside the norm and frequently outside the law made him the king of hobos and a literary sensation when it first came



out in 1924. The masses who made it a bestseller might have been dallying with the pleasures of fictional danger and escapism, but Tully also opened up their eyes to the idea that the hobo life was a valid alternative to the mundanity of a conventional life. Not that Tully had it easy from the start. Born in Ohio in the 1880s (exact date aptly

unknown) into a family of 'drunken barbarians' (as he called them), he was orphaned at the age of seven and worked on a farm until he ran away, aged 14. Seven years of railroad travelling, fights, brothels, jobs varying from labourer to circus hand, and some prison time later, he turned his ongoing battle with life into a nascent career as a boxer. But after being knocked out, he drifted until he became a reporter and started writing.

Like Bukowski, he had spent his years as a bum reading voraciously in public libraries, and it was this self-gained knowledge and passion that shaped this autobiography. Tully's tough yet vividly pictorial writing was a primal force in the shaping of the later 'hardboiled noir' genre, while subsequent success as a journalist, Tinseltown columnist and screenwriter didn't stop him from bringing his old hobo friends home to annoy the wife. More than a half a century on from his death, it's about time he got his due. www.akuk.com

Try also: Nelson Algren: *The Man With The Golden Arm* (Canongate)

Zines

Words: **Lady Lucy**

What is a zine in these times?

"A zine is equivalent to a 21st Century manifesto or Dada pamphlet," states Melanie Absolon (*Nuisance*, Bristol). "A zine is a space where we can put things that have no other place to be put. A zine could be a new form of therapy where you make up the treatment as you go on. *Ad hoc*. A zine can be made by anyone in the world about anything. Still and always radical, subversive, political, personal, liberating..."

Nuisance is an interdisciplinary artzine (see accompanying Nick Stole illo) conceived in April 2000 as a response to the void between popular

culture and the sometimes inaccessible arena of highbrow intellectualism. www.nuisance.org.uk

"For a control freak, any type of opinionated writing is impossible, I would say," writes Christo Wallers from Newcastle. "Now, the zines I like are the ones almost entirely filled with pictures, or are written by people using a language foreign to their own. I wouldn't say zines have much currency as a way of changing things. But they are a GREAT way of spending time – making and reading them."

Christo made a picture zine called *The Gift*, which he describes as a 'picture mix tape'. It folds out to an A2 poster. cineside@hotmail.com

"I needed to explain myself," explains Diss Miss, also from Bristol. "*Dutty Girl* is not a small feminist organisation (although it is). To me, *Dutty Girl* is about creating a balance in hip hop, and to do that, I feel we need to have certain amount of segregation. A fanzine is a forum for a voice; often fanzines create their own movements. Every good movement starts underground."

Dutty Girl nights are the best place to dance in Bristol, and to get a 'women in hip hop' education at the same time. womeninhiphop@hotmail.com

"A zine is, and almost always has been, a personal statement," clarifies Fly (*Peops*, New York).

"It's an independent venture so the editor or creator or instigator can pretty much do what they want. I still see zines that continue to push the envelope and that gives me hope for a glorious tomorrow."

Fly makes these zones full of *Peops*, who tell her the stories of their lives, which she then makes into comics for 'zines and books. www.bway.net/~fly/

"Zines reach young, creative, alternative or radical people," thinks Amber Gayle (*Notta Lotta Love Stories*, New York), "who are open to checking out new things and respond directly to a zine writer as a peer when something resonates with them."

Amber Gayle co-runs Evil Twin Publications with her twin sister Stacey Wakefield. Her main focus is writing memoir/narrative novels. www.eviltwinpublications.com

"Zines are about making a small difference in the world," says Rachael House in London. Her zine *Bumper Summer Fun* came out last summer, and is a satire on the art world. Rachael also makes sometimes very rude, but always very funny comics, including one called *Red Hankey Pankey*. She now is running a gallery in South East London, Space Station 65. rachaelhouse@btinternet.com

"A zine is absolutely vital in these times of high gloss, mass-produced, corporate blandness," states Cathy Lomax (*Arty*, UK). "A zine gives its producers a voice and the opportunity to communicate directly with the world. Let's have more handmade, lo-fi, mistake-filled, living publications and less advert-filled, star-promoting clone magazines."

Art fanzine *Arty* comes out six times a year and is best described as a curated magazine. The books issue is out now. arty@huntergather.com



photo: alex barale



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Why I Love...

Words: Ian Svenonius
Illustration: Andrew Clare

Diplomacy



The television program *Survivor* held no allure to those already familiar with the game *Diplomacy*. All the savage backbiting antics are present in this classic boardgame, which was supposedly played by the Kennedy brothers in the White House, by the evil freak Kissinger and even by the Bishop of Woolwich.

speeds across the cobblestones of your ancient capital. Hundreds of widows scrape at the palace window; they are starving. You have them run down by your cavalry as you enjoy a recital of Chopin and dine on a small game-bird dipped in cognac. You put a towel ceremoniously over your head as you devour the creature; such is the custom.

of negotiations, in which each player sues for the cooperation of his neighbours in achieving their respective goals. Each nation is individually so weak that one must rely on alliances to achieve anything of substance, much like in a modern day rock'n'roll group.

The game moves are written in secret and revealed at once, so all moves are simultaneous. As alliances flower or flounder, the imperial powers enlarge or disappear and the political boundaries of Europe are redrawn. The game has the strategic aspects of chess, but with seven players and manic, simultaneous play. It's really best suited for the post. One requires the mask and dignity which distance allows.

After all, if you are the Arch-Duke of Austria-Hungary and are supposedly aligned with Russia for an assault on Turkey's colony in Greece, but are suddenly sold down the river by the Tsarina to facilitate some new treaty with England, well, you can imagine how your heart might burst or how bile might bubble from your lips. This could lead to a regrettable situation for which you might find yourself apologising later.

But really, why should you apologise? Do you remember all the things she said in that back room? The promises of bounty and opened borders? How the two of you would collude in an unholy union against the world and bring orthodoxy to the papal dogs? And now she aligns with that protestant moron and the heathen tartar!

I think she owes you an apology.

It doesn't require brains: just tenacity, ruthlessness, dishonesty and raw nerve

That was in the early Sixties, when being an intellectual was fashionable and Buckminster Fuller was being namedropped around the pretzel bowl. *Diplomacy* was the attendant game of the day because of its perceived cerebral quality. That was a marketing image, though, because it doesn't require brains: just tenacity, ruthlessness, dishonesty and raw nerve. The object: you command a country in Europe at the height of the imperial age. You must battle other nations, betray your loved ones, destroy your allies and rise through the blood to conquer all of continental Europe. You must turn your eyes from the lists of casualties and the mothers of war-dead who spit at you from the street as your driver

You are related by blood to all your nemeses and you must still butcher them with your sword. They plead for mercy, but you know how vile these creatures are. You've summered with them every year at the summer castle by the lake. Played croquet with them and endured their stupidity. "Have their lands burned and their palace sacked," you say offhandedly.

Visually, *Diplomacy* is reminiscent of *Risk*, but with no dice and just a map of Europe as it was in the year 1901. Seven players are needed for optimum play, as each represents one of the great Imperial powers at the *fin de siècle* (Russia, Turkey, Austria-Hungary, France, England, Italy and Germany). Each turn begins with a session



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S/T

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KULTUR SHOCK

KULTURA DIKTATURA

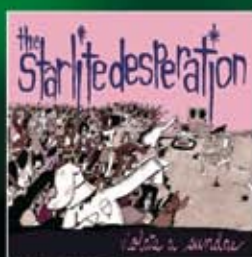
Recorded by Jack Endino (Soundgarden, Mudhoney, Nirvana). Kultura Diktatura is ethnic music played with pure electrified power. (KOOL ARROW)



THE USA IS A MONSTER

TASHEYANA COMPOST

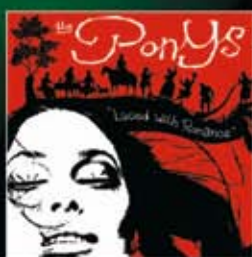
A brilliantly fried two-piece guitar and drums band from Brooklyn, think Meat Puppets meets Black Sabbath in the same mental fart as other LOAD two piece terrorists. (LOAD RECORDS)



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