

park attack black lips alex smoke last.fm matmos the drips jana hunter



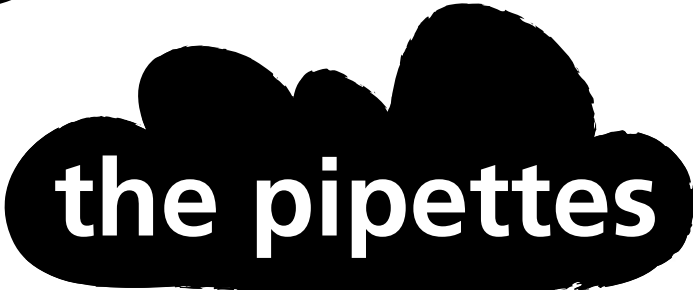
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final fantasy

violins, videogames
and a virtuoso nerdfox

mike patton

'It's not a dark,
disturbing,
perverted
record'



the pipettes



the coup

dubstep

issue 12

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june/july 2006

the long blonde

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"intergalactic sharp guitars and bass heavy grooves" NME
 5th JUNE



Granddaddy - Just Like The Family Cat
The fourth, final and most fabulous album from one of the Americas truly visionary bands.
 OUT NOW





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'There's polka-dots, there's dancing: it's very simple'

– The Pipettes, pg 52

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Alcohol inspired madness backed by Sagers avant blues riffs & improv organ. Scott provides the missing link between Robbie Burns & Charles Bukowski -

4.5/5" The Independent
INVADA - CD-DVD

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Debut full-length features dueling M/F vocals and a cohesive narrative of desire & sexuality over the swaggering guitar pop hooks that make Bang! Bang! so addictive.

MORPHIUS - CD



SEEKONK
Pinkwood

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TONGUE MASTER - CD

MAMMATUS
Mammatus

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INVADA - CD/LP



THE DEATH SET
To

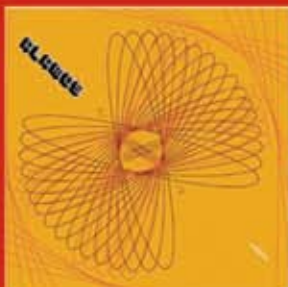
Fuzzed out gutter-pop for the experimental jet set. Sydney duo blends electro-candy backing tracks with driving guitar & distorted vocal ranting, like a spazz-revolution.

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editorial

I started off this issue writing an obituary for Nikki Sudden – dapper former singer of Swell Maps – who died of a drug overdose in New York City on 26 March. He was 49.

I'm ending this issue with an obituary, for Grant McLennan – singer/guitarist with The Go-Betweens – who died in his sleep in Brisbane on 6 May. He was 48.

Both deaths make me feel sad. Both were before their time. Both men have been part of my adult life for over two decades, instrumental in my growth as a person, a critic and a music fan. The following is taken from *Careless Talk Costs Lives 4*, the only time I was privileged enough to meet The Go-Betweens.

Here's what annoys this critic.

On the one side, there's The Go-Betweens. The Brisbane band were together for a decade, during which period they released six mature, poignant, melancholy pop albums all centred round the slightly off-key vocal and guitar interplay of Grant McLennan and Robert Forster. Albums that delighted in their intricacy, in their subtle insights into human relationships and suburban nostalgia. Albums that became more polished with each release, as new members got added, but never lost sight of the basic humanity at the core. Albums that spawned a brace of classic singles: from the sun-drenched 'Cattle And Cane', to the teeming rain and pathos of 'Streets Of Your Town'.

So, on one side – call it the angels' side, if you like – there's Forster and McLennan. And on the other? INXS, Chilli Peppers, Coldplay, U2... pretty much every fucking guitar-based rock band that's ever existed.

Is it true that you used to play as The Australian Go-Betweens?

Grant: "No. But we wanted to."

I'll just say you did then. These tribute bands pack out places now...

Grant: "They do. If we were The Australian Go-Betweens, we probably wouldn't show up. We'd have to get some really shit-hot players stuff like that, start dressing like it was the Eighties again."

Once there was a band called The Go-Betweens. They created deceptively simple, understated music – nagging riffs that neatly underpinned vocals about wide open spaces, surfing and claustrophobic relationships. Forster and McLennan never wasted 20 notes on a tear-jerking harmony or laconic description when five could serve just as well. Like The Velvet Underground, they understood the power of silence. Somehow, popularity eluded them.

Towards the end of the Nineties, someone mooted the idea that perhaps the old magic was still there. The pair wrote 10 new songs, a recording studio and new band was found and... beauty isn't always transient.

Why do you get up on stage? Why do you sing? Why play guitar?

Grant: "Because I like doing it. Also, we're a great band and there aren't enough great bands around. Also, we've got a point of view and a look that is like no other band. Also, so many people in music are really bad and mean public figures, and we're good advertisements for rock'n'roll – as good as The Stooges or The Byrds. Also, it's incredibly fun playing with friends. I love the noise screaming out of the speakers, that visceral thing. And I don't have a choice, finally."

Why add 30 harmonies when one brief flurry will do?

Everett True

I had this theory about animals and pop music that went something like, certain animals are fashionable among certain musical genres at certain times. I don't mean in the really obvious way, like power metal = dragons, etc. I mean in the more nebulous world of the music we cover in *Plan B*. It was based on the vague notions (no empirical research as yet) that monkeys were cool in the late Nineties, but they hardly ever show up these days. From about 2002 onwards it was all about birds, and possibly foxes, and in the last year or two it has been totally wolves, foxes and bears. I thought cats were making a comeback last summer but then they didn't, unless you count big cats, like tigers and leopards and lions. Lions are pretty hip right now. Not as hip as wolves, although all these wolves are getting a bit much now, don't you think?

Anyway, like I said, no empirical research as yet, so you can discount the above as the ravings of an insomniac if you like. But I do think that certain imagery – whether it's an animal, or a word that lots of people like, or in this case a location – seems to recur at certain times, and if you were to draw a graph of how many mentions of the desert there are in this issue as opposed to, say, mentions of the sea, you'd probably notice that the desert came out tops. It's almost up there with woods as a handy and evocative lonesome psychedelic metaphor, and I think it might even be overtaking forests in the spooky sense-of-place stakes. How exciting!

Anyway, there are loads more deserts than usual in this issue, including two actual bands that have been in the actual desert: Hawney Troof's trip to Egypt is recounted in the Tour Diary, while Metallic Falcons go one better and actually made some of their record out in New Mexico desert, the show offs. The result of this is that I'm experiencing massive desert envy, and am now desperate to visit one myself. With my wolf. I am such a fashion victim sometimes it's hard to live with myself.

Frances May Morgan

plan b magazine

Editor-In-Chief: Everett True everett@planbmag.com
Art Director: Andrew Clare andrew@planbmag.com
Photography Editor: Sarah Bowles sarah@planbmag.com

Editor: Frances May Morgan frances@planbmag.com
Live: Graciette graciette@planbmag.com
The Void: Stewart Gardiner stewart@planbmag.com
Emily Graham emily@planbmag.com
Daniel Trilling daniel@planbmag.com
Albums: Nick Bradshaw nick@planbmag.com
Film & DVD: SF Said sf@planbmag.com
Mark Pilkington mark@strangeattractor.co.uk

Comics: Alistair Fitchett alistair@planbmag.com
Art: Pii and Galia kollektiv.pilandgalia@planbmag.com
Games: Kieron Gillen kieron@planbmag.com
Books: Miss AMP ampster@gmail.com

Publisher: Chris Houghton chris@planbmag.com +44 203 008 7162

Assistant Publisher: Richard Stacey richard@planbmag.com

Advertising: Nick Taylor nick.taylor@planbmag.com 07941 715 815

Classifieds: Amy Guthrie ads@planbmag.com

Plan B Events: Ahsen Nadeem ahsen@planbmag.com

Thanks: Oli Harbottle, Dominic Thackray, Robin Sumpton, Georgia Taglietti, Lisa & Jenny @ Capsule, Mark Slater, Isabelle Juanco

Web Editor: Jonathan Sebire jonathan@planbmag.com

Sub-editors: Graciette, Alex Macpherson, Daniel Trilling, Robin Wilks

Contributors: Adam Anonymous, Hayley Avron, Ben Blackwell, Dan Bolger, Melissa Bradshaw, Beth Capper, Stevie Chick, Chunx, Merek Cooper, The Corpo, Ralph Cowling, Jon Dale, John Darnielle, Tom de Ville, Dickon Edwards, Ki Ellwood, Jonathan Falcone, Fiona Fletcher, Richard Fontenoy, Ana Garcia, Kieron Gillen, Hannah Gregory, Hawney Troof, Joris Heemskerk, Ben Hoyle, Felicity Hughes, Miranda Iossifidis, kicking_k, Mathew Kumar, Neil Kulkarni, Jack Lewis, Leon McDermott, Alex Macpherson, David McNamee, Sophie Mayer, Nicola Meighan, Sean Michaels, Natalie Moore, Shane Moritz, Doug Mosurock, Ben Myers, LJ Oddman, Louis Pattison, Aaron Shaul, Joe Shooman, Greg Smyth, Daniel Spicer, Ringo P Stacey, Joe Stannard, Lianne Steinberg, Lauren Strain, Preti Taneja, George Taylor, Jonathan Trayner, Matilda Tristram, Robin Wilks

Photographers:

Joe Blanchard joe_blanchard_uk@yahoo.co.uk
CJ Clarke cjclarke@mac.com
Becky Cross beckscross@hotmail.com
Joe Dilworth www.joedilworth.com
Steve Double www.double-whammy.com
Patrick Doyle www.ilovepatrickdoyle.co.uk
Simon Fernandez simonfernandez@eml.cc
Grant Peden grant004@yahoo.com
Steve Landles www.stevenlandlesphotography.com
Bryony McIntyre bryonymcintyre@hotmail.com
Greg Neate www.brightonsmudge.co.uk
Mark Newton maaknewtonphotography@yahoo.co.uk
Rachel Lipsitz pantsofitttlepant.com
Patrick Pantano patrickpantano@netscape.net
Alice Rosenbaum [alicerosenbaum.com](http://www.alicerosenbaum.com)
Cat Stevens [catstevensphotography.co.uk](http://www.catstevensphotography.co.uk)
Brian Sweeney sweeneypix@bulletproofid.com

Illustrators:

Emily Alston www.emilyforgot.co.uk
David Bailey www.itsmountpleasant.com
Lucy Bailey www.lucybailey.com
Hannah Barton miss.hannahbee@gmail.com
Jussi Brightmoore jussi@bluedotdotdot.com
Phil Elliott www.elliott-design.com
Tom Eastland tom_eastland@hotmail.com
Adrian Fleet adrian_fleet@hotmail.com
French funeralfrench@yahoo.com
Tom Genower wispbybernards@hotmail.com
Hennie Haworth hennie.haworth@tinyworld.co.uk
Colin Henderson mr_c1@hotmail.com
Katy Horan www.katyart.com
Laura Hughes hug.laura@gmail.com
Tez Humphries www.glufo.io
Søren Mosdal s.mosdal@mail.tele.dk
Ben Newman www.bennewman.co.uk
Marcus Oakley banjo@dircon.co.uk
Matt Pattinson www.culprit-art.com
Iain Paxon iainpaxon@hotmail.com
Simon Peplow sidelicatayes@hotmail.com
Robert Ramsden www.robertramsden.co.uk
Ben Rivers benamathèque@yahoo.com
Till Thomas Till@tdthomas.de
Emily Twomey smemnim@f5mail.net
Vincent Vanoli vincent.vanoli@free.fr
Anke Weckmann www.linotte.net
Nick White nickbixby@msn.com
Lindsay Wright lcrubywright@hotmail.com

Cover photography: Sarah Bowles

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Distribution:

Wamers Group Distribution (newsagents, retail chains, international) 01778 391 194
andrews@wamersgroup.co.uk

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6 tracks, 53 minutes of sublime, spooked cosmoics and beatific psych workouts from the undisputed chieftains of the free folk movement. A decidedly more euphoric listen than 2005's 'Joy Shapes'. Full Page Wire Review: "A deeply reflective journey across the undersides of clouds. Her voice projects a sense of longing that stretches infinite arms in the darkness of night." CD Out Now



DANIEL JOHNSTON - 'LOST AND FOUND'
(SKETCHBOOK)

The title 'Lost and Found' is very apt for Daniel's new album, since 2006 looks set to be the year that Daniel is recognised as more than just a cult figure and reaches a wider audience with the release of a major film 'The Devil and Daniel Johnston'. This is Daniel at his very best, heartrendingly honest tales of unrequited love, cosmic mishaps and existential torment. Digipak CD Out Now.



AFX - 'CHOSEN LORDS'
(REPHLEX)

4/5 in UNCUT: "Analord is Aphex Twin doing what he does best: refreshing electronic music in such an exquisite, effortlessly inventive fashion that you pity his peers. Once again, James dissolves the boundaries between disco, electro, techno and pop, and stimulates the parts other musicians don't even know exist. Pure synthesized heaven". Digipak CD, Out Now.



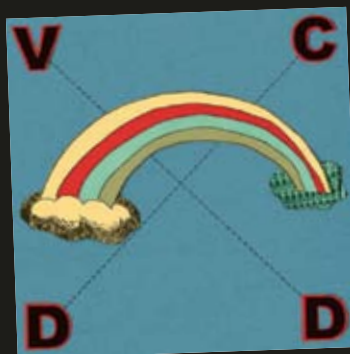
KAREN DALTON - 'IT'S SO HARD TO TELL WHO'S GOING TO LOVE YOU THE BEST'
(MEGAPHONE)

Major re-release of this absolutely essential all time classic folk/blues album with new packaging, new booklet and for the first time a stunning DVD with archive footage. "My favourite singer in the place was Karen Dalton. Karen had a voice like Billie Holiday's and played the guitar like Jimmy Reed and went all the way with it." - Bob Dylan in 'Chronicles'. CD+DVD Out June 12th.



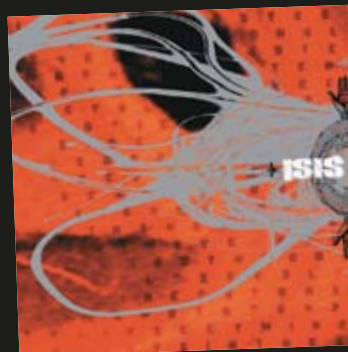
BARDO POND - 'TICKET CRYSTALS'
(ATP RECORDINGS)

Philadelphia's Bardo Pond return with Ticket Crystals - their sixth studio album and second for ATP Recordings. Ticket Crystals includes the spellbinding ten minute-plus 'Moonshine' and the band's unique reworking of The Beatles' 'White Album' classic 'Cry Baby Cry'. CD Out June 12th.



HAWTNEY TROOF - 'DOLLAR/DEED'
(SOUTHERN RECORDS)

Vice Cooler from Oakland (California) is the sonic insurgent behind Hawtnay Troof. Dollar And Deed is his second main album. Features guest appearances from Barr, Mika Miko, Jenny Hoyston from Erase Errata/ Paradise Island, Mates Of State, Stereo Total, and was produced by John Dietrich from Deerhoof. 2LP/2CD Out Now.



ISIS 'SGML>05'
(NEUROT RECORDINGS)

Long out of print lost classic from Isis, whose last two albums of glacial rock atmospherics ('Oceanic' and 'Panopticon') were met with unprecedented critical praise and acclaim. Along with new artwork and a Justin Broadrick remix, also featured on this mini-cd are four breathtaking suites in all for an unparalleled aural experience. CD Out Now.



SCATTER - 'THE MOUNTAIN ANNOUNCES'
(BLANK TAPES)

Second album from Glasgow's finest free folk/jazz ensemble. 4/5 in Uncut: "The Sound Of Young Scotland has come of age." 4/5 in The Times: "Clear a path through the chaotic... and moments of genius spring up." 8/10 in NME: "The Mountain Announces might be ignored now, but it'll be dusted down four decades later and hailed as a lost classic." CD Out Now.



**CURRENT 93
'BLACK SHIPS ATE THE SKY'
(DURTRO JNANA)**

Current 93's most powerful and important album to date. On 'Black Ships Ate The Sky' David Tibet, Michael Cashmore, Ben Chasney, Steven Stapleton, and co are joined by some very special guests including Antony, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Marc Almond and Shirley Collins. 4/5 Review in Uncut: "Apocalyptic Avant-Folk. Scintillating and harrowing listening." CD Out Now.



**VARIOUS - 'FUZZY-FELT FOLK'
(TRUNK)**

Superb collection of lost folksy oddities for adults and possibly their children if they have any... from the label that brought you the original Wicker Man soundtrack. This peculiar genre of sound came in to being one afternoon a few years ago when Jonny Trunk was listening to kooky, childish records with fellow collector Martin Green. Very Ltd LP/CD Out July 3rd.



**GHOSTLY - 'GROW UP OR SLEEP IN'
(BROKEN HORSE)**

Debut album by Lawrence, Kansas' Ghostly which contains a bonus unlisted track featuring Wayne Coyne of the Flaming Lips on vocals. 4/5 Review in Mojo: "Invigorating debut by Kansas-based psych-popsters with Lips links." and 4/5 review in Uncut: "Resembles a mix of the Shins and Pavement. Haunting, inescapably." CD Out Now.



**GROWING - 'COLOR WHEEL'
(ROCK ACTION)**

Color Wheel amazes with a sonic dexterity unmatched in drone-metal or any other music for that matter. On their 4th proper full-length, Growing have ventured into uncharted territory, where sheets of noise meld with metallic noodling and blissfully numbing drones. CD Out June 12th.



**BORIS - 'PINK'
(SOUTHERN LORD)**

Truly immense new album from Japan's most powerful power trio Boris. 4/5 REVIEW IN UNCUT: "Parting is a tremulous seven minutes of dials-in-the-red shogazing to put Mogwai to shame, but elsewhere they tackle bluesy psychedelia and Motorhead style hard rock with ease." PLAN B: "Staggering - utterly vast and epic, yet garage, sleazy and raucous." Ltd 2LP/CD Out Now.



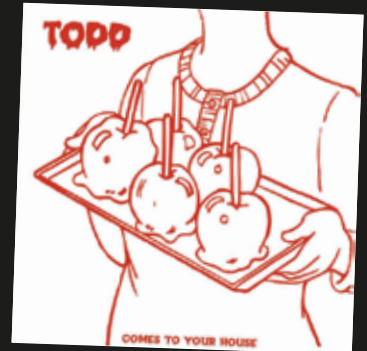
**FINAL FANTASY - 'HE POOS CLOUDS'
(TOMLAB)**

New album from Arcade Fire's string arranger Owen Pallett aka Final Fantasy. On his second album, "He Poos Clouds," Owen Pallett clearly proves his skills as an arranger, working with a large chamber music ensemble, featuring a string quartet, piano, harpsi-chord and percussion (amongst others). LP/CD Out June 12th.



**LOSCIL - 'PLUME'
(KRANKY RECORDS)**

'Plume' is the fourth album from electronic composer and visual artist Scott Morgan aka Loscil from Vancouver. Improvised organic instrumentation, including guitar and vibraphone instrumentation, including guitar and vibraphone instrumentation, with computer generated electronic sequences, analogue with digital, to create an extremely serene and spiritual sonic marriage. CD Out June 5th



**TODD - 'COMES TO YOUR HOUSE'
(SOUTHERN RECORDS)**

Kerrang 4k review: "Even gnarled contemporaries like Part Chimp and Hey Colossus sound safe compared to this bunch. The trick is that Todd aren't just crushingly heavy, they're also all-over-the-place weird, making this A wonderfully disorientating experience, reminiscent of Butthole Surfers genuinely unnerving menace." Ltd LP/CD Out Now.

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live



killer parties almost killed me

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Liars photography: **Greg Neate**

All Tomorrow's Parties

Camber Sands Holiday Camp

Distressed, glorious din is everything that Mudhoney Day at the 2006 All Tomorrow's Parties is about: feedback and drone abused and manipulated by noiseniks and garage trash who ride that phosphorescent, squalling din like a buckaroo hoss. You can hear it lurking in the retro-arcane wonderment of **Holly Golightly**, plucking a massive guitar like the garage-rock Rosetta Tharpe, and the dark rockabilly Americana of **Mark Pickerel**. It fizzes and lashes throughout the dizzying gothic whirlwind of **Scientists**, Kim Salmon's Perth proto-punks stalking a bleak, soulful corner. It throbs and spills out messily during fellow Australians **The Drones'** acrid set: loose and noticeably aggrieved, they splay guitars into ringing gobs of blues, the perfect backdrop for singer Gareth Liddiard's sulphur-gargling caterwaul.

Wiring their stoner-vintage colossus riffs into Noel Harmonson's rack of antique sonic torture devices, **Comets On Fire** stir up hurricanes of lysergic noise, until the riffs

Liars close a fearsome, insaniac set of Buttholian art-terrorism with a take on Nirvana's 'Territorial Pissings'

burst under their own weight, oozing oily, metallic drone ('Black Poodle'). Impressive stuff, as are the Zappa-esque organ arpeggios of 'Pussy Foot The Duke'. Downstairs, Tim Kerr's **Total Sound Group Direct Action Committee** blurt insolent brass, pummel proud skins and hammer out a new national anthem from feedback and screaming Hammond, as Mike Carroll – a Santa-bearded behemoth of blues – breathes fire on the faithful. A glorious triumph of free expression, of moments stolen to celebrate every breath, garage-rock hymns to godhead Coltrane.

Upstairs, the stately stadium-stoner of **Black Mountain** satisfies, but sounds strangely sterile (if no less satisfying) next to headliners **Mudhoney**. For too long branded 'failures' because their pungent brand of grunge never went platinum, the 21st Century Garage Revival has, with perfect taste, latterly recognised Mudhoney's feral garage brilliance. Clearly relishing playing these songs, new and old (and both kinds equally fine), the 'Honey throw ironic rock shapes that actually enhance the drone-warp skronk-rock of 'In 'N Out Of Grace', churn rainbow noise like a Converse-sporting Hawkwind for 'Sonic Transfusion', and bask in the Nugget perfection of 'Touch Me I'm Sick', a snort-rut that will still thrill when we're all forgotten.

Where Mudhoney's day mapped a borderless sonic cartography, **Yeah Yeah Yeahs'** line-up is more location-specific. Mostly celebrating the teeming invention of the Brooklyn loft scene that birthed them (plus a few out-of-town kindreds), the bill essays the squalling din YYYs rose from, at the same time positing them as this scene's smart-minded pop mavens, a 21st Century Blondie.

Ex-Models are masters of repetition – a common art this afternoon. They take densely laced sewing-machine torrents of riff and layer them, stop'n'start them, switch 'em up and juggle them till you're as dizzy as a Two Card Monte chump. Try and dance to them and you'll snap your spine.

New Yorkers **Magik Markers'** set is a long and winding game of lull and roar, bruised improv guitar snarling alongside raw Lydia Lunch reportage. Uncomfortable chills, but compulsive. **Blood Brothers** increase pulse rates, careering about the stage like graceful missiles. New material (for an album recorded with Guy Picciotto) suggests the Brothers are in fearless mode, Johnny's twisted croon and their lethal pop smarts played to the fore. Later, they resurface with **Liars**, to close a fearsome, insaniac set of Buttholian art-terrorism with a take on 'Territorial Pissings'. Well, it is a party.

You can see how **Celebration** shaped early Yeah Yeah Yeahs – how singer Katrina Ford's dark grandeur and sense of threat were an inspiration for O. Their burnished

drama and stark romance glower finely tonight, aided by members of **TV On The Radio**. Their own set is startling, their hyper-sensitive dream-pop reaching for ever greater heights – 'Staring At The Sun' builds to an unbearable ecstasy tonight, while a closing 'Ambulance' – Tunde and Kyp's pining vocals lacing between Dave Sitek's mean oral beatbox – is breathtaking.

Fat Bobby leers from behind his keyboard, dropping super-cool, cutting asides that fly over some of the audience's head, and hit others between the eyes – **Oneida** are coming out fighting tonight, fucking with our heads for their amusement and our enlightenment. This means hyper-repetitive masterpieces like '\$50 Tea', 'Each One Teach One' and 'Sheets Of Easter', stretched out into hypnotic Krautpunkpsych epics. This means manna. They wipe your brain, to etch it with new wisdom.

Yeah Yeah Yeahs seem apart from the militant art warfare lower on the bill tonight, and it suits them. Their love for the underground can't be doubted; neither can their ambition for the mainstream, albeit (brilliantly) only on their terms.

They never sounded this large, this confident, the pop songs played the way they should be, as hyper-real high drama *moments*, like the kids holding their phones in the air to torch song 'Maps', or the gorgeous, soaring 'Turn Into', of which Roy Orbison would have approved. The snarling art punk spats are intact too, but while today celebrated Brooklyn's dissonance, YYYs are something else.

Again, it suits them: the mainstream should be glad for such able, artistic and beguiling pop.

divine magic

Words: **Miss AMP**
Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

Owen Pallett calls himself **Final Fantasy**. He's a virtuosic violinist nerdfox who fancies Link from *Zelda* and writes delightful string quartets about sex and death – inspired by *Dungeons And Dragons*. Miss AMP was only too happy to take on Toronto's smartest game boy

An envelope is torn open. A CD snaps on bubble-wrap. The press release crackles as it unfolds.

"Ampy, look!"

What?

"It's a record by the boy who did the strings for Arcade Fire!"

We put it on as she reads me the important bits from the press release. "24...Canada...Ooh, computer games, Ampy, you'd like this. Toured with Hidden Cameras –"

"Is he gay?"

"Dunno. Probably. Yeah. Gotta be. Listen to this music. It's the gayest music ever made. In every sense of the word".

Violin loops are twirling out of the stereo, curling round our heads like something from some Classic FM advert. I'm expecting bluebirds with ribbons in

please please please

You're indie shagging music, you know that? I can barely recall an indie fuck I had last summer where your record didn't feature in the background.

"Some girl emailed me and told me she lost her virginity while listening to Final Fantasy. I was like...YES!"

You know what you are, Owen? (I glance at Owen's thigh as he sits cross-legged next to me on Tomlab's sofa. I could circle my thumb and forefinger around its tiny bonelike stretch.) You're our generation's Barry White.

Owen laughs. "I think that's wonderful. My music is all about sex."

No. Stop scowling. Wait. I'm just scratching the surface, exploring the superficial pleasures

OK. Owen Pallett. Nerdfox. Geekboy. Violin virtuoso. Started music lessons at a young age, played in "crappy rock bands" at school, went to university to study music composition, where he began taking the violin more seriously. Post-college, he found himself with no work as a composer, but in high demand as an arranger. He worked with local Toronto bands such as Picastro, Hidden Cameras, and Arcade Fire. He had no real prospects as a solo artist till touring with Arcade Fire, who asked him to open for them, at which point he realised that if he was going to make any money from this music lark, he'd better have an album to sell. Young Marble Giants and Guided By Voices flung albums together in a week – why couldn't he? So he did, and *Has A Good Home* was ready to go a week later. Final Fantasy was born. His records now feature strings, timpani, drums, horns, organs and choir, but live he prefers to play alone, using a looping pedal to sample his violin. He plays over the loops as they build up, accompanying them with fey melodies and yelps and shouts – it's an awkward, intimate, beautiful experience to see him play.

Owen takes classical music and brings it into the hipster domain. He takes an album of string quartets and puts the word 'poo' in the title to make people laugh. He explores grandiose themes of self-delusion, isolation, fear of death – using concepts derived from a game whose title has become a codeword for total geek inadequacy. He drops a graphic line like, "*Don't let your cock do all the work*" into a song that, musically at least, you'd be more than happy to play to your religious mother-in-law. And of course, the 'high culture' of classical music and the 'low culture' of computer games are inextricably intertwined throughout the whole Final Fantasy project. Luckily for me, low culture in all its forms are my speciality.

do you love?

Owen Pallett has the smallest, tiniest little features, delicate like a bone china horse. He is very long and very thin and displays an impressive array of vintage T-shirts. His answers come pouring out in a torrent of opinion, aphorism and references, backed up with examples and recommendations: obscure games publishers, fascist Japanese authors, obscure queercore and Riot Grrrl bands – such lucidity!

I wanted to play video games with Owen, and then trawl the gay bars looking at boys together, but he ate too much candy-floss at the fairground, and is in a monogamous relationship, so we just...chatted.

'Constant goals, and total beauty. That's all anyone really wants'

their beaks to start flying in through the windows. The vocals are half-breathed, half-sung: harmonies glide over delicately plucked notes, over stuttering, quivering string sounds and the occasional restrained drumbeat.

"What does he look like?" I ask, cutting to the chase. "I bet he's hot." (Oh please, don't tell me you don't think like this. Why do you all like Cat Power so much? Give me a break.)

She fumbles through the press pack.

"Nah, he's not all that."

I grab it off her, check out the boy in the photo. You can't really see his face, just a smooth, blonde wing of hair all flicked like Princess Diana's; a mouth crunched into a concentrating shape, half-hidden by the maple slash of the violin; and a waistcoat made out of some hessian, tweedy fabric, like something an imaginary blacksmith might wear, or a character out of a Thomas Hardy novel.

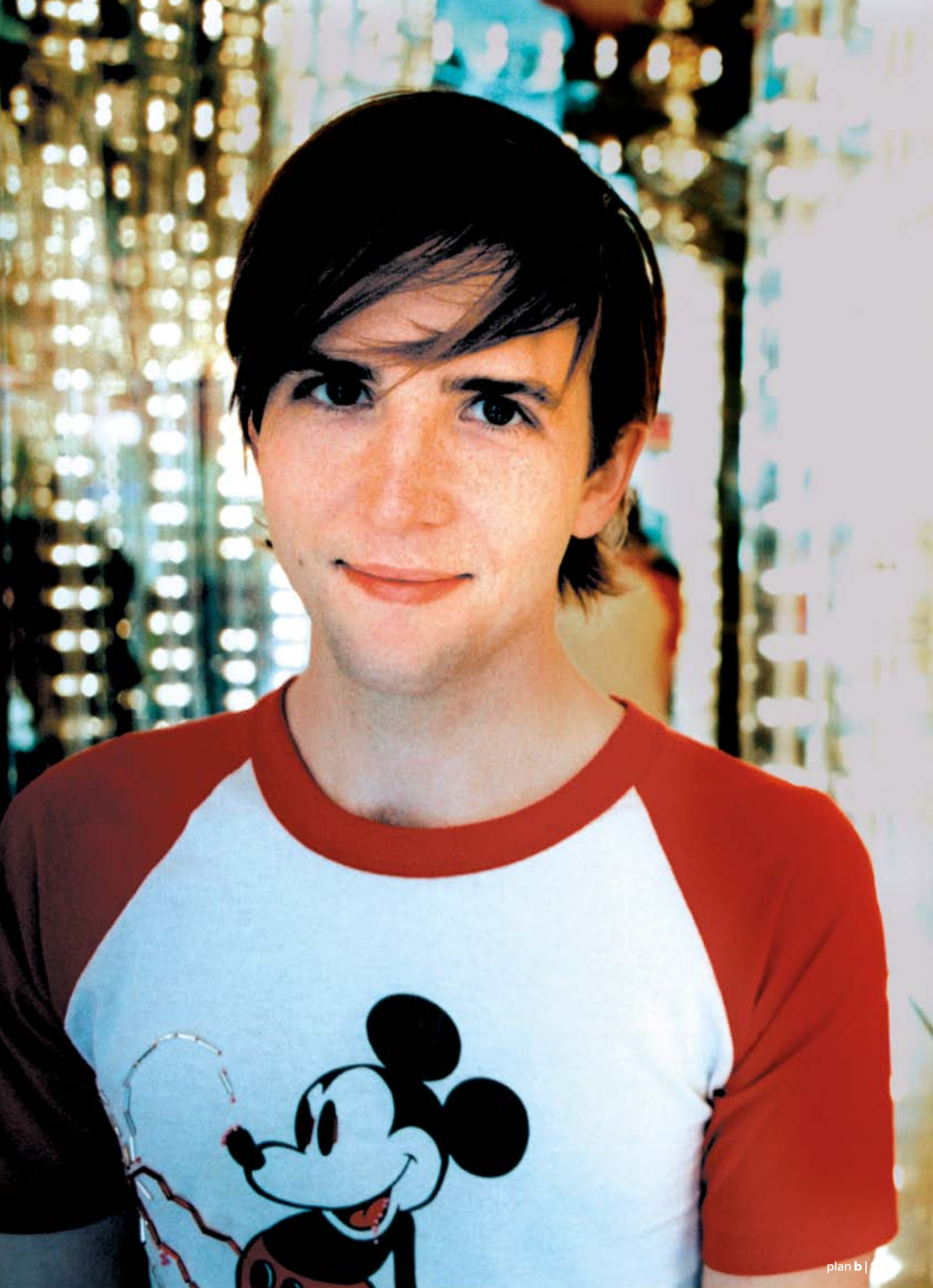
The sampled loops of 'This Is The Dream Of Win And Régine' pummel up inside my throat with that opening/closing feeling you get when you're trying not to cry. I stroke my finger across the dots that make up the picture of his hair.

"Not all that? Come off it. Please. He so is. The music is. The name is. All of it is. It's beautiful."

offered by the music of and persona behind Final Fantasy. This article isn't all going to be about how 'hott' Owen Pallett is, I promise.

You can relax. I'm not going to go into how good his first album, 2004's Tomlab release *Has A Good Home*, is to fuck to, or how Owen's going to pose for *Butt* magazine making out with his boyfriend while they're wearing frilly shirts or perhaps swim trunks, or how he thinks the first two issues of *Sweet Action* magazine (a porn mag for hipster girls) were just 'boner central', or how his first appearance in *Plan B*, in last June's feature on Canadian music, involved him saying how he'd like to jack off onto a map of Northern Ontario, or how he's in favour of what he calls 'a new homo conservatism' because he'd rather see a man in a nice overcoat or suit and tie than just standing around with his man-tits out, or how Owen's whole being gay thing is maybe just about a desire for masculine camaraderie, because you just can't shoot the shit with straight men, or how he thinks of his music as 'pervert music' rather than 'homo music' because he feels more like a pervert than a homo, because...because...because I'm just not.

Because, for once, there's all this other stuff that's just as interesting.





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That's alright though, because chatting with Owen Pallett goes like this: you'll pat your fingers lightly on the top of a subject, and Owen will shove his hands right in till he's elbow-deep. Then he'll pull up a glistening nugget of content, and knead it and knead it till it starts to rise, teasing out idea after idea. Then he'll spread his hands and show it to you. "There," he kept saying throughout the interview. "Was that alright? Are my answers alright?"

adventure.exe

It's impossible to talk to Owen Pallett without talking about video games. His interest is foregrounded in the project's very title of *Final Fantasy*; songs such as 'Adventure.exe' and 'He Poos Clouds' are inspired by video games; 'An Arrow In The Side of Final Fantasy' is largely based on a melody from the game *Six Golden Coins*. Like *New Games Journalism*, Owen's interested in what a game's world can tell us about ourselves. So space shoot'em ups are a metaphor for masculine thinking, he says – a phallus spitting bullets at never-ending streams of aliens – while his most recent favourite game is *Katamari Damacy*, where you roll a ball of rubbish through a town and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. We puzzle over why *Tetris* is the most popular game for women – a metaphor for dieting, perhaps?

His songs seem to demonstrate a longing for the combination of adventure and order that you find in video games, rather than the mundane, arbitrary chaos of day-to-day life. "I need an empire to overthrow", he sings in 'Adventure.exe'. "You make me wish for a more dangerous life/So I could show you 'bout self-sacrifice..."

Too often in life, A + B = WTF? In games, A + B = C. A video game character won't cheat on you, run off on a three-day coke bender without calling to say where he is, or display any of the unpredictable quirks of humanity. 'He Poos Clouds' suggests that a video game character can make a better – or at least, more reliable and constant – friend or lover than another human. The music of *Final Fantasy* betrays a yearning for that stability, whether it's in the ordered world of the video game or the careful structures of the string arrangements.

So what has playing games taught you about life?

"Games haven't taught me anything about life – they've just taught me about what we lack. The worlds games present are utopias. They teach us about a world people are craving. Constant goals, and total beauty. That's all anyone really wants."

the pooka sings

The second *Final Fantasy* album, *He Poos Clouds*², has just been released. (It's OK. It's a stupid title. You're meant to laugh.) Here Owen returns to his classical roots, with all the songs arranged for string quartet and voice, plus a little bit of timpani, horns, and the occasional appearance from a choir. Ostensibly similar to (although more elaborate than) *Has A Good Home*, what we have here couldn't be more different – it's a good, old-fashioned Concept Album, complete with insert displaying Pallett's carefully structured, multi-layered lyrics. These lyrics are jam-packed with references and allusions and instances of intertextuality, citing everything from video game characters, the *Narnia* stories, Japanese novelists, President Bush's daughter, Irish winged

'I've certainly licked my lips a couple of times while playing the *Zelda* games'

OK. So the song 'He Poos Clouds' is all about you having a boner for Link from *Zelda*, right?

"Well. It hasn't been obsessive, but yes, I've certainly licked my lips a couple of times while playing the *Zelda* games. I think it's the short tunic. There's a character in *Metal Gear Solid 2* who is naked for part of game, walking round with his hands on his genitals, and all you can think is – what on earth are the designers thinking? I could see if I was more hard-up for action or too poor for pornos I'd be wanking for video games. I never got that far but yeah... Maybe I'm oversexed or something but I was always really attracted to Link.

"But the song's not so much about attraction – it's more about the relationships that you form with video games characters. Whether you're owning a Nintendog or moving into a town in *Animal Crossing*, you do develop strange paternal feelings towards your character. In the song 'He Poos Clouds', I'm wondering what Link is thinking. I'm taking care to have him protected, and you would think he would develop some affection for me. But if he were to look into our world and compare it to his own, I think he'd find it sadly lacking.

"Our world is godless. Their world has many different gods that you can summon. They have specific tasks, concrete goals – it would be wonderful, if I were to make an album and somebody was like, these are the things you have to do to achieve your goal. And then at the end you'd get checkmarks, and a gold medal. But doesn't work like that. I find the idea of being a creature of service as a video game character far more appealing than being the free spirits we are in our world."

devils and more, all structured around the theme of magic – specifically, the eight schools of magic within *Dungeons And Dragons*, and –

Er, Owen, these lyrics are totally impenetrable.

No, really, readers. They are – to the uninitiated. The vocals in *He Poos Clouds* are buried low in the mix – you get the suspicion that Owen Pallett's not too keen on the sound of his own voice – and the advance copies were sent out without the lyric sheets, which seems a bit of a curious move for someone so keen on exploring concepts through words as well as music. This interview's the first time I've seen a copy of the lyrics, and, well. I don't know about *Dungeons And Dragons* and... I look at Owen. What's it all about? I mean: "I'm not content/ You know I hate it when your friends are in the pool/ Donna Karan/ Old money stinking, send those faggots back to Forest Hill/ And Kara Saun." You might as well be speaking in tongues.

He looks disappointed. "People call me pretentious, but I wanted to make an album that was accessible superficially and also interesting from an academic perspective. I hope with analysis people will be able to see the depth with which I've written these lyrics. I spent a long time crafting them. Pretentious to me is not a valid term – it's a word people misuse when they really mean 'filled with content'. To my mind, if there are superficial pleasures available to any listener then you can put as much complexity in as you want."

OK. So. *He Poos Clouds*. Initiate me.

"The eight schools of magic in *Dungeons And Dragons* are abjuration, illusion, conjuration, necromancy, enchantment, evocation, divination, and transmutation. For this record, I was trying to



'I find the idea of being a creature of service as a video game character far more appealing than being the free spirits we are in our world'

pick each of these schools and write songs about day-to-day phenomena which could represent these particular things³. So, for example, [the track] 'He Poos Clouds' represents illusion. It's all about being in love with a video game character. 'Do You Love' is about transmutation – about cookery and plastic surgery. 'Song Song Song' is about evocation – creating something out of nothing. It's a call for women to ignore male music criticism and create their own musical language. And so it goes on⁴.

"And at the end, a pooka, which appears in Flann O'Brien's book *At Swim Two Birds* – it's a winged devil that likes to cause trouble – turns up and chastises me for using *Dungeons and Dragons* to examine routine events. At which point, I (in the song) put down my bow, and the record ends."

NOTES

1 As I'm sure you're aware, 'gay' has myriad meanings these days. There is, of course, the man who likes to bum other men; but the British language is far more nuanced than that, no? There is the schoolyard usage of 'gay as in lame' – sometimes spelled 'gey' for those who believe misspelling can convey intent and thereby avoid offence (as you can imagine, this subversion is entirely lost in speech). When applied to music, this schoolyard usage can convey any music that is delicate, fluttering, featuring vocals which will be sung in a fey, slight voice if sung by a male (Death Cab For Cutie, Postal Service, Maximilian Hecker), or dreamy, swooping harmonies if sung by females (Camera Obscura, The Concretes). To be 'gay for'

someone is to have a crush on them, normally artistic or intellectual rather than sexual, eg: "I am so gay for the writings of Michael Bywater", or "You are totally gay for Kovacs even though what he's doing at this point could be more accurately described as trolling than debating, you l@m3r." And finally, the word has retained some of its old overtones of happy, joyous, delighted – though perhaps with an undercurrent of cynicism, a nodding awareness of the fact that such joys are delusional or at best transitory, eg: "The sun is shining, I just bought some gorgeous red geraniums, and I think me and Frederick might be falling in love with each other – god, I'm being totally gay, aren't I?" Owen's desire that after hearing *He Poos Clouds* the listener might

That's pretty sweet. I rescind the 'impenetrable'. Replace it with 'rewarding'.

better than worse

You say you hope that no one who's listened to your music will ever again entertain thoughts of suicide. What's that about?

"It's not that the music of Final Fantasy is like aural Prozac," Owen says. "But I'm trying to be an antidote to the Elliott Smiths and Kurt Cobains and Ian Curtis of this world. I want to be the reverse of that – to still make music about sex and death, but to be incredibly available to anyone who emails me. I'll be active in online and social communities – if someone on a message board says my album title is crap, I want to get in there and defend myself!"

"I mean, I like listening to The Smiths, but sometimes I wonder if Morrissey hates us. Hates his fans. Sometimes I feel like he's deliberately trying to incite people to commit suicide. He's creating himself as a god who demands sacrifice. Because if he's not belittling you, then he's telling you your life is worthless. And maybe it's all a joke but he's so unavailable to society, as though he's the equivalent of the Catholic Church, and his CD is the Pope. The only way to communicate with him is through the music. I don't want to be like that. I don't want to be behind a mask.

"Like right now. I've told you everything. I feel like I've just slit my stomach open and spilled my guts out all over Tomlab's sofa, just for *Plan B*. And you know what? That's the way it ought to be."

never again entertain thoughts of suicide ties in with this usage. "At its heart," he says, "*He Poos Clouds* is a record of real good times, good vibes. It's a party record." (Happy happy gay gay!)

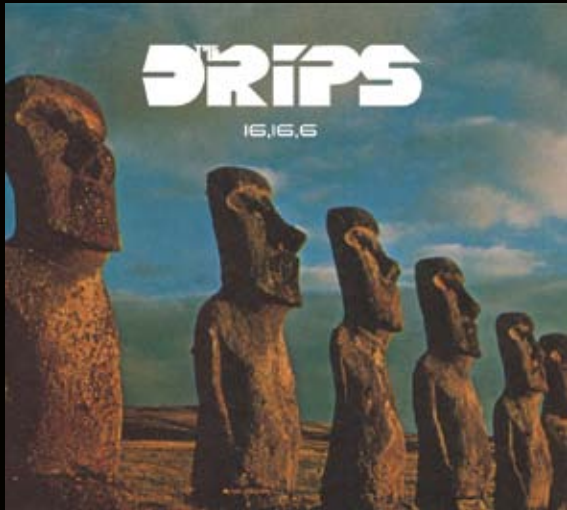
2 Writing on the music message board ILM, Owen explains the title thus: "*He Poos Clouds* is a preposterous, over-the-top statement of devotion, much like 'I Am So In Fucking Love With Him' or 'He's A Prince'. The presence of "poo" in the title is meant to defuse the potential seriousness associated with an album of string quartet music.

"A lovely side effect: half-assed listeners are weeded out."

3 The schools/songs are as follows: Abduration – 'Arctic Circle'

Illusion – 'He Poos Clouds'
Conjuration – 'This Lamb Sells Condos'
Necromancy – 'If I Were A Carp'
Enchantment – 'I'm Afraid Of Japan'
Evocation – 'Song Song Song'
Divination – 'Many Lives -> 49mp'
Transmutation – 'Do You Love'

4 He did explain, but the word counts limit exposition here. A Google search will bring up other interviews in which Owen talks about 'If I Were A Carp' – a frightening, heartbreaking song based on the experience of watching his godfather slip in and out of death while on morphine – and check www.goodhodgkins.com for a funny, interesting insight into 'This Lamb Sells Condos', a scathing attack on Toronto property developer Charles Lamb.



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the void

the void



the drips

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Photography: **Steve Double**

The Barfly is the biggest cheese of all Camden's venues, most nights playing host to industry liggers and kids dressed like indie rockstars. Tonight, however, the front row is peopled by stripy-shirted screamo waifs, a be-fro'd Japanese dude and, most notably, a contingent of gnarly skinheads resplendent with faded blue tattoos and flaky black leathers.

"You know what, man?" grins Matt Caughtran, The Drips' sweet, dough-faced frontman. "That was the *raddest* thing ever. I love those dudes – because I've always *been* one of those crazy dudes. To have guys like that show up really means something – when dudes who listen to GBH 24 hours a day are coming to your shows... It's not like The Drips are a *hardcore* band, anyways..."

Perhaps not when placed next to GBH. But The Drips' breakneck punk rock plugs deep into the more melodic vein of SST Hardcore (Hüsker Dü, Descendents), their flab-free pop – played out on swaggering, metallic guitars, nailed down by machine-gun snares and illuminated by Caughtran's kerosene-doused bellow – very much a sunshine-flip to Caughtran and guitarist Joby J Ford's day job in steroidal thrash-punks The Bronx.

'We never expected people to be into any of our shit'

"It's sort of a 'circle of friends' thing," smiles Matt, unthreading the groups' tangled family trees. "Vince and Dave [bassist and drummer, sons of Los Lobos guitarist David Hidalgo] were childhood friends, and Joby played in their group. I joined, and we became The Drips. Then Joby and I started writing songs that didn't really fit with The Drips, and that's how The Bronx started."

The Drips hit the back burner while The Bronx rode the success of their self-titled 2003 debut, a brutish rush of shrapnel guitars and deadly dynamics. When the pressure of recording the follow-up, their first for a major label, began to tell last year, Matt and Joby were glad to blow off steam with The Drips.

"The new Bronx record wasn't a bad experience by any means," explains Matt, "But I tell you, we busted our asses on it. Everything took so long. At times, we were like, 'FUCK! I need to be doing something else...'"

Which is where The Drips came in. They added Distiller Tony Bradley on second guitar and got into the studio. The result – a blistering 11-song amphetamine-ripped dash – is gloriously kinetic noise candy, tunes painted in frazzling neon guitars as Matt howls along as if 'Oi!' were the sweetest sound he ever heard. "The Bronx are full-on headbang music," muses Matt, "whereas The Drips are more of a side-to-side bob."

Examples of The Drips' unabashed pop sensibility include interpolating a slice of Men Without Hats' Eighties hit 'The Safety Dance' into careering closer 'Coastline', drubbing Matt's vocals with dubby echo on 'Downbrown' so his voice scars audible traces into the galloping mêlée, and '16, 16, Six', the group's ballad. Unfolding to a sugary skank The Police would've approved of, it's a teen love story that's honestly awkward, clumsy, painful. Judging by how the screamo boys yelled along to lyrics like "*This is the story of a broken heart/I tried to love but it fell apart*", striking heroic poses like they were some sozzled divorcee singing 'I Will Survive' at karaoke, it could make The Drips huge.

"If it sounds awkward and naïve, that's because I wrote it a long time ago," offers Matt. "It was the first love song I ever wrote, and it was about my first girlfriend, who I was with for seven years. It was a tumultuous relationship."

For all their phosphorescent ferocity, The Drips onstage are mostly defined by Caughtran's amiable, excitable charisma, grinning non-stop, like every moment – sharing his mic with the moshpit, leaping into their outstretched arms – were his best ever. Which is pretty much the truth.

"Shit, yeah, man," he affirms. "The Bronx, The Drips – we never expected people to be into any of our shit. Especially not The Drips, it's our *high school* band. I still can't believe I make my living from this... I believe it's what I was born to do, so I'm having a blast doing it. It's the only thing I really wanna do."

www.thedrips.com



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i hate: ladyfuzz

"I dislike loads of things! I dislike dishonesty, there's nothing I hate more than that. I hate averageness. I hate people just accepting stuff.

"I generally don't like very much music. I go to shops a lot and buy stuff and I go home and it doesn't really blow my mind. That happens a lot. I'm not a very big indie music fan, you know, like, four boys with guitars, people trying to sound like someone else or trying to please someone else. I totally despise the whole rock'n'roll cliché, the getting drunk and taking drugs. I'm not a very big indie rock fan; in fact, I'm not very much into bands. I like solo artists, like Laurie Anderson and Björk.

"I hate crappy shoes. I really hate crappy shoes. That drives me insane. That's how I judge boys: 'He might be cool, but check his shoes!' When you're thinking of liking someone, 'liking, liking' someone, but he has bad shoes, it's like, 'Psssh, it's over!' It's not a fashionista style thing, it's just, you meet someone you like and he's really cool, and then you look at the feet, and it turns everything off immediately. It's like a switch for it to be over.

"I think it's horribly, horribly superficial and I've tried to change myself. But in the grand scheme of things it's impossible! I think the main part of the outfit is the shoes. It's like a frame for a picture, that's what the shoes are for me."

(Liz Neumayr)

first record: the black heart procession

"Kiss – *Alive 2* on tape. I was pretty young, I must have been about seven or eight, it was a Christmas present."

(Pall Jenkins)

first love: adam green

"The first time that I fell in love, I felt as though I had melted butter flowing through my veins. Then she broke my heart, and I hers. So began a chapter of betrayal that resulted in a gruesome love-triangle. I tried to destroy it and escaped relatively intact.

"She was the daughter of a Russian aristocrat and she smelled like paint. We don't speak to each other anymore."

cooking with: camera obscura

"I've been busy recently, so I need quick recipes. My current favourite is a crab spaghetti that Carey and I ate last night after practice.

"It's very easy. To make the sauce you need to blanch tomatoes, take the skin off and cut them up. Chop up a clove of garlic and a small chilli and sauté with butter. You can use olive oil, but butter makes it taste much better. Add tomatoes and crab meat to the garlic and chilli. Squeeze the juice from a lemon and add parsley. Add salt to season."

(Traceyanne Campbell)



music that time forgot

Words: **kicking_k**

Illustration: **Tom Genower**

**The Sisters Of Mercy
Floodland (Elektra/WEA, 1990)**

I was raised in a town with no centre but a shopping centre, a botched amalgam of council estates, scrubland, pebbledash, tattered porn mags littering dead grass, closed or closing factories under blind white skies, stray dogs and dogshit, single mothers and superstrength. There was a pub car park opposite my bedroom window and colossal drunks would fight there at closing time, teetering on the edge of extinction. And me, the smallest, stuntedest, runtiest kid in the year, male or female. Gentle reader, there was no hope. I became a Goth.

This was music that sounded like the slow cool of the apocalypse

Not common-or-garden. Not scene-but-not-herd. I didn't pool with other shadows. For starters, I'd long since missed their heyday. For seconds, I hated most of their music. There was only one record that mattered, and for a long time it was the only way I could relate to the world.

I was deep in that difficult phase when you don't know who you are or what you're turning into. When I wasn't role-playing the Paladin or an almost autistically shy school kid, I think I wanted to be Andrew Eldritch, the Sisters' erudite, arrogant, permanently ironic and grandiloquently snarky singer, who happily transplanted high modernism's mania for hypertextual references into rock'n'roll, knowing exactly how ridiculous such a manoeuvre was. That infamous baritone, pitched somewhere between last word and fundament, a subtext

insinuating itself into yr consciousness as you sang along: "*I hear the roar of a big machine/Two worlds and in-between/Hot metal and methadine/I hear empire down...*" It meant everything and nothing at once. I had the whole album memorised.

The lyrics for *Floodland*, cryptic labyrinths though they may be, are reports from the end of the world, allusions to a second extinction, Cold War and its natural product, the 20th Century suicide pact. This is a record that grapples with history. This is a record that's read a lot of books. Meanwhile, the music manages a grandeur that veils classical bombast with sinuous Eastern rills, a drum machine stitching together or rifling apart with stately inevitability. The density is awesome, everything concentrated in the bass range, shuddering synths and whispers. The backing track leaves huge silences that somehow take the texture of darkness, beats disappear like tracer shells, and entire harmonic lines sink beneath the washes of atmospherics like broken fences. This was music that sounded like the slow cool of the apocalypse, all other options exhausted.

And then there were the three hit singles.

I'll zero in on 'This Corrosion' – 11 minutes of staggering pretension that roped in rock operatic producer Jim Steinman to bring together Motown harmonies, Wagnerian choirs, metal guitar solos and even jangling indie strings as if, for one last transmission, every radio station jammed in a heavenly cacophony. It got to Number Seven.

Most Goths, myself included, were walking melodramas, turning their tantrums to requiems, sickly postures playing dead, passive-aggressive resistance to a world that wouldn't listen. But don't belittle symbolism. Never was there a more eloquent response to the leaders of a world that had committed itself to the suicidal logic of Mutual Assured Destruction than when their children dressed in mourning for their future. This isn't a protest record, it's a montage of scenes to fill the space between pushing the button and final impact. Trends end. Tastes change. I'm not a Goth anymore. We're still all going to die.

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first live: fire engines

"I think the show that had the biggest impression on me was The White Riot Tour: seeing The Clash, The Subway Sect, The Buzzcocks and The Slits. It was in Edinburgh at the Playhouse Theatre on Saturday 7 May, 1977. That was the most important show for me – it was a revolution of the mind. It was like everything else before was erased, like a year-zero effect.

"The Jam were also playing, but I wasn't too into the Jam at the time. The Clash were really brilliant because they were playing the stuff from their first album, the *White Riot* album.

"Ari Up [Slits vocalist] was 14 at the time. It was amazing: she was walking into the audience asking people for a comb so she could backcomb her hair. Basically, before that when you saw a band playing they acted like divinities onstage and The Slits completely broke that down. They trashed the whole rock ethic. There were a lot more women involved in punk, and they still are very exciting.

"I think a lot of that stuff – The Slits, Subway Sect, Buzzcocks and loads of other bands – is still really potent because those bands haven't really been consumed by the masses. I don't think they ever will be, and I think that's why they've retained their potency. And why people still enthuse about them 30 years later: it hasn't been digested. It hasn't been puked up and regurgitated, because it wasn't properly consumed in the first place."

(Davy Henderson)

synergy: joan as police woman

Your music's soundtracking a film – what's happening in the film?

"Massive dusty desert at sunrise. Two people are separated and are walking towards each other. They are far apart and they walk and walk and finally they meet in the middle of the desert.

"Cut to narrow city street on rainy, dark night. Someone is riding on their motorcycle towards an unknown destination. The street lights reflect off the pavement; the buildings rise up high on either side.

"Cut to many people lying down in the grass, staring up into the sky. It is midday and it is very bright. We see them from above, and the way the sun hits them.

"Cut to middle of the ocean. We only see water and the way it moves and the shapes it makes within the movements."

on the stereo: black heart procession

"I've been listening to The Dirtbombs a lot lately. They're great. They play a really good live show too. Also, Public Nuisance, who are an old Californian, Sacramento psychedelic band that never got to put out records. They've just re-issued their records, or finally put out their records or something like that recently or something – I don't know the exact liner notes but someone from a record store recommended them to me. They're pretty awesome.

"I also really like Sela at the moment and lots of dub music. I like all kinds of stuff, I have a recording studio so I get into all kinds of music."

(Pall Jenkins)



deserted village records

Words: **Frances May Morgan**

Photography: **Alan Caufield**

The deserted, abandoned village is an evocative image and a powerful metaphor. Whether it's the ghost bells of Dunwich ringing beneath the sea that claimed the town, or the empty houses of Imber falling into decay on Salisbury Plain after the villagers gave it over to the British army for street-fighting practice during World War Two (and were never allowed back), civilisation is a tenuous, temporary illusion, and we enjoy – with a shiver – imagining the mist, the weeds and the spirits encroaching upon it.

'I think folk music translates into modern-day DIY culture'

Named after the Oliver Goldsmith poem of the same name, Irish label Deserted Village taps subtly and perfectly into this metaphor, and comes up with music that's placed somewhere between eldritch, atmospheric, semi-improvised folk and post-industrial soundscaping à la Current 93 and Coil. Like fellow travellers Larkfall Records, their take on Earth Mysteries and folklore is idiosyncratic and often bleak: United Bible Studies' new album, *The Shore That Fears The Sea*, mixes flutes with feedback and traditional songs with droning incantations, to haunting, dew-drenched effect.

Deserted Village began as a home for the free-improv of Murransk, whose self-titled CD-r was the first Village release. As the group's other projects – in particular United Bible Studies – flourished, it made sense to gather them together, and to trade with other labels and musicians. "The whole label thing came about without too much intention of starting a 'record label'," says Shane Cullinane, who plays in UBS with David Colohan and Gavin Prior.

forthcoming from the village

As well as United Bible Studies' new album, *The Shore That Fears The Sea* (out now), Deserted Village will be releasing **Juniper Meadows'** *Jacaranda Twilight* CD-r (duo of Brad 'Foxy Digitalis' Rose and Chris Skillern); **Magickal Folk Of The Faraway Tree's** *The Soup And The Shilling* (A reissue of the first two Magickal Folk CD-rs on one CD); and new releases from **Anahita** (Fursaxa's Tara Burke and cellist Helena Espvall-Santoleri) and Pseudoarcana's **Antony Milton**.

"I guess when we started there were no other Irish micro-labels," says Colohan. "The Jewelled Antler Collective and Pseudoarcana were certainly early role models for the Village, both musically and in the way they seemed to be part of a worldwide community of like-minded souls. Now there are more labels in Ireland we feel an affinity with."

Deserted Village releases are crafted, cherishable things, both visually and sonically. Handmade covers and live recordings, such as United Bible Studies' dronescape *Airs Of Sun And Stone*, recorded in a Limerick church, strive to capture both the music's spontaneity and a strong sense of place – something that I associate with folk music.

"I think folk music translates into modern-day DIY culture," says Prior when I bring up the F word. "No artificial separation between band and audience, and hearing about new music through word of mouth rather than having it drip-fed to you. I love music to be presented in a fun and unmediated way."

"I see folk music as being the labourer singing in the fields, the old guy reciting in the corner of the pub... Experiences which have resonated down the centuries," continues Colohan, who's also a member of the more traditional Magickal Folk Of The Faraway Tree and solo project Agitated Radio Pilot. "There's a magic and a whole world in tiny things within folk songs that's very alluring and inspiring. Maybe it's the sense of things that are gone: a lost, pre-industrial world. I feel it strongly in the old songs, when they had a real connection to the land. They lived, worked and died on it. Ireland is not an industrialised country and we are never far from rivers, farmland, lakes... but maybe our music's connection to the land is in our need to escape the towns and cities." Not surprisingly, he also claims inspiration from "psychogeography, and making music that has a direct connection to its environment", citing experiences that have shown him the "liminal aspects in nature".

So what are the parallels between folk music and the more noise-based, experimental music you make?

"I suppose they're both unadorned, direct forms of expression," explains Prior. "They can both be made cheaply and without formal training. Sometimes I think of the drone as the bedrock underlying all sorts of music. When playing with UBS we can dive beneath a one-chord modal thing and surface in noise territory, and this feels like a natural transition."

Live, he says, "United Bible Studies is a very different beast to the records. It can have up to 10 members: electric guitars, drums, percussion and horn section, and is usually totally improvised, noisy and rowdy." Despite the hermetic, intimate sound of Deserted Village's recordings, it's clear that live music is an important part of the label's identity, with shows with Charalambides, Nalle and Chris Corsano coming up over the summer. "Through promoting shows in Ireland, the virtual community has been made flesh somewhat," says Prior, adding that, "Playing live and improvising are our lifeblood."

www.desertedvillage.com



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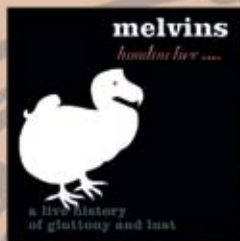


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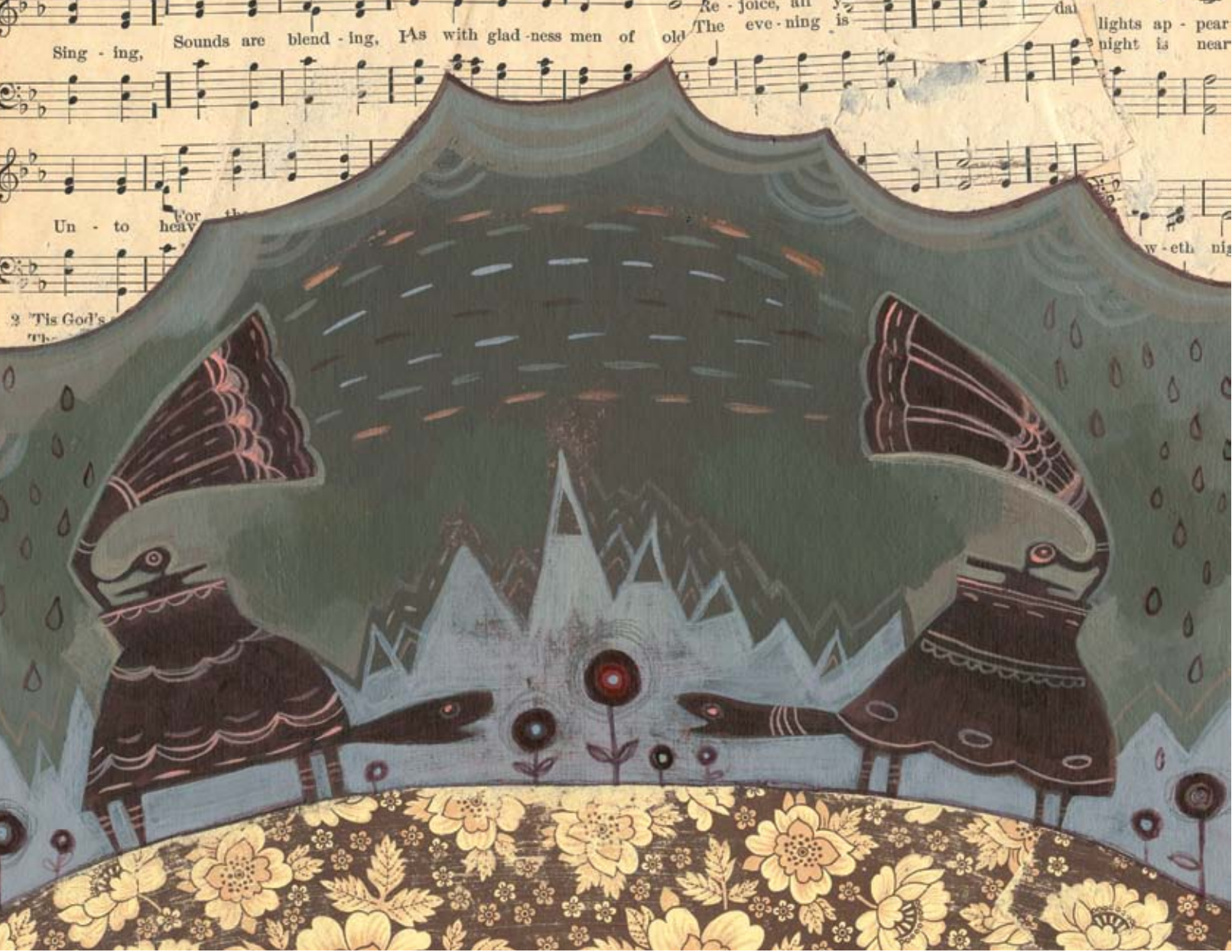


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singles club

Summer lovin' (and hatin')

Words: **Neil Kulkarni**
Illustration: **Katy Horan**

Summer! Shit, it crept up on me again. It doesn't come on. It attacks. It caught me out today and I was in my big coat as well. Bastard. By the time I got home, just in time to slap my shades on and send the sun scurrying behind a cloud (they're magic weather-affecting shades, got them the same place I get my magic bus-producing cigarettes), I looked like I'd just straggled over the Sahara, having basted my face in a bucket of chipfat.

Fuckn'ell, you don't look good in summer. Sweating like a pig digging ditches. Community service. Minor sexual offence. Your face twitches when the mercury rises, some kind of spastic panic at the discomfort of all that absent cloud-cover, the semi-nude freakshow of the chav massive swarming you with their tied-off £140 shirts and their bad tats and their scrawny rat-like frames, the odd stray metal fan clinking their nip-rings down the high-street. Everyone (it seems) is able to parade their unclad malnourishment without let or hindrance – since when has it been acceptable for a man to be seen shirtless before tiffin of an afternoon? Birch the thugs, or at least give them tassles.

And in the charts you can already sense that summer-long feeling of general revulsion taking hold: all those Joy Div tribute bands with their neatly ironed school shirts and delay pedals; all those honest Johns and heartfelt Jills; a whole generation of skinny fan boys throwing themselves into the task'n'graft with such paltry results. Ugly tarts like Orson and Sugababes (so off-the-boil post 'Push The Button' it ain't true) jamming their sweaty-cracked leather-shod arses in the air and rotating their salmon-paste down your neck with grotesquely confident crotch-twirls. So much vision-deficiency, such poorly pre-empted fantasy, such half-assed dedication – and nary a whiff of intolerance from the happy-to-be-here press, just a hi-def colour-supplement glow to pop; all of us finding our own sure musical space to mould, collectors and curators

of the canon slipping and sliding between different brands of the great god 'Quality'.

Mandatory enthusiasm, happy with our place in the schemata of this business called show, sure that even our most obscure desires can be confidently sated (and get 150-word write-ups somewhere). The final death of militancy, misery, fury and bitterness in pop experience. I miss that stuff.

In an infinite musical universe, you can't kick against a damn thing, cos every swing of the boot just pushes you out into your own free-swim. Come on in. The water's paralysing.

And in this hot-town summer in the city, in the absence of another great **Charlotte Church** single and with that 'Too Hot Remix' already disappearing from view, I seek the cold. Music that hits you like liquid nitrogen, makes you oblivious to the crowd, super-fragile to the touch, ever about to topple and scatter into infinite shards of quicksilver.

Best to pull that chill from the furthest reaches of the universe, and be warmed only by the riots down the road.

Just something so OFF about **Dabrye's** 'Air' (Ghostly International) it sounds so ON in the bodyshock of sun and tightening tension that is June. S'like the music Prince would play as Paisley Park flares, Waco-style, around him. MF Doom contributes a driven and dazed vocal on the original, and then re-rubs it all up with extra dub and hair metal on the flip remix – somewhere in between Akufen and the best bits of Ghostface's *Fishscale*. It's a purely sonic derailment (like **Foreign Beggars'** masterly 'Slow Boiled Ilk' (Dented)), a black Arctic wall of noise to hide within pitched against a nation that's gonna be waving flags and wearing shorts until autumn, just far enough away from here to help you forget who and what we're all becoming. This is sound that upsets you,

unsettles your equilibrium so much through sheer alien terror that it opens up vistas in your vitals, renders your innards interstellar.

And if there must be heat this summer, let it be so hot you start seeing things. Let it laser down with an ant-frazzling, pinpoint accuracy that damn well bullies you into delirium. **Missill/Blurum 13's** 'Choose To Care' (Elephant) positively seethes with electro-heat, the freewheeling, semi-improvised synth part from PM and Parisian mash-up queen Missill having its buzz maximised and its modulation fine-tuned to painful impact, Blu drops heavily robotised verbals in all the gaps he can find and plenty he slashes out for himself, that damn synth part not letting up until it's bored a hole in yr skull roughly big enough to fit a grasping fist in.

Similarly, feel your flesh coming adrift from your bones this month to **Killa Kela's** 'Secrets' (Spit Kingdom), **Kashmere's** 'Playing With Fire' (Receptor), **Raydar Ellis' Graffiti Rock** (Brick), **Sway's** 'Products' (Dcypha), **God's Gift's** simply stunning 'Incisions' (Ramp), **MCD's** 'OK' (Mouthwatering), **Juvenile and Papoose's** 'What Be Happenin' remix (white label). **Busta Rhyme's** 'New York Shit' (Interscope) and **Lloyd Banks' '70 Bars Of Death'** and 'Cake' (G-Unit) are three definitions of NYC summer madness; there's whatever Baltimore ghetto-tech gutter music you can find (the *Couche-Tard Spank Rock* mixtape and **LaCrate/Amanda Blank's** 'Blow' EP (Milkcrate) will do nicely); also **The Coup's** startlingly lush and heavy 'My Favourite Mutiny' (Epitaph), **Skuff's** 'Filled In' (The Music), if only for the stunning 'I Migrant', and **Breaking The Illusion's** 'Joe' (Nice Things) for lancing its boiling, simmering drones with the finest Burning Spear bass you've heard since *Garvey's Ghost*.

Then draw a line from James Brown's 'Mother Popcorn' to Miles Davis' 'Duran' to Can's 'Spoon' to The Congos' 'Congoman' (always thought you could swap those last two around surprisingly often, so soundalike are they) through Schooly D's 'PSK' and then leapfrog forward to **Project Polaroid's** 'Digital Engineering'/'Diamond District' (Threshold Recordings). At all points in that line we're talking about bass and rhythm, we're frequently pointing towards Africa, and we're always engrossed in mystery, magic and the suggestive ways the most physical music can unlock parts of the brain untouched by the more direct communication of coherent pop.

Project Polaroid is Tom C3 and Kool Keith and the weird fucking thing is that Tom C3's contributions are even odder than KK's. A low-slung groove of

Fun in the sun? Fuck off. I ain't coming out until the leaves start falling

Seventies funk gets assaulted by all kinds of blaxploitation bizarreness and jarring moments of Sun Ra space drama. You can almost feel PP's steps going from pavement to pulsar every step of the way, until you yourself are hot-stepping on the radiation all the way out, feeling the half-life decay in your marrow as the Geiger counter gives up your ghost.

On the flip, 'Digital Engineering' is more agitated, leaps forward a decade and sounds like the soundtrack to a never-commissioned Eighties mini-series where Manimal becomes The A-Team's bukkake bitch. The snares and Mike Love melodies are turbo-charged to the max, and the past is righteously denigrated, abused and torched on the wasteland it left behind to light our way to a brand new bleak day.

There's huge complexity and discovery in the emotional breadth of all the above, but what they share is an appalled desire to escape through the looking glass in 2006. What they all seek is spiritual transcendence or demonic damnation from all the safety we're ensconced in. What they all angle themselves towards is nothing short of a redefinition of what it is to be human here today.

And looking around at all this contentment, all those badges, all the unwarranted and unwanted displays of underwear (what'll be more horribly apparent this year, I wonder? Indie boys' folded-over boxer-waists, or good ol' thongs too far up the crack?) and repro-retro t-shirts that we can legitimately expect from this most loathsome season, I strongly suggest you resist all music that tries to make you feel better in the coming few months, or that encourages you to feel good, or that goes well on the barbie with a crate of stubbies.

Push away that arm so much summer pop wants to casually slip round your waist and over your shoulders (and into your chest to steal your heart). It's too hot for that kind of ease and creeping intimacy. Keep your heart heavy, pirouette past planets and dance to the death.

Stay in, pour yourself a big iced gin and juice, draw the curtains and catch up with what deliberately botched auto-surgery and cryogenic suspension pop can give you.

Fun in the sun? Fuck off. I ain't coming out until the leaves start falling and my cleavage stops shining.

And while there's breath in my body, I'm not wearing fuckin' sandals –
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU FREAKS?



playlist: coquetel molotov

Words: **Ana Garcia**

Illustration: **Tez Humphries**

Cansei De Ser Sexy – Off the Hook

The most glamorous electro-rock group in Brazil. Put a little Eighties new wave like The B-52's and Devo with a little Casio lo-fi pop (Stereo Total, Chicks On Speed) and the electro of Miss Kittin, and you have five girls and one guy totally tired of being sexy.

Diouseu Mimdoisema – Epilético

Diego Medina spends most of his time recording in his room making bizarre lo-fi beats under his not very tuned voice. I love it. He's quite a genius and is also one of the best Brazilian illustrators.

Módulo 1000 – Animalia

In the middle of Tropicália and bossa nova, the country had a handful of psychedelic groups strongly influenced by progressive rock. Módulo 1000 is one of them, with heavy guitars that sound like the first Black Sabbath and *Meddle*-era Pink Floyd.

Jumbo Elektro – Run, Run, Run!

A bit of glam rock, T-Rex, electronica and Rolling Stones – and their visual is great.

Secos E Molhados – Fala

This is one of my favourite groups from the Seventies and this is their most beautiful song. Their performance is very theatrical, lyrical and poetic. Ney Matogrosso has the most beautiful voice, and was never afraid to talk about dictatorships in his lyrics. This group has been sampled by many hip hop artists, and I've heard that Kiss got the idea of painting their faces from them.

Spleen – Beautiful Smell

Singer, poet, hip hopper: Spleen, originally from Paris, invites CocoRosie to sing this song. He is the founder of the Black and White Skins collective, an international association of young artists from the new American soul and folk scene: Devendra Banhart, Antony And The Johnsons and CocoRosie.

Volver – Não Ria De Mim

This sounds a lot like The Beatles' first records: simple riffs and three-minute songs with great choruses to sing along to.

Emilie Simon – I Wanna Be Your Dog

I met Emilie Simon through the soundtrack to *La Marche De L'Empereur*: very delicate songs, kind of ambient for the glacial era with little electronic noises under Emilie's sweet voice. I never imagined I would find a Stooges cover on one of her records.

Coralie Clemant – Indecise

Coralie borrows textures and guitar sounds of American indie rock to recreate French pop music. Benjamin Biolay, the composer and her brother, produced this record. I love the mix of the vintage keyboards, charming voice and noisy guitars.

Mickey Feio – 3 ETs Records

This is the special and spatial project of painter and home computer musician Paulinho do Amparo. He loves Elvis Presley, Frank Zappa, Tim Maia and Miles Davis; his records are produced at home with strange, homemade instruments, creating high-lo-sci-fi. Live, he has three ETs playing with him: it's beautiful.

Mundo Livre S/A – Por Pouco

This is the group that co-founded the movement Mangue Beat. They created a whole new concept of music from North East Brazil with Chico Sciende and Nação Zumbi – a mix of Brazilian rhythms with rock'n'roll.

La Pupuña – La Pupuña

'Guitarrada' is a style of music and a rhythm from the north of Brazil, influenced by Latin and Caribbean music with many guitars. This is the best salsa, guitarrada and surf music to dance to. And they wear the best flowered t-shirts.

Coquetel Molotov is presented by Ana Garcia, Jarmeson de Lima, Tathiana Nunes and Viviane Menezes, and is broadcast on Universitária FM, 99.9 (Brazil), Saturdays 11am to 12pm.

www.coquetelmolotov.com.br



the unit ama

Words: **Leon McDermott**

Photography: **Mark Newton**

To the long list of buzzing, visionary albums and singles that Nottingham-based Gringo Records have released since their inception back in 1997 – and it's a list that takes in everything from Bilge Pump's muscle-jerking explorations to Eska's charged sonic battery through to the controlled explosions of Nottingham's Wolves! (Of Greece) – you can add The Unit Ama's eponymous debut.

The north-eastern trio – drummer Christian Alderson, bass player Jason Etherington and vocalist and guitarist Steven Malley – make a beautifully unholy racket, dense with weight but shimmering with light, throwing out jagged, atonal riffs and gnomic musings on dead animals and the perils of acquiescence to the hand of the government.

They're a slightly shady bunch – peruse their website, where they seem at least as interested in recommending restaurants and capps, or inviting passings surfer to create a "variation ...in audio or visual form" of The Unit Ama, as they are in telling you about themselves – but for Gringo Records' Matt Newnham, that's part of the band's appeal.

"They're not the kind of band who are going to set up a MySpace page and let everyone contact them," he says. "They like a bit of mystery, and that's not the way most bands like to present themselves. Most bands completely lay themselves



polysics

Words: **Felicity Hughes**

Photography **Becky Cross**

Hiro, lead singer of Polysics, grits his teeth in masochistic ecstasy as his body, shot through with tazer blasts of synth pop and frenzied stabs of distorted punk rock, is flung about the stage.

"Hi, Poly people! Fire, do you feel fire? Let's burn this fucking place down!" he screams.

Rewind a few days and Hiroyuki Hayashi is sitting in front of me. Noting his clear skin, bright eyes and perfect teeth, I speculate that if he hadn't started a band, then he could have been just as successful with a career advertising something wholesome, like milk. Fumi, the band's bass player – with chipped black nail polish, lopsided grin and frizzed hair – fits the rock image far more.

Despite these differences, throughout the interview the two of them often speak in stereo, as if wired into the same network. They tell me that during their recent American tour Fumi received a copy of a film script from a devoted fan in which she was one of the main characters. I ask what it was like.

"Strange," they chime in *Midwich Cuckoos*-style synchronicity, then burst out laughing.

I'm surprised to find them so relaxed and friendly: their onstage uniforms of orange jump suits and wraparound reflective shades make them a fairly menacing quartet.

"We put on our costumes and ..." Hiro makes a robotic clicking noise, "On."

The style of dress is very similar to the outfits worn by Eighties band Devo, and Hiro freely admits that the band were a huge influence. "I first heard Devo when I was a student. It was a shocking experience. My concept of rock music got turned

'They draw you in, break everything down, and then explode'

open, and want people to know everything there is to know about them, but they're not really interested in that."

Operating as a hive-mind collective (according to Newnham, "they have the notion that no one person is more important than anyone else"), The Unit Ama have, since 2002, coalesced into a muscular, inventive band whose music – rich with tricky rhythmic and melodic flourishes, as expansive as it can be claustrophobic and constricting – crackles and bristles with invention. Think the tight, clipped aesthetic of Dischord (post-)hardcore filtered through a paranoid, uniquely British worldview, the scarred post-industrial landscapes of the once-productive Tyne and Tees painted in sound, the beauty of rust and decay played loud.

Signed to Gringo after blistering support slots with Fugazi, Erase Errata and Bilge Pump, The Unit Ama, along with Lords – whose sucker punch of blues primitivism, *This Ain't A Hate Thing, It's A Love Thing*, has also just been released by Gringo – and Polaris are Gringo's vanguard attempt to promote homegrown talent. "The trouble with British bands is that there's not enough support or interest, so building a community that's spread across the country is the core of what Gringo is about," Newnham says.

"The Unit Ama are definitely an intense band," he adds, "and they've got a lot going on, but one of the things I love about them is that they're never po-faced about what they do. They draw you in, break everything down, and then explode. They're serious about their music, definitely, but there's a sense of humour in there too, in their stage mannerisms. When they're playing live you might see Jason and Steve jumping about or wrestling on stage, and at first you might think, 'What the hell?' but it's funny. Or at least, it is to me."

www.theunitama.com

'We want to make a record with Devo!'

upside down. Shocking, like a lightning bolt coming from above and . . ." Hiro jolts with imaginary volts of electricity.

He explains that Polysics have taken Devo's electro-punk sound and developed it into their own style. "It's not the new wave of this decade nor the new wave as it was in the Eighties – it's the new style of now. When we made our last album we wanted to continue to make new forms of music, a new punk experience."

During their nine years as a band, Polysics' success has spread from their native Japan to Korea, America and the UK. The new album, *Now Is The Time!* justifies their continuing popularity by adding new elements to an already startlingly original repertoire, including new single 'I My Me Mine' – a song sung in 'space language'.

Hiro is keen to demonstrate: "Like an instrument – I feel sound and rhythm and energy," at which point he opens his mouth to emit a high-pitched squeal, finishing with a couple of clicking noises at the back of his throat. "No meaning. Just passion."

So, after nine years, do Polysics ever think of hanging up the space shades?

"Not yet!" chorus Hiro and Fumi.

"There are still places we want to go. We want to make more records," Fumi says defiantly.

Finally – with a strange, metallic glint in their eyes – the pair finish off in perfect sync: "We want to make a record with Devo!"

www.polysics.com



promoter profile: dolly mixture

Words: Nicola Meighan

Photography: Patrick Doyle

"At around four o'clock on the day of our Christmas party, I got a frantic call from Douglas BMX Bandit, crying, 'my Santa outfit has fallen through! Can I just wear a parka?'" laughs Sharon McHendry, the mini-beehived Scottish quarter of Glasgow's lady-led club collective, Dolly Mixture. What happened? "I ran around panicking, of course, and eventually found him suitable attire. He had presents for good boys and girls; some even sat on his knee."

A hyperactive, liquorice assortment of one part Weegie (McHendry) and three parts Swede (Sara Carlsson, Josefin Westman, Malin Landqvist), Dolly Mixture has been delighting party lovers with tunes from girl-related groups of all eras – and "cool lady noise" – for over a year.

Five tunes you're likely to hear, according to Dolly's queen bee decree: "Madame Hollywood" by Felix Da Housecat and Miss Kittin; "Pull Up To The Bumper" by Grace Jones; "Hittin' On Nothing" by Detroit Cobras; "I Heard it Through The Grapevine" by The Slits; "Big Spender" by Shirley Bassey."

Recent DJ sets have come courtesy of Sons And Daughters' Ailidh Lennon, and live shows have included Lucky Luke, The Gussets and the aforesaid, new-look BMX Bandits – now with vocalist (and requisite vixen), Rachel MacKenzie.

'We want to see men and women enjoying quality music with a female slant'

"That said," alerts Sharon, "this isn't an exclusive ladies' night in any way – we want to see men and women enjoying quality music with a female slant," she avows. "The point of the night, in some senses, is to encourage more women to set up clubs, to DJ, to play in bands and basically to get creative."

While the presence of cheerleaders at their first birthday party was brilliantly fitting, less likely is the sight of their occasional 'assistant': a denim-clad vintage cash register. "Yeah, it became like a mascot when my ex-flatmate, Gareth, did the door," Sharon enlightens. "He found an old seventies till in the Barras market, got it working, christened it 'Mama Casio', dressed it up in a pair of designer jeans – cut up, of course: the till was too fat for drainpipes."

Perhaps they'll resurrect Ms Casio when the Dolly DJs relocate from Glasgow's Stereo to MacSorley's in June. The venue may change, but the Dolly dogma stays the same. "We've got quite an open music policy," muses Sharon, "but there are a few offenders, some tunes that are barred." Such as?

"Touch Me" by Samantha Fox – good God; "My Heart Will Go On" by Celine Dion – we'll have none of the Warble Brigade, thank you. "Wind of Change" by The Scorpions is equally bad and will never grace the Dolly decks," she menaces.

I am gutted. No lighters aloft then?

"Lighters are banned."

www.myspace.com/dollymixclub

the void

first live: nebula

"I went to some big stadium/arena shows when I was young but I classify those as events.

"The first real 'show' that I went to was at a place called Fender's Ballroom in Long Beach, California. I think I might have been 15 at the time, and the main band that I went to go see was Blast. The headliner, I believe, was The Exploited. Other bands on the bill that night were Entropy, Aggression, and, if I'm not mistaken, maybe even The English Dogs.

"Fender's was great because it totally imprinted, still to this day, a massive fear within. The skinhead population was really big there and they rallied together sometimes and went for people like a massive freight train that had no breaks. In fact, that first night, I remember we all met at one friend's house and as I walked into his house he just bolted upstairs and into his room. Almost instantly he came back down with a pair of Doc Marten's and throws them at me and says, "You might want to borrow these tonight."

"I was really glad that he did because the skins got really rowdy that night. It was the scariest night of my life, and the whole time I was split in two. One half was, "Get me the fuck out of here!", and the other was, "Give me more!" The show was so great for me. I couldn't believe that the bands were REAL, and right in front of my face (when I raised a bit of courage to push towards the front, although always at the sides).

"The skins – they were getting so knarly that night, especially towards the one long-haired guy in the crowd. After a couple of failed attempts due to a crowded floor, the freight train gathered mass steam during a change-over of bands and the floor was cleared of all moshers and slammers, except for my friend who lent me the boots. Like true bats out of hell, the skins charged for the long-hair. There was like maybe 20 of them ranging from twig size to double XL all together one massive herd... CHARGING.

"I witnessed this whole thing from huddle to hike, and there was my friend standing alone in the middle, right in between the single long-hair and the hairless horde. He got bowled over and trampled so hard that I was surprised he didn't explode open like a watermelon dropped from the 13th floor. I couldn't keep from laughing my self shitless as I watched the tsunami take my friend.

"I am so glad that that was not me on my first night ever at Fender's or else I would have never seen other greats such as Bad Brains, Reagan Youth, Sub-Humans, GBH, The Stupids, RKL and other bands like 7 Seconds and Uniform Choice plus a whole lot of Dischord bands. I also saw Eddie's first band, Worked World, play there before I even knew him. Ah, Fender's... may you rest in peace... Since she burnt down to a crisp, in a blaze of punk rock glory ever emblazoned upon my mind."

(Ruben Romano)

first record: witch

"The first record I ever bought with my own money was Kiss *Alive* on double LP. I was nine years old and I remember seeing an ad for it in the paper, the week it came out, which was in 1975. It was \$5.99 (in Canadian dollars). When I got it home I stared at the back cover and remember thinking about all those lucky fuckers in the crowd photo, waiting around for the show to start. And here's me, stranded on a fucking island with no chance in hell to ever see something like that."

(Dave Sweetapple)

first live: ladyfuzz

"The first show I ever went to was a concert of my dad singing. Both of my parents are classical singers. My parents met through singing, and my granddad played organs and violins all the time. My first memory – apart from my dad coming home from work and singing all night and us not being able to fall asleep – was my mum teaching me some Austrian folk song when I was about four. I ended up as part of choir, a church choir, and singing gospel and stuff."

(Liz Neumayr)



metallic falcons

Words: **Beth Capper**

Illustration: **Robert Ramsden**

"The Falcons are slaves to a sick dream of beauty and eternal forlorn," says Sierra Casady of Metallic Falcons, the Brooklyn-based duo that she forms one half of. About a year ago, when interviewing Sierra and her sister Bianca Casady for a piece I was writing on their band CocoRosie, they told me a childhood story about going out driving in the desert, getting lost and running out of gas. Stranded there, without supplies, they waited it out while their father went to get help.

Last year, Sierra revisited the desert for a second time accompanied by her friend Matthea Baim. There, somewhere in New Mexico, a well of ideas appeared like a water mirage, and *Desert Doughnuts* – the debut from Metallic Falcons, released on Bianca Casady and Melissa Shirkovitz's Voodoo Eros imprint – was created.

"One year ago, sitting on a little chair made of sticks and stones, I heard a noise," recalls Sierra. "It was the sound of a bird but I looked up and there was nothing. My mind loosened and allowed feelings to rehearse inwardly. They sang 'We Are Broken' and I thought I might try and figure it out. The desert is love and we, though bound, betray it with flight, finding glory through death."

The Casadys are often this vague in interviews, preferring their audience to read between the lines. While Sierra suggests that the music she makes with CocoRosie is all about looking for a glimmer of light in the darkness, she defines the foreboding operettas on *Desert Doughnuts* as doing the opposite – taking the light into the dark, like snuffing a candle in an electrical blackout On the album, Metallic Falcons sound like deceased choir singers holed up in a tattered cathedral utilising a

detuned organ and the tragic intensity of their voices. Their haunting, dreamy falsettos rise and fall in waves of sadness, while propulsive scratchy guitar drives them onwards, like cries from beyond the grave trying to make an indent on the living.

Desert Doughnuts features special appearances from the most obvious sources, with Antony (Antony And The Johnsons) providing vocals on the ghostly 'Nighttime and Morning', and brief cameos from Jana Hunter and Devendra Banhart. Casady's mother also joins her – an experience that proved inspirational.

"My mother is so beautiful and her voice and innocence is so inspiring," she says. "She returned to New Mexico during the time of our recording after years away. We took some amps out into the sand, plugged them into my mom's truck and let the wind teach us about forgetting."

www.voodooeros.com

love spells: more from Voodoo-Eros

"I wanted to put out a magical, rough compilation of all my friends most special old tapes," says Bianca Casady, of the label Voodoo-Eros that she started with her friend Melissa Shirkovitz.

"Mostly, we aren't looking for new musicians, we are making music. But we are always listening. I can't describe what for, but it has to be crazy raw. We all met at church and found each other through harmony. Some of the songful beauties involved include Nomi, Antony (Antony And The Johnsons) and Diane Cluck."

SMOG

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leopard leg

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

I've been dreaming of all-girl psych-noise-magic collectives for years, but I don't think I ever quite envisaged the Brighton/London group Leopard Leg, not even that time I was tripping in a meadow and everything went a bit like a Richard Dadd painting and I thought a thistle was a real person, a bare-armed girl with green-white skin, and that there were maybe hundreds of other whispering thistle girls hiding in the long grass.

Almost, though: there appear to be hundreds of Leopard Leg members (around 10, at the last

'Free jams in the forest are all go'

count), and they hide in a meadow of jack leads, mics, drums, and more drums, and they whisper too. They dress in motley costumes from a desert-island dressing-up box. But – after a beautifully tense build-up of groans and sighs, scraped violins and microtonal sea shanty – they erupt into a massive fucking racket, a Heath Robinson-ish construction of percussive sound. They're no longer ghostly or hallucinatory; they're like some elite fighting faction: determined and quixotic.

"Leopard Leg was one drum and four cassette players until last summer," says founder Maya, who describes herself as a "meat and death historian". "For a long time I had wanted a really big band that was drum-based, that other girls would see and think, 'I can do that'."

A year later, and Leopard Leg have just been recording their first album – in Seven Sisters forest in

Sussex. "It was on a new moon, and we saw some unidentified flashing lights!" says Robyn. So where else would they make music, given the choice? Answers range from: "One of the chambers in the Great Pyramid of Giza" (Aymie) to "A petrified forest, or Wookey Hole" (Blue) to "That church made entirely of skulls, in Prague" (Emma, referring possibly to the Kutna Hora ossuary). Rowan would like to play in Newgrange, Ireland, "on the dawn of the winter solstice. It was constructed in 3200 BC, and for only 17 minutes a year it's flooded by sunlight," she explains. "It has interesting acoustic qualities, like misplaced echoes."

Leopard Leg share with recent tour-mates Liars a self-aware primitivism that draws on a non-specific, mondo-archaeological past in order to make transcendent, hedonistic music in the present.

"Leopard Leg in a way feels like a humble salute to our ancestors," Robyn says when I ask what ancient civilisations the band like the most. Aymie and Emma go for the Egyptians. "I love Ammut, or 'female devourer of hearts'," says Emma. "When you die, you meet Horus and he weighs your heart against the feather of truth for rights of passage into the Underworld. If the scales tilt, the Ammut will crawl up to the scales and gobble your heart. Ha!"

The band's forthcoming release is a split album (on Upset The Rhythm) with San Francisco's T.I.T.S., another band of mind-melting female avatars. T.I.T.S. are less in number than Leopard Leg, more song-based and more guitar-heavy, but they share a similar group-mind aesthetic. They're pretty heavy, too, with giant riffs and chilling choral vocals straight out of *Suspiria*. Is the release harbinger of a slew of heavy music that's female-friendly and female-led; a document from a world too wyrd, fun and scary for the macho noise-posturers of the current sub-underground? I certainly hope so.

"Sometimes it's hard for someone new to connect with us on stage when we've all created a storyline," is the tactful reply when I ask if they need another pair of hands. Luckily, however, "free jams in the forest are all go!" Count me in.

www.upsettherhythm.co.uk

Islaja



in the mix: six organs of admittance's songs for outdoor listening

Popol Vuh – In Den Garten Pharaos

A perfect sunrise track. Near-religious contemplation. Drunken monk-style. Get the hand drums rolling and get the hell away from the hippies. You can float on this song for a long time. Texture and texture.

Jakob Olausson – Welcome Traveler

This is a great song for cruising around in the woods. Jakob is the new thing, one of the only people making folk-inspired music right now that I not only can get into, but am totally jealous of. I'm over it now, so I can just kick back and listen and be amazed. Thick and multi-tracked vocals layered on dissonant reverb-laced melodies. Damn.

Bola Sete – Guitar Lamento

He doesn't need a lot of fancy tunings and he doesn't need steel strings. I could listen to any of his songs anywhere, but there is something light and heavy about his touch that makes me want to listen to it in a windstorm. The location doesn't matter.

Fennesz – Circassian

Fennesz also makes perfect sunrise music – if you were living on Venus, and the sun rose and burned all your flesh to blackened dust within seconds. A good trick is to put on Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* series and play a Fennesz record as the soundtrack. The images of huge suns and galaxies fit perfectly with the macro-fractal shards of electric beauty.

Islaja (pictured above) – Rohkaisulaulu

This is about as forest music as you can get without pulling out your 20-sided dice to figure out what key you should play your lute in. What I mean is that it is dark stuff, without falling into any of the medieval clichés that make me want to puke. I don't really know what she is singing about, but I doubt it's about dragons and shit. It's just scary. It's also very soothing. The music seems to be built horizontally rather than vertically, which is probably why some people find it too abstract. Too bad for you, losers.

Sleep – Dragonaut

This is one song that I actually do listen to while outdoors – mostly while walking to the record store here in Oakland, California. Sleep perfected the rhythm. Yes, *that* rhythm. The one that everyone does now. The march. The, 'I've got my headphones on and am walking hard and fast so don't ask me for money and don't look at me' kind of march. Totally sick guitar solo, too.

Bruce Springsteen – Nebraska

No song captures the essence of being in the great, vast expanse of the middle of America like this one does. The slow boredom that turns to banality, the lyrics depicting travel and laying waste to innocence. So beautiful and absolutely frightening and still: so natural. I have to listen to this whole record everytime I travel through that area.

(Ben Chasny)

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this aint vegas

Words: **Hayley Avron**
Photography: **Steve Landles**

The name says it all. This Aint Vegas. It's straight-talking, but it could mean one of a thousand things. They're hard to pin down. On the surface, it's all manifestos and slogans. The Sunderland band's record covers secrete such confidence they make you look for a dotted line, eagerly licking the nib of your ballpoint pen. Their website looks like somebody has forcibly hand-stamped a small corner of the internet.

Then you delve deeper and find more questions than answers. *"What's the use in promotion without a decent calculator?/What's the use in promotion without a decent grasp of number?"*

'What's the use in promotion without a decent calculator?'

I ask the band some open questions and Adam's answers leave me wanting to ask more, though we're constrained by time and deadlines.

"Influences for lyrics or anything else come from everything. I know that sounds a little vague, but the meanings behind the songs we write are so far apart, there is no other way of putting it."

My suggestion that they have an anti-corporate attitude is met with a no-nonsense response: "The simple fact is – it's not a route we have ever fancied. Good luck to anybody who does want to try it out. We have a lot of friends who have gone that way, and that is fine."

That these guys are old primary school friends comes as little surprise; there's a audible bond

between them that follows them onstage, you see it the minute the feet start stamping and the microphone stand begins its ritual strangulation; you hear it in the run-out grooves as the echoes of studio life spill out onto the vinyl.

"We were very young when we first started... As time progressed, we absorbed what was going on around us and took great influence from many different sources. It's important to us to make our own decisions in whatever we do. As a group we feel more comfortable like that. It leaves you free."

And freedom, it would appear, is something that translates well to the creation of jaunty, forthright rock'n'roll. Listening to This Aint Vegas is like listening to a choir that has been stripped down to one member and placed through a punk rock compressor. Watching them live, you can't help but glance around, look on as the awe on the faces around you turns into jocular grins. They're intense and alluring, without being lofty. The guitars are equal parts mangled and precise, the vocals seek advice from invisible devils and harlots, and the drums are every bit as primal as they are studied.

They're a hard-working band who let the music do the driving while the ambition rides side-saddle. This mightn't be Vegas, but they're worth the gamble.

www.thisaintvegas.co.uk

my robot friend

Words: **Ralph Cowling**
Illustration: **Simon Peplow**

Dear My Robot Friend,

How difficult was it growing up as a robot? I know that the kids in my school used bully me just for having long hair and listening to records by people like Lawnmower Death – and they were probably right to.

"It was difficult for me because I didn't know that I was a robot until much later in life. My parents never told me the truth, so I spent my youth wondering why I was so different from the other kids. None of my other friends were able to light up at night or perform processor-intensive numerical calculations, so I felt pretty isolated. Then there was also my sexual attraction to machines and other inanimate objects. I felt like I needed to keep that a secret from others and it wasn't until I heard the music of Kraftwerk that I realised that there might be more going on with me than I had been told."

Do you fear Luddites? I know that that shit started up back in the 19th Century but there are some angry-looking dudes out there. I mean, my sister, she can't write an email, you think she starts going on about how she's a failure and admits defeat? Hell no! The computer gets a beating... That's got to be an issue for you as a robotic entity, right?

mgr

Words: **Stewart Gardiner**
Illustration: **Tom Eastland**

What do the letters in the name stand for? I'm guessing Mike Gallagher Recordings...

"I have heard that one before," says Mike Gallagher, the Isis man whose solo project we're here to discuss. "But it actually stands for mustard-gas and roses. It's a quote from the beginning of Kurt Vonnegut's book, *Slaughterhouse Five*."

For music so rife with darkened, mystical – and notably voiceless – imagery, Vonnegut appears to be our perfect guide. "Listen:" he tells us in that novel, *Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time*. "This idea of being cast adrift, beyond the boundaries of linear progression, sits well with wrapping yourself amidst the sepulchral ruins of *Nova Lux* (out now on Neurot Recordings).

"It all kind of started unintentionally," explains Gallagher of the project. "I purchased some recording equipment a while ago and I started writing little vignettes as a way to familiarise myself with the new gear. Songs started to take shape and before I knew it I had written and recorded what was to become *Nova Lux*."

The intensity of Isis has certainly been carried over, but here there is a real sense of calm. Although that's not to suggest there isn't an uneasiness at play. MGR may act as a means for Mike Gallagher to express that which he can't within his band, but at the same time it remains an extension of what was made possible in the first place.

Mike agrees. "MGR does allow me to express elements and textures that might not

'I am a robosexual'

"I don't fear Luddites. I have an advantage over most other forms of technology in that I am very sexy. I find that even people who are anti-technology are not anti-sexy. So I am pretty safe."

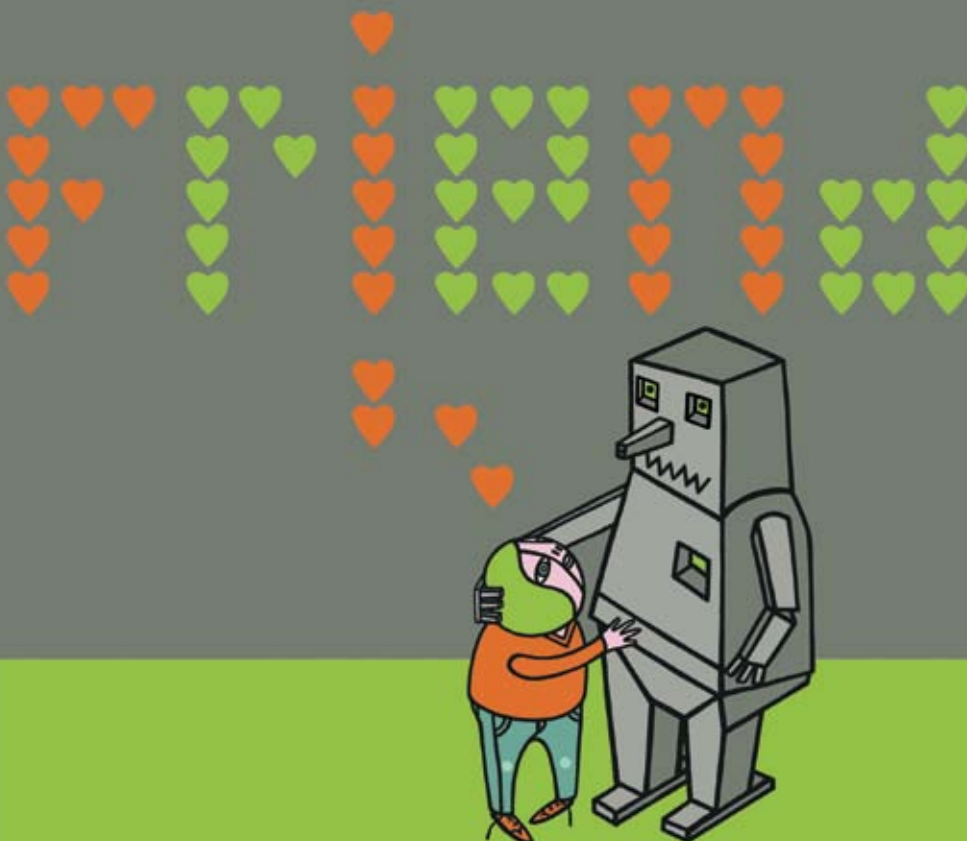
When did you first realise you had a talent for making music? What was your function prior to that time?

"Oh, I'm still waiting to realise that I have a talent for making music. I enjoy making music, but the talent part... Well, one can always dream! Before making music I was programmed for making visual art. I used to do very elaborate pen and ink drawings and stay inside and mope. At a certain point I realised that this excessive moping and isolation was due to a bug in my programming, so after several years of calculations and system reboots, I became a different sort of robot."

Even though you are a robot, I've felt a lot of love in your music. Do you try to spread your love around with your musical sounds?

"Indeed. I am a robosexual. I found that, once I accepted myself as such and embraced the quirks of my romantic construction, there was plenty of love to go around. At the very core of my operating system is a desire to love and be loved. So, yeah, I am a bit of a robohippie in that regard. Love! Love! Love! I've got lots of it. You want some?"

www.myrobotfriend.com



Beautiful end-of-the-world music

fit into what Isis is trying to accomplish, and I am very grateful to have the opportunity to get that out of my system. But the fact of the matter is that I have been playing with Isis for close to eight years, and those guys continue to influence and inspire me. So I think that MGR also shares many similarities."

With MGR he's making a more beautiful end-of-the-world music, if you like. Think less *Donnie Darko* on the cusp of time, more being locked inside and out of it; a place where death is in the moment.

Nova Lux is an astonishing record, viewing the best of avant-garde drone workouts through a dark post rock sensibility, at times recalling Angelo Badalamenti's compositions for David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. I wonder if movie soundtracks are indeed an inspiration.

"The influences for the music are kind of all over the place," explains Mike. "After I was finished with 'III' [from the LP], I realised that the background loops sounded very similar to the highway noise that was always audible from the apartment that I was living in at the time. I guess those sounds crept into my subconscious. Some other, more obvious influences are Neil Young's *Dead Man* soundtrack and Bobby Beausoleil's *Lucifer Rising* soundtrack.

"To me, the album has kind of a relaxing feel to it. Part of the reason for that may be due to my days being a bit crazy at that time, and me needing something to just zone out to."

www.mgrsounds.com



RAMESES' REVENGE

tour diary: hawney troof

Words: **Vice Cooler**

Illustration: **Vincent Vanoli**

London

I arrive sleepy and grossed out following a 12-hour plane ride with overflowed sewage soaking into the floors of the economy seating. The customs man drills me about my love for shopping, staying with men and, uh, San Francisco. I quickly realise where he is going when the fag-basher veins start popping out. Welcome to the UK!

The show tonight is with Afrirampo, who are the sweetest. The show is sold out, with an enormous line around the block. I sell my last 40 mixtapes and get rid of 62 of my shirts. A good start!

The next morning, I wake up and walk through Mat's house to piss. As I walk past the living room, I see a huge French man laughing – this is Mat's roommate. I realise that I am wearing boxer shorts with huge lipstick marks and x's and o's all over them. I also have a bloody mouth from an unnamed incident that happened hours earlier. Greeeaaatt!

Tonight I am scheduled to play with Ana Da Silva. This is a huge trip because The Raincoats have had such a profound effect on me since I discovered them in my early teens. I recently bought her solo record, *The Lighthouse*, and was blown away. Unfortunately Ana is ill in hospital. Tonight is her first cancelled show ever! I hope she gets better.

Luckily, Hands On Heads save the day, reminding me of The Yummy Fur. They are super-great. I party post-show with the Upset The Rhythm kids. We make a drum circle outside, eat falafel and watch a "best of YouTube". Also an Australian children's show from the early Nineties that has a green child who suffocates himself if anyone but this other child holds him. Tanith, whose home we're at, actually stars in this episode!

Bristol

Me and Mat take the One Pound Bus to Bristol. It's a huge double-decker thing crammed to the max. We are on top and I attempt to sleep but the bus almost blows over many times. Scared as shit, but we arrive in B-town OK. The Corey O's, Valerie and Naomi play. It's an awkward show but good



considering I bought two peanut butter milkshakes thinking that someone else would drink them with me, which didn't happen, so both went into my stomach making me a full vomitsville.

Leeds

I'm playing at this old meeting hall. It reminds me of seeing my first shows at veterans' halls in the south. Jonny, who set it up, decorates with balloons, shows *Revenge Of The Nerds*, holds a raffle and tops it off with a pie-eating contest.

London

Tonight is the last show in England and I am pretty beat and tired. But Kim and Thurston just arrived in town and took a surprise cab with their sweet

manager to come see the show. I always trip out when I see friends in unexpected places. It makes me really psyched! The set climaxes (literally) when two young boys have sex on the side of the stage.

Egypt

I look out the plane windows and, through the dust and smog, I can see the pyramids. They totally dwarf the city. It's unreal.

Themba and Nora are friends of mine who moved here from the north-west of America. We take a cab to their home, which takes almost an hour. The view is endlessly insane and there are policemen on every corner holding Uzis. Here the cabs rule the traffic and roll through whatever lane they please. There are no traffic lights, speed limits,





It's so punk, but no one here cares or even knows what punk is!

traffic officers, or street signs. And absolutely no rules. Like almost everything in Egypt, the taxis are from the Seventies. They are falling apart, rusting and most of them only have a few doors that open.

I have my own guestroom with a large, dusty bed. The porch overlooks the Nile! We dine at the market on 10-cent falafel, fool, and freshly squeezed orange juice, before heading to the Nile and renting a sailboat to watch the sunset. All of a sudden there is this moaning Arabic chanting coming in stereo over the water – it is the last round of today's prayers broadcast from barely working speakers from every mosque in the city!

We go to a dirty, worn-down café to discuss the logistics of tomorrow's show with Sherrif, at whose house I'll be playing. A drunk guy at the next table picks a fight with the largest man in the room. Large man invites him outside where drunk man's face becomes smashed. Post-smash he runs in bleeding all over the floors and tables. The larger guy's friend runs in, yells a sentence, then headbutts the drunk man's already crushed face. His whole face has been turned into a cracked-skull egg mush!

The next morning we rent camels to ride to the pyramids. The pyramids are closed so we pay off these kids who stand at the fence (which surrounds the pyramids for miles), letting people in for a few pounds. The ride through the Sahara is intense. The horizon is all city to the right and endless desert in every other direction. Below every sand dune is another obstacle, resembling the old video games like *King's Quest* or *Zelda*. Sometimes it would be the military (whom we pay off way more than once) or a man who has made a fence out of rusted car doors and barbed wire as the only trail down a cliff. We park our camels behind a dune and run to the pyramids. Nora speaks to security for 15 minutes in Arabic and, miraculously, we don't have to pay a fee. So awesome.

Regardless of our meeting the night before (I said I needed a PA and a mixer to do the show), tonight we only have a stereo speaker. Themba and I go store to store for an hour without finding the right adaptors or mixers. But Sherrif says his friend is bringing a four-track, and so I end up using his homie's 1980 Fostex four-track running through a home stereo he inherited from his father! It's so punk, but no one here cares or even knows what punk is!

A woman buys one of my shirts, which has 'Blow This Place Up' written above the White House. She invites us over for major hangage and drinks so we catch two cabs to a street corner and walk through several crazy security checkpoints (with her wearing a 'Blow This Place Up' shirt) until I finally see a sign reading "Welcome to the home of the US ambassador". Woah! We end up in one of the most secured areas of the world (connected to the US Embassy, btw), sharing stories beneath the stars by the heated pool until sunrise.

The next morning we go back to the market for one last lunch blowout. I try a dish which is spaghetti, noodles, rice, chickpeas and a tomato curry sauce all thrown into a cup! It reminds me of something I would have made as a kid! I haven't showered since getting into town and I reek of camel, sunscreen, sweat and sand. It's been one of the best trips of my life.

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WHY I HATE...

pop

Words: Ben Myers

Illustration: Søren Mosdal

Why are we pretending to like this bland, disposable, vacuous music?



Yes. I hate pop music. Controversial, eh? It shouldn't be.

But, before the assassination, a definition: "Pop music is often defined as music produced commercially, for profit, or 'as a matter of enterprise not art'," notes Wikipedia. "Pop is designed to appeal to everyone and doesn't come from any particular place or mark off any particular taste."

See, already I'm getting annoyed. It's that line "designed to appeal to everyone" that gets me. In an age run by marketing men, pop music – which has, to be fair, always been sold for mass appeal – has morphed into culture we're all permitted to buy into. Pop says: come one, come all. Bring your cynicism and your irony, so as long as you keep buying. It's McMusic; sickly, disposable, idiot fodder. Music as communism, but in the hands of capitalists. Cultural uniformity.

Fuck that! I want my music elite. I don't want to find myself discussing Kaiser Chiefs with my headmaster uncle (last gig: Westlife) on Christmas Day again. I want him to take me to one side and ask me to remove my Gay For Johnny Depp T-shirt. I want snobbery and discourse and, unless you're Green Day, chances are I'll hate you once you pass the 10 million sales mark. Sure, I like pop songs.

Some of them. I like Blink 182 and Chic and Natasha Bedingfield and Har Mar Superstar, but I have no interest in the false conceit of pop music.

The way I see it, there are two types of pop fans. Those who like a song buy it, love it without analysis or irony, live by it and dispose of it; the average high-street shopper who gets his or her cultural stimuli from Asda, basically.

Then are those who merely pretend to like it – those who witter on about pop's beautiful vacuity

I want to punch Cat Deeley in the face

and veneer, and how jolly wonderful it all is. I'm looking at you, Paul Morley.

But since when did hating pop music become anathema? My entire adolescence was a reaction to all things popular. Music was never about continuing to live in a Saturday-morning fantasy land – I mean, I want to punch Cat Deeley in the face – but rather a guest pass to the adult party: sex, alcohol, sleeping in ditches. Of course, pop music provides pivotal moments of brilliance. Songs that soundtrack your life. Define your era. And the

obsession of true pop devotees is undeniable, but then the same can be said for any musical genre.

There are two words that sum up everything I hate about pop: Pete Waterman. This man ensured that my generation's formative years were soundtracked by a sickening, synthetic, airless carousel of music devoid of meaning or value.

One other point: pop music has killed critical faculties in the 21st century. You can no longer merely say: 'I love pop music – it's brilliant,' as it won't fly. I want to be blown away, confused and face-fucked by a song, not just briefly titillated. And *puh-lease* don't say you love Sugababes and Girls Aloud because they're sultry and real and have great production and because *that's what you're meant to say*. Say it because you mean it. I like some Sugababes stuff, yes. I also think Madonna has released nothing but conceptual offal with all the life irrigated out of it for 15 years straight. Ditto Jacko (at least Prince had his creative crisis in private). And my opinions on Robbie Williams have remained watertight since 1991. Sue me.

No. Pop is merely an extension of the current culture of perpetual adolescence, cheap thrills, mindless gossip and whooping.

And I hate whooping more than I hate Williams.



why i love...

girls aloud

Words: **Alex Macpherson**

Illustration: **Ben Rivers**

Wake up to the smart, single-minded pop genius of the world's finest girl band

They aren't exactly underground, though their debut album was entitled *Sound Of The Underground*. They're the best band in the country – no, the WORLD – right now. They are Nadine Coyle (singer), Sarah Harding (blonde *FHM*-friendly 'totty'), Kimberly Walsh (utility player), Cheryl Tweedy (tabloid dream; icon), and Nicola Roberts (completely out-of-place ginger; also an icon). They are Girls Aloud.

Their songs boast the smartest lines, the most fucked-up sounds, the most instantly gratifying hooks. They make anthems for Binge Drink Britain, choruses which sound most alive when bellowed raucously by a gaggle of alcopop-saturated girls; they do a nice line in tear-sodden balladry, too. They're also the best acid test for snobbery. The UK music press failed it, sneering that Girls Aloud's origins were in "hotspots of teenage pregnancy and petty crime around the country" (true, and they never hid it; maybe there was something in that *Sound Of The Underground* title after all), proving that while working-class white boys will always get lionised as 'gritty' and 'authentic', no matter how bad their music (Oasis, Arctic Monkeys), working-class women must feign classiness and sophistication in order not to be dismissed as trash.

They've produced three albums in as many years, all of which are high-concept works, and essentially perfect. (At this point, their producers and writers, Xenomania, deserve a parenthetical mention. But although the Girls Aloud project is guided by them, the relationship is a symbiotic one.)

Sound Of The Underground (2003) takes its cues from diverse sources including Puretone, Betty Boo and The Knack, and paints Girls Aloud as teenage

small-town rebels: the girl gang hanging out on street corners and in provincial meat markets, bored out of their skulls by everything. The music is bubblegum of the purest, pinkest flavour, but the recurring themes are dissatisfaction and frustration. 'No Good Advice' is pop at its most nihilistic, giving the middle finger to every authority the Girls could think of: parents, God, the very concepts of hard work and ambition; 'Life Got Cold' recounts in dead-eyed detail the desperation of finding ways to fill endlessly expanding time. There's no self-pity though: rather, there's steel-eyed ambition and determination to make it the fuck out of this shithole.

Which they did, by winning a reality TV programme.

What Will The Neighbours Say? (2004) follows the Girls as they move to the big smoke. The small-town mindset is gone; the cheap beats have metamorphosed into a smorgasbord of sleek, forward-thinking, hyper-polished production. It sounds like a bunch of kids let loose in a sweet shop, eyes widened as they try to take in all the hitherto unavailable delights on offer at once. There are heartbreaks and hangovers, non-stop bons mots ("He started out a squeeze, but pretty soon he was a tourniquet"), and pounding techno that sounds like Vitalic on pink wine ('The Show'). There is the ambitious 'Graffiti My Soul': twanging guitar + banging Prodigy techno + lyrics about fisting + best stutter-vocal effect in pop ever = rejected by Britney's people because it had no chorus.

Chemistry (2005) moves on to the serious shit, and it's funnier than ever. 21st Century C-list celebrity is amusing, vacuous, beautiful and

Their songs boast the smartest lines, the most fucked-up sounds, the most instantly gratifying hooks

completely fucking ridiculous, and on their third album, the Girls embrace their *Heat*-magazine status fully. The album is full of finely judged barbs, from which they don't exempt themselves. 'Models' is a girl-power riposte to 'Girls On Film'; elsewhere, they capture the dark, heady intoxication of their own transient semi-fame on the astonishing 'Swinging London Town'. The endlessly quotable lyrics amp up the cartoonish ludicrousness to tabloid levels: check the impossibly addictive mid-album double-header of 'Watch Me Go' (which culminates in a Daphne And Celeste-esque chant of "I know what you're thinkin'! You been thinkin' 'bout my butt!") and 'Waiting', all about how much the Girls love to have sex. Meanwhile, they manage to both trump The White Stripes' entire career with the faux-blues intro to 'Biology' and dip their perfectly manicured toes into the waters of ketamine-house with the blankly blissful 'It's Magic'.

Who knows what comes next? Who cares? Right now, Girls Aloud make music for the head, the heart and the hips, and they are brilliant in every single way.



absolutely flawless

Words: **Alex Macpherson**

Photography: **Cat Stevens**

Meet **Alex Smoke** – classically trained orchestrator of precise, pristine micro house anthems

'I like order and harmony, in every sense'

Alex Smoke would, I think, like to be much more of a moody bastard than he is. "I'm naturally rebellious," he offers as explanation for turning his back on his classical background; later he will claim, "I hate really happy music." He cites Ryoji Ikeda's *dataplex* – "an album of pure glitch" – as his favoured listening of the moment, and notorious moody bastard Aphex Twin as one of his musical heroes. And there's no doubt that moodiness is one of his music's most important threads.

But Alex Smoke – real name Alex Menzies – is actually an extremely affable and accommodating Glaswegian, the kind of character people will describe as "a really, really nice bloke" and mean it.

His music, too, is extraordinarily accommodating. Smoke takes basic house templates and swathes them in gorgeous, trembling melody and obsessively multi-layered arrangements. It's a formalist, rather than formulaic, approach; and even when Smoke aims for a harsher effect, it's one always characterised by precision, internal logic, and a total lack of unnecessary elements.

More often, though, it's beautifully and exquisitely pristine: both Smoke's debut, 2005's *Incommunicado*, and new album *Paradolia* are replete with music that is both delicately crafted and astoundingly effective on the dancefloor. The former is a collection of refined takes on electro-house, dubstep and the currently vogueish minimal house, composed over a four-year period; the latter is a more coherent album *qua* album, full of sleekly and elegantly constructed techno.

Centrepiece 'Prima Materia' is particularly astounding: it starts off portentous and dignified, with orchestral phrases sweeping imperiously

forward, before Smoke drops a completely standard house beat and the song metamorphoses into a big gay anthem, all triumphant horn fanfares and ecstatic string climaxes. Elsewhere, 'Formax' sees the animals from André Kraml's 'Safari' rounded up with electric cattle prods, while 'Never Want To See You Again' features the best descending minimal riff of 2006 so far.

One thing that fascinates me about minimal house is the way it perfectly and simultaneously expresses very opposing, extreme emotions: obviously, there's the anthemic dancefloor element, but at the same time, and without impinging upon the happiness, it's often wistful and melancholic.

"The best music I've written has been in times of stress. Relentlessly happy music like trance seems unnatural to me – it has to have an element of melancholy to make any sense. Trance is almost like... California emotion, painted with such a heavy brush."

Trance is really the elephant in the room, with regard to a lot of minimal house, though. The minimal sound has been ridiculously fashionable for a while now, but more and more I hear stuff and think, "Hang on, I have heard music like this before, and it was not music anyone called cool."

"Ha, yes, there's a lot of music coming out right now that I can't differentiate from stuff I know I detested. Therefore... Do I conclude I detest it? Or did I never really detest it in the first place? I mean, the trance thing, I guess I've done it myself – 'Chica Wappa' on the first album was pushing towards it, and I can't bring myself to play it out, because it seems so... obvious."

Neatness, tidiness, order: these things are crucial to Smoke's music. He reiterates his dislike of his classical upbringing, but says his current listening is "more classical than ever, now that I don't have to". "I like order and harmony, in every sense, and I also like tight, complex rhythms, which need a lot of space around them to work. I think the reason I like Mozart so much is because his music is so ordered and balanced. It takes a lot of time and effort for me to try and roughen things up, if that's the texture I want to go for."

Sent away on orchestral courses each summer, Smoke sought refuge first in hip hop (it's telling that Nas' *Illmatic* proved an early favourite: only the smoothest rappers for the teenage Smoke!) and then techno, with early purchases including Carl Craig's *Landcruising* and Laurent Garnier's *Laboratoire Mix*. These days he has rediscovered a love for orchestra. "An orchestra has a lot more scope for creating or conveying an emotion. And with electronic music, you can create even more noises." He talks most enthusiastically of his ambition to score film soundtracks.

Though Smoke is adamant that tracks and film music should be kept separate, the visual qualities of his albums are what remains with you: 'Gam', the opening track of *Incommunicado*, evokes startlingly sharp scenes: circling strings panning gradually in deserted city streets, last night's detritus borne along on the breeze and a couple of early-morning stragglers heading home, then zooming further and further in, until the scene of the last rave still going is brought into focus, and then in the final stretch bursting through the doors to join them.

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bewitched

Words: **Hannah Gregory**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Bat For Lashes conjure genies and aliens from a ghost piano

It's wild swans calling and emerald slippers pattering, mystery and mysticism and bad weather. It's storytelling, fantasy and the desire for discovery, creation and procreation. It's the thunderstorm when Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights, or the tornado that whisks off Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz*. It must be the dramatic Kate Bush-esque production; the mighty harpsichord highs and the dirty desert guitar lows, the ovary-rattling sub-bass and the delicate harp in between. Or her voice, like rain on your heart. And the crescendos – what crescendos!

Natasha Khan, the Bat herself, talks about her music like one possessed. She grapples to pin it down, cross-referencing films, illustrators and dream-scenes: *Karate Kid*, Edmund Gorey, boys with animal heads.

'There is definitely a magical aspect to it, like casting a spell'

I tell her how, a few months back, I'd walked into Bat For Lashes' stripped-back show in London's Buffalo Bar, to see Natasha and her onstage partner, Ginger Lee, playing a mixture of guitar, autoharp and electronic machines, with only the audience's claps for percussion. How I had rushed through the city's streets to get there, and that as soon as I stepped inside it was as if someone had pressed hold on the beat of the city. Natasha's hair was long, slick and black like Cleopatra's. They were dressing up through the music, wearing feathers on their

heads in decoration. The scene was sparkling, and there were candles.

"I try to create the same feeling of dark and light in the dynamics of playing live, as I would working with subtle atmospheres and textures on the album," Natasha replies. "It's good to try to create a frenzy – I love that intense, chaotic Godspeedy element, which we try to bring in. There is definitely a magical aspect to it, like casting a spell."

You often talk about magic when you describe your music.

"I suppose it's just a way of describing a pure essence that's fantastical or that takes you out of the everyday. It's my escapism, it's my way of delving into another world. It's like a twisted rainbow... A beautiful thing..."

"In my early childhood, I lived in Pakistan and I have bizarre and strong memories from that," she continues. "I remember that we used to buy cages of multi-coloured chicks, which they'd dip-dyed, so you'd get big cages of chicks in neon pink, orange, green, ultra-blue – you know like the horse in *The Wizard Of Oz* that goes round and round and changes colour? I was so in love with them that I squeezed them so tightly they kept on dying on me!"

"My aunts believed in genies and ghosts, and if there was a power cut they would start chanting and praying because it meant the devil had come. It was like my version of Father Christmas. It takes a certain amount of naivety to suspend disbelief. Now I get that same naïve feeling by going to the cinema or when I'm visualising the story for a song – you know that it's not really true, but you believe in it anyway."

When did you stop believing in the mystical?

"When I was about 11 my dad disappeared overnight," says Natasha. "I didn't know what was happening, so I made up that he'd been abducted by aliens, because it was too sad to think that he'd done it off his own back. When he left the glass shattered. I grew up, overnight, and then I started to play and write songs. I would go downstairs at night-time to the piano and play with a soft pedal on. I never realised why I started playing at that point but maybe that was why... trying to get back to the unconsciousness of it. It was really secret, my special time to fantasise about things and let out my emotions."

There's an excerpt from one of those first pieces included on the forthcoming album, due to be released by Drowned In Sound in September (her debut single, 'The Wizard', was released on her own imprint of the label, She Bear Records, last month). The piano sounds far, far away, interspersed with spoken word in a swirling soundscape, as though from an open-air cinema. She agrees how special it is to be using a rediscovered tape from her childhood on an actual recording.

How does the secrecy of those first music-making experiences compare to sharing your music now?

"I think there still is secrecy, because when you're writing, you are in secret. Songwriting takes me back to those childlike feelings of not knowing and wonder and playfulness. And to that trance-like feeling of writing something and it working through you so you're almost unconscious, and then at the end what comes out of it is like a present, and you're like – well, thank-you! I don't really know where that came from, but it's good!"

"Then, the secret is out."
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Mixing it (L–R): **Kode9, Mala, Loefah**



night of the living bassheads

Words: **Melissa Bradshaw**
Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

It's deep, dark and underground, and it's about to take over... *Plan B* meets the figureheads of the dubstep revolution

Nando's, Croydon, April 2006. Over chicken with Digital Mystikz

How do you know when to release a track?

Mala: "I dunno, it's just like..."

Coki: "They done their time, innit? Most of the tracks he plays, no one else has got them. Obviously, once you start giving them out to other DJs, it becomes more known, and you see what response you get from other DJs."

And from crowds...

Coki: "Yeah."

Mala: "But it's also something you can't really explain; when we look at it now, it's also about experience. It's good that Digital Mystikz is two people, because we learn things off each other. For example, there's a track that I'm just playing at the moment, and Coki deleted it! He didn't even finish it, and deleted it cuz he wasn't happy with it."

Coki (*grinning*): "You can't take it personally!"

Mala: "I played it in Leeds and it got reloaded, it can't be finished cuz it doesn't exist anymore, apart from this one dub that I got. Things are like that, though. A lot of people say, 'You should release more tracks. When are more tracks coming out?' but I like that some tracks are only ever gonna be on dubplate. To me, music is about the moment. There's people that I've heard play out and I haven't got a clue what that track is, and I know I'm never gonna hear it again. But I'll always remember. There should be more mystery in art, man! Too many people are spoonfed, and everything's given an explanation or a description. People should interpret it how they wanna intepret it."

And god, there have been moments. Some, messy and commingled memories: sub-bass filling and overflowing through every muscle and nerve; too much beer, or is that the bass causing this giddiness?; crazy South East Asian dancer dude (at every FWD and dmz, spazzing like he's dancing the world to death) and mighty dready dude are both on the loose again (no dubstep rave is right without them); crowds bursting into skank; frightening sounds, uplifting sounds; dark jackets, black caps; things that make you say "duttu"; the "flashpoint of an exploding scene" (Mary Anne Hobbs); bumping into The Bug, again; Red Bull vs Stella; the buzz of a massive and familiar drop; the uncanny rush of beauty in new tracks; recognising them again, and chasing them, and finding they have been released on DMZ, Ital, Tectonic, Soulja, Hotflush, Hyperdub or Tempa; the bank manager ringing to ask you to stop going over your overdraft limit – blame Boomkat (www.boomkat.com); feeling like an addict in the most glorious way, emotions all over the shop...

On Breezeblock's infamous 'Dubstep Warz' special, Youngsta said something about his emotional relationship with dubstep – that this sound felt like home for him. Is writing music emotional for you?

Loefah: "Yes."

(He looks me in the eye. Pauses.)

Loefah (points to his chest): "Someone was telling me, you have glands in your body that release the hormones causing your emotions. And at our raves our music can stimulate those glands. So that might be something to do with it..."

And, one week later:

Benga: "Emotional to write? Sometimes... You get that feeling sometimes that makes you wanna cry – that's when it gets messed... I don't wanna talk about them times. It is very hard to explain it sometimes. What's your other question?"

Other specific memories: having to move away from the right speaker at the last FWD because the big hoop vibrating in your right ear was threatening to saw through your earlobe and your eardrum was about to fucking explode; the night dmz moved from 3rd Bass upstairs to Mass, because the queue outside the door was so long; the long coach ride to the first dmz in Leeds, watching the headlights of cars flash past the window, listening to a bunch of boys next to you discussing plug-ins and what label of what dmz 12-inch was what colour, while listening to the eerie, liquid skank of 'Officer', and wondering about the metaphorical value of the coach clock's 09:30 reflected backward in the window in front of you; the expression on Frances' face upon first hearing a few live dubstep tracks at the end of a set Mala played at Bash (Loefah and The Bug's dancehall monthly at east London's Plastic People); the first dmz you attended, still at 3rd Bass, being completely, utterly wowed by the bass, and some feeling of having been out of space; Matty bouncing up, grinning, to you to tell you she felt like her teeth were going to come out of her skull; a drunken conversation with a Scottish dude on the coach ride home at seven am, or whenever it was, about how funny Deleuze was, and how could anyone not realise he was taking the piss, and then oh, duh, getting an email the next Monday



from Kode9 and realising it was him...he looks different when not bathed in red, smoky lights and crouching behind decks; the coach on the way to Leeds again, the echoing, restless percussion of 'Stuck', and look – that town on the left looks like a mini galaxy, a web of night lights in a little dip in the land.

Skream was telling me that he met you online.

Kode9: "Yes, an online dating agency. What is he talking about? Oh, dubplate.net. When? This is stuff I didn't know. I probably thought he was just some little punk...I'm not sure if I can be interviewed by you, actually. It's kinda strange! You can put that in if you want."

"I've been making stuff that is vaguely related to dubstep since '99. Since garage. I released a drum'n'bass thing in '98, '99. It was really horrible. Just horrible...we did a CD...No, that's stuff's all horrible. I don't wanna talk about that..."

"...A label called Katatonics."

I like cats.

"Do you want some milk?"

No, I've already got lemon in the tea. Thanks.

"OK. I was making dark garage back in '99, 2000, when the whole internet/MP3 hype was starting. So I was just uploading them to all these swag sites that were around at that time, for people to download them, knowing that no one was gonna pay for shit. I was doing that for a couple of years. And then...I don't think that question demanded a life story, so I'm gonna stop there."

No! I want life stories! Isn't it weird to be from Scotland and be at the helm of dubstep?

"I'm not at the helm of dubstep, so it's not. If it wasn't for Digital Mystikz and Skream and Loefah, I wouldn't be interested. When I started doing it, it was like El-B and Horsepower. And then it was like fucking boring. If it wasn't for those three, I'd be doing something else."

Nothing about it is fucking boring now. Check this: completely turn off the functional part of your brain, and you can see in rhythm. Buildings aren't libraries or HSBC headquarters, they are patterns of windows and towers. Six-storey blocks of regularity cemented in an irredeemable, unruly mass. The walkers and buses and cars that pass across your line of vision at street level are snare patterns.

Adverts sliding past tube windows are ghostly melodies. The rebel part of your brain doesn't sit in concrete rectangles or plasticated slabs. It's non-commercial, belonging not just to a forgotten and unconscious past, or an imagined future, but to both at once. A huge bass kicks in, black syncopations fight with ominous snares, indescribable textures whip and crash. The rebel wakes and flexes his sonic muscle.

Ha. That was just the 'me' bit: wordy, hyperimaginative, overanalytical. Everyone has their own meditations. Loefah's 'Ruffage'. I've heard stuff about drug-free rushes, hallucinated metaphors, tears on dancefloors. Spine tinglings. Skream's 'Dutch Flowers'. Unrest at the pit of your stomach. Nothing about it is fucking boring.

Can you explain what they (Digital Mystikz, Skream and Loefah) brought to the sound that made you interested?

dubstep: need to know

"It doesn't just vibrate your body, it vibrates your brain, and strange things start happening" – Kode 9. Frequency, depth, and space are the features that've been getting the masses all agitated. But each producer has his own sound (and his own relationship with it).

Digital Mystikz and Loefah: 'Twisup' and 'Dubsession' (12-inch, DMZ 001 and 002) Historical moments from 2004! On 001: 'Twisup' for the meditative feel; 'Chainba' for mad texture; 'B' for eerie rhythms, slow build-up... massive bass bruckout! On 002 – 'Lost City', 'Horror Show', 'Jah Fire', '10 Dread Commandments' – the half-step tempo adds to the spaciousness and mood saturates each track.

Skream How to choose? It's not just about 'Midnight Request Line', you know. Oh no. He's 19, he's a genius, he has over 8,000 files on his computer. Cripes. 'Skreamizm Vol. 1' (2 x 12-inch, Tempa) might be a good place to start. 'Hag' sounds like the stormtroopers are coming to get you. Loefah's 'I' Remix is massive: check it on Tempa's 12 or *Dubstep Allstars Vol. 3* along with the indomitable '0800 dub'.. Then become a trainspotter on dubstepforum.com...

Benga: 'Newstep' (CD, Bengabeats). Having sat on dubs for LONG, ("I haven't made enough dubstep bangers" blah blah, "I've been making house" and "Grime stuff without the gun-talk") he finally let us have a few. Check how he uses blues chords and modal shizzle. And makes his bass move.

Kode9, Benny III & The Culprit: 'Fat Larry's Skank' (12-inch, Tempa) Way back from 2002. Syncopated something-step: it's fat and it skanks. Warping forward, 'Backward/Nine Samurai' (12-inch, Hypderdub) for some dark, infectious cabalism, aggravated in no small part by more apocalyptic visions from the Space Ape. According to 9, each of his tracks is like a personality... "It's like another sound which breeds through another personality. Who has lots of traits that are like the opposite of what every person that you make comes out sounding like." Er, yep.

Digital Mystikz: 'Neverland' and 'Anti War Dub' (12-inch DMZ 005 and 007) These are 2005/2006 anthems respectively. Brrrrrrrrrrrr.

Loefah & Skream: '28g/Fearless' (12-inch, Tectonic) 'Warbling' bass was another – already much emulated – dubstep moment.

Loefah: 'Root/Goat Stare' and 'Mud/Ruffage' (12-inch, DMZ 006 and 009) 'Root's' dark-step kicks, 'Goat Stare's' gravelly rumble, 'Mud's' awesome intro, 'Ruffage's' fearsome low-end... whatever you call it. He must be up there. He's not stopping. Grrrrr to Lady Vinton, Loe's famous staff...

Bare peeps have been missed out: Vex'd, Hatcha, Toasty, Youngsta, Slaughter Mob, Chef, Benny III, Tubby, Deapoh, Distance, The Plastician, D1, N-Type, Blackdown, Luke Envoy, Random, Shackleton, Joe Nice, Search & Destroy, Appleblim, Hijack... bound to be more... Georgie C (www.drumzofthesouth.com) and Blackdown (www.blackdownsoundboy.blogspot.com).

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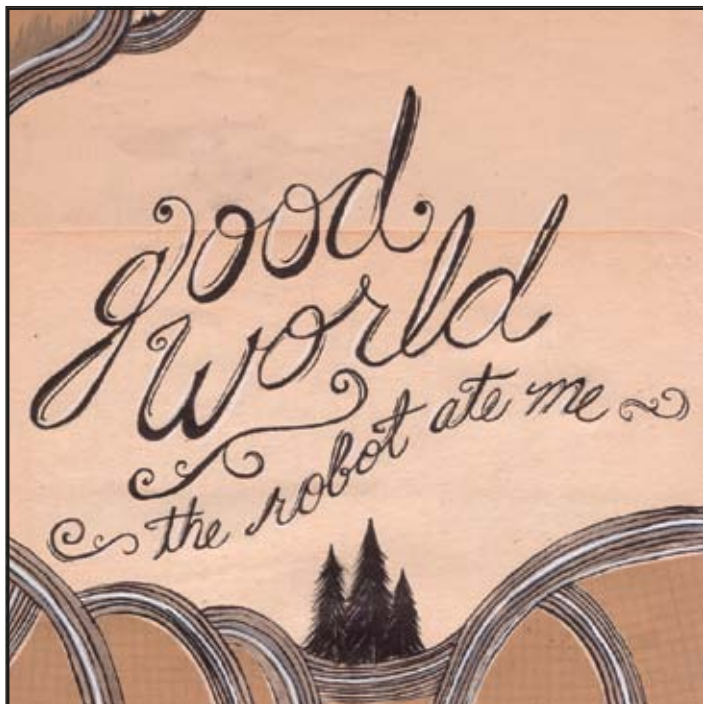
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Kode9: "I don't want to give you a definition of a sound...no one wants to give journalists that, because then you'll pigeonhole us!"
I don't mean in terms of defining the sound. I mean, more in evolutionary terms...

Kode9: "When garage crashed, Horsepower kept doing stuff, but their records sales were shit – no one was really excited about it. There were a couple of DJs on the radio, but not playing dubstep stuff. And I was going away because I'd set up the Hyperdub website. Everyone was writing about Artful Dodger and whatever. That was in 2001. Leo and Sarah started dubplate.net at the same time. I started Hyperdub nights at The Bug Bar, underneath 3rd Bass. We did three of them. We did one night that was just me and Benny III."

Were you calling it dubstep then?

"I can't remember...And then, cuz garage started, no one was really interested. But because I was running a website, I was getting loads of bookings abroad. To play Tempa stuff, because no one else really did. Hatcha did, but he'd also play Benga and Skream and Benny III. FWD was going on, ticking along in the Velvet Rooms. And then, about 2003–2004, the early Benga and Skream stuff was really minimal, and Hatcha had them on serious lockdown, until you'd heard them played so much you were bored of it."

"When it got interesting again was when it stopped being so minimal – beginning of last year, end of 2004 – and Skream's stuff started becoming more colourful. I think Mystikz and Loefah and Skream had really low sub-bass, and I suppose if you'd heard it in any other place apart from Plastic People, you might not have noticed."

Digital Mystikz (Mala and Coki), Loefah (who with Mystikz makes up one-third of dmz, the label and the dance), Skream and Benga, along with Hatcha and Youngsta, became associated through Croydon's Big Apple Records (a label and a shop). When Skream and Benga were about 14, they used to write tunes and play them down the phone to each other to see if they were any good. Benga remembers going to buy some Craig David, and being given a record on the Manchu label. And that was it. According to Mala, the closure of Big Apple was a catalyst to dmz the label. The original



"It's weird how good the vibe is, compared with how dark the music is"
– dubstep wunderkind **Skream**

Turn off the functional part of your brain, and you can see in rhythm

intention was a rotation of Big Apple releases from Artwork, Digital Mystikz, Benga and Skream.

"Nobody really knew what to... nobody called it anything then. And we just decided to do it ourselves." The night started in a similar way ("People forget we were already doing Substation at the Black Sheep Bar in Croydon for dubsteppers"); part chance, part through pure appreciation of sound science: "You've seen what it's like in there – no complications, just straight to the point. Sound! Too many clubs... I think Loefah said on that BBC documentary that too many clubs worry about how the club looks, but then they forget to put on a good sound system, you know?"

A few hours before sitting outside in a pub in Camberwell with Kode9, opposite the tower block where he lived with MC Space Ape and where he wrote 'Sine of the Dub', I met Skream and Loefah at Wetherspoon's. How symbolic is that? Crap places, where you hang out as a teenager, getting pissed for no reason, scrounging your coppers together. That's what dubstep comes out of; or its inverse, its rebel. That and jungle, hardcore, dub, two-step, half-step, hip hop, bashment. Croydon's love of textures is Detroitian too. Drum'n'bass heads have migrated. Metalheadz and Wu-Tang. Skream and Loefah profess their love of disco.

Loe is late, and Skream and I have three pints each on empty stomachs, even after Skream has told me all about how he had to tone down his partying, which he did in part because, he says, "When Mystikz came into it, they give me a right big kick up the arse, man! I thought, that's what I should be... not what I should be doing, but the quality... music hadn't been as much my focus for

two years as it should have been. And I heard them, and I was like, 'Why aren't I doing stuff to this quality?' Coki's sick! He's one of them people – no one can stand still to one of his tunes. He just listens so intently. He and Mala brought the dubby part to dubstep. It might not sound identical, but it's the skank and that. Your head starts going in and your whole body starts moving. It's banging, innit! It's weird how good the vibe is, compared with how dark the music is."

And later:

Loefah: "If you went out for a night in Croydon you'd have the shittiest night... that's got something to do with it. Even the alternative bars are shit."

Skream: "You can listen to tunes by that crunk bitch... what's her name?"

Ciara?

Skream: "Yeah, her!"

Loefah: "We just do dubstep because we love it – it's what we do."

A bunch of boys. Nice ones, who just fucking love their music. Not really too hung up on the ego promise that's everywhere in urban music: spit or build a beat, and expect instant fame. You know, when the market kills the spirit. Sure, there is likely to be behind-the-scenes ego, and competition is a strong element. But it's still a good competition, one that's about making a noise more than making a name.

And it's about deeper things too – dmz flyers call it meditation. They appreciate mystery and emotion, and the physicality of music: how it can make tectonic plates shift in your chest.

Benga: "Sometimes I'm not even gonna put my name on the dub. I've got a few songs at the moment that I've never played, and I'm just gonna put them on CD and give them out to people and say, 'Yeah, my friend made it'. Three years later, I might come out and say, 'Yeah I made that song'. A couple of the biggest songs I've made in the past few months, I'm not even gonna tell anyone that I made them."

Once, when Mala dropped 'Anti War Dub' at FWD, I saw a crammed room of dubsteppers, who had been swaying and gently bumping, suddenly erupt into a huge skank. I saw limbs and dreads and caps outlined in silver light. It was the best anti-war statement I've ever seen. It wasn't intended as one, judging by Mala's reaction when I tell him, but he's grinning at my enthusiasm... Later that night, we first heard 'Learn', and spent days asking each other, "Why haven't you learned anything?" It was funny. It was deep too.

That net of lights on the way to Leeds? It set off thoughts about us and technology. Bad stuff: claustrophobia, banality, pollution global warming. But more the stuff happens when we put the numen back into technology. Makes you catch your breath.

What do you think about at a dubstep rave?

Coki: "I don't have a clue. Sometimes my ears and my mind are locked on certain frequencies and things that you just pick out. Sometimes you just tend to search the beat... Yeah, search the beat, man. You can start from the bass and go up, or you can search the top and go down. You get lost in it."

ain't nothing but a

Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Cat Stevens**

heartache

Sheffield five-piece **The Long Blondes** write aching, gorgeous pop songs about motorways, darts players and unrequited lust

Pop said. When I was a child, the half-hour walk to primary school led me across a busy road, the A12. It wasn't a motorway, and either side was punctuated by trees, gravel pits and hidden copses where if you didn't run fast and wily you'd quickly be pinned down, but there was no denying that the folk who lived on the new housing estate near the Junior School didn't hang around with us kids who lived in the old part of town. We were separated by a trunk road.

One time, I walked slap bang into a lamppost. After that, I kept my eyes open.

Do you find that you intimidate audiences?

Kate Jackson (voice, songs): "I hope so."

Dorian Cox (guitar, songs): "Not intimidated, but..."

Kate: "I don't think so. They never fail to come over to us afterwards."

Dorian: "The intimidated ones scurry off home to write on message boards, 'The Long Blondes were crap'."

Screech Louder (drums): "Jealousy, nothing wrong with it. It's a human emotion."

Oh blimey fuck. I don't know. I'm so unused to doing interviews these days. You know how to do interviews. You tell me how to do it.

"Ask us a string of questions about how we formed and what our influences are and all that stuff," suggests Screech. OK. The Long Blondes formed in Sheffield in 2003 and, after releasing a handful of singles on a variety of cool labels, have been snapped up by Rough Trade. Until recently, Cox worked in admin at Sheffield University ("It was getting embarrassing, the number of students asking me for autographs"), Jackson sold vintage clothes on e-Bay, Louder was briefly at the Home Office and the other two members, Emma Chaplin (keyboards) and Reenie Hollis (bass) worked in a Leeds art library and in the media studies department of a Rotherham college respectively.

Their interests are...oh, wait. I get it. I'm supposed to ask *them* that.

Do you recognise yourself in the mirror?

Kate: "How do you mean? I don't know what you're getting at! At home...?"

I don't recognise myself in the mirror.

Kate: "I'm very, very used to seeing myself."

Screech: "I try to avoid looking in mirrors as much as possible."

Emma: "I'm the same, especially if I'm on a night out. You don't want to see the sick truth!"

Screech: "Yeah, mirrors and tape recorders."

Emma: "I don't like looking at photographs of me at all."

Kate: "I do. I look at pictures of me a lot, because there are lots of pictures of me all over the place now."

When you're singing, do you know what you sound like?

Kate: "When I hear recordings back I do, yeah."

How do you do that?

Kate: "I've got a good voice, mate!"

lonely this christmas

So I was listening to your single 'Christmas Is Cancelled' earlier, and my wife pointed out that it sounds exactly like Elvis Costello's 'Oliver's Army'.

"A lot of people have said that," replies Screech.

"Do you know The Vichy Government? They did a cover of it and mixed the lyrics to 'Oliver's Army' in, and it sounded great."

"I'm quite pleased with that," says Dorian. "It's always nice to give Elvis Costello a leg-up. I thought I'd do what I could."

Context. This is important. Pop said, trust in me and if you're sweet and calm and wear floral-patterned shirts on Tuesdays and keep taking the piano lessons, maybe I'll re-introduce you to some decent music every 16 years. Pop said, it's the Christmas records that are the most special, because they have a head start – they're already about a special occasion – and the most special ones of all are the ones that mix melancholy with the tinsel, heartache alongside the happiness – and the reason you fell so heavily, headily for The Long Blondes, Sheffield's finest if we leave aside near neighbours Arctic Monkeys (and we'll do that for many, many reasons), is because they did all this on their free Christmas download of a couple of years back, a song you placed on play and repeat on iTunes one rainy winter in Seattle. Yet it's taken you this long to realise its similarity to Costello. And this, after you heard The Long Blondes' pink vinyl debut single, 'New Idols'/'Long Blonde' (SPC) and had them initially tagged as a fine reprise of The Au Pairs' agonised, political, early Eighties groove (see Albums, Reissues).

Where do you fit in with the current pantheon of music? I'm not clued in on it right. All I listen to is what I like, and anything else I don't like I don't listen to.

"That's the best way to be," nods Screech.





the long blondes

I was watching the *Live Forever* documentary... "Is that the Britpop one?" the drummer asks. "Yeah," confirms Dorian. "I've seen that. The saving grace is Jarvis – and Liam's hilarious." It depressed me.

Screech: "It is a bit..."

Dorian: "...self-serving..."

I'm guessing you don't relate to Blur...

"No," exclaims Screech, horrified. "No," he repeats. "We're very much not Blur. I can think of a few bands around that are Blur. We're not."

So what is the context you exist within? What about these almost mythical labels like the Sheffield Phonographic Corporation and the Angular Recording Company you've released singles on, with their anachronistic artwork and fond regard for vinyl? These people are stars in my world: the abrasive mix of teen punk and jagged refrains they keep releasing, scouring the UK for like minds.

I'm talking the minimalist art school frenzy of Champion Kickboxer, those crafty magpies Smokers Die Younger, the very excellent Motherfuckers, the even more excellent Fucks, the Virginian chicken farmer Charles E Cullen. I'm talking The Violets' Gothic screech, yes, Art Brut (and there's nothing wrong with that), Luxembourg's glam pout and The Sweethearts' gentle femme-pop ("Me, my housemates, a bottle of Lambrini, a Casio and a four track," writes Angular co-founder Joe).

Isn't this The Long Blondes' world, not all those dumb-ass awards ceremonies where Kate's been nominated for 'Sexiest Female' and a bunch of skinny boys with perfectly tousled hair and a collection of Hives and Yeah Yeah Yeahs singles rub shoulders deferentially with Chris Martin.

have a girlfriend, now you mention it. All I had was a plastic bag swinging gaily from my hand, containing vinyl and crisps packets and spectacles, as I hopped from one foot to another in abandon, out of time.

So many different ways: they understand about cool and poise and chic and why Continental people are cooler than Brits, and why comic book artists are obsessed with the Victorians, and what it's like to throw up purple puke over your glitter-streaked face, and how to cherish a pair of shoes, and the attraction certain icons (Warhol starlet Edie Sedgwick, Sixties film star Anna Karina) have over others, and what it's like to have friends you can have conversations with. I'm 45 and I still don't understand any of that stuff. All I can grasp at are certain mannerisms, the way a wrist is flicked downward, a yelped backing vocal, resonance and pure, clear female voices dipping and soaring and rising gracefully upward, and yeah, lust etc.

"The Long Blondes," someone whispers, "are the ultimate fantasy pop group: Jean Harlow, Mae West, Nico, Nancy Sinatra and Barbara Windsor."

A weekend? Man, these kids know how to make a man feel insignificant. I wish I'd paid more attention to The Go-Betweens. They'd have taught me how to wear eyeliner.

What is your favourite item of clothing?

Screech: "This Adam And The Ants T-shirt. It's an original I was given by a friend. I've had it for about a year. It fits me like a dream. It's a good gig T-shirt. It's white, so it doesn't make me too hot."

Dorian: "Favourite item of clothing? Oh Christ! Suggest one. I've got so many."

'How does it feel to be style icons? It's fantastic, fan-bloody-tastic, fan-fan bloody-bloody tastic!'

– Kate (voice)

"We've met a lot of likeminded people on the way up," agrees Dorian, "but when we started, we thought we were the only ones. We thought we'd be up against macho laddism – soundmen in shorts. But then these people cropped up."

Your lyrics: it's rare to hear a woman singing them...

"I think it's rare for males to be singing them," corrects Dorian. "I can't think of any other bands that are doing it."

Sardonic social commentary mixed with teary-eyed heartache? I read somewhere that's what the Arctic Monkeys do. I listened to their record and didn't hear it myself, couldn't get past that horrendous drumbeat, but...

"It's completely different," counters Screech.

"Alex is an auteur at what he does – social commentary in the vaguest sense. But I think, and this is not necessarily a criticism, they have a very laddish and braggish attitude. That's not us. To use a hideous soundbite, they're in the gutter looking at the gutter and we're in the gutter looking up at the stars. Our lyrics are much more aspirational. We're saying we're in this situation and we'd like to escape it, and they're saying they're in a situation and they quite like it."

dry your eyes, sunday girl

There are so many ways I don't relate to The Long Blondes. One: they know about kissing. Two, their new single is called 'Weekend Without Make Up'.

Weekend? I spent my entire early twenties without deodorant or hair styling, in 10-inch polyester flares hawked from jumble sales (charity stores were too grand for me) and no, I didn't

Emma: "Your cowboy boots, because you wear them for every gig."

Dorian: "You make me sound like Jet! They're supposed to be like Edwyn Collins."

Yeah, well. I never did understand that side of Edwyn.

Dorian: "It's meant to be Americana, like the Davy Crockett hat."

Screech: "Kind of Velvet Underground."

Is that what it is? See, I never understood The Velvet Underground.

Screech: "Ah well, there you go. They are a band of two halves."

There was one half I really didn't like.

Dorian: "And the other half I really didn't like."

Kate: "Did you see Lou Reed when he was on Jools Holland? He had the Tai Chi."

Dorian: "It was Antony, from Antony And The Johnsons."

Kate: "It was like the worst five, seven minutes of television I've ever seen."

Screech: "He's a dull man isn't he, Reed?"

Dorian: "Very Reed."

Screech: "That's well Reed. You could use that as an insult."

Pop said, place your trust in me and really, there's little that can go wrong. Pop isn't a matter of throwing money at a wall, or endless years spent in back rooms 'paying your dues', or fitting in, or tracksuit bottoms and one-star sneakers. Pop is craft is pride is joy is the knowledge there is more than one way out of this is filmic splendour is Shangri-Las B-sides is the odd snatch of a whispered refrain caught from a car window is sunlit ferry rides





'You look at Arctic Monkeys and it's like an Oxfam advert. You can't help but feel sorry for them'

– Dorian (guitar)

'The last book I read was *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* by Jean Rhys. I couldn't believe how much like Dorian's songs it was'

– Emma (keyboards)

into industrial wastelands is The Royalettes. Pop is tight-fitting skirts, the charm of Rita Tushingham, a dimple, smudged mascara, the knowledge that the illusion you create can be more important than the reality you face because life is all about perception, and nothing matters more than having a nice pair of spectacles. Pop is a three-minute rush of blood, and to my way of thinking, nothing starts that blood rushing faster than hearing a perfectly composed, slightly cruel, *femme* voice warning unsuitable types away from getting too close.

When I import my promo CD of The Long Blondes' new single, it shows up in my iTunes folder as 'Boombastic' by Shaggy, from the album *My Lover Lover*.

That's *precisely* what I'm talking about,

sheffield sex city

"I'm Kate. I'm the singer in The Long Blondes. My favourite item of clothing is my black patent stilettos, which I wear for every single gig and they're now falling apart as you can see. There's a rip, the toecap's come off the heel... [she holds the shoe up for my inspection]...yes, they are battered. I can't bring myself to buy any new ones. They're moulded to the shape of my feet and, um, they're a classic shape, and, um, they go with everything I wear. They were from Langton's Antique Centre in Sheffield, a bargain at £8."

"I'm Reenie. I'm going to go for the yellow polka dot headscarf that I'm wearing. Yellow is the colour of the season supposedly, and yeah it's summer, so it's time to get out your headscarves."

Do you follow colours of the season? You're wearing yellow eyeshadow.

"No," Reenie replies. "Because you don't want to end up in puce."

"I'm Emma. My favourite item, I wore it for the last four gigs we did, it's my customised cat shirt, it's white with little black spots and little black cats all over it and it goes with everything, all my jeans, all my skirts, it's a classic and it was £3 in a sale."

Pop told me this: it's important, what bands wear. Music is not just sound, it's *context*: what you're drinking (orange squash, thanks), the way your glasses needle your nose, the lack of overbite in the jaw, the hum of an overworked computer, the colour of the walls, the repetition on TV. I imagined The Long Blondes to be my friends, to be dressed in suede and velvet and cheap antique clothing way before I ever saw a picture of them. Gotta confess, I thought that Kate would have blonde hair but that's an old prejudice. Flowery-patterned dresses, sharp pointed shoes, the odd PiL or X-Ray Spex badge on the lapel, red handbags...kind of like my old Pastels crowd up in Glasgow, if I'm honest.

I guess what I'm saying here is: there's no way The Long Blondes can disappoint me because I have little imagination left and hence zero expectation. So when you get up on stage, do you dress up?

"Hmmm, I suppose," muses Reenie, "compared to what we've been wearing in the van."

"Where have the cosy socks gone?" Kate suddenly asks, aghast, looking around the tour van where the interview is taking place. There's a montage of Diana Dors that Kate's been working on for the new single sleeve slung over the back seat, a few discarded croissants and bottles of water, plus a copy of *Mojo*. I've seen far worse.

"Ah no, they have disappeared, Katherine!" exclaims Reenie. "The boys must have hidden them. They're far more concerned about image than us."

I don't normally prep for interviews but I made a special exception for you because, Gosh darn it, I *like* you kids. So I noticed all the questions thrown at you are about image, and either refer to Kate as a vixen, a vamp or a...

"Or a style icon," the singer laughs. "How does it feel to be a style icon? I get that all the time. It's fantastic, fan-bloody-tastic, fan-fan bloody-bloody tastic!"

So I was watching *Live Forever* last night...

"Did you like it?" interrupts Reenie.

It reminded me of how much I hated Britpop... but The Long Blondes remind me of Britpop and I don't know why.

"I guess it's because we're all of that age," Kate extrapolates. "When we were teenagers and going out, Britpop was huge. We loved those bands. Suede were massive."

"You know, the good bands, not your Northern Uproars," Reenie reminds me.

God, don't tell me. I interviewed them once on a council estate in Manchester. Man, it was depressing. Nice lads but...depressing.

So you liked the poncey bands?

"Yeah," they reply in unison.

"Have The Long Blondes made you want to revisit the Britpop era any more?" Kate asks coyly.

No. It made me think I should stop listening to The Long Blondes! I fucking hated Britpop. Except Pulp, of course...and, well there's the rub, there's the game right there, the money shot, the billion dollar payback, the green, the focus, the moment



'We're very much not Blur. I can think of a few bands around that are Blur. We're not'

– Screech (drums)

'Music as a consumer is a really unsatisfying hobby. You buy your album and you don't like most of the songs on it, and you go to gigs and you get treated like shit'

– Reenie (bass)

where pound signs start to appear in A&R people's eyes (and boy, do we care for those sparkly, cheery, dimpling A&R people's eyes). Because. Well I may as well state it. The Long Blondes remind me of Pulp: the same sardonic wink, the same literary liturgy, the same elegant, cheaply-dressed charm, the same fucking city for God's sake, the same disregard for convention, the same love for Sixties girl pop.

No bad thing.

Here are some Long Blondes songtitles I like.

appropriation (by any other name)

"Eighty per cent of lovers never forget their first/That significant other whose departure makes it worse." Man, these lyrics lacerate. *What would you do if I didn't come back tonight/I'm not always at your beck and call."*

Ever had a love attack? You're equal but different. This was the quintet's third single, backed by 'Lust In The Movies' and 'My Heart Is Out Of Bounds'. The song is spiteful and jarring and sassy and smart and boasts a melody line that wouldn't have been out of place on an early (*delete as applicable*) Blondie/ABBA/Motown album. There. I've given more of the game away. There's little left now except fascination.

Honestly? I much prefer life on random. Because life is random, as the slogan rightly states.

Do you ever look at press releases?

Dorian: "Only our own."

I hate the way artists always get compared to the same 10 groups – Gang Of Four, Joy Division, Nirvana, My Bloody Valentine, Radiohead, Coldplay, R.E.M., Huggy Bear...

Dorian: "When we started, we put on our website that we don't listen to The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix or The Doors, because they were the bands that anyone who was in a band looked up to. They're all fine, in moderation – apart from The Doors..."

Murmurs of agreement.

Screech: "And possibly not [Bob] Dylan."

Reenie: "I don't mind Hendrix. I've got a best of somewhere..."

You don't need it. He's only got one song.

Reenie: "There's a new list now."

Screech: "Joy Division are top of the new list. The Clash, Talking Heads..."

Dorian: "We're from a different generation to you. What have we got to rebel against?"

Arctic Monkeys.

Dorian: "You look at their faces and it's like an Oxfam advert. You can't help but feel sorry for them."

weekend without make up

"At the start, I see an isolated woman," explains Kate. "By the end, she's triumphantly overcoming what she's been struggling with, ie: a guy, always a guy – and ends up going out and dancing. So yeah, go out and dance when you hear the record!"

...those words you sing, it's unusual to hear a woman singing them.

"Well," counters Kate. "Half of our lyrics are written by a guy."

So what half do you write? Do you write the drippy, sappy...

"No," she laughs. "Those are Dorian's!"

a literary bent: books and the blondes

Kate: "I'm reading Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out For The Territory* at the moment, but I'm not getting very far because I keep getting car sick. It's a geographic and metaphysical walk around the Hackney area."

Reenie: "I'm reading the Belle And Sebastian biography. It was a present."

Screech: "I'm reading JG Ballard, *High Rise*. It details the story of what is meant to be a high rise utopia where all these people live together, but it all falls apart and everyone begins to hate one another and descend into violence. Driving around Portsmouth today, I could totally see where he was coming from; all these luxury apartments being built, 'designed for

city living'. It's another way of creating divisions between people."

Dorian: "I'm reading *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey. It's one of those books that everyone reads when they're 16 but I never got round to it, and it's so good to discover a book like that again. Just that mentality of being on the inside, but having an edge over everyone else because you can see the bigger picture. But I read that Tom Wolfe book about him and he came across awfully. First up, he's a hippie. I guess it just goes to prove that everyone's got one good book in them, even a hippie."

Emma: "Last one I read was *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* by Jean Rhys, and I couldn't believe how much like one of Dorian's songs it was."



I was thinking as much.

"Dorian writes from a female perspective and I write the more masculine songs like 'Darts' [fine, short, punky song about countless student afternoons spent watching daytime TV] and 'Separated By Motorways'," the singer explains. "I write about sitting in pubs."

I'm interested to know your definitions of masculine and feminine here.

"There's a certain *ballsiness*, for want of a better word, about 'Separated By Motorways'," says Screech, "whereas 'Giddy Stratospheres' or 'Weekend Without Makeup' have a vulnerability that people associate more with femininity."

"I wouldn't ever write myself into a vulnerable position," states Kate.

"Kate's got a very self-assured character," Dorian comments, "whereas I don't, and that comes out in our lyrics. And the twist is in the way she interprets them."

"I sing them quite aggressively," Kate explains.

Do you like the way she interprets them?

"Yeah, absolutely," the guitarist enthuses, "especially now I know what suits Kate's voice. It all stems from Motown and the Sixties writers that wrote for singers like Dusty Springfield and Scott Walker. The reason they were such great singers was because they could interpret other people's lyrics and make them their own. They took a step back from that earnest Lennon and McCartney approach, 'We write and sing all our own lyrics'. So what? That's just a means to an end."

"Just because you write it and sing it yourself it," comments Screech, "doesn't necessarily make it a good song."

lust in the movies

"*I just want to be a sweetheart (x3)*." Stalking, talking, the finest song based around a love of old film this side of The Go-Betweens' 'Lee Remick', boils away with barely concealed passion, wait there's more: "*So never, ever, ever tell me it's a pleasure being alone/All I have with me are the books and records that I own/Nag, nag, nag (x4)*"... maybe I can relate! The song references The White Stripes and Rough Trade electronica pioneers, Cabaret Voltaire... and God alone knows, I do that every other day.

swallow tattoo

Now I've started thinking, Sleeper. And I never want to do that.

giddy stratospheres

The second single, no wait, *this* is the Au Pairs one. Live, it soars; Kate singing at least an octave higher and with such an engorged tune you want to snuggle it up in your arms and tell it never to run away again, hang on tight if need be, but please – no more Koala Bear noises late at night, they're so damn scary. There's some killer call-and-response from the other ladies, too. And the B-sides ('Polly', 'Darts') are even finer... shorter and finer.

I tell Screech he drums like a girl.

He nods, complimented: "My favourite drummers are girl drummers."

Me too.

"Do you like Wet Dog?" he asks.

That's exactly what I'm talking about!

"The guitarist in Wet Dog also drums for Country Teasers and The Rebel," Screech continues. "We did

some gigs with them up in Scotland. She is the best drummer, she doesn't use a kick drum, she stands up and she's absolutely amazing."

once and never again

"*Nineteen, you're only 19 for God's sake/You don't need a boyfriend*." A song of empowerment for teenage girls, Kate's voice cajoling and critical and knowing and swooning through the chord changes, backed up by some frantic keyboards and seemingly random segments of guitar: great break in the middle too, "*You know I'm not so young/I spend an hour getting ready every day*"...

Once again, one suspects a lyric of Dorian's, not Kate's.

"We exist in our own little bubble," says Screech. "This single is like a doorway into that bubble, and if you get it you're allowed to go through the door, and if you don't, then you can fuck off."

separated by motorways

This is where we came in. The fourth single. *Elastica* is the preferred band of comparison for four out of five music critics. Why not just say Wire, and be done with it?

Kate: "It has a matter-of-fact tone you might associate with..."

I thought it was sad, a comment on the way nasty modern-day life keeps people apart with its reliance on all these soulless byways for roaring monsters of metal and steel, rushing past continually, no room for human contact... little children running across motorways...

Kate: "No."



Screech: 'He's a dull man isn't he, Lou Reed?' Dorian: 'Very Reed' Screech: 'That's well Reed. You could use that as an insult'

I had to cross the A12 to get to my school when I was a kid.

Screech: "My school was on two sides of a busy main road."

Earlier, at Portsmouth's Pyramid Leisure Centre, as Kate was pouting and preening and sashaying in her pencil-sharp skirt in front of squealing 14-year-olds on the latest *NME* tour, I was accosted by a couple of new acquaintances, dance guru and street performer types.

"She's good, isn't she?" they asked rhetorically. "Got a bit of a No Doubt thing going on..."

I stumbled, perplexed, into a toilet cubicle. The Long Blondes remind me of many things – overnight trips to Edinburgh, when the bus has broken down and we while away the small hours by seeing how close we can run to the passing 80mph traffic; a quayside in Manhattan with helicopters whirring in the distance; boot fairs and the ridiculous delight to be had in finding Bow Wow Wow, The Muppets and Rachel Sweet singles for 50p, even though you own them already three times over; tuning into a late night dial, all crackly and hissing before Blondie's 'Denis' breaks through the static; crushes on girls wearing berets and neckerchiefs and stripy tops in the late Seventies: arguing late into the night as to whether Philip K Dick's work should be entirely discounted simply because too many hippies like him; keyboards and cold churches and warm chocolate – but not ska.

But, y'know. First time I saw them, in some scummy London industry pit, *Plan B* Albums Editor Daniel Trilling took me aside, and said, "They look like they all used to be in ska bands when they were

younger..." and you just knew he wasn't being complimentary, wasn't talking about The Specials, Desmond Dekker and Dave & Ansel Collins, but something more insidious, more *Nineties*...but fuck it.

Listen up, Trilling. I've spoken to these Long Blondes kids and they're products of the Britpop bedsit generation, swooning in teen tandem as Brett Anderson flicked his hips and Jarvis lasciviously licked a lollipop...but wait. Now I think on it, maybe Anderson was a ska-head in a previous incarnation. Seems the sort. Did big Jarvis all come down in Texas to save our skins? It's a moot point.

mind your own business

So what's your motivation for being in a band?

Screech: "When I was at uni, I had these hideous friends who were serious musos and they were like, 'Let's sit round all day in a house'. They had a three-bedroom house, and there were two of them, and they'd turned the other room into a music room where they'd sit all day and watch bootleg videos of The Beatles and The Jam. I was like, 'Well, I can play keyboards in your band', and they were like, 'You're not good enough'. Fuck you. It doesn't matter whether I'm good enough or not. That's nothing to do with it."

Reenie: "Music as a consumer is a really unsatisfying hobby. It's so awful. You pay your money and you get your album and you don't like most of the songs on it, and you go to gigs and you get treated like shit. I thought that if I'm going to be interested in music I need to be a bit more active."

Kate: "You're constantly told that you only have two options in life, either get a career and be a good

citizen – or be a dropout, a loser. Being in a band is my third way. You can make your own choices and be true to who you are, but still be good at what you do and be successful at it."

So you're like Tony Blair...

"I got my third way before Tony Blair!" says Kate defensively. "Scrap that, I'm in it for the money."

"We're all in this band out of sheer boredom, a way of manifesting our escapist fantasies," explains Dorian. "We all worked, we did all the normal stuff you do until you're 21. We decided that if we pushed ourselves we could do something else – which, in my opinion, is how bands are supposed to start. They're not supposed to start by advertising in the back of a music paper, or in a guitar shop saying, 'Bass player wanted'."

"And it's always Red Hot Chili Peppers on those adverts!" Screech groans.

"The more you get into the music industry, the more the veil is lifted," muses Emma.

"In the same way that life has a set of formulas, record companies seem to think there's a set of rules to making a band successful and you don't have to even have talent," continues Kate. "Some of these bands emerge out of nowhere, all over MTV, with shitloads of money pumped into them and no one knows who they are."

It's like that guy says in *Dig!* Record companies actually expect 90 per cent of their acts to fail commercially. No other industry in the world would countenance a 90 per cent failure rate.

"You don't get into it because of that," ends Dorian. "That's something you only discover as you go along, and what happens next depends on how you react to that."



The Pipettes skip onstage with their waistcoat-clad backing boys, as the venue bubbles with vibrant colour. "Move closer, snog someone you don't know – because it's not love, but it's still a feeling..." glints Gwenno, her feline eyeliner curling upwards in a pretty, catty smile while Rose tosses her chestnut hair around her painted face, humming and doo-wopping: dusky, husky, pearlescent. Stage left, Becki's twirling theatrics trace heart-shaped dances across the floor. Clasp hands, they make waves with their arms; peeking out from beneath glossy, soft fringes and Alice bands, their diamanté eyes blink and wink.

They're frills, pom-poms and ponytails. Liquorice, sherbert and carnivals. But if you're thinking Brighton's Pipettes are just sugar, spice and all things nice, think again.

"There's three girls in short dresses on stage – that's gonna cause a lot of people to immediately say, 'Well, they obviously don't know anything, because they haven't got a guitar on them,'" says Rose, when asked if she worries they'll be construed as bubblegum for quick consumption. "But I'd like to think that gradually people will realise

this is actually quite a big idea; it's all thought through."

"We are a concept band," agrees Becki. "Everything we do is for 'The Pipettes' as an idea and we don't see anything wrong with that. It is all about drawing people into this notion of there being a machine – and we've had all this, 'Ooh yes but y'know, these girls, they're not really very good, because they obviously just roll out of bed and turn up' and we're thinking, 'Well, actually, you're just the kind of people that we're fooling.'"

"We take our songwriting as seriously as any band, but we don't have to go on about it all the time," Rose says, adamantly.

"It is for immediate effect; there are polka dots, there's dancing and it's very simple," Gwenno states. "Then you elaborate on that. But it's always very important to have that immediate impact – it's why we were formed."

"And everything that goes on behind that, nobody's supposed to know about," smiles Becki, triumphantly. "It's like, 'Who does write everything, who comes up with the chorus, who does this or that and so on?' Well, The Pipettes do."

leaders of the pack

So, there they are, writhing with beauty queen goodness, suspended inside a ballroom-shaped, kaleidoscopic blast of rainbow audio; at once approachable and unattainable, huggable and aloof. Out come the hand jives, the hip swings. The mouths of cynics purse into half-smirks of distaste and condescension, while the irises of everyone else illuminate from the inside out like dilating jewels. Hands are tentatively raised and brought together in a clapping fashion. Swaying is experimented with. Then, BOOM! A flurry of abandon explodes. Dainty Dorothy shoes click their heels, and voices glitter upwards into the neon summer air.

But this is London; this is Brixton! We're supposed to be emotionally pained, mentally deranged, physically adorned with trilby. Not tonight – and not for much longer.

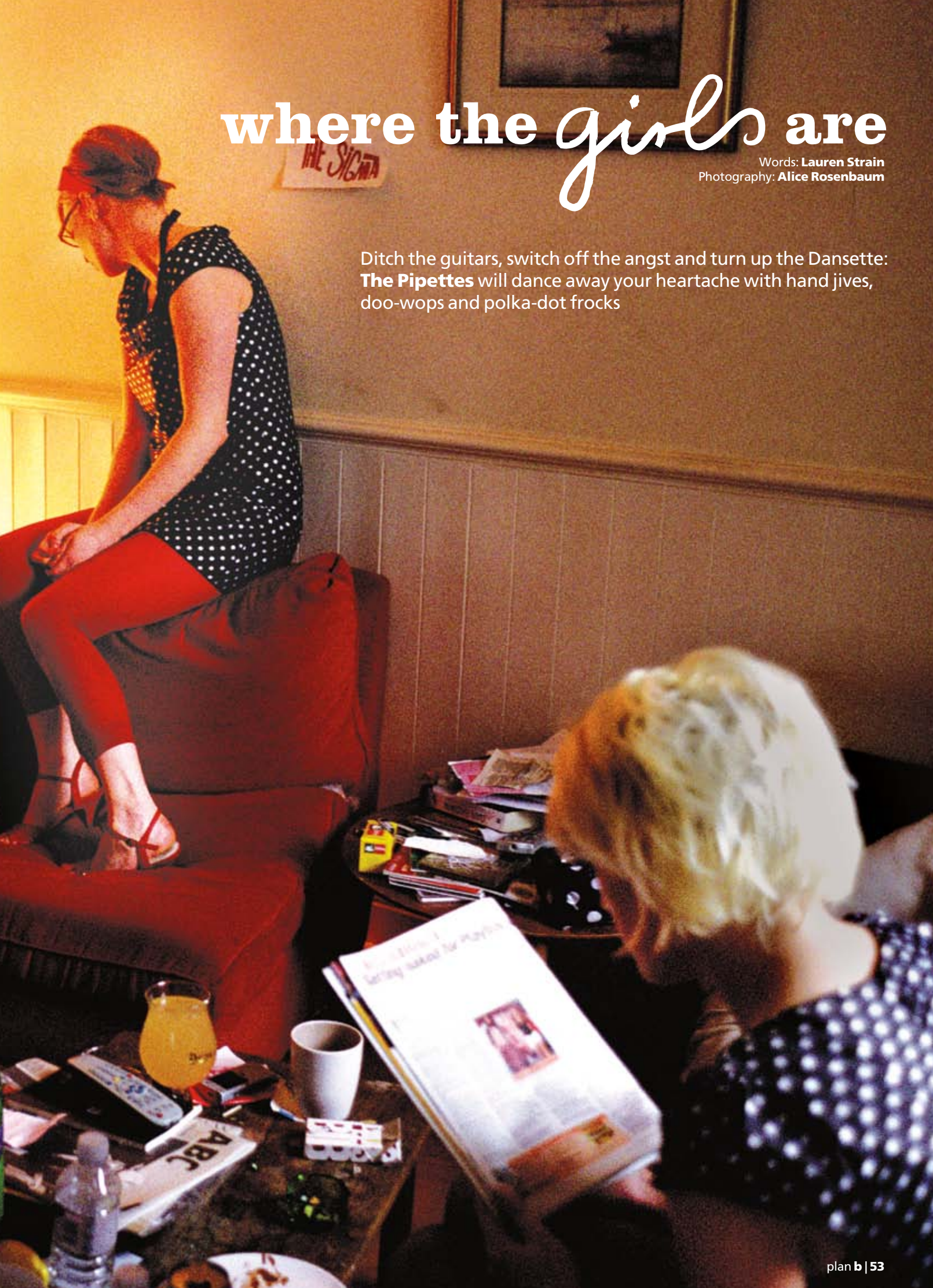
"The band was formed as a direct reaction to the fact that there are so many boring guitar bands," says Gwenno.

"It is very much about having a good time. I think people want that. When they go to a gig they want to be entertained, whether they'll

where the *girls* are

Words: **Lauren Strain**
Photography: **Alice Rosenbaum**

Ditch the guitars, switch off the angst and turn up the Dansette: **The Pipettes** will dance away your heartache with hand jives, doo-wops and polka-dot frocks





'We take our songwriting as seriously as any band, but we don't have to go on about it all the time' – Rose

admit it or not," nods Rose, "not stroking their chins, wondering whether it's 'good' or not. We do, hopefully, cut through that quite a bit, just because it's such upbeat music and there's a huge amount of energy in what we're doing. It stops you from having to think.

"People have this problem with even calling us 'pop' music," she continues, "which is a real shame, because pop is meant to bring everyone together, it's not meant to be exclusive, which is why we don't belong to any kind of 'scene', particularly. Maybe we do come across as a bit of an anomaly in this context" – tonight, they support Kaiser Chiefs, and their mums are here to witness the sheer madness of it all – "but that's a good thing, because we don't want to attach ourselves to the hip of some skinny young boy."

we're the prettiest girls you ever met

Take note, all you girls in yer faux pearls, tired of slotting into some narcotics-spiked world of debauchery and lines of coke; all you boys in yer airforce jackets, your youthful, yellowing fingers nipping the soggy, sad end of a roll-up, your skeletal frames jerking about to the latest skag'n'bone racket to greet your iTunes – I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.

Your already cancerous hearts are screaming for a bit of wholesome, flirty fun.

Fancy a skip through fields of daffodils with fairies at your feet? A spin under a discoball in a yellow T-shirt and, hell, sandals? A naïve, longing kiss with the quiet, cute one from the back of Geography? Sure you do. Maybe

– no, definitely – The Pipettes are for you (and everyone else).

Because The Pipettes replace the gritty bits of life that make you want to curl up and cry with a cuddle, a twist and a fruit cocktail. They create Songs. Which, in case some of us had forgotten, are things that can make you feel...healed.

"I personally use this band as a form of therapy!" giggles Becki. "I get onstage, go mental for half an hour and afterwards I feel great."

"It's very empowering," enforces Gwenno, "because it gives you that opportunity where no one has any control over what you're gonna do – I feel like we can be the people we'd like to be onstage. That sounds wanky as fuck, doesn't it? But..."

"...it does exist," completes Becki. "And it is something that takes a long, long time – I've only in the last few months gone 'Fuck it, I don't care what anyone thinks.' And it's about developing an appeal that's ultimately your alter ego. You just get up there and become 'Riot Becki' or 'Rosé' and it's almost you, but not quite. Then you're back to being you again. That's a really nice thing."

"All this 'Ooh, I'm playing an instrument and I'm really serious and I'm a genius and tortured...'" sighs Gwenno. "I mean, the guy behind The Shangri-Las [George 'Shadow' Morton], he was incredibly tortured – but that's not what he gave to people in his music. Although he put a lot of it into those songs, it's very hidden. Instead, it was about lifting

people's spirits, which I think is forgotten about now."

"All the classic bands took really serious issues but turned them into something much more accessible, so that if you want to just enjoy the music then that's fine; but if you want to dive into subtext and meaning then there's a whole load you can draw out of it," concludes Becki. "That's something we definitely want to aim for. I mean, someone like ABBA...it's a huge ideal to hope to be able to write songs like that!" she laughs, incredulously. "But it's something that you do aspire to. Throwaway, novelty pop isn't what we're about."

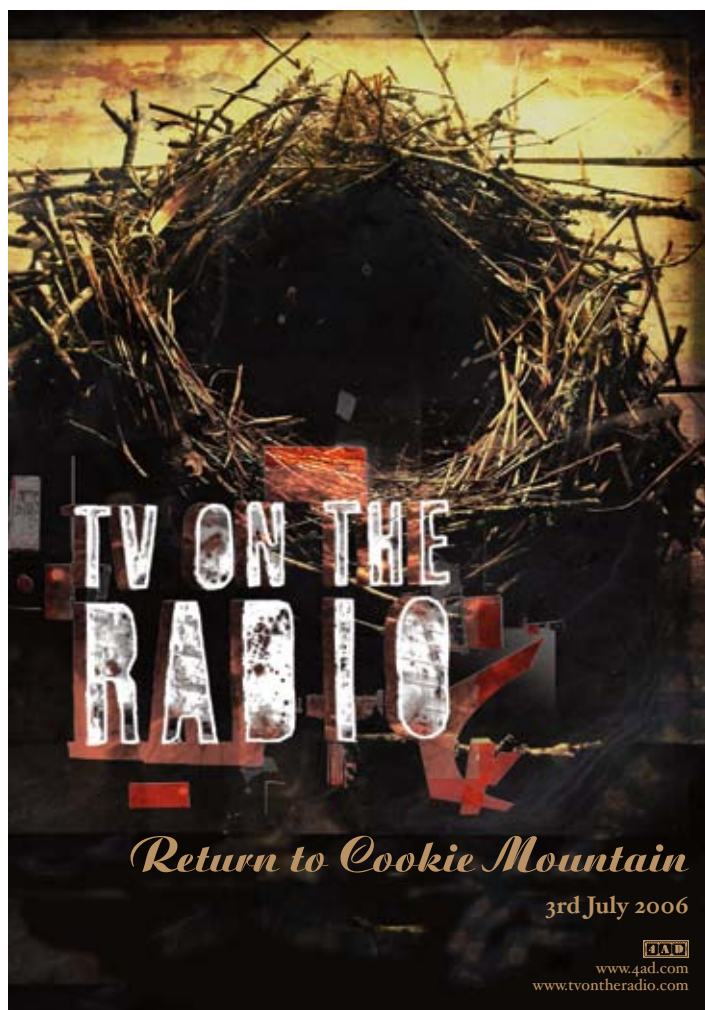
gotta dance to keep from crying

So, what of all these endless comparisons to the ladies of the Sixties, who were generally just vocal vehicles and attractive faces for behind-the-scenes songwriters? The Pipettes – well, they've a bit more control, and a truckload more sass. Their sugary strings, crystal complexions and cheeky chirrup about boys in uniform might seem unadulterated and harmless: not the case. Take 'Judy', the barbed ditty about a high school gal who earns herself a smidgen of a reputation (read also: STD). Or the bittersweet harmonies of 'Why Did You Stay?', gently brushing off an adoring admirer.

Is being lumped in with the Phil Spector bunch denying them a chance to make their own mark?

"We do reference those bands," comments Gwenno. "If you've seen our website there's those manifestos about how we go back to an

the pipettes



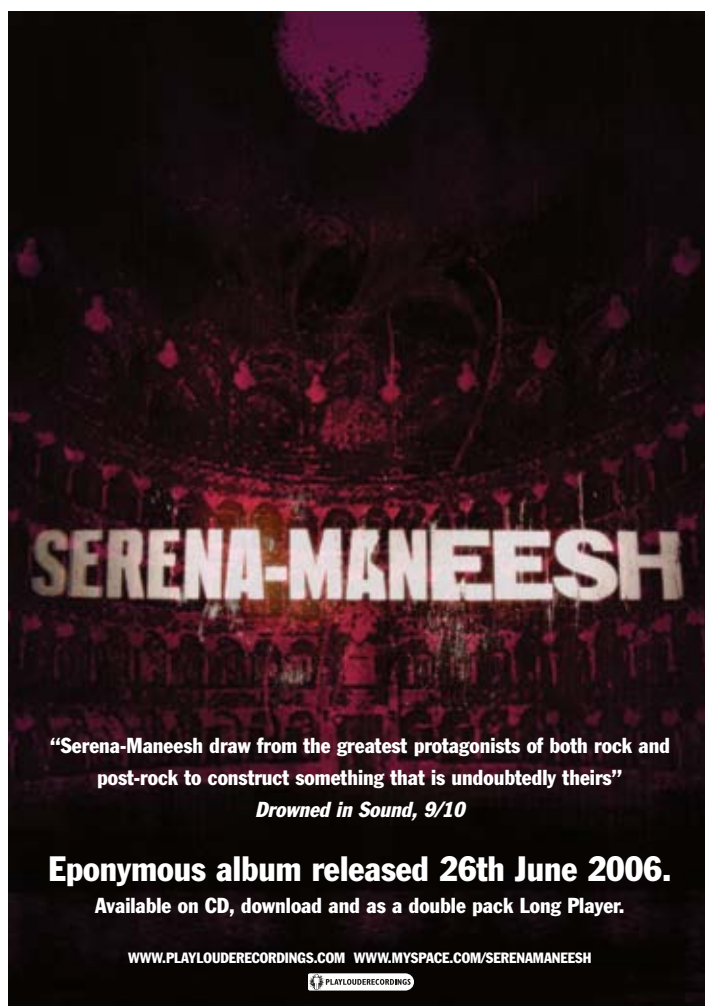
era before The Beatles came along and standardised pop music, and I think it is important that you always have a sense of history, however forward-thinking you're being. Our lyrics and songs are about being a woman now, though. It's not as if we're trying to create a retro feel; it's just the disciplines and sentiments of that era, those bands and what pop music was about at that time, that have been forgotten about. That's what we're very interested in."

And so an impeccable, manicured balance is struck; between the past and present, the real and the cartoon: under the cherry-red magazine lips and Broadway glamour, there's a girl next door. So scrap the unclean, unstrung, defaced, debilitated body of culturally 'cool' music as it is today. Let it snort its chemicals into tainted bloodstreams and wallow in murky pools of fuzz. Then whack a splurge gun in its face, let your imaginations run rampant with quirky tales of growing up and bounce about instinctually, hormonally – driven, determined and fuelled with feistiness – because even hurt deserves a tune.

Beam from blushed cheek to teardrop earring, step in front of the mirror and hold your head up high. 'Cause The Pipettes just made you happy.

classic noughties girl group sounds

- 1) **The Long Blondes** Christmas Is Cancelled (2004)
 - 2) **The Pipettes** Judy (2005)
 - 3) **Camera Obscura** Teenager (2003)
 - 4) **The Organ** Brother (2006)
 - 5) **The Concretes** You Can't Hurry Love (2004)
 - 6) **The Blue Minkies** Christmas Means Nothing Without Presents (2004)
 - 7) **Stereo Total** Do The Bambi (2005)
 - 8) **Ronnie Spector** Hey Sah Lo Ney (2006)
 - 9) **Holly Golightly** Walk A Mile (2005)
 - 10) **The Detroit Cobras** Laughing At You (2001)
- Everett True



'We go a lot more free now'



Recreational Abuse

Words: **Stewart Gardiner**
Photography: **Brian Sweeney**

Glasgow's no wave troublemakers **Park Attack** talk free noise and famous fans

I hear rumours. Of course they may be just that. But on this occasion it's something about Park Attack and Sonic Youth in France, and it's Dep in Monorail that's telling it, so... Why not ask the band?

"Yeah, it was in Paris," drummer Lorna tells me in the darkened, secluded spot that is Stereo come a Sunday afternoon. "We're on the label Textile, which is based in Paris. And Magik Markers have just put out a record on Textile as well, and they've toured with Sonic Youth before. The guy Benoit who runs our record label sent Thurston Moore our record. And he sent him an email back saying he liked it, and what was the story about us – have we got other records out and stuff. So Benoit said that we were playing with Magik Markers, and did he want to come along for a drink that night. So Thurston Moore sent an email back saying he quite fancied doing a noise piece with John Moloney from Sunburned Hand Of The Man.

"Not exactly sure what happened, but I think John Moloney got a flight back to England or something. So he couldn't do it. So Thurston Moore was going to do this noise thing on his own. But then Sonic Youth had been playing in Paris the night before and they decided on the day that they all just wanted to sleep.

"So they came to see us play."

It's all delivered with casual awe, wide-eyed expectation broken down by the fact that as personal histories go, this is the least Park Attack should expect.

This is the third time I've interviewed them, but the first where we've hooked up in person. At the time their debut EP, 'Last Drop At Hideout', came to my attention I was still living in London. That was back in 2004, and not only has their brilliantly makeshift Mars-torturing-DNA turn grown into something they can truly call their own, but the core of the band itself has changed. Lorna Gilfedder and Rob Churn (on guitar) remain, while Tom has left, leaving long term-collaborator Jamie Grier (on "bass, noises and stuff") to make up the three-piece.

Halfpast Human, their sullied, brutal beast of an album, is what all the fuss in Paris was about.

rip it up

So what have you been up to besides almost cavorting with Sonic Youth?

"Well, Jamie's been playing with us for a year and a half," Lorna tells me. "The sound's really evolved into something darker – because Tom's not in the band anymore."

The influences are certainly harder to pin down this time around, but it's obviously a case of a band stepping into their own orbit as opposed to denying what they were in the first place.

"I think the songs are a lot more sophisticated than on the EP," she continues. "The EP was just like total raw spazzing out. Whereas on the album there are structures to the songs, but there was also that free element."

"I think we go a lot *more* free now as well," adds Jamie. "Without the keyboards it's got a lot less pop to hold it together."

"We've been playing together for three-and-a-half years now. We're just a lot tighter."

"And we've been doing all these other band things as well. Like improvised things – kind of combinations of all of us. It's evolved into loads of different things."

I wonder if these individual projects function as some sort of release.

Lorna is straight in there with a semi-serious turn. "I play drums for International Airport, and I think that gets all the melodic niceness out," she laughs. "Then I can just rock out."

Improvisation plays a considerable role in their practices outside Park Attack, sometimes resulting in Rob and Lorna making up entire songs and sets with friends of an afternoon to perform that night.

Whether it feeds back into the band proper would at first seem a matter of contention – the rhythms and structures are wound so much tighter this time around – but note the space and playful noise intrusions throughout the LP, and the freedom is there for all to see.

"I think in the future we'll definitely be recording a massive body of stuff," muses Lorna, "and then taking maybe improvised parts out of that for the next album. But with *Halfpast Human* we went over to France and we only had a week to record. So we just went into the studio and played the songs, and that was the record."

dish it out

Since No Wave seems to have thankfully fallen off the fashion bandwagon, the musical landscape feels primed for Park Attack to get their message across, which is something that perhaps eluded them before.

"Being on the Optimo label [OSCARR, for the first EP] you get a whole different crowd," Rob tells me. "At Textile, the other people on the label are pretty much more wayward thinking."

Considering this for a moment, Jamie arrives at a seemingly unexpected conclusion.

"Are we their pop band?" he asks.

"Yeah," states Lorna, not missing a beat.

"We are."





revolution in the head

Words: **Ringo P Stacey**
Illustration: **Jussi Brightmoore**

How Oakland crew **The Coup** souped up their politically minded hip hop with dirty funk and razor-sharp humour

How did you start with music?

"Well, first, when I was a kid, I wanted to be Prince."

Who didn't?

"Exactly. Then, when I was 15, I decided I wanted to devote my life to being a revolutionary activist."

That's young.

"Not really – people have to make all kinds of life-changing decisions at that age. Rich white people can wait until they're 30–35 and it's perfectly acceptable for them to not have a career yet. If a poor black person hasn't decided what they're doing with their life by the age of 18 or 19, then they're automatically labelled a waster."

Can you remember any particular incidents that prompted your decision?

"Yeah. One day, I must have been 13 or 14, I was planning to spend the day at home. This guy came by with van full of girls, asking if I wanted to join them and come along to a demo. I thought about it for a minute and said, 'Hell, yeah!'"

Sometimes, to get to the bottom of what makes an artist brilliant, you need to look at their one true stinker of a recording. Until recently, I never thought that Oakland rap crew The Coup had made one. To find it, you'd have to go back. Way, way, back. As far back as 1991 and 'Economics 101', the third track on the crew's first, three-track tape, EP.

Boots Riley sounds young, naive, idealistic. Nothing at all like what he does now – none of the suave, disgusted analysis. Some elements of the formula are already in place – his timbre is there, combining the rich scholastics of Rakim with a dash

of Snoop Dogg's loveable silky pervert. But beyond that, it's a funk-free, a cappella, dud. "When you're that young," he says in his own defence, "you think the revolution's going to happen some time next week."

Fortunately, the rest of their five-album, 15-year career could be seen as an extended apology for that moment. In some ways, it's like they've grown down, taking first a few tentative steps towards, and then diving right into, a new, more approachable menu of bawdy humour, cut with a captivating, bleak eye for docudrama.

The move is striking and deliberate. "I went from rapping stuff that was basically a pamphlet set to music, to telling stories that people can relate to," says Riley. "I'm very into the craft of songwriting. That's what it started out as. It's something I love to do – tell stories and paint pictures, make soundscapes. I've spent time honing my skills."

On the new album, *Pick A Bigger Weapon*, these stories and soundscapes range from the bawdy Marxist singalong 'Head (Of State)', with its squeaky chorus, "*Bush and Hussein together in bed, giving aitch-eee-ay-dee-head*", to the affecting tale of 'Tiffany Hall', a girl Riley and the guys used to tease at school about having a fat ass, who was later killed by liposuction gone wrong.

'IJustWannaLayAroundAllDayInBedWithYou' and 'BabyLetsHaveABabyBeforeBushDoSomething Crazy', elsewhere explore a bedside manner that's more Isaac Hayes than Millie Jackson or R Kelly.

"'BabyLetsHaveABaby...' came from a direct quote from my girl."

I found it a confusing sentiment – I've heard the exact opposite argued.

"That there are too many people on earth?"

No – more that given the way the world is at the moment, it's probably better not to bring children into it.

"If we thought that way, there would be nothing to fight for. Most of the baby boomers wouldn't exist. People have babies out of an affirmation of life. That song is about hope in a time of despair. That's what my music is about – hope and change."

The Coup started in 1991 as a three-piece, with Riley joined by DJO (replaced by DJ Pam The Funstress by the time the first LP was made), and since-departed second MC E-Roc.

"The music was slower back then," says Riley. "That was down to how we listened to music then. People would blast tapes out of their cars when they were ghost-riding them. You heard that phrase? It's called when you 'ghost-ride the whip'. They would walk alongside, real slow, with the car driving itself at about five miles per hour. There's a big outcry over it now, but amazingly, over all these years, only three people have died..."

"And that had an effect on the tempo of the music."

Even before the humour, although the tempos are slower, the elemental funk is already there, even on debut album *Kill My Landlord* (1993). It's in the slouched lo-fi Califunkadelicisms of 'I Know You', and the Large Professor-esque swagger of 'Dig It' and 'Funk'. And it's there in the nasal vibes of E-Roc



'When you're young, you think the revolution's gonna happen some time next week'

playing counterpoint, trading lines, more often than verses, with Riley.

"There was a track on that album called 'The Liberation Of Lonzo Williams', which was key," says Riley. "That was one of the first proper stories. The whole of the next record was my attempt to take that and make it work over a whole album."

Indeed, the second LP, *Genocide & Juice* (1994), the title a pun on Snoop's 'Gin & Juice', represented a major leap in both imagination and wit, pioneering a new and resonant welfare/DSS poeticism. Such as the opening verse of the album's almost-a-hit lead single, 'Fat Cats, Bigga Fish':

*"The street light reflects off the piss on the ground,
Which reflects off the hamburger sign that
turns round,
Which reflects off the chrome of the BMW,
Which reflects off the fact that I'm broke,
Now what the fuck is new?"*

It was also notable for being the album where *The Coup* got funny. His is the kind of unpredictably sharp humour Eminem edged towards when he was young and hungry. In later years, this would develop into sequences like the one on third LP *Steal This Album* (1998), where a dissertation from Riley on sneaking into a cinema for free somehow ends with him in Washington DC pissing on the grave of George Washington.

And, on *Pick A Bigger Weapon*, a series of skits sees Riley, under the influence of a miracle drug called "ass-breath killers", first tell his boss, "I'm supposed to be dragging my foot out of your motherfucking ass", and then launches into

a spirited singalong in praise of shoplifters ('I Love Boosters').

Like most good concepts, their threads usually fray and break after a few songs, but while they cohere, they're rousingly vulgar and funny. Perhaps still none more so than the extended satire on *Genocide & Juice* that runs from a flirtatious blag for free hamburgers, through Riley posing as David Rockefeller bragging of how he's "running shit" and how his genealogy is, "Straight Anglo-Saxon, when my family got they sex on" to E-Roc's perfectly inflected Too \$hort impersonation as Jean Paul Getty, "Lay you out like linoleum floors, I'm getting rich off petroleum wars".

If the concept's prescience was remarkable, a decade before Victoria Aitken's abortive rap career, it's striking to dig further and discover it's only one example in a career littered with such foresights. They famously, accidentally, forecast the World Trade Center attacks of September 2001 with the cover of their fourth album *Party Music*, from earlier that year. Way before Kanye West spotted that the president of the USA doesn't care for black people, Riley rapped, on 1993's 'Not Yet Free', about how, "From the day I was shitting in diapers, it was evident the president didn't like us".

"I think that it's good that Kanye West said that," says Riley. "I think it's great that people are feeling more comfortable coming out with things like that."

He's cautiously optimistic that the changed atmosphere will help them find at least slightly more receptive ears this time round. "There's no

bandwagon to jump on right now. But I think that people are ready for something like this."

Maybe what has changed for *The Coup* over their career isn't to do with them at all. Beyond internal issues, musical or otherwise; beyond the increasingly impressive dimensions of Riley's afro, the most crucial changes are external.

Who are you making music for?

"When I make my music, I speak primarily to the black community, because that's who I talk to in my daily life. But the music is for the whole working class in general because these struggles are universal, even if they happen in different ways."

When you talk about revolution, you're talking about it in a very immediate sense.

"There is no definite beginning or definite end to revolution. Even after the people take power, there's still going to be battles. I think that people are ready for change but don't see that they have any power to do it. So I think that maybe our children right now will see that.

"Do I think that in 10, 20 years the US will be a socialist state? No [laughing]. But do I think that the movement will be so strong that there will be all sorts of concessions happening all over the place? Yes."

Do you think that it's possible for people to take that kind of power without being corrupted?

"Who knows? You can't go much wronger than now. Maybe. But it's kind of like not going to a movie because the movie might be bad. You've got to try.

"I have faith in humanity. I have faith that, as we go, we'll work things out."

DEGENERATION SPOKESMODEL

Words: **Joe Stannard**

Photography: **Steve Double**

Where do we begin? **Faith No More, Fantomas, Tomahawk, Peeping Tom...**
Meet **Mike Patton**, the hardest-working man in show business

It's perhaps significant, if only in a 'Gosh, what a bizarre synchronicity!' kind of way, that perversely polymathic vocalist and musician Mike Patton grew up in a California town called Eureka. OK, so that famed exclamation attributed to Archimedes may translate as 'I am in the state of having found it!' and refer to the discovery of a method of calculating the volume of an vessel, but because people are generally pretty lazy and superficial and Stephen Hawking has yet to bless us with an equally snappy catchphrase ("Just keep talking" doesn't cut it) the word has come to be associated with smart stuff, cleverness, ideas and all that good shit.

Mike Patton, more than most rock-affiliated musicians, is bursting with ideas. What's more,

can definitely do pop. But what is pop to Mike Patton? And what is Mike Patton to pop?

pop psychology

"It's been in me and it's seeped out," says Mike, sprawling in a hotel room chair. "I even think you can hear it in some of the extreme shit I do. Peeping Tom is me taking that kind of stimulus and running with it, seeing how far I could go within those boundaries. 'OK, let's take some of these things that we've been playing with over the years and harness them into roughly three to four-minute pieces that don't stray too far from the path, that don't have too much information in them; just enough to be interesting. Verse, chorus, bridge, verse, chorus, get out.' That may sound easy or boring, but

That's the good part of it. The bad part is you have to fuckin' wait. And there's a certain amount of, 'Yes, I'm glad I'm fuckin' done with it!' But realistically, it's fuckin' just starting."

patton comes alive

The night before this interview, Patton played a show (and it really was a show) with the Fantomas-Melvins Big Band at London's Forum. It was, as my gig companion put it, fantastic to watch a band using their formidable expertise to make music that is essentially very *wrong*. The Big Band, comprised of Patton on vocals and electronics alongside drummers Dave Lombardo and Dale Crover, guitarists Buzz Osborne and David John Stone and bassist Trevor Dunn, were as well-drilled as James Brown's Furious Flames, as devastatingly precise as Duke Ellington's orchestra and as tight as Nelson Riddle's...um, arsehole. Oh, and yes, they 'rocked' too. It was hard to take your eyes off Patton, a whirling, screaming, squealing ball of catalytic energy at the centre of a brilliantly choreographed storm of sound. This was what rock could be, we thought, something to be honed and harnessed, sharpened to a fine point and jabbed into the throats of the pitifully undemanding *Artrocker* generation, the kind of people who think, "Avant-garde is French for shit, huh huh huh". Fuckin' idiots.

Are you going to tour the new material?

"Think so. Yeah, yeah."

There's no way you're going to be able to get Doseone, Norah Jones, Kool Keith and Bebel Gilberto to all commit to a tour. How are you going to fill in for the missing guests?

"Hire different guests! Hehehehe! More affordable guests! We'll see. I think maybe two singers, two vocalists, a trio or quartet of organic players, couple programmer guys, maybe a DJ."

You should get The Roots (Philadelphia's live hip-hop supergroup).

"Good idea. In fact we've heard from them. They wanted Tomahawk to play with them, which I thought was really strange. Guess they're fans or something."

Well, you've already worked with (Roots beatboxer) Rahzel.

"Yup, he's gonna be in there. We're doing *The Conan O'Brien Show* at the end of May and he's gonna be in that. Pretty funny...!"

Did Norah Jones need much persuading to say 'motherfucker'? 'No. She loved it'

the guy can't seem to sit still for a fucking second. In the years following the dissolution in 1997 of beloved cheese'n'ham merchants Faith No More, Patton has co-founded a record label (Ipecac), fronted several more bands (Fantomas, Tomahawk, and now Peeping Tom), performed with major figures in the worlds of rock and avant-garde music (Melvins, Merzbow, John Zorn, Dillinger Escape Plan, Rahzel, Amon Tobin *et al*) and generally made hard work look like the coolest thing on earth.

Peeping Tom is Patton's latest labour of love. Several years in the making, the resulting album sees the singer reining in his naturally outré instincts and dabbling in some straight up beat-driven pop music (albeit of a uniquely mean-spirited, obscene stripe) alongside such guests as Bebel Gilberto, Kool Keith and Norah Jones. This isn't entirely without precedent. Faith No More were always more sick pop group than dumbo alt-rock outfit, and releases such as Mr Bungle's *California* (their 1999 swansong) and *Romances* (a 2004 collaboration with Norwegian composer Kaada) have featured Patton wrapping his elastic pipes around some truly gorgeous melodies. The guy

it's not for me. It's a difficult thing. I respect song form and great songwriters, and if I were to put pop in a box, it's a big fuckin' box, and that's why I do a record like this. To play with it. There's a lot of shit you can do. Even this stuff, as linear as it is in my world, there's still quite a few levels of things going on. It's really dense and still pretty provocative, I think. I hope!"

So you consider this album as much an experiment as anything else you've done?

"Well, yeah. I see it as on-the-job training, learning by doing. The weak links were mostly in the beat department. I realised it was probably not such a good approach to hire a band this time, but work with some guys who can do this with their eyes shut."

Did you find that having recorded the album, you got all this pop out of your system, or is it something you'd like to revisit at some point?

"There's...there's more. One of the good things about the amount of time that it took and not focusing on it was that I kept writing shit, so now I've got a stockpile. I would say three quarters of the next album is done.





Is that something you're not looking forward to?

"It should be fun. But it's a fuckin' TV show, y'know? And I'm putting a band together really for one song, so...it is what it is."

Patton first appeared on the *Conan* show back in the late Nineties, promoting the final Faith No More record, *Album Of The Year*, an aggressively bittersweet behemoth that belly-flopped on release. That's my favourite FNM album, I tell Mike.

"Oh," he smiles, wryly. "Took the title to heart, huh?"

through the keyhole

So, Mike. What's the Peeping Tom concept? What's the story behind the name? Sounds kinda kinky...

"Ahhhhh...it's a good name! Evocative, a bit ambiguous, a bit creepy. I also wanted to accentuate the lighter side of it because this is a fun record, it's not a dark, disturbing, perverted record. I don't know if you've seen the final packaging, but it's pretty juicy. I just saw the final version two days ago and I'm still kinda buzzin' off it."

Did you design it?

"Oh, yeah. I really can't stress how important I think the artwork is, especially with some of the more difficult stuff like *Fantomas* or *Maldoror* [Patton's 1999 collaboration with Merzbow]. If you don't have a seductive cover that actually is a part of the story, it's that much closer to being meaningless."

The most recent *Fantomas* album, 2005's *Suspended Animation*, came packaged as a desktop calendar illustrated by Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara. The artist was credited on the cover of the album, above the band's name, rather than in small print on the reverse.

"That was a great one," nods Patton.

"And y'know, without that, let's just say that was a cardboard cover...sure, you'd figure it out, but would it be the same experience? No way."

Do you think this is a problem with a lot of experimental music? That the packaging is almost an afterthought?

"I think it's the case with music in general," agrees Mike. "You have a blank sheet, y'know? Use it. But I think, especially with difficult music, it needs to draw the listener in a little bit, make it a little bit less abstract. A visual reference. Sometimes it's a sensual thing. I'm a bit of a fetishist but I'm hoping other people enjoy that shit as much as I do. I think they do. There are enough nuts out there."

Then there's the issue of downloading. Is that a concern?

"Ummm...no. I was into it before this craze, hehehehehe! Before these damn kids got into it! No, I always thought it was really important. It's just that now, when I come to my partners with a crazy expensive package, I have a better excuse. I can say, 'Well, man, do you want them to download it? The cooler we make it, the more it costs, the more desirable it'll be!' So it's kinda funny."

Of course they can counter that by saying if anyone wants to download *Delirium Cordia* – *Fantomas*' 2003 third album, a single 74-minute track – it's going to take them about two hours.

"Yeah, hahahaha...and imagine *that* without the artwork! Totally. What reference point would you have?"

It's a difficult album.

"Pfft! It's a pain in the ass! Let's be honest."

Do you listen to your own stuff?

"Not much after it's done, no."

Just the initial playback and then onto the next thing?

"Sometimes if I get a finished thing I'll put it in, just to make sure the mastering's OK, check the titles, but that's more just kind of mechanical. Sitting down with a glass of wine, y'know, in my underwear, looking into the sunset, listening to my record? Doesn't really float my boat!"

I was wondering about Norah Jones' part on the *Peeping Tom* album, her vocal on 'Sucker'. Did she need much persuading to say "motherfucker"?

"She loved it. When I described the concept to her, I just said I wanted her to be a real bloodsucking man-killer. She said, 'I can do that!' It was really easy, a painless experience that could have been a total nightmare. She had a lot of people muttering under their breath, or behind her back, or even to her face, 'What the fuck are you doing with this guy? There's no money in it!' She's made, she's paid, she doesn't need me for fuckin' shit! But she loved the music and wanted to do it. Not only that, she made it happen."

glossolalaland

Mike Patton has one of the most imitated voices in rock music, but almost every attempt to emulate his style has proven to be a complete and utter waste of oxygen. Imitators always miss the point, finding themselves unable to adequately simulate Patton's morbid wit or the diverse range of musical inputs that inform his vocal experiments. Few vocalists

With that in mind, how much of a hassle is it to write lyrics?

"I've never felt that I was very good at writing lyrics. Sometimes I'll have fun and laugh, 'Oh, that's pretty good!' But it's always a chore for me. It's always a pot of coffee, the night before a session. It seems like the more I do it the worse I get, hahahahaha! I don't know. The learning curve has not improved."

He pauses for a second, thinking deeply. "Actually, maybe I just don't like it? I used to love to write...I don't know. For this record, I actually had a pretty good experience, because I didn't rake myself over the coals, I didn't worry too much, if it sounds good, if it flows, it's in there. Meaning? Bleuugh! Even some of the titles are just kinda like, 'Huh?' Like 'How U Feelin'? It just sounds good! Hahaha! Some of the rappers on there, I don't even know what they're talking about! I don't fuckin' understand Doseone! 'Gblalalbbalbalabalabalabalabalab!' God only knows what he's talking about!"

Do you think you stop caring so much about lyrics as you get older? I rarely listen to the words anymore. The vocals just become a sound. You're obviously more interested in pure sonics.

"Well, that's definitely the case. And that's not to say that the lyrics aren't important but the sound of the lyrics is the most important thing. The way I write lyrics mostly is that I will do a babytalk version of a song, either singing or even yelling or whatever. From that, I figure

**'I don't fuckin' understand Doseone!
"Gblalalbbalbalabalabalabalab!"
God knows what he's talking about!'**

have ever been able to ricochet between hardcore scream, r'n'b melisma, jazz croon and death grunt with quite the same degree of success.

I ask Mike, at what point did you first realise you could use your vocal cords for something other than, say, asking for a biscuit? When did you realise you first had a voice?

"Mmmm...I dunno. I'd been singing a long time before I started realising that I could play with it. Before that, I didn't really think, 'Gee, I'm a singer!' I never took it that seriously. I'm really untrained, I just kind of did what I thought the music needed. It was usually something really straight up and boring, you know? Just kind of singing."

That was with *Mr Bungle*, right? Your first band.

"Yep. But you know, the way we started, I was just screaming my head off. I guess that's a funny place to start, but I went into singing from there, oddly enough. Just by goofing around and having the willingness to fall on my face on record and in front of people. If you do that enough times, man, you'll try anything! Also hooking up with John Zorn, and him encouraging me to play improv gigs. In those contexts, a melody and lyrics are kinda meaningless. You gotta do other things, and when you're forced to do that on the spot, at the moment, in front of people, you sink or swim. It's a total immersion, y'know? It's like learning a new language. You dive in, say 'Don't fuckin' speak English to me' and you know what? You figure it out."

out what I'm gonna do. I record it, listen to it a few times, 'Oh, I'm gonna change that,' and then I find lyrics or words or phrases to match those sounds or cadences. So in a way, the words are really the last thing on my mind. Literally! With *Fantomas*, I just left it at that stage. I didn't bother to put words over it because I didn't feel like it needed any. I left it in the oven, hahahahaha!"

But it wasn't burnt.

"No, no, no. It's good in there."

international lover

You're known for being a busy guy, Mike. What have you got coming up in the immediate future?

He makes a flabbergasted, jet-engine sound with his lips.

"Buncha crap, yeah. The next month and a half are crazy. I gotta go to Italy for this classical thing with a choir for a week. Eivind Kang, interesting composer. He wrote a piece for choir and two soloists, and I'm one of the soloists. Then New York to play with the X-ecutioners, do something with Zorn, rehearse the *Peeping Tom* band, two more gigs with *Eye* from *Boredoms* and *Makigami Koichi*. It's like a vocal summit, hehehe! Then I go to Canada, do a bunch of shit there at a jazz festival, three projects, I think, in three days. Then I go back to New York to do the TV show.

"Then," he says, finally, "Home."

Mike Patton, ladies and gentlemen. The hardest-working man in showbusiness.

Words: **Ben Blackwell**
Photography: **Patrick Pantano**

kiss of DEATH

Embrace the darkness with **Black Lips**: garage-punk perverts and true Southern gents



Black Lips are total white trash. Pissing onstage, singing songs with titles such as 'Everybody Loves A Cocksucker' – they're sure to offend even the most liberal supporters of the arts. At the same time, Black Lips are complete gentlemen, all charm and grace and sincerity. It's bands like these, full of paradoxes, contradictions and sheer unexplainables, which make rock music exciting, dangerous, unpredictable – and all those things it has always promised it could be.

Cole is a dead ringer for Paul McCartney on the gatefold of *Sgt Pepper's...*, complete with a push-broom moustache and an endearing dark helmet of hair. Onstage, he's like a child imitating Jimi Hendrix. He has mastered all the parlour tricks: playing with his teeth; pushing the microphone stand forward with his feet; bending at the knees; and extending the guitar like an oversized phallus as it screams out fuzz from the urethra of its pick-ups.

Jared is the cutest of the bunch (they all have those faces you just wanna make out with). Bred from a long line of prominent Southern preachers – Tammy Faye Baker used to babysit him – he was the main objector to the working title for *Let It Bloom*, which was to be a re-appropriation of Lester Bangs' claim to be "the last of the white niggers". Giving the album that title pretty much meant he would never be able to talk to his family again. They were big supporters of the Civil Rights movement in the American South – if you're adventurous, search out recordings by The Swilley Family, a country/gospel-style act they formed in the Sixties and Seventies that Jared describes as "not half bad".

Ian is the missing link. As the band's fourth guitarist, it's clear he's the one who should have been there all along. He's the Brian Jones in the rock solid Mick/Keef-style line-up of Cole and Jared. He's arguably also the most skilled musician of the bunch (arguably, because Joe is a classically trained pianist, but I get the feeling he likes to stay behind the drums just for the challenge).

Ian joined the band the day before the start of a tour they spent opening for Sky Saxon and the Seeds. Cole taught him most of the songs in the back of the van. "This song is E, D, A," Cole would say. And then: "This song is a little different – it's E, A, D." All Ian could say to himself was: "These guys are fucking brilliant."

Ian is also known for the removable gold caps (or 'grill') he puts over his teeth. It's such a confusing merging of dirty Southern garage rock and screwed Southern hip hop that I can't help but be enamored by the audacity and absurdity of it. Oh yeah – and he supposedly bought the grill with aid money he received after Hurricane Katrina.

But, before I can get all up in arms, I hear one of the Lips' latest compositions, 'Katrina', the entire lyrics of which are as follows: "Oh, Katrina, why you gotta be mean?/You stole my heart way down in New Orleans/I can't believe what I saw on the TV screen/Oh, Katrina, why can't you be serene?"

The song is all clumsy drums and whirling fuzz lines. It is by far the most accurate approximation of modern day *Back From The Grave*-style garage since The Gories busted out with 'Drowning' in 1992. Black Lips hope to release the song on a New Orleans label, and to donate any profits from its sale to charity.

Joe is the organised one. He drives the van, deals with promoters and basically makes sure everything works as smoothly as possible. Up until not too long ago, he could be found tuning Cole's guitar in the middle of a set, because Cole had no idea how to do so. When he drums, he looks as though he is undergoing electro-shock treatment. He writes more songs and is more responsible for the band's sound than any other drummer I've ever met. But he's decidedly in the background.

Black Lips have their roots in a high school band called The Renegades; all the current members were

in it at one point or another. The only relevant story about The Renegades I can pull out of them is that both Cole and Jared sprayed Binaca on their dicks and set them on fire during one performance. Cole made the mistake of covering his dick with Gak (children's goo – part Silly Putty, part calf liver) and it quickly turned into a melting mess.

And then there are the most relaxed tales about Black Lips: their insane onstage antics find Cole vomiting, pissing into his own mouth, spitting in the air and catching it on his face, and sometimes using his cock as a guitar pick.

Regarding the pissing, Cole is the first to admit, "It's so fucking stupid."

"It's lame and I hate it," he says, "but it gets such a reaction from the crowd."

punch-drunk love

When Black Lips get drunk at a Best Western in Denver, after a 13-hour drive through a blizzard that has essentially shut down the state of Kansas (and only to play two songs), they're unnaturally excited about watching their limited-edition tour DVD. Filmed while the band was on the West Coast in 2005 recording *Let it Bloom*, it finds them in the van and in the studio, and captures all the shenanigans one could expect from a bunch of kids in their early twenties with a never-ending supply of beer.

But there's also a terribly heartwarming scene in the DVD that has Black Lips performing in a small apartment in San Francisco. All of the attendees are underage kids who couldn't get into the Lips' 21+ bar show. The band holler lyrics without microphones; Joe plays with towels

Carl Perkins B-side on Sun. And on a disarmingly brilliant cover of the Jacques Dutronc song 'Hippie Hippie Hourrah', the decidedly austere arrangement proves that these degenerates can transform a song and turn it into their own. And don't forget the crowd favourite 'Dirty Hands', a Spector-ish romp that apes The Beatles and asks – in a tone bordering on sheer dumbfounded – "Do you really want to hold my dirty hands?"

makeout city

Their most recent tour ends with an unexpected spot opening for Yeah Yeah Yeahs in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak. The Lips boys are beyond excited, and Cole's take on the situation is simply: "I'm viewing this show purely as a publicity stunt."

Black Lips hop onstage half an hour after the doors open and are facing a fairly empty room (the capacity is roughly 4,500) of a couple of hundred Day-Glo clad suburban Karen O wannabes squished up to the front barrier, plaintively waiting for Yeahs. It is still the biggest crowd they've ever faced.

What those hipster teenagers get is 20 minutes of pure distilled brilliance.

The Lips cut any deadweight from the set. Surprisingly, all three of the YYs are sitting stage right and fully taking in the spectacle. Ending the set with the quintessential Black Lips song, 'Freakout', Ian lights a pack of Black Cats as they dangle from his mouth, to looks of pure horror from the unsuspecting teens.

He spits up some blood and then crosses the stage to lock tongues with Cole.

Cole made the mistake of covering his dick with Gak – part Silly Putty, part calf liver

covering his drums; and the room is packed with frantic teenagers revelling in the excitement and generally losing their shit. The gig seems so totally uncharacteristic of how these guys are perceived, and it makes me wanna crawl up and give them a collective hug, tell them they're doing everything right, to fuckin' forget those assholes who focus on their onstage tomfoolery – to follow their instincts, as they've proven to be spot on so far.

After some brew, Cole and Jared are quick to name their idols. Tonight, at least the following were mentioned: Billy Miller and Miriam Linna, of A-Bones/Norton Records fame; Los Saicos – a relatively unknown South American garage-punk band that Black Lips have taken loads of inspiration from; Darin Raffaelli, frontman for long-forgotten Nineties acts Supercharger and The Brentwoods, and better known for penning songs for The Donnas among others; and some dude from Seattle punk-scuzzers The Spits (prominently featured in the DVD).

But all members would say that their initial infatuation with the Sixties punk sound was via Van Morrison's group, Them. From there, a logical progression came about: they were slowly turned on to records like the aforementioned *Back From The Grave* compilation series on Crypt Records: an eight-volume collection of pure outta-tune, untalented Sixties teen punk howling that is the most accurate blueprint of Black Lips' sound.

But other styles creep in unexpectedly. Songs such as 'Born to Be A Man' and 'Make It' are good ole hillbilly country, à la Buck Owens, or an obscure

This homophobe-baiting seems to draw the most ire from the crowd. And, like that, the show is over. In a show of irony, self-deprecation, giving the finger, or whatever you want call it, the Lips boys venture out back onstage with white towels around their necks, holding one another's hands. And they bow. The classic arena rock goodbye.

YYs are blown away, dispensing hugs and praise. But their tour manager and assorted higher-ups from the venue are none too pleased. Black Lips are immediately kicked out of the club, their gear loaded outside by the union grunts. The tour manager lectures the guys ("What made you think you could do this? You ever ask permission? Heard of a fire code?"), to which they just shrug their shoulders in a Dennis The Menace 'sorry, mister' sort of way. But they mean no apology.

The band sneak back into the club (by lying to security and saying they were Blood On The Wall, the other opening band), and are able to witness Karen O wearing a Black Lips sticker on her chest during the entire YYs performance. These boys are content; everything was worthwhile.

So Black Lips again found themselves in front of a room of teenagers, but their performance was the complete polar opposite of the one before, in the San Francisco apartment. And yet it worked; Black Lips made sense. In their world, this is something to behold. Black Lips have learned both to transcend and to embrace their contradictions. It is now time for everyone else to transcend their own reservations and embrace Black Lips.

live

hush little baby

Words: **Gracelette**

Photography: **Grant Peden**

Jana Hunter

Zo Caffè, Bologna

Jana Hunter is this little Texan woman with mousy brown hair. She's wearing unhip nerdy glasses, a pink cardigan, baggy trousers, and wielding a bigass, lowslung electric guitar. She looks like the kind of girl who'd hang out with you on dusty kerbs, who'd not feel obligated by crap ideas of femininity to scream at spiders, and who'd never play dumb so the boys would like her. Proper. Dude. She's probably in her twenties, like me, but I still want to ask her to be my mum...somebody's mum. She looks dead capable, like she'd make a good mum if she's not one already.

She steps up to the mic, starts to sing. Her voice is lowdown and jazzy and gutsy and direct. She's got a thick Southern accent and, call it folk, country, or blues, she's hailing from a genre in which strong women with hidden vulnerabilities deal with whatever gutpunches life throws at 'em then sing the pain away. It's hard to make out any distinct words as she lingers over the syllables, drawing them out with summertime laziness before lurching up to the next note. But I don't need to know what

I don't need to know what words she's singing

words she's singing, just like I didn't need to know, way back before I could talk, that my mum was singing about scarlet ribbons and the white cliffs of Dover. And I find myself thinking not just of my mum, but mums and babies in general and what exactly was going on when they sang to us.

Because lullabies are meant to soothe you to sleep, but there's something terrifying and disorientating about being forced to remember the vulnerability of being too young to understand the words. It's this vulnerability that Jana pushes onto us by singing as though she's the only one in this crowded room capable of understanding the lyrics, allowing her voice to lurch and list through the words like an unmanned ship, distorting their sense. Maybe it felt scary for my mum too when she sang to me, unable to communicate verbally with the crying thing in her arms.

But Jana doesn't sound scared, she sounds strong as she sings *"my pain is fantastic"* (the lyrics sheet says it's really her 'aim'). The strength, too, is equal parts comforting and disturbing. There's the comfort of the lullaby, the way that singing voices reassured us in our earliest moments. But there's darkness too. There's a lack of sentimentality in Jana's voice.

Even as I want her voice to hold me, I can hear, in its strength and simplicity, the other side of motherness, the kind of flat-eared pragmatism that eats its young. She doesn't try to hide it. Why would she? That pragmatism is the unspoken threat at the heart of every lullaby: what might happen if you don't go to sleep.

At times, she reminds me of Tracy Chapman in 'Behind The Wall', singing about hearing a neighbour getting beaten up by her husband and the silence that follows. The lyrics sheet suggests she wouldn't stand for such things (*"I'll carry your backbone round in my pants"*), but her voice is filled with similarly domestic kinds of emotion, whether mourning a family death, or crying after violence, or laughing with your friends around the kitchen table because what else can you do? And what's really disturbing is quite how close to these things a lullaby can sound. So maybe that's why she sings: *"This cradle is a tomb, an everlasting sense of doom. My momma's in her room. She's dead; she died too soon."*

But then there are the crescendos. They're great stonking things of defiant enjoyment, selfish and unrestrained, that perfectly balance the lullaby moments by reminding you that even mums have a right to a life outside of looking after *you*. She deploys noise and silence with such grace. Not since Low live in 2004 and High On Fire on *Blessed Black Wings* in 2006 have I heard musicians listening this hard to themselves and throwing that experience back on their audience. And, sure, I'll compare a Texan singer songwriter, whose *Blank Unstaring Heirs Of Doom* album will be the first release on Devendra Banhart's new label, to a lo-fi indie rock trio and the best metal band I've heard in recent years because that understanding of noise and silence transcends genre.

Yet Jana is of her genre, and it's shot through with domesticity. As she dances with awkward jerky movements, handclaps her way through an unaccompanied refrain about laughing and crying being the same thing, then crouches down low on the ground, she seems to perform without awareness of an audience, setting her music firmly within the context of the home.

So when Jana crescendos, voice rising and falling, guitar building to a full-on vamping *noise* before dropping away, leaving only the hum of conversation from the café next door, she doesn't sound like somebody's mother or wife or daughter. She just sounds like those moments when you're singing alone in your bedroom, then you pause, hear only the neighbour's TV set through the walls, and realise just how loud you've been singing, before smiling inside and starting back up to drown them out again.



LE ARGUMENT

WHL

dw

A musical semaphore to the stars



you've got a glow

Words: **Nicola Meighan**

Photography: **Bryony McIntyre**

Maher Shalal Hash Baz/Kama Aina/Tenniscoats/Kazumi Nikaidoh/Bill Wells

Tolbooth Jail, Stirling

She sings just like trumpets and birdsong and stars. She skips like a rabbit, she yodels, she laughs. She uses her voice-box to tune her guitar. She twirls her arms into the sky like a halo. She's **Kazumi Nikaidoh**, and soon we will love her.

"I image Scotland," opens the Japanese folk pop gem in broken English, killer-cute: "road, town, country – my first time here. My song. How I image." A grin. "I wrote for Scotland. You understand?"

And like Björk, Bob Marley, Scout Niblett, a brass band, she comes alive; oversize guitar in hand; allures in the universal language of 'lah-lahs': sings like a squeaking wheel, dives like a bird of prey; flushes the world in wide-eyed awe.

Later, when local hero and show curator **Bill Wells** leads an all-star adventure through cuckoos and hiccups and fireworks and cries,

Nikaidoh unravels astral jazz through her arms – a musical semaphore to the stars. We understand.

We too comprehend that r'n'b is best expressed on a banjo – thanks to tropical one-man band **Kama Aina** (alias Takuji Aoyagi). His whistling calypsos and Hawaiian jazz-pop and wigged-out banjo blues are embellished with heartfelt kazoo. Joined on percussion by a shuffling angel and a moody Eskimo (it's suspected **Tenniscoats** may be snuggled within), Aoyagi untangles his charms.

Said Tenniscoats soon shrug out of their parkas and into a delicate, spellbinding showpiece: Saya in pinafore, stark by a piano, keeps the beat with her bare feet, her voice like gauze. Takashi Ueno tickles a silvery guitar, and together they sculpture barren, psychedelic psalms. Wells and his sonic comrades sidle up to join in under big, heroic piano washes. They play bottles of water, cups of tea, dinner bells. Nikaidoh circles, plummet and flies: wired to the music, wired to the sky.

The collaborative spirit further thrives as Japanese folk-punks **Maher Shalal Hash Baz** commandeers centre stage: they're unexpectedly austere tonight; and they're all the more potent, and imposing, for it. Reiko Kudo's vocals are exquisite – as keen and as glimmering as a new pin

– while partner Tori's exuberant prowess on every instrument known to man is formidable: theirs is a mercurial musical hoopla. Katrina Pastel enrolls for percussive duties; various Mahers, Tenniscoats and others pull out harmoniums, oboes, and bongos. The Kudos' son Namio joins in also, grinning as he slowly rolls a giant beach-ball drum with furry pompoms. Reiko puffs on a melodica – as if for breath – the music a lifeline. We live it.

"Man! Lion! Bull! Eagle! Love! Justice! Power! Wisdom!" Tori spits and commands, before regaling us with 'The Last Ornette', and some typically, brilliantly, unvarnished banter: "Ornette Coleman is nearly 80 years old. He came to Japan. I saw him." Nikaidoh indulges in a nifty bit of mimicry with a trumpet: her confounding vocals a cut glass mirror for its every squeak, and scrape, and peal.

And everyone winds up on stage together, and the room is a farmyard, a playpen, a film-set. Chords whirl around toy snares, tom-toms, ragas; dumpling bongos and pumpkin banjos; Appalachian dulcimers and day-glo saxophones. They fall into a finale of sublime lullabies, and cinematic serenades, and a refrain that echoes 'Michael, Row the Boat Ashore'. Hallelujah.

Bell Orchestre

The Magic Bag, Ferndale

Despite the venue's fervent advertising that Bell Orchestre features members of Arcade Fire, the resultant attendees get dubbed by the Montreal quintet as the "smallest crowd we've had in six years." That's Detroit for you, not wishing to cross the 8 Mile divide and relinquish the dank for the halfway swanky atmosphere of The Magic Bag. The band performs decked out in immaculate matching white uniforms, housing two randomly placed points of light underneath. Beyond this superficial otherworldly intimacy, the group humanises their nearly vocal-free set through the aesthetic that everything has percussive

potential – upright bass, violin, even the French horn beats a tribal rhythm that's from nowhere but the terra firma – while undercutting post-rock pretension. It's easy to revel in the short-lived duelling glockenspiel interlude, the theatricality of typewriter percussion and the brass section's unamplified call-and-response stroll through the crowd. Even the final bow in unison manages a genuine affection towards the audience not found in most instrumental music's more cerebral contrivances. It's all the more fitting then that, with 12 points of light between them, the group chooses to centre them primarily around the heart, staying far south of the mind.

Aaron Shaul

Bellowhead

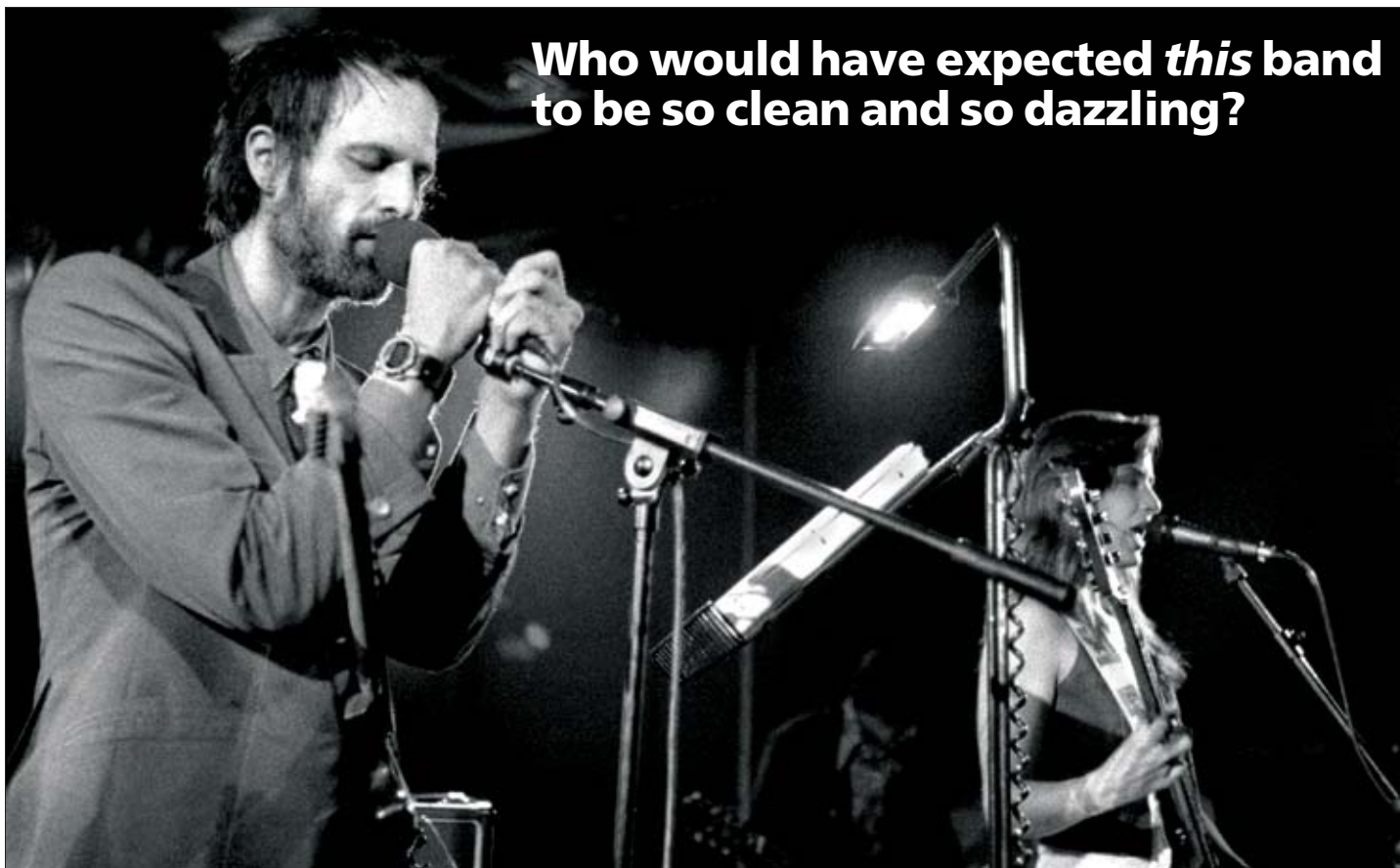
Blackheath Halls, London

Some jobsworth tells us we can't enter "because the concert has started and the hall is full." As my companion tries to reason with her, I dash for the other entrance and duck in, losing myself in the crowd, which is only a few people, standing awkwardly by the door while most sit politely round tables like a dinner theatre. Now this is weird.

I grew up going to folk festivals with my father, and they were raucous, rambunctious affairs. People pounded on tables, stomped their feet, sung harmony along with the choruses. Not like this lot, staring at the band like a museum piece preserved in aspic. There's a reason there's been such a revival

of folk recently. It's not just because people in a transient society want to reconnect with their roots, looking for tradition in a world where friends, families, communities flutter in the wind of progress. It's because folk music is utterly participatory, a shared and egalitarian experience in a world where our songs, our stories, our heroes and villains are manufactured and owned by corporations.

Bellowhead are something of an English folk supergroup, an 11-strong throng of fiddlers and pipers and even tuba players, fronted by the irrepressibly charismatic John Spiers and Jon Boden, playing traditional music in untraditional arrangements. It's heady stuff, stories of gin riots, rambling sailors and dodging the hangman – proper



Who would have expected *this* band to be so clean and so dazzling?

hallmarked hearts

Words: **Sean Michaels**

Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

Silver Jews

The Bongo Club, Edinburgh

When David Berman comes on stage for what is perhaps his group's 18th ever live performance, something sparkles on the skin around his eyes.

He strides to the microphone and adjusts the music stand that will hold a binder with his lyrics. With him are his band – men who look like they've been borrowed from church basements or Nashville studios. Beside Berman is his wife, Cassie, with a bass guitar taller than I am. And around his eyes: something sparkling. I can't tell if they are fairy sparkles or simple sweat; something set there with fingertips or brought up from below. But whatever it is, it's silver.

I've been hearing stories about the Silver Jews. Two, really. The first concerns Berman's attempted suicide, three years ago. That he left a scrap of a goodbye note, put on his wedding suit, then medicated and medicated and medicated as he took a shower and made his bed. That

his wife chased him to his dealer's, to an upscale hotel, and then finally brought him to hospital. And the second, well that's a smaller, bigger story. It's about the love between David and Cassie.

A dear friend told me of a recent Silver Jews performance she had seen, Berman singing with his love and beside his love and looking over to his love for reassurance. Their love: that's the second story I heard.

But tonight I try not to think of these stories. I try not to impart too much subtext to a gig in a place called the Bongo Club, in a Scotland that's far, far away from David Berman's dear Tennessee. Instead I watch long-limbed Berman and his band burst into loud, noisy, b-b-beautiful country rock. "In 1984," he drawls, "I was hospitalised for approaching perfection."

We hoot and we holler; the band booms and it shines; Berman grins like a man who's just figured out how to skateboard. Hair blooms from his face like a garden finally healthy. And all about us: the clang clang *clang* of life.

Whodathunkit? Who would have expected *this* band, a band of poetry, dust and depression, to be so clean and so dazzling? While there's a muddiness to 'Pet Politics' and 'Dallas',

elsewhere his words leap from page and mouth, zigzagging distortion and a microphone in hand. "Sometimes a pony gets depressed!" he yells. Our organs jump in our bodies. They play a Walt Whitman poem turned into song – "Oh heart! heart! heart!"

And he does look at Cassie, he does, but then he turns back to us and a smile again catches the corner of his mouth, and we cheer, and even when I don't know the words, there are magnolias blooming in the shadows and guitar-guitar-guitar-keys-bass-drums in my ears. There is life pouring from everywhere.

But it's not an ecstasy. We're not losing ourselves in the crowd – eyes rolling back in our heads as we cheer. No. I watch the earring on Berman's ear, like a tattoo brought back from sea. I watch the way Cassie looks at David, sometimes, when he *doesn't* look back. I watch the way he glares at his monitor or stumbles over a lyric.

And I feel a mortal kind of joy – the stuff of human beings and human lives. The sterling wonder of a gift that's made by fallible human hands, by creatures with hearts more silver than gold.

folk music has a higher body count than gangster rap. (Note to any fair maidens: if you find yourself in a Bellowhead song, DO NOT venture out upon the very first morning of May, or BAD THINGS will happen.)

We push our way to the front and stomp a mad jig around the reverently cleared dancefloor. The spell is broken; people dance and shout and sing. Folk was the music of revolution, of insurrection, the English Civil War to Wat Tyler, who led his angry mediaeval mob to the very Black Heath on which we now dance. Fuck scratchy field recordings and notions of authenticity – Bellowhead make this music *alive*, urgent and entrancing. Wat Tyler would be proud.

Fiona Fletcher

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy

The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

The recent flurry of activity in the Will Oldham camp (live album, guest spots with Sage Francis and Björk, a partnership with Matt Sweeney) reveals the emergence of a social butterfly from a solipsistic cocoon. Tonight he is here with a full Scottish folk band, merging New World and Old – a geographical ping-pong game between Appalachian country and tavern-born highland dance music. Oldham's voice drips sweet warm honey, the hall swoons, and, with a thrust of the hips and a stomp of the boot, we're off. Already showing a talent for reinterpretation on *Sings Greatest Palace Music*, Oldham takes some of his best-

known music and arranges it in awesome Celtic splendour. From the quietude of the verses, a gush of sound bursts through, as man and woman sing together, ancient harmonies tearing holes in the night sky, grabbing at the sun, the song speaking not just for life closing its eyes (as Johnny Cash covered it) but for the full grasping of all you can see, all that can be.

George Taylor

Cannanes

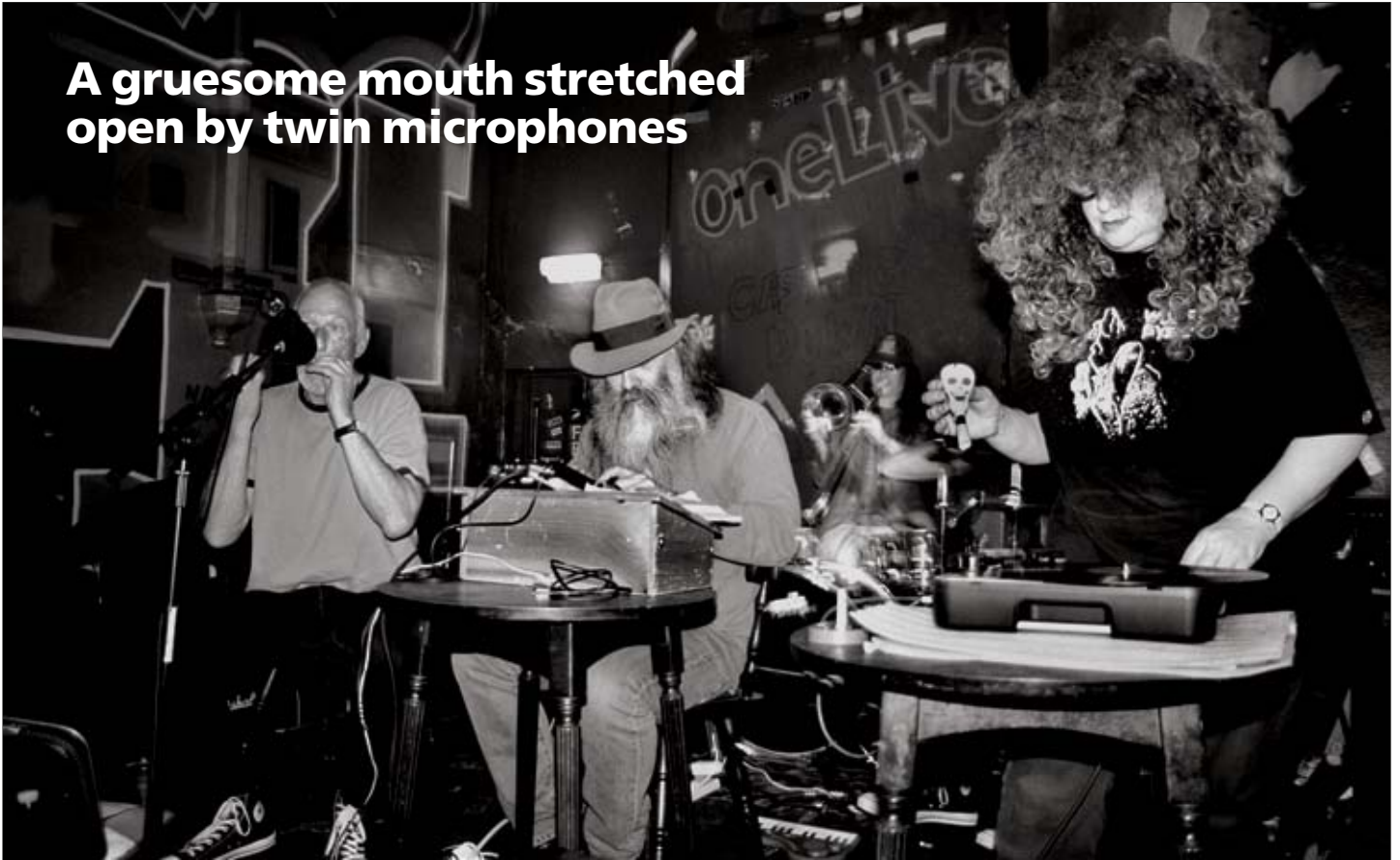
Golden Vine, Bendigo

I don't know any fabulously charming novelists, but I know Frances Gibson and tonight she owns the stage with her divine presence, her jokes and the way she locks

eyes with everyone in attendance. The Cannanes dole out a masterful, horn-kissed psychic rhythm. The melancholy yet uplifting tremor in Fran's voice, the pale hues from Stephen's fading guitar chord, and the life-affirming toot of Penny's horn. The beer here is served flat, in contrast to the Cannanes' set, which is bubbly, and buoyed by drummer Bon's jazzbo beats and jangling guitars. A tambourine appears in my hand, at which point I leap on stage like an errant spark from a bushfire. In retrospect, I was rather inept. If only I had curbed my enthusiasm and allowed the Cannanes to carry on properly. Instead, there were lots of mums and dads frowning into their garlic prawns.

Shane Moritz

A gruesome mouth stretched open by twin microphones



golgotha shakin' going on

Words: **Dan Bolger**

Photography: **Joe Blanchard**

Smegma/ Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock/Hototogisu/Deepkiss 720 Bardens Boudoir, London

Some people like to go out on Mondays, particularly for an event as special as, say, a live show from Smegma. "Smegma?" you say? Well, for the sort of people who like to go out on Mondays, Smegma are very special indeed.

First, though, Brighton's Jason Williams, playing as **Deepkiss 720**, is attending to a tall, one-stringed homemade instrument (the string fairly flaps from side to side as it feeds back) and a whirring handheld toy on a sound-reactive surface. His set thrums along, a big earthy drone swelling beneath clacking and fluttering sounds. All the while he seems pensive, listening. It ends quickly, unsentimentally brief. Already the ringing in the ears has begun.

Hototogisu are unlikely to soothe those ears. Their pitted wall of (mostly) trebly ringing, produced by guitars either mammaged with fists or wriggled with bottleneck slides, is not an easy

listening affair. These guitars, humming and juddering with everything Matt Bower (forceful, almost brutish) and Marcia Bassett (splenetic, bottleneck) inflict on them, make a truly horrific sound. It's a great, horrible sound. It feels like sheet lightning.

Zurich-based duo **Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock** follow. A gruesome creature, its mouth stretched open by twin microphones wedged *right in there*, creeps on stage in a black dress-cum-smock. You can hear every breath, every grunt from this thing's mouth. At the end of each arm is a long cord. A pig-faced humanoid strolls up, a small Roland amp on its shoulder. It wanders into the audience, presses a button. The onstage creature presses one of the buttons on either arm, and an awful burst of very sudden, very ghostly sound rips through the room. This continues, the pig singling out members of the audience for its attention and the creature onstage responding, setting off another flurry of binaural shrieking. Or barking. Or something equally painful-sounding. This exercise in tension, full of pregnant pauses, is very simple but totally unsettling.

So, **Smegma**. A merry band of frankly weird-looking old dudes and a dudette from Portland,

Oregon set up behind a bunch of odd-looking equipment. One guy is playing an elastic band which sounds, in his hands, like a squealing tenor sax. In the middle a big beard plays a box of tricks, a theremin attached to the side, some tapes inside making burbling noises. There's a rigid-fisted drummer, occasionally switching to trombone or effects pedals. The dudette is reading record labels with a torch (she's wearing sunglasses) and playing stuck grooves on the deck in front of her. Occasionally she squeezes a skull-shaped dog toy into the mic. Finally, a charming-looking wastoid is ring-modulating a bugle and slide guitar.

Together they create a joyous, lol-cacophony of whistles and chirrups until the guitarist morphs into King Riff and the band launch into a strange lurching beast of rock, permeated still by bubbles and burps and boings. Then they swing back into a treacly wall of sound. At the end they are joined by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock (now dressed down as real humans) for the encore, a staccato burst of full-throttle Smegma punctuated by the call "Happy Holidays!" It's fun. People laugh.

There really aren't any other bands that are as inventive *and* funny, bands that will really lift a Monday evening like this one.

The Fiery Furnaces Concorde 2, Brighton

I went to the beach before the gig, all last of evening sun, sea-glitter and gull-squawk. It made me think. I guess it was my misfortune to see a band I prize so highly for their freestylin' whimsicality during a tour in which the gimmick is: no gimmicks. Garage Prog. The New York duo's musicianship and intensity is relentlessly waspish, but it makes me wish for one of their detours, or just some respite — all their kisses have been sharpened to bites and melodies cut like so many empty calories. I can also confirm that Matthew Friedberger sticks his tongue out the corner of his mouth while laying down the guitar solos which annoy me so.

I forget sometimes I live in a town with a beach, and a promenade, and a huge uncluttered sky above both; that old cliché, quality of life. I thought: I am going to remember this town mostly as a bedroom, a computer screen and a list of deadlines.

Word to the Furnaces: sometimes we could all profit from going to the metaphorical beach, you get me? I had a good time, I do still love you. Just — don't go normal on me, OK?

kicking_k

Foreign Beggars Beach Club, Brighton

Foreign Beggars are in town to celebrate the completion of second album *Stray Point*

Agenda. A chance to play a few new things, a few classics, some favourite routines (Schlomo's beatboxed Big Pimpin'), right? Well, yeah, but it's also a chance to indulge their pent-up heavy rock fantasies. Thus it ends, with Orifice, fist in the air, jumping around like an agitated kangaroo to old Rage Against The Machine records.

It starts in much the same way, minus RATM. Orifice, Metropolis and No Names run on, Orifice pausing to put down his bottle of Jack Daniels before unleashing Phase One of the battle plan: an adrenalised performance of favourites from a relentless 'Frosted Perspecks' to a disturbingly hysterical scream through 'Glacial (Motorhead Remix)', sick invalids and all.

But where the standards devastate with fresh steroidal bulge, the more recent tunes barely need enhancements: they're built to rock. It's after 'Slow Broiled Ik', which collapses into Dead Prez, which collapses into shout-outs for Sepultura, Pantera and Napalm Death, that we get the evening's key admission. Gasping for breath, Orifice tells the crowd 'this isn't hip hop anymore!' and though you know he's kidding himself, there's a grain of truth in there.

Ringo P Stacey

Ghost Terrastock 6 Festival, Providence

Ghost, it is rumoured, are never playing the United States again. The Tokyo sextet's final

They never tell the same stories twice



felt tip fragments

Words: **Miranda Iossifidis**

Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

Magik Markers **The Luminare, London**

"You know when you're with a guy and you're all excited and then it's like...oh. It's OK...It happens to everyone."

The Magik Markers didn't get to soundcheck, and now things aren't working: leads are broken, guitars are broken, they are broken. They start and then they stop. It's not intentional and it teases us and it catches us. It's uncomfortable to watch: Elisa furiously tugging at cables, Leah gesturing beyond the crowd, Pete's laptop precariously nestled on the edge of his tom. Elisa wanders around the stage carrying her borrowed guitar like a satchel in which she's lost an important pen.

"You know some shows are good and others are bummers? This is going to be a bummer."

Prove it. I didn't say that, someone else did, someone at the back. I heckle with my retinas: Elisa's got me enthralled. Her hair's all over the guitar body, knotted and damp but the guitar doesn't make a sound. She's got a rectangular

piece of steel that looks like the cast of a chewing gum wrapper, and she's pecking at the guitar. She can't carve anything out: it's a good lamination job. Pity the thing: it's powder blue and as a friend mentions, should be playing retro pop. Instead it gets treated like a disposable toy from Argos. Leah's tearing at her hair, rolling her eyes and waving her mic like she wants more attention and half-heartedly wrestling into the crowd. Elisa doesn't notice: she's locked in motion, prodding pedals without pattern.

Last year it was different. Hannah and I met Elisa and Leah at ATP. I'm not sure who made the first move. They've been best friends since they were nine; we've been best friends since we were 11. We talked about productivity. An hour later on stage they transformed: Elisa's eyes wildly roaming the room, an echoing guitar on her shoulder poised for attack, screaming: "Get off the Internet!"

Today it was different. I ask about that night – turns out we'd missed the second part of the dare: "Say it to my face." An anonymous online self-publisher referred to the girls as pube twirlers so they named a tour after it. This fragment of a story was my version of them, and maybe I didn't need to know the details. They never tell the same stories

twice, and I believe them. When they share some of their other stories: pious nuns haunting bad girls and sailors drowning, I think of architect Cecil Balmond's advice to those who build: I am the thread propelling a story.

Hearing these themes worded is akin to the act of being mesmerised by Elisa's tangled hair: they are the silent, fetishised, aesthetic qualities of this Connecticut trio. It's easy to slip into and focus on these states because they are so familiar, but without a distinct form the narrative wouldn't work. Building layers of improvised noise implores narrative, but the sounds themselves are still more important. When they are onstage tonight, a toy shark becomes a plectrum. The bars lining the stage become a slide. A harmonica and max/msp experiments temper the drumbeats and a rhythmic drone forms a thick cloud, immersing the proceedings. We are locked in.

Elisa says before the show that they need their "pinkies looped together" behind their backs, otherwise it doesn't work. This whole thing wouldn't work if they weren't so tightly bound. It's volatile and messy and I won't ever know the story: I'm only hearing the wails. But it is always as honest as it is open as it is compelling.

show has a packed, almost rabid audience. Above my head, a tall contraption attached to Slinky-style wires, leads down to an infernal noisemaker stage front. There's even a glowing electrical orb.

Masaki Batoh is imperious, aware of his moment, a thin wraith with long cascading hair, balanced between an electric now and a primeval then. Around him the band perform on everything from a massive vibraphone set-up and equally huge drumkits to a grand piano and more. Michio Kurihara calmly plays his guitar in the shadows, gracefully summoning aural demons. Performances range from a delicate, Batoh calm with acoustic guitar in hand, to the epic and apocalyptic, a tribal ritual conjured up by

fever dreams of What Rock Once Was or might have been. Towards the end, maybe by design, maybe in the moment, he calls out in rapturous mantras, willing us all up to a higher place, or so one wants to hope.

Ned Raggett

Grizzly Bear

The Luminare, London

"This is our first UK show", the front-Grizzly bravely announces, and everyone shuts up. An autoharp is poised, eye-contact denied, and lo! A mirage of woodland instrumental is summoned, beseeching us to get lost, undress and hang out in the forest where these rough-hewn Brooklyn boys tread. This is brave music for soldiers of the new world;

one of Spirograph textures and expansive melody, a guitarist who looks like he might explode and a drummer whose bouncing head signals abandon. I write home:

"They attack with a barrage of love-moaning, indeclinable vocals: *'This is a hymn for you, this is a song for you.'* They express inexplicable instances of cuddling, *'It's so cold... I fell into your arms that night. Don't ask.'* Marching a slow retreat into no-man's land, they mislay a tambourine, and progress instead with steady clicks and collaborative, morale-boosting claps."

"It reminds me of so much!" says the excitable guy to my right. But I'd rather it reminded me of nothing at all.

Hannah Gregory

The Noisettes

Joseph's Well, Leeds

With wild hair and war paint, the writhing misfits before us are mesmerising: a drummer that looks like he was given hair instead of human DNA, a singer whose fluorescent forehead fails to cloud her piercing grin and a laconic bluesman on guitar. Singer Shinghai Shoniwa batters and discards guitars with an abandon and disregard that doubles the drool descending from the lips of the 30-something voyeurs pressing their groins against the stage. The melodrama of songs like 'Malice In Wonderland', all cascading harmonies and teasing guitar, are not lost in this black box of a venue.

Hayley Avron

gig diaries: gravy train!!!!

Words: **Hunx** and **Chunx**
 Photography: **Joe Dilworth**

**The Echo, Los Angeles**

Los Angeles is chock full of celebs, spray-on tans and apparently, gabbillions of drunk teenage Gravy Train!!!! fans. What's not to love? Girls are barfing in the parking lot by 5pm and getting kicked out of the line to get in for mooning busloads full of people. I walk to the bar to get a drink and pose for 30 pictures in four minutes. Three hundred flashes are going off for the entire duration of our performance. Is it BEATLEMANIA or GRAVYMANIA??? During our last song, 50 kids jump on stage and get so psychotic that security have to escort Chunx OFF the stage! I pull a jacket over my head to hide like I am Michael Jackson dodging paparazzi. After the show someone peppersprays the venue and even though everyone is choking, the kids are still trying to buy things.

Hunx

Chop Suey, Seattle

The last time we were in Seattle two years ago, no one came to our show because the paper listed the wrong time and declared that there was some "rap battle" between us and

FannyPack and that they were the "winners". WELL GUESS WHAT SEATTLE? We returned, we proved you wrong and we turned you OUT!

We graced your stage wearing matching gold satin jackets. We held a walk-off between audience members and gave prizes to the hams that could do the best Kurt Cobain and Jesus impersonations! But most importantly, we ensured that we are forever blacklisted from the venue by allegedly shoving the entire length of a microphone up our collective shitty ass! The club contacted us early the next morning requesting payment for a replacement mic. DAMN, we knew Junx's ass was big, but not that big! Speaking of Junx, the after-show frenzy caused us to forget who had the money. Just when we were getting paranoid, who comes running up to the van, straight from a back-alley quickie, stumbling and pulling up his pants? Why, it's Junx! And like magic, he pulls our payment (but alas, not the missing microphone), from somewhere deep in his underwear. Funx sprayed it with a little disinfectant and we were good to go!

Chunx

little blue ghosts

Words: **Frances May Morgan**
 Photography: **Rachel Lipsitz**

**Daniel Johnston****The Barbican, London**

"THE H-BOMB WAS REALLY DANIEL JOHNSTON!" says the felt-tip pen caption on the projector screen. Jason Pierce sits below the screen. He has his eyes shut. He sings of Jeeeee-suhhhs and the devil. Three gospel singers and a string quartet embroider his tastefully pained voice and acoustic guitar. Poor Jason. He has suffered, like Jesus, and like Daniel Johnston.

But his vulnerability is seductive and self-absorbed, prettified and passionless; the kind that knows its power to attract sympathy and intimacy. It is not the kind that — chainsmoking and overweight and tracksuited and high-voiced — draws a three-headed duck monster with a big bum and shoe-shaped feet and writes DIE SATAN DIE underneath.

Daniel Johnston, creator of the duck monsters, the devils, the little blue ghosts, the muscled women, the superheroes, the songs about love and fear, is the reason Pierce and other assorted vulnerable men are here tonight, to sing his songs.

For Daniel Johnston means something different to everyone. After 20 or so years in the countercultural consciousness, his songs (and his art) are, like all good pop, ciphers, conduits, vehicles: things way bigger than themselves.

So we hear Vic Chestnutt's own close-to-the-bone blues holler and wry poetry; it identifies with Daniel, it's clear, having fought demons of his own. We smile at Howe Gelb's coathangers in the piano and his crappy Casio on 'Walking The Cow': Johnston as genius, fellow eccentric. Meanwhile, Teenage Fanclub's plaintive harmonies and James Yorkston's hymnal folk make a winning case for Johnston as writer of both heartbreaking radio pop and re-interpreted traditional/country music. Everett True's between-set a capella singing draws a

neat parallel between Johnston and TV Personalities' Daniel Treacy. Constant projections of Johnston's artwork remind us why we're here. It's as if we don't need Daniel Johnston himself, so well-rounded is our evening.

But then he walks on, a bit too fast and stiff-legged, and of course we do need him. He starts to sing, of tears that hate him, ache him, plague him. He sings of losing his head (over you). His nylon-string guitar is out of tune and played so hard sometimes that he kills all the resonance.

Recent recordings have seen Johnston flanked by a band; the argument always goes that "he wants it to sound that way". Maybe; but mentally filling in the gaps in Johnston's lo-fi renditions feels somehow righter. Knowing what he's trying to do is always more fun: sometimes drum-fills and horn sections form in your mind, sometimes you just hold your breath for the spaces between the notes.

After three songs, he makes as if to leave the stage, but instead sits down at the Steinway, in almost-darkness. And this is where the magic is all his, behind a piano and angry-voiced. The song's called 'Without You'; its subject is unnamed, but Johnston sees them off. "Without you," he states, "I'll be all right." Go Daniel! And then — leaning into the mic — he shrieks "And now I'm free — to watch you DIE!" It is both the best moment of the evening, and the worst. Because the hatred in the song is all out of joint, and the fear is all too much, and the jaunty, spiky piano is all he's got to defend himself with, and what are we going to do about it, except watch, listen, and maybe buy something later?

I wonder how it feels to have a tribute to you while you're still alive. Does it make you feel dead, like when Johnston posed with a fake gravestone on 2004's album of cover versions of his songs. Does it make you feel more alive, more loved, or more alone? "Thank you... Sorry... G'night," he says, and strides off with the same too-fast, too-focused walk with which he arrived.

**Okkervil River****The Cockpit, Leeds**

A trumpet plays like we're watching the bodies of soldiers being unloaded from a DC10, draped in the colours of their country. A mandolin shivers, a bass pulses. There's smoke in the air, black threads around wrists, odd slogans on T-shirts. What light there is catches on thick-rimmed black glasses, and the 70 bodies in a half-empty hall stare up at the six on the stage. You wouldn't look twice at these Austin musicians if they were down here. Singer Will Sheff murmurs, "Some nights I thirst for real blood/for real knives/for real cries."

And then guitars crash, and bounce, and, in the space of a single line, Sheff is howling

and there's chaos from the keyboards, the drums hammer, and all the hurt in the heart of these country noir songs is overrun by the joy of making a wonderful racket, of knowing what you're doing is special. Our swaying turns to dancing as we lock into a loop — when they play faster, we dance harder, and when we dance harder, they play faster. Okkervil River write some steely-eyed lyrics; at their best, as direct as Raymond Carver, flat like a photograph.

But as they play on, I'm hearing things now that were half-hidden brought right to the surface. Chris shouts in my ear. "I wasn't expecting this."

He's grinning. So am I.

Ben Hoyle

Prurient/Consumer Electronics**The Luminaire, London**

What do you look for in your noise?

Catharsis? Transcendence? An excuse to toss a beer? I'm not a bad man — promise — but I want aggression, and tonight, Prurient wrings my neck. Back to the audience, leather-gloved fist clamped round microphone, Dominic Fernow flails at the speaker, once, twice, three times; body reeling in a sound tunnel of shrill tinnitus scree.

It's aggressive music, but this Wisconsin-based musician plays victim, not aggressor, engaged in a public ritual of self-sacrifice. "The Bright Eyes of noise", perhaps — but I like him more than that.

Baring skinny chest, face contorted behind aviator shades, Consumer Electronics — aka Philip Best of Whitehouse — strides the stage like an arrogant Kommandant, his laptop spewing forth a cracked-ceramic African drum salute. The lazy response to Whitehouse is to dismiss them as misogynists or shock tacticians, but beneath Best's raised-claw fists and demented devil-babble lurk ghosts of deep grief. It's music about weakness and human fragility, music about *Salò* and Guantanamo. It's there in the way Best neglects his shrieking laptop, battles through its cries, and finally jerks out its power cable, mere moll in his vicious power games. Is it wrong to leave elated?

Louis Pattison

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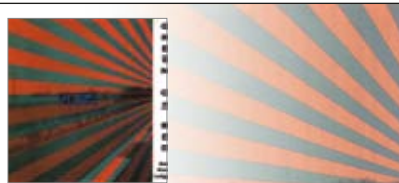
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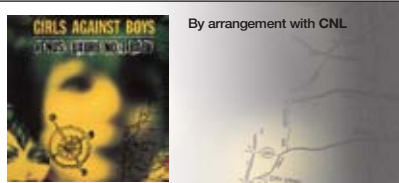


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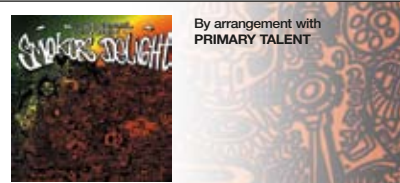
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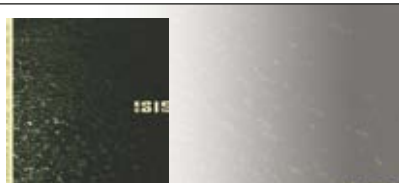
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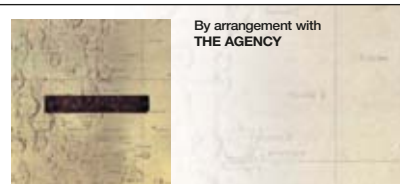
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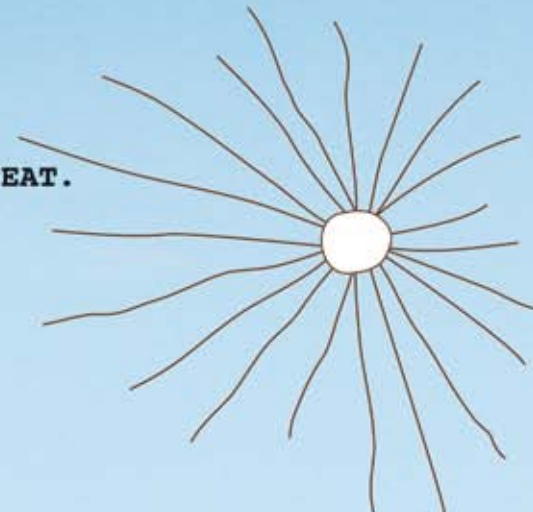
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Words: **Robin Wilks**

Illustration: **Hennie Haworth**

A pop theorist's wet dream

Matmos

The Rose Has Teeth In The Mouth Of A Beast (Matador)

Burning flesh, semen and a cow's vagina aren't commonly used as musical instruments. Nor is it a regular occurrence for dried roses, false teeth, manure, cows and geese to be employed as a backing to Björk (among others) reciting excerpts from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. But Matmos, who in more ways than one are a pop theorist's wet dream, are as conceptual as they come, and their latest album interprets the lives of 10 of the duo's favourite historical personae through characteristically unlikely sound collage.

So, for example, NY house hero Larry Levan is represented by a rump-shaking house track brimful with the noises of steam and sequins; excerpts from Andy Warhol's would-be assassin Valerie Solanas' *The SCUM Manifesto* are read over an abrasive mix of booty bass featuring knives, scissors, bovine genitalia and a rape alarm; King Ludwig II of Bavaria is given a suitably decadent, jubilant and mad-sounding soundtrack; while, for suspense writer Patricia Highsmith's tribute (a moody masterpiece), lasers connected to theremins are triggered by an her favourite animals: snails.

Some of the tracks are clever evocations of their subjects (as with the creepy surfadelica of 'Solo Buttons For Joe Meek'); others are deliberately twisted snapshots of barely significant moments from their lives; but all of them sound like they were fun to make (apart from the burning flesh part, obviously – Matmos have an extreme tendency to

involve their own bodies in the sound-making process, and on 'Germs Burn For Darby Crash', a tribute to the self-destructive singer of LA punk band The Germs, Drew Daniel apparently had The Germs' Don Bolles stub a cigarette out on his – Drew's – skin).

MC Schmidt and Drew Daniel make much of the incongruity between the sounds and their sources, between what you hear and what it was produced by; this makes for entertaining reading after you've listened to the record, and leads to some incredulous reactions. For example, could the gloriously demented, distorted lounge music of 'Public Sex For Boyd McDonald' really contain "recordings of anonymous sex acts made surreptitiously at Blow Buddies in San Francisco during International Bear Weekend"? I can't hear them. And how do you provoke semen to make a noise, anyway?

But in the past, this sound/source dichotomy has also been Matmos' undoing – if full appreciation of the record lies in examining the liner notes, and the CD on its own sounds like a dated post-glitchcore laptop yawnathon, why bother even listening to it? Conceptual music without aural appeal is like Alphabetti Spaghetti drained of its tomato sauce.

Which makes it a blessed relief that the music on *The Rose*... is actually very good. Not groundbreaking. But very likeable, in a curiously easy-listening kind of way. 'Semen Song For James

Bidgood', dedicated to the cult filmmaker and photographer, sets cut-up murmurs from Antony out of the Johnsons against a string quartet playing great suspense-film fare to sumptuous effect. 'Germs Burn for Darby Crash' distorts recordings of self-harm and pain into abrasive beats and comes off sounding like a weightless, transcendent techno rave on board Concorde.

But the highlight is doubtless 'Rag For William S Burroughs', a 14-minute tour de force that starts with hallucinatory, ambient, ragtime piano, curtailed by a drawn-out gunshot, after which the insistent, malevolent hammering of typewriters gradually builds into full-on psychedelic, hypnotic, tribal trance music.

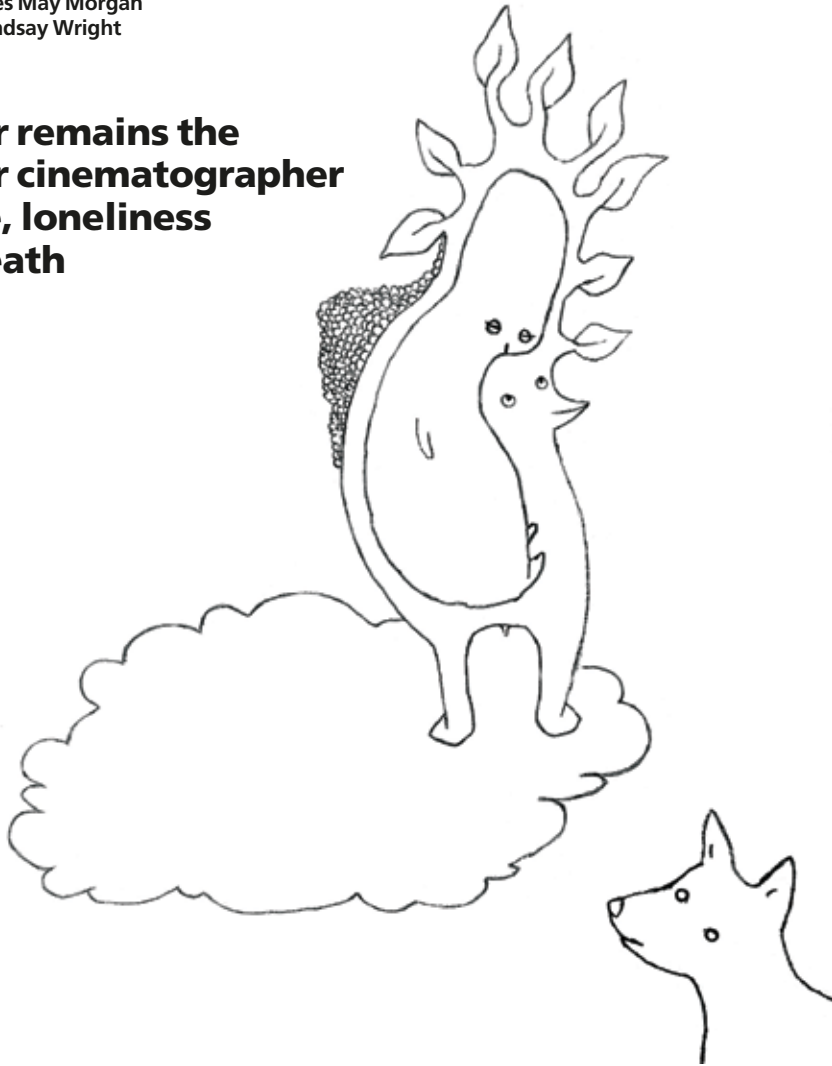
It's all very satisfying... unless, that is, you listen to it late at night, in the dark, at which point the harmless little samples that make up these well-thought-out audio mini-ographies somehow amplify themselves tenfold and sound like the scariest, most unsettling noises you've ever encountered, and the record as a whole seems to conspire to remove any hope of getting to sleep.



life through a lens

Words: **Frances May Morgan**
 Illustration: **Lindsay Wright**

Walker remains the master cinematographer of fate, loneliness and death



Scott Walker
The Drift (4AD)

It has become such a cliché to call a record ‘cinematic’ or like ‘a soundtrack to an imaginary film’ that most writers have, thankfully, stopped doing it. The description came to mean anything with a swooping, string-led, Noir-ish melancholy; with even the vaguest echoes of Morricone or Bernard Hermann. It allowed no distinction for records that really did apply a filmmaker’s vocabulary to their construction, and prompted no discussion of what it was that differentiated the truly cinematic record from the synergic potential carried in all music.

Scott Walker – whose most recent recording before this was in fact a soundtrack for a film, *Pola X* – has made music-as-cinema since the mid-Sixties. He has done so in ever-darkening spirals: from the picaresque characters, eyelinered existentialism and lonely lost loves of his first two solo albums, to the political/symbolic flourishes (and even lonelier lost loves) of the next two, and so on, deeper and sadder and heavier until you get to *Tilt* (1995), an industrial, nihilist mourning for what felt like the whole world (perversely released at the cosy height of Britpop).

And now this – a disconcertingly lush masterpiece that further confirms Walker’s auteur status. In film terms, *The Drift* has the composure and bravery of Tarkovsky’s later works: still committed to experimentation and still engaged with society, but even more committed to expressing a personal truth (or confronting the fundamental lack of it), through recurring, haunting symbols. As such, *The Drift* is a surprisingly coherent work, as long as you accept Walker’s notion of coherence – as long as you *hear* it, which I’d argue that you can.

For one thing, *The Drift* is anchored by a Walker speciality: a beautifully arranged string section. Credits are given to screaming children, donkeys, punched meat

and feet on stairs; the drums on opener ‘Cossacks Are’ canter like Liars; and closer ‘A Lover Loves’ relies on just a four-note acoustic guitar pattern. But the strings are the waves on which the abstractions of songs like ‘Cue’ rest like weird-shaped craft, and they provide the album’s overall oceanic, nightmarish texture.

For another, the placing of every sound is so considered, so storyboarded, that you feel the album’s presence as a whole even if you can’t articulate what that whole is. You can bask in its immediate musical effect without diving into Walker’s wordplay. Subject matter is as diverse, dark and gothic as ever, hymning war, death, ghosts, birds, blood, bones, donkeys, shells, teeth, torture, sex, god – but it’s as woven into the timbre of his fatalistic, detached voice as it’s articulated in lyrics.

That said, I still find myself returning to the most literal track. ‘Clara’ is about Mussolini’s mistress, Claretta Petacci, who was executed alongside him in 1945. Walker casts her as yet another of his fallen women, romanticises a Fascist love affair and gory death – but he does so with such an eye and an ear for the human heart of a historical event. The song is both lush and warlike; buzzing strings hover and wail like fighter planes and air-raid sirens, then swell into voluptuous, doomed chords. But cutting through the mise-en-scène is Walker’s voice (and that of a female singer, ‘playing’ Claretta, who sings over the sound of meat being punched and slapped), intoning a stark, minimal tune, coolly photographing the characters with an eye both horrified and sympathetic.

Even at his most elliptical, Walker remains the master cinematographer of fate, loneliness and death. On *The Drift*, as always, he continues to frame that which we’d do anything to avoid within the most unlikely, baroque tableaux, knowing that we’ll be compelled to look it full in the face.

Acid Mothers Temple & The Cosmic Inferno
Starless And Bible Black Sabbath
(Alien8)

Starless and Bible... takes the start of *Black Sabbath* and heretically summons the dark spirit that haunted the spaces between Iommi’s cursed, shredded fingertips and Ozzy’s blank, bleating throat. It doesn’t take a note of Sabbath’s actual music, but steals all of its black soul.

Side one just takes a fragment of a riff, a slowed-down metal-on-metal cog-grind, and revolves it for 35 minutes while Makoto’s flailing electric witch of a Stratocaster rains starfire down on everything. In all the pantheon of Bad Sabbath vocalists – Gillen, Dio, Glenn Hughes, etc – it never occurred to Iommi to fill Ozzy’s void with the squealing spectre of Hendrix’s forever-flaming guitar.

This album banishes Sabbath into space; a place with no stars, just intermittent flashes of colour, spiderwebs and tunnels.

David McNamee

Alias & Tarsier
Brookland/Oaklyn (Anticon)

Horizontal wipe-cuts push back and forth against the screen in perpetuity, moments blurred at capture. Languid sounds drift, float, melt. The voice is one of beauty, not unlike a calm, thoughtful Björk. At first glance it’s all very *nice*. Early Massive Attack, Mo’ Wax circa 1996 and the aforementioned dancer in the dark are the most obvious points of reference on a surface level. It’s not that if you dig beneath you’ll discover untold riches, but Anticon continue to stretch their considerable charms and ideas in directions that could hardly be expected. So, reactionary trip hop? Hardly. Just good, smoky music for times when you really miss that sort of thing.

Stewart Gardiner

Anti-Flag
For Blood & Empire (Columbia)

Once upon a time, an emo-boy peed all over my punk bonfire with his heartbroken Incubus-driven lyrics. Said boy also opened my ears to these Pennsylvania punks. Our band might have never made it past the town hall, but this one’s now on a major label, rallying their politico-angst like never before. “*This is the sound of a dropping bomb...*” go the screamo-riot calls. The music is secondary to the lyrics, apart from that the fast thrash of drums pushes their anti-propaganda propaganda forward more raucously than the quiet protest of folk tambourine could. But oh, how a folk tambourine would be so much kinder on the ears. Now, I can’t listen to this at all.

Hannah Gregory

The Big Eyes Family
Players Band
Do The Musiking (Pickled Egg)

As Big Eyes, the Leeds group have been melting their hearts into a slightly syrupy, slightly too-polite Dirty Three-lite for the past few years. The Big Eyes Family Players Band sees them extend their line-up – and, to a lesser degree, their musical remit – with the inclusion of like-minded souls, the most recognised (if underused) of which is Fence Collective-acolyte James Yorkston.

As a group, Big Eyes emphasise a love for organic and antique sounds that are slightly obvious but always very pretty. They’re in

love with simplicity and the way a scrape of violin or cello against a brush of acoustic guitar can evoke flashes of woodland, or how a soft, undulating drone rained on by a pitter-patter of percussion denotes sky and safety. It's comforting, warm, woolly jumper music.

Do The Musiking is a tranquilising dose of the natural. It's nice to drain all the whirring technology and crap out of your head once in a while, and stuff your skull with leaves, grass and the scrape of bow on violin.

David McNamee

Frank Black

Fast Man/Raider Man (Cooking Vinyl)

Black Francis is the banshee-voiced and fiery-hearted Pixie, while alter ego Frank Black has shown a liking for country-tinged pop that slides and swirls via Lou Reed and weary vignettes. On this double album – recorded, in part, in a 24-hour whirl of emotion – these personas collide, veer and flail through 27 tracks that range from spaced-out Iggy ('Dog Sleep'), to prismatic country ('Fare Thee Well'). As a result, we're granted an insight into where Charles Michael Kitteridge Thompson IV's own heart lies. Perhaps.

Joe Shooman

The Black Angels

Passover (Light In The Attic)

Jesus fuck. I know I don't listen to as much fuzz-laden psych-rock freak out as before, but this album is mighty. Relentless. Surging. Repetitive. Billowing. Layers of guitar layered upon layers of guitar layered upon a primitive beat courtesy of Stephanie Bailey. Voices, deadened and hopeless. Guitars that long ceased referencing any music since 1968. In places, reminiscent of the Velvets (and of course Spacemen 3), shorn of all artifice and given foot-look fringes to peer from gloomily. Two girls, four boys, all from Austin, Texas – and a debut album that is perfect for late night immersion, immolation, inspiration.

Everett True

The Black Keys

Chulahoma (Fat Possum)

Taking six songs by the late Mississippi bluesman, Junior Kimbrough, The Black Keys paint their blues colours to the mast. Opening track 'Keep Your Hands Off Her' drifts on Dan Auerbach's bare enunciation and wozy guitar. However, at times it's hard not to feel for drummer Patrick Carney who sounds as though he's at the improvised whim of his bandmate: on 'Work Me', Auerbach sounds as though he's happy to eke out bluesy bends rather than melodies. When a hook finally arrives in the form of 'Meet Me In The City' and 'My Mind Is Ramblin'', it dawns that *Chulahoma* is a *bona fide* tribute but their journey to the Deep South is slightly mired by heatstroke.

Lianne Steinberg

Boxcutter

Oneric (Planet Mu)

This record doesn't quite succeed at being dubstep, nor straight IDM, but features the weakest components of each genre in amalgam. After watering good music down with layer upon layer of irritating DSP and digital edits the music gets hopelessly lost and it just becomes a tedious venture into swaggering boredom. Nice try, but see Vex'd and Eight Frozen Modules on the same label for better renditions of the same idea.

Ralph Cowling



ridicule is nothing to be scared of

Words: **Frances May Morgan**

Illustration: **Iain Paxon**

There's a perverse, tasteless, ostentatious, joyful and self-sabotaging part of my character that manifests itself in enjoying the Wrong. I can't help it. It's like a survival instinct. Ironic? Nah. Contrariwise? Possibly. Musical? Most definitely. See, when you love music so much it has blown your mind, and then you wake up every day to a bunch of press releases telling you here's another great new band that ticks all the Right boxes, has heard but not really absorbed all the Right other bands and has the Right hair that just happens to fall in the Right direction and so please write about them – well, you have to do something so as not to stick pins in your ears and howl like a disheartened coyote, and one thing I tend to do is just go all out for the Wrong. The over-the-top, the ambitious, the bloody-minded, the pretentious and the unsuccessful; the absolutely happy-making; the Wrong. It's always the cleverest and the most complex stuff. And as with clothes, as with *anything*, you will invariably, although not for a while, be proved Right.

So it was that I bought myself the self-titled album of Dave Soldier's **Kropotkins** project, having heard one song on WF MU, which I listened to about three times before deciding I could not possibly decide if it was good or shit. What I did decide was that it was Wrong, and as such it was fucking brilliant. Basically a mid-Nineties New York project of maverick composer and violinist Soldier, *Kropotkins* (Koch) slaps the laconic Southern vocals of Lorette Velvete over a whimsical folksy klezmer

bluegrass funk backing and manages to be precious, cringeworthy and utterly, utterly ace. Laurie Anderson at a Cajun ceilidh. Cabaret Beefheart. It shouldn't work, but it does...n't. OK, it does. You can get this record for about three quid off Amazon, and you so should.

Next up, in heavy rotation, has been **Tom Zé's** new album/operetta on the subject of sexual politics, *Estudando O Pagode*. 'Learning To Party', it means, according to my Brazilian consultant, but it's also a nod to his classic *Estudando O Samba*, as Pagode is a kind of modern urban samba derivative. The songs seem to use this form to switch voices and viewpoints and vignettes, commenting on jealousy and misogyny – but beyond that, my understanding is purely on the sonic level. And that's plenty. *Estudando o Pagode* finds Zé mashing up tradition and post-tradition to mirror societal confusion with painfully distorted or lushly massed vocals, a dizzying array of odd digitised cuicas and saucy strings, crisp beats and donkey noises. It's funky as fuck, too, and it is wonderfully, awesomely Wrong, and it is quite unsparing. Like Rita Lee says, it's time to learn Portuguese, although I'm guessing it wouldn't help much here; the clues are in Zé's elliptical, irresistible musical language as much as in his lyrics, and are deliciously cryptic ones too.

I was hoping **Faun Fables** would join the mighty canon of Wrong, but it appears they still have about 45 years to go before they are as batshit and awesome as Tom Zé. But they're getting there! The poor sods got erroneously

lumped in with the first wave of nu-psych-folk in 2004, and no one took much notice, or they got confused, because Faun Fables are essentially a vaudeville cabaret performance-art band – a kind of Angela Carter backing group, if you will – and they're also the band that Dresden Dolls fans *should* be listening to once they get over themselves. *Family Album* was a little too rites-of-passage for me, but *The Transit Rider* (Drag City) is a haunting piece of Americana, a neat travelogue that veers between camp and genuinely inspired as it chunters across the state line in a boxcar, stars in its eyes. Dawn McCarthy and Nils Frykdahl sing zealously, often in unnervingly close

Why exactly are you listening to this?

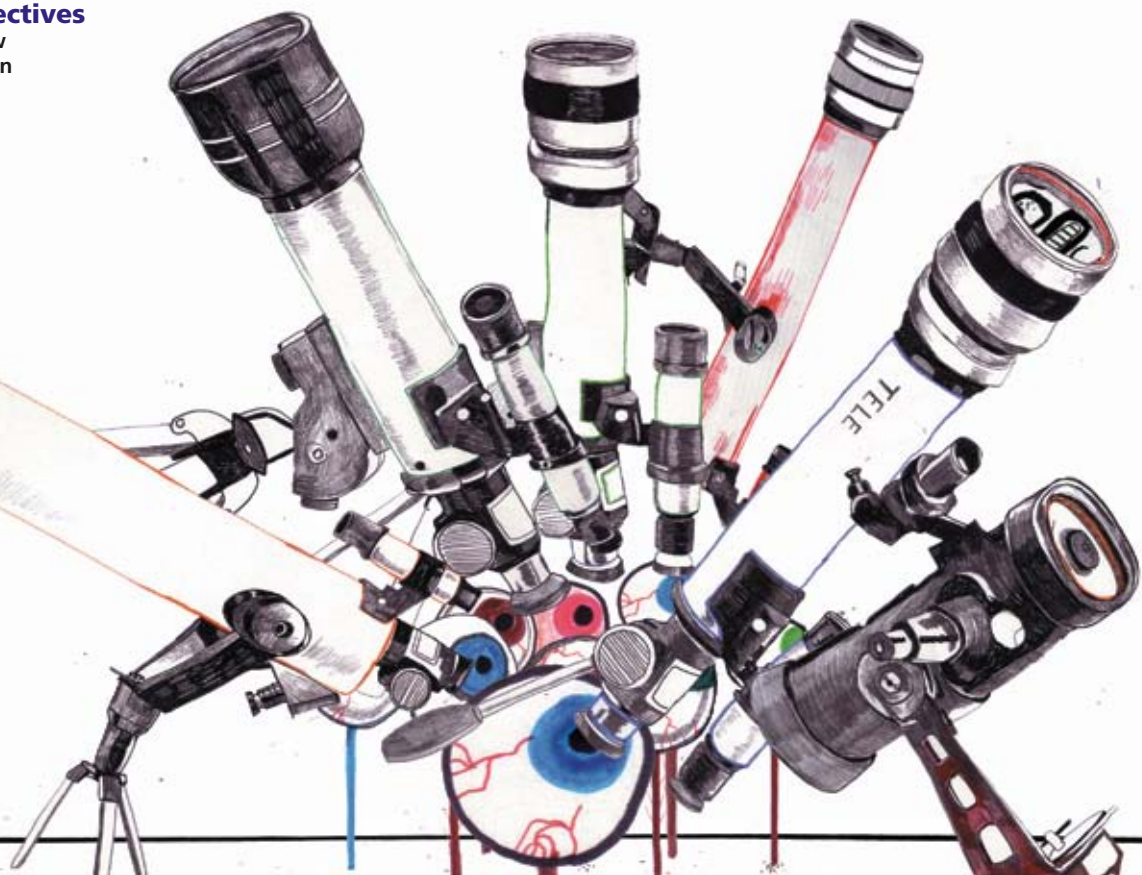
harmony, and often so intently that the Right/Wrong state line is tentatively breached, and that's good! *The Transit Rider* is best when it takes *both* musical and emotional risks; the musical risks are as yet a little subdued, but I see them becoming more eccentric as time passes and look forward to their next one, if only to see the confusion on people's faces when I play it to them, as if to say, Why exactly are you listening to this, Frances?

I tell them, well, it's the difference between Converse from Office and delphinium-coloured dance shoes from eBay (£4.95), and then I put on the new **Roedelius Best Of** (Grönland), which just confuses the fuck out of them because it's about two parts sublime late-Krautrock heaven to one part gloopy ambient swimming-pool water, and that tends to shut them up.

watching the defectives

Words: **Melissa Bradshaw**
Illustration: **Hannah Barton**

Voice as instrument is one of Jean Smith's several talents



Mecca Normal

The Observer (Kill Rock Stars)

"He's a jerk, he's a jerk, he's such a jerk..." sings Jean Smith, merrily, while David Lester strums an understated guitar lick. A croaky vocal drone announces itself among the lilting. "Krrrrrrrrrr."

The twists from visceral moans to lighthearted la-ing, the grating twang she can yell right up against your ear as if desiring to flail your cochlea, the beautiful round shapes she can carve and bend out of air... Using voice as instrument has seen Smith and Lester's 20-year-odd collaboration compared to the punk poetics of Patti Smith and Laurie Anderson – but it's never been more than one of Smith's several talents. Photographer, novelist, cartoonist, painter. Friend to Calvin Johnson and companion to Riot Grrrl. Mecca

Normal bridged the political out-righteousness of the latter with the Baudelairean attempt to engage with the sub/unconscious that inspired Patti Smith's most swirling, mystical work.

Voice, guitar, some piano, a bit of percussion here and there. *The Observer* sees Smith engage more explicitly than before with the subject of men. Any anger is overarched by a tempering, wry humour as she describes: being someone's stop-gap ('I'm Not Into Being The Woman You're With, While Looking For The Woman You Want'), being a bastard ('I'll Call You'), the patronising new man who recommends a website of Austrian designed lingerie – "It's expensive, but it's beautiful... I stand by the stove in my slutty outfit, which probably cost a total of \$15" ('Attraction Is Ephemeral'), internet dating with an Aspen brat

turned 30 with no life ('Fallen Skier'), and learning that "Repelling men is more important than attracting them" ('Arsenal'). All the while Lester's guitar perfectly amplifying Smith's point.

More narrative and direct than previous Mecca Normal LPs, but the moods previously dominant – the straight-up challenge of *Mecca Normal*, the hazy, charming grace of *Dovetail*, the tenebrous, sometimes fearful evocations of *Flood Plain* and the melancholic wisdom of *The Family Swan* – are all there somewhere. 'The Caribou And The Pipeline' is an environmental complaint of the simplest kind. Mature, sure, and an addition to an intriguing story. But *The Observer* is also direct, and open. Refreshing, like when the clocks go forward. Suddenly there is light. Whoever else sings this unashamedly, this womanly, any more?

Burial

Burial (Hyperdub)

Burial is the first release on Kode 9's Hyperdub label. A star of the burgeoning dubstep sound, this reclusive genius rebuilds the lost syncs and steps of UK garage among hiss and crackle, and splices them above grainy, ominous bass. A memory, argue bloggers like Blackdown and K-punk, of a dark garage that never happened (when all that crap, cheesy shit was going down). 'Forgive' is a strange, semi-siren, urban whalesong. There is a tribal feel in the pulses of 'Southern Comfort' and 'Prayer' that recalls the ancient and feral still smouldering in the city, a tribute made explicit in a sample from Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog*. 'You Hurt Me' makes you a part of its heartbreak.

Melissa Bradshaw

splurges? Bubbles are what happened. Bubbles and babies, turning in the womb; tiny vibrations heard muffled and giant. Twisting trumpet is what happened. Twisting trumpet, and high-heels clicking across frozen lakes. Frozen lakes, and the bubble-blown words that escape when the water thaws. They're the best bit – the words – harmonious with the high-processed notes they perch on top of, and abstractly beautiful in way only Japanese vocals can be to people who don't understand Japanese, like me. Microscopes and wonder and trumpets and bubbles and babies and high-heels and lakes – that's what happened.

Hannah Gregory

Camera Obscura

Let's Get Out Of This Country (Elefant)

This is my secret passion this month: fully engorged, engaged pop music from Scotland that swings and coos with delight. Drenched with melancholy and saturated with the most gorgeous, brass-tinted, guitar-plucked melodies. A female voice sings so cool yet simultaneously so emotive. You say Skeeter

Davis. I say Ellie Greenwich. You say The Concretes. I say Jesse Garon And The Desperadoes. You say sunny days out in the country, a magpie hopping from branch to branch, a child's face turned upwards in wonder. I say yes. Standouts include the single, the enflamed title track... damn, *everything*. In our house, this album is mandatory breakfast listening.

Everett True

Charalambides

A Vintage Burden (Kranky)

Hush-folk pioneers Tom and Christina Carter return from testing the limits of their sparse, unhurried sound to find they've created a space where they can record an album of songs. Christina's voice is cracked and breathy; multi-tracked to create a haunted persona, which she wraps around herself protectively in moments of vulnerable abandon, like a shy, country-rock Fursaxa.

The 18-minute 'Black Bed Blues' accumulates layers of acoustic strumming, pedal steel wails, electric finger picking, and fuzzed-out soloing, like a one-way mule ride

out into the desert with the hallucinations coming on heavy. Thirst won't take us, though: when Christina sings 'Spring' it's a shower of rain from a clear blue sky, leaving droplets on the cacti and we're saved.

Daniel Spicer

The Coup

Pick A Bigger Weapon (Epitaph)

A hip hop album which slaps the chill hand of marketing from the track selection process (memo: OK guys, we need one club banger, something radio-friendly with a guest, a ballad, and one hard track so it doesn't look like you've sold out). The Coup stay true to old school political party music via songs about skipping work to do nothing in particular with a loved one, a slash lit fantasy featuring George'n Saddam, a celebration of shoplifting, and a sensitive girl who died from a botched liposuction op: "You said that one day we'd be ruled by computers/I said, 'It's like that now cuz we all machines'/And you replied, 'But I'm a robot with dreams'." Be real with me, readership. Steal this album.

kicking_k

snapshot of the infinite

Words: Daniel Spicer

Illustration: Marcus Oakley

Kieran Hebden and Steve Reid The Exchange Session Vol 2 (Domino)

At bottom, this joyous, holy racket sings with a deep spiritual significance. If the drum signifies physical matter and electricity is the animating spark of existence, then what we have here is a musical representation of the presence of sentient life in the universe.

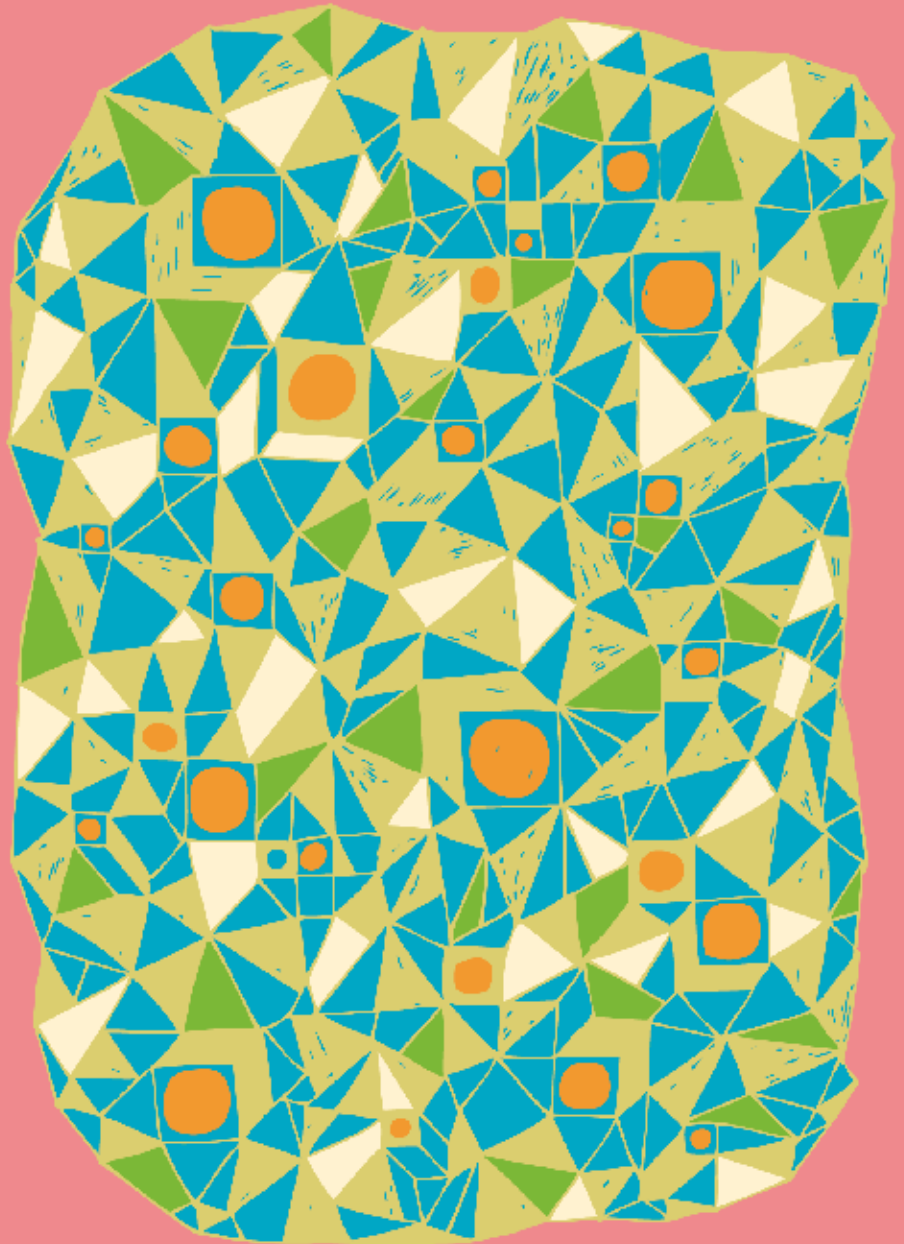
The opener, 'Hold Down The Rhythms, Hold Down The Machines', begins from a formless, rolling, primordial soup of sound, created by Reid's supra-rhythmic, thudding presence on the bass drum, tom-rolls and swelling cymbal crashes. Hebden's lightning electronics flash into this cloudy mess, setting off reactions, suggesting order among the chaos as drum-matter coalesces around electricity, patterns emerge, a motorik riff takes hold, thrashes blindly till it can't hold any longer and then just comes apart, dissolves back into the murk until it's replaced by another short-lived groove and another. It's Reid's singular vision

This is how music could be

of the role of rhythm in freely improvised music. Rather than just laying down a tempo-less mass of sound and leaving the listener to find their own groove, he happily provides joyful examples of rhythm. For Reid, every rhythm is just another aspect of the One True Rhythm – just as every human is just one subjective manifestation of the Godhead, a snapshot of the infinite in finite form. Galaxies burn bright and fade away, civilisations grow from nothing and crumble, people are born, play out their lives, die and decompose. The matter never disappears, the energy doesn't die – it's all just a question of the coming together.

'Noémie' is a hundred million years later. Heat-haze forming in the early morning bazaar, shimmering light and the pipes of shepherds coming in off the hills. A Babel confusion of whistles, chimes, cymbals and bells, building up to a clamorous midday cacophony. There are splits in time, incongruities. Robots in the side-streets. The warrior clarion and the gleaming chrome of terrible machines behind curtains. This story starts off like the dawn of a religion and ends up as alien abduction: a brand new Sunday school explanation for your children. And the result? 'We Dream Free': all jazzy rim shots, skittering ride cymbal and gasping hi-hat; an atomic-bass, turbo-rumble cyber-blues with a lurking funk; a perfect synthesis where it doesn't even matter who's doing what.

This is how music could be, if we can just hold the matter and the energy together long enough.



Current 93

Black Ships Ate The Sun (Durtro Jnana)

Burling on the axis of recurring biblical insignnia 'Idumea' – as interpreted by Marc Almond, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Shirley Collins, Baby Dee and Antony – this 20th opus from Albion sorcerers Current 93 rides out like a potted guide to parabolic folk.

Apocalyptic visionary David Tibet, (whose C93 has included members of Psychic TV, 23 Skidoo, Coil and Nurse With Wound since the early Eighties), is on gloriously histrionic form throughout, while his band this time counts William Basinski and Six Organs' Ben Chasny among its brethren. Encumbered with ominous, bleak motifs – of black ships and sunsets and dissolution – C93's appeal revels, as ever, in depicting the banal as rare and alluring.

Nicola Meighan

Danielson

Ships (Secretly Canadian)

Full disclosure: this band make me happier than just about anything. Pull-quote for advertising purposes: this is the very best

record the (extended) Danielson Famile have gifted us so far. Sublime and unlikely, ambidextrous, colour-blind symphonies revolve around a core of sincerity like a glorious old-timey carousel. It's got bells and (synchronised) whistles. It's got all their friends massing tongues in wildly enthusiastic call-and-response chants, unschooled voices exploding out of smiling mouths. "We love you now," they trill in my headphones and suddenly my empty bedroom is repainted seven kinds of rainbow. Me and this record are going to be friends forever. Join usssss.

kicking_k

Kimya Dawson

Remember That I Love You (K)

In Kimya's world, everything's lo-fi and rapped and clapping-rhyme fast. There are felt-tip pen doodles and Jeffrey Lewis drawn sci-fi menageries, caring words and hearts pinned to jumper sleeves. Her appeal has always been her vulnerability – her humanness. Her wilful innocence – even though she's clearly well aware of the world

and its malfunctions, even though she sees things with a cynic's eye. Which is why, of course, she chooses the child's eye, singing about rubber ducks and tyre-swings, tsunamis and surviving, alongside that basest of all human maladies: love. "I Hear You!" says Kimya with this album, wishing a big bunch of spring daffodils on anyone in need of a little sunlight.

Hannah Gregory

Doddodo

Sample Bitch Story (Adaadat)

Bringing her lo-fi plunderphonics straight out of Osaka for a debut UK release, Doddodo shows there's still a fair amount of skewed fun to be had with a couple of samplers and a leftfield imagination. Where others might stick at harsh noise or quirky metal soundbites, Doddodo populates her enjoyably fractured tunes with a variety of (mostly Western) folk loops, finding Irish reels mashed up against hip hop beats as often as – or alongside – scratched vinyl.

Sometimes the resolutely lo-fidelity of the faux-naive melodies can jar, but there

are also deranged shrieks and noises off in the mix which become genuinely unnerving. An eventual, irresistible, grower of a record.

Richard Fontenoy

Ekkehard Ehlers

A Life Without Fear (Staubgold)

Ekkehard Ehlers makes music that references people that he likes, this time tying together fragments of traditional South African music, Blues Legends Robert Johnson and Charles Haffer Jr, and Miles Davis's trumpet. The press release calls it 'translating' as if the word 'sample' would imply that he was some sort of Moby-alike laptop leech. Principles aside, *A Life Without Fear* is a beautifully cultivated bluesy tangle of wheezing speakers, hissing trumpets, ponderous clarinets and nebulous static. Freshly un-techy for a German, it impels me to lay down my arms, hurl my iPod under a train, leave the lids off all my pens, blow my nose on receipts that I ought to keep, step on my CDs, and unflinchingly snap my laptop. Don't expect I will though.

Matilda Tristram



tear it up

Words: **Stewart Gardiner**
Illustration: **Anke Weckmann**

Sonic Youth
Rather Ripped (Geffen)

"Do you believe in a sweet sensation/Do you believe in a second chance?"

'Do You Believe In Rapture?'

I was more than a little disappointed come the summer of 2004. After having lived off *Sonic Nurse* for a couple of months before its release, I was absolutely convinced that it was going to blow the lid off the stale state of affairs that saw everyone and their hipster grandmother write off Sonic Youth as a spent force, coasting where they used to whiplash about. It wasn't that the band hadn't produced anything magical in recent times – a brief immersion in the sensuous *Murray Street* puts pay to any notions of mediocrity – but perhaps their quality had remained too consistent. They weren't

young and dangerous enough (you want scary, dive into Lee Ranaldo's film compositions with Christian Marclay and Alan Licht), but with songs this good, why should that matter?

Rather Ripped effortlessly continues the journey of the last two records, forming a trilogy of sorts, each setting up and challenging the next, before

Experimentation is not always visible on the surface

a necessary stripping away occurs, at which point the moth bursts out of its cocoon. If *Sonic Nurse* upped the Seventies classic rock ante out of the icy pastoral glazes of *Murray Street*, then *Rather Ripped* pulls down, back and soars out minus the sometime No Wave stabs and electronic crackle (Jim O'Rourke is notably absent). This is Sonic Youth in full-blown summer rock mode, and it's a joyous ride.

So open and free is 'Incinerate' that you wonder at how it could be played anywhere but from an open-roofed car in deepest America. However, none of this is in any way MOR, AOR or any other acronym, infused as it is with that Sonic Youth sensibility: the metal fetishist clarion call searing under every guitar line. 'Do You Believe In Rapture?' is one of the most poignant, melodic moments of their career, and 'Rats' sees Ranaldo boil down the fuzz of primal, exploded post-punk into a thing of ephemeral, tangible beauty.

There's a real sense of continuity throughout, of a band completely at ease with who they are (expected) and where they are going (not so; no one else seems to, especially at the 25 year mark). Sonic Youth are unafraid of developing into something, whatever that may mean at any particular time. You may ask if you can forgive them for a lack of experimentation, but you'd be plain wrong, because the funny thing about experimentation is that it's not always visible on the surface.

Tim Exile

Nuisance Gabbaret Lounge (Planet Mu)

Yes! Get in! Finally, Tim Exile cuts to the chase and releases a live album.

For the uninitiated, Tim has one of the most innovative musical set-ups that still incorporates a laptop. Taking Native Instruments' Reaktor patches about as far as anyone has been able, Tim does all the stuff that most junglists and drumfunk people are doing, but manages to do it live, which makes it about four million times as interesting as watching your common IDM-backpack DJ looming over an apple logo at four am. Donning a Madonna-mic and keeping a running commentary of terrible jokes throughout while laying it on thick with increasingly heavy beats (from Britney to gabba) instantly propels any listener to a sonically good place.

Ralph Cowling

Final Fantasy

He Poos Clouds (Tomlab)

I keep imagining that these little signposts of activity – Caribou; the Dirty Projectors; this here Final Fantasy record – indicate a contemplative trend, when the truth is probably grimmer: one needs must fiddle while Rome burns lest all that screaming harsh one's mellow. Still, hope springs eternal. *He Poos Clouds*, whose title proves once and for all that there is no God, is an utterly beautiful album that's either, "A set of songs that attempt to modernise each of the eight D&D schools of magic" (the press kit) or something rather more elusive than that. Three cheers for red herrings! What this sounds like to me – besides early Seventies John Cale solo albums (no slight praise) is a rich, melodic, occasionally pained wrangling with some hard questions. Friends, or no friends? Stay home tonight and entertain

myself, or go out and risk all? That sort of thing. The orchestration and arrangements are lush; the performances are jaw-dropping; there aren't as many great hooks as there were on *Has A Good Home*, but the album's not looking to lodge in your short-term memory. It's reaching a little deeper. It would handspring into, and then deeply affect, your whole day. It does not over-reach.

John Darnielle

Fireworks Night

As Fools We Are (Organ Grinder)

Watching fireworks go off in slow motion is an awesome sight. Trust me, I've seen this happen. Drops of fire slowly unfold, explosions gain momentum and disappear in a roaring silence. It's a bit like listening to *As Fools We Are*, the second album by Fireworks Night, which is an appropriate name for these Englishmen. These are

brooding torch-songs led by the lonesome voice of James Lesslie. As the seconds pass, guitars pick up pace and rumble, cellos weave and minor piano keys initiate waltzes through endless dark nights.

Joris Heemskerck

Terence Fixmer

Silence Control (Gigolo)

Remember how exhilarating bumper cars were when you were six? So delightfully scary was each body-buckling thump, as your big brother bashed you both about on a rainy Saturday afternoon. Now, replace the fairground music with helicopter techno, your big brother with Robocop, the perpetual rain with... Wait, there's still perpetual rain, and the bumper cars with hoverpods (or more helicopters) and you've just about set the scene for Fixmer's similarly delightful *Silence Control*. You'd better hurry to get

woodcrafting

Words: **Ralph Cowling**
 Illustration: **Colin Henderson**

Leafcutter John

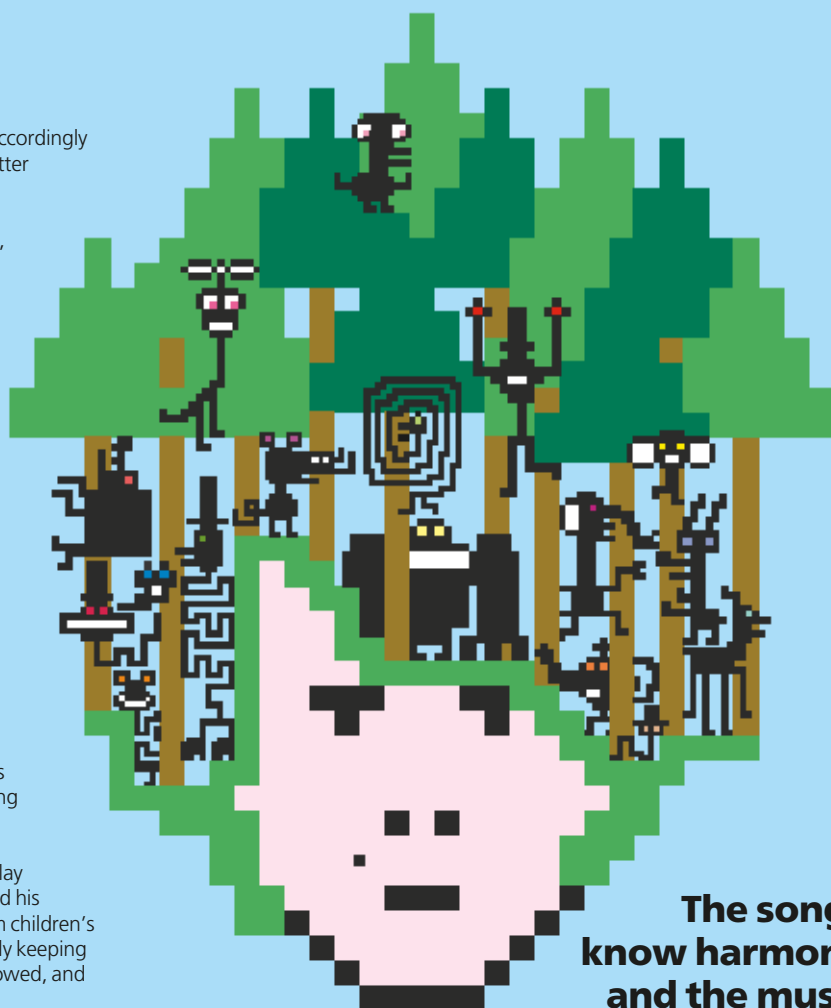
The Forest And The Sea (Staubgold)

Bravery has always been a difficult term to define musically. Accordingly one rarely finds a record with so much brave beauty as Leafcutter John's second album, *The Forest And The Sea*. Brave for its transgression, both musically and historically. Mixing acoustic instruments and electronic sounds has always settled uneasily, whether it becomes an unsatisfying, internequine descent into audio drivel, one sound slithering away having recently been brutalised by the other, or runs the risk of pushing one into paramount display, the other forced to be the ugly backing. Yet in attempting to put something personal into an otherwise very impersonal musical scene, John Burton has produced a courageous record that demands attention where others fail in their lack of vision.

Why am I fumbling around with the semantics of bravery, and attempting to apply it to a record? Because of the closeness that is instantly recognisable in the music, which shuns the usual clever ideas, rendered in Max/MSP, stripping away beats and overbearing sonic attacks in favour of voice and guitar. But the spellbinding experience that this combination creates is helped by the thoughtful build of moodier sounds; ethereal, distant and often unsettling. John determinedly renders a fantastical adventure of journeying through a forest and out to the sea. But the record is special because of its creator's ability to just make things work. *The Forest And The Sea* will leave songwriters and producers reeling with jealousy, for the songs know harmony, and the music knows feeling, together forming what is often crudely termed 'passion' and idly slapped onto records that address sublime parts of meta-thought.

Seeing John (along with Simon Bookish and Alice Grant) play this material at a recent Staubgold night at the Spitz reaffirmed his capacity for interesting musical performances. He moved from children's accordions to guitar to chiming bells, whilst all the time steadily keeping his eye on his computer for direction. The music ebbed and flowed, and gradually overwhelmed.

This record is all the best cadences of folk combined with all the best parts of sampling and processing – together they render a whole new form.



The songs know harmony and the music knows feeling

a copy of this lung-collapsingly tough, industrial muscle-core, as the other 'people' who'll want one can most likely run as fast as cars.

Matilda Tristram

Josephine Foster

A Wolf In Sheep's Clothing (Locust)

So Schubert turns to Goethe and says, "Hey man, remember that cracking lieder we knocked out in the 19th Century? 'Der Konig In Thule'?" and Goethe goes, "Yeah – pretty sweet trick that, but I always thought the madrigal lute riff would've loved the wet licks of electric guitar." And then Schubert turns to Schumann and says, "Dude, remember that German/Austrian art song, 'Wehmut', that you jammed with Eichendorff back in 1840?" and Schumann goes, "Sure dude – I dug that saucy little proto-Weimar Cabaret torch-song, but I always reckoned it'd sound a bit better with an American opera folk chick on the vox." And a million years and miles away, Josephine Foster stretches out; feels warmth from the heavens. And smiles.

Nicola Meighan

The Futureheads

News And Tributes (679)

The title seems a typically playful gesture, but this is no rehash of The Futureheads' debut. 'Cope', 'Yes/No' and 'Skip To The End' are all jerk-punk-fizzingly, vocal-harmonically Futureheadish, yes, but

elsewhere, there's a more stretched-out, stripped down feel. 'Fallout', 'Burnt' and the title track are a trio of considered, crafted pop shimmers. By the time matters are melded to a close with the staccato build and subsequent Cure-tinted tri-riffed muse of 'Face', Sunderland's finest have moved on from the instant XTC rush of their debut with knotty nonchalance and crashing class.

Joe Shooman

Ghostface Killah

Fishscale (Def Jam)

Rolling over his best collection of beats in years, Ghost recruits Pete Rock on three tracks (including the summer jam jump-off 'Be Easy') and, in a bold stroke, the cut-n-paste soul damage of MF Doom. No one ever expected a full-on Wu reunion over a Doom production; for that matter, no one expected such a touching, visceral portrait of child discipline than 'Whip You With A Strap' (produced by the late J Dilla and appearing on his swan song *Donuts*). This type of real life experience storytelling, combined with Ghost's lyrical delivery – a stock pot boiling over with anxiety, impatience, intensely episodic detail, and breathless compassion – manages to come off as uniquely hard: street, yet aware of his mortality in a way that's poignant and tough, even in moments of introspection.

Fishscale is his best since Supreme Clientele, the strongest salvo fired off by East Coast hip hop since the last Gang Starr

album, and one that will be bumpin' long after this summer rolls to a close.

Doug Mosurock

Grandmaster Gareth

The Party Sounds Of (SL)

There are 30 one-minute tracks, 30 of these tricky minute melodies, full of zip and fire and really rubbish superheroes and George Bush and animal impersonators and hypnotic sponges, 30 moments of sheer delight and...one 17-minute bonus track that could easily wrestle the boredom blues into the bathtub. Like The Residents when they went all *commercial* on us, only with sillier voices, more brass, the odd guest Outsider artist (Brute Force), a few tolling bells, and not one moment of rap, however masked. A cornucopia of found sound, snatched delight, children's bedtime melodies, babies crying, riotous psychedelia and the Misty's Big Adventure front man's very own exercise program. If you're thinking all this sounds too annoying, well. Fuck you.

Everett True

Hamilton Yarns

The Show-Boat, Over (Hark!)

Woody sounding instruments rattle and bleep and whirr like disabled toys... "It's a good view from here, you can really see the fear on their faces"...ostensibly honest live recording slowly reveals itself as a more sophisticated construct...Freddie Philips and his music for Camberwick Green...Gastr del

Sol at their charming-est...semi-narrative structure...cakey Sunday afternoons snurled up on the sofa...taking the dog for a walk...overwhelmed by town centres...conversational interludes bump up against subliminal birdsong...Britishness in the Martin Parr sense of the word...creates tangible spaces...implies a story...the violin illustrates details in the plot with plucks, scrapes and glissandi...The Red Crayola...wooden-y sounding does not necessarily equal folk music.

Orangina Rivers

Hawney Troof

Dollar And Deed (Southern)

Begins with the giant space robot from the 'Intergalactic' video causing havoc on a broken laptop kicking about the house beside the pile of old – now classic – Grand Royal magazines. He takes a liking to the issue with that free flexi-disc of 'Benny And The Jets', its DIY hyper-hardcore reworking of crowd screams always having confused you. Maybe that's why you bought that Atari Teenage Riot album in NYC and never really got that either. Giant robot agrees, thinks you should sort it out, play that noise. But with Fisher Price toys. Confused, you stumble about the room, images of Tetsuo: Iron Man drilling his member into a bunch of indie-somethings, Cex giving him the thumbs up in the background. Chaos and porn are, of course, strange bedfellows.

Stewart Gardiner



A hot, summery mess of urban Americana

sticky fingers

Words: **Daniel Trilling**
Illustration: **Till Thomas**

J Dilla

Donuts (Stones Throw)

I'll admit it. I'd have probably ignored this album were it not for the sad story behind it. Maybe I've been to one too many rap shows and watched a few too many men with nothing to say crowding round the mic like failed sperms around an egg, or maybe I've heard one too many corpse-shagging references to the glory days masking a total lack of new ideas, but I didn't think hip hop had anything left to offer me. I'm an idiot though, and you are too if you ignore this album.

J Dilla, aka Jay Dee, the genius producer behind Detroit group Slum Village (and Common, D'Angelo, Q-Tip and Erykah Badu, to name a few) made this album from his hospital bed shortly before his death in February this year. *Donuts* consists of 31 instrumental hip hop tracks, none of which are more than a couple of minutes long. Essentially they're sketches, intended to be fleshed out into fuller songs. Hearing them in this context, though, is like a series of tantalising glimpses at something wonderful, and *Donuts* is all the stronger for it.

The overall effect is dreamlike. A hot, summery mess of urban Americana: soul, Sixties idealism, televisions blaring out advert jingles for products that no longer exist, lolloping breakbeats echoing off brick walls and guitar loops shimmering in the heat haze. *Donuts* is an album of possibilities, of murmured phrases and half-finished ideas, just waiting for you to fill in the gaps.

As a producer, Dilla has neither the arch coolness of fellow crate-digger Madlib, nor a desire for futuristic new forms. He is simply adding the latest square to hip hop's patchwork quilt – one that spans generations and continents. Rather than trying to impose himself on the music, Dilla lets the choice of samples speak for itself: disembodied voices battle with space-age klaxons above layers of breaths, beats and melody.

In an ideal world, these tracks would be backing the year's finest rap and soul songs, and a few of them are – check Doug Mosurock's Ghostface review – but mostly they're not. For that reason, the beauty of this album lies in the ears of the listener; in the realisation that you'll never be the omnipotent God-producer, that the most you can hope for is to add your own, imperfect, unfinished mark to the stain of humanity.

In this, you'll hear your own mortality.

James William Hindle

Joshong (Early Winter)

A little like Devendra's *Oh Me Oh My...*, this half-hour mini-album of 11 tracks – all but one of them between one and three minutes long – has the feel of a diary filled tentatively with fragments, sketches, notes-to-self, recorded at home, with the curtains drawn, complete with the whirr of tape-heads and the click of the on-off button. With acoustic guitar, banjo, harp, accordion and chimes, Hindle produces a hushed, bedroom-folk, creating tiny, self-contained worlds of bucolic finger-picking, melancholic micro-ballads and bluegrass Bagpuss banjo. Best of all, though, is the eight-minute instrumental 'Joshong Pt 2', which sounds like a drone version of The Doors' 'The End' with John Fahey sitting in for Jim Morrison.

Daniel Spicer

Home

Sixteen (Brah)

Blame The Flaming Lips. I'm not denying the 'Kings of Space Rock' (© every crap publication ever) are a more interesting

template for two-track and four-track home studio buffs than – Jesus! – Coldplay or The White Stripes, but still. Psychedelia doesn't need to begin or end with giant rolling bubbles or rabbit costumes. But still. Home aren't half-bad, not least because they too dig the skewed purple haze that first inspired Wayne and company, the beguiling idiosyncratic melodies to be found lurking at the heart of pomp rock and ancient Disney movies. *Sixteen* is a concept album about fucking that sounds like a seahorse, and recalls label bosses Oneida's stoner Brooklyn groove and label-mates Aspera's star-twinkling beauty more than any lecherous A&R man's late night drinking session.

Everett True

Hot Chip

The Warning (DFA/EMI)

"Hot Chip will break your legs/Snap off your head," intone Hot Chip vocalists Alexis Taylor and Joe Goddard on the title track of *The Warning*. Such bold threats from a group offering up such open-ended, accessible electro-pop are not to be taken

lightly. Rolling with more of an early evening vibe than on their strictly-afterparty debut *Coming On Strong*, the ghosts of freestyle and charmed, laddish New Romantic harmonies pinball around in some significant machine funk. Moreover, Hot Chip prove that their sense of humour and reliance on purely electronic instruments are more than gimmicks and the markings of a novelty act. There's a confidence here that reinforces the material, now in collaboration with the DFA (who also have not missed a beat in their young career as a production team).

Doug Mosurock

Howlin' Rain

Howlin' Rain (Birdman)

Comets On Fire's Ethan Miller and Sunburned Hand Of tTe Man's John Moloney in a van, heading into the desert with six cases of beer, four bottles of bourbon, a coupla lids of grass, FM radio playing loud, trying to make Barstow by nightfall. It's all going dandy till Miller realises someone's dosed the Jim Beam: he's turning into Chris Robinson from The Black Crowes and his

guitar's melting. He hears himself on the radio singing something about "Poured myself a wine/and blew another line", wonders if it's gonna be a bummer.

"It's OK, dude," says Moloney. "Ain't no one to see. Let's be Lynyrd Skynyrd."

Daniel Spicer

Islands

Return To The Sea (Rough Trade)

Fresh from the ashes of The Unicorns, comes Islands. The Unicorns were Nick Diamonds, Alden Gingerand Jamie Tambour; now Diamonds and Tambour expand their sound with more musicians and instruments. It's a superbly smooth clatter, and they're in danger of sounding too much like fellow Montréalers Arcade Fire. But Diamonds and Tambour are better. Like The Unicorns, Islands write upbeat dance songs about death: 'Bucky Little Wing' is a piano-based song about the death (possibly) of a childhood friend that could be a metaphor for the breakup of the Unicorns. Bigger is not better but sometimes it's pretty good.

Jack Lewis

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VETIVER

'To Find Me Gone'
[FATCD43 / FATLP43] - 05/06

Breathtakingly lush second LP. Moving away from the folk references, this is a freer, more mature album, confirming Andy Cabic as one of the finest songwriters of his generation. Other players here include Devendra Banhart, Otto Hauser, Alissa Anderson and Kevin Barker.



OUR BROTHER THE NATIVE

'Tooth & Claw'
[FAT-SP12] - 19/06

A stunning new find, OBTN are 3 young kids (aged 16-18). Like Animal Collective / CocoRosie's kid brothers, their debut LP offers a thrillingly jumbled push of ideas and emotions, balancing pretty songs and melodies with cracked electronic noise.



THE MUTTS

'I Us We You'
[12FAT054 / CDFAT054] - 22/05

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Scritti Politti

White Bread Black Beer (Rough Trade)

Forget the early obsession with Jacques Derrida and opportunistic reissues of the scratchy post-punk scribbings. This is POP and what matters much more is that Green Gartside has a voice to be rolled over and over in the ear, a candy-sweet aural confection with just enough flexibility and bite to prevent it from being sickly. What also makes Scritti is Green's knack for giving that voice sparkingly imaginative and complex melodies to negotiate, resulting in a dream-pop beyond the capabilities of pretty much every contemporary singer-songwriter, except perhaps Liam 'Plush' Hayes and Eric Matthews.

Gartside reputedly recorded this album alone in his home studio in Hackney. No shit. *White Bread...* is a fucking lonely album, its protagonist alternately berating and comforting himself through bleak times. Sound-wise, it's a weird mixture of spit and polish, homemade plastic pop-soul and musical box fragility. Melodies stick out of songs at odd angles, stacked harmonies cast merciless light on scenes of disarray like early morning sun on an unmade bed, and the words essay a self-doubt alien to the boundlessly confident boy-wonder of Gartside's Eighties incarnation: "There are no fine lines/more than I can draw." Troubled and disconsolate, *White Bread...* teeters on the edge of not working, and that's what makes it compelling.

Where once Green would have raised a wry eyebrow at pop's lexicon of love, now he seems to understand the compulsive nature of romantic cliché, the fact that certain words mean everything in the very worst of circumstances. 'Snow In Sun' is the most obvious example, a tale of everyday guilt and failure punctuated by promises that might not be kept, that she's heard a million times before, but which still ring true: "Should we be beset with trouble/I will never let you come to harm." Hmm. Perhaps we should feel sorry for loverboy after all.

Joe Stannard

Izu

Going Salamander (Highpoint Lowlife)

Going Salamander explodes through the speakers like a DSP cluster bomb. One set of heavy beats sequentially offsets and brings up another. Though this is not enough for most listeners – it doesn't matter how good your beats are, if there's nothing else added on to it. Once you have established an interesting beat, it must develop into something new, fantastic and interesting; otherwise the original excitement of that beat exists only in a paralysed state that eventually implodes upon itself.

A music without music then: that exists in order to congratulate the original conception made manifest, yet knows not what to do with itself after its initial imperious outset.

Ralph Cowling

Daniel Johnston

Lost And Found (Sketchbook)

The Daniel Johnston *Lost And Found* Variety Show is complete with routines for all the family. Dad grabs his belt loops and lurches to big booted clomp-rock. Mum takes her cardie off and joins in with a brassy swing number. Granny and grandpa snooze out to country donkey noddies that wryly remember how, "Dad fought the Japs in the war and now there aren't any more". Love-struck teenage daughters daydream through exalting ballads, where growling guitars almost drown out Johnston's signature tremble. For the children there are piano-plonking party songs that go "oompa oompa", which, apart from the melancholy lyrics about lonely mental asylums, are perfect for playing musical chairs. Seasonal special is 'Rock Around The Christmas Tree'. Later, sozzled Santa will bump into baubles, tread on the presents and get his beard full of pine needles. Fans of Johnston's lo-fi aesthetic may be surprised by this wallopingly orchestral album, but the overall effect is as magic as ever.

Matilda Tristram

Mr Lif

Mo' Mega (Definitive Jux)

I was a Def Junkie back in the days of Cannibal Ox's *The Cold Vein* so I feel justified in expressing disappointment with much of the label's output since then. There's been a resurgence lately with decent albums from Cage, C-Rayz Walz and The Perceptionists but nothing to fulfil the promise of Can Ox's progressive-synthetic-symphonic masterpiece. Sigh. Mr Lif is still a diamond though, and the news that his latest album would be produced by hip hop's answer to Philip Glass (El-P, dummy) inspired Pavlovian salivation in yr faithful correspondent. Gratifyingly, 'Collapse' opens proceedings like Iron Man remodelling Jay-Z and Kanye's 'The Takeover' and hearing the combination of El's beats and Lif's lugubrious monoflow is like coming home, albeit a home gutted by arsonists and spray-painted by New York's finest. Yeah, it's a good album.

Joe Stannard

Lords

This Ain't A Hate Thing, It's A Love Thing (Gringo)

When people talk about ass-kicking music, people talk about sonic assaults. Some of them have been talking about Lords.

In actual fact, they're wrong: this is more of a sonic barn-dance, a lusty knees-up on the sonic porch. When Lord Philippe sings, "You pat your tummy and I'll rub your head/Let's prove that we need each other, let's preen each other", there's as much Bill Hicks in there as Bill Wyman and it's more fun than your first and last drink combined.

Hayley Avron

Lupen Crook

Accidents Occur Whilst Speaking (Tap N Tin)

Can't go wrong with starting an album with a song about fucking, especially the sort of fucking which is a little bit wrong and so terribly right. The sort of sex you tut at pruriently, but would kill to have a bit

more of. The sort of sex that Miss AMP has constantly and teases us all about by putting in her reviews. The fucking show-off.

There's a fair bit going around That There London at the moment. File next to the excellent Flipron for the Dickensian-pop word-hungry thing, with a similar aggressive vaudevillian sensibility with a few nods towards the folk storytelling tradition. Lots of the dark stuff, but with a smile, as if the Artful Dodgers are finally following playfully behind Uncle Luke Haines through the streets, but wisely choosing to dump the Harrison-stylings for something with a bit more of a bounce in its step.

Kieron Gillen

Madlib

The Beat Konducta Vol 1-2 (Stones Throw)

Madlib is a musician with so many pseudonyms and side projects that it is becoming increasingly impossible to pin either the man or his work down.

Take this release – a collection of 35 instrumentals tied together loosely as soundtracks to imaginary movie scenes. With the longest tracks clocking in at just over the two-minute mark, listening to the album is rather like sitting next to an impatient couch commando racing through TV channels. There are several gems here: the D'Angelo-sampling 'Pyramids (Change)' and the illuminating reworking of 'Planet Rock' on 'Open (Space)' stand out immediately. It's a shame Madlib has made it an almost superhuman effort on the part of the listener to take in the rest.

Natalie Moore

Frances McKee

Sunny Moon (Analogue Catalogue)

Frances McKee came through in the late Eighties as half of Scottish group The Vaselines, making a virtue of vice while whittling pop music down to its most primitive, post-Ramones/VU skeleton. With *Sunny Moon* McKee keeps the buzzing guitars in check, swerving sideways to include churchy, mumbled folk songs. Sleepy-eyed and blurry, 'Drink In The Sun' and 'Wasted' dissolve into the air, equal parts Big Star Third and Heidi Berry, possessed of a strange moon-shadow glow. Winding string arrangements and thick waves of nebulous distortion only amplifies the temporal lag evoked by *Sunny Moon*, making you long for an album where McKee really lets her songs float free of their moorings.

For now though, *Sunny Moon* is gorgeousness incarnate.

Jon Dale

Melvins

Houdini Live 2005 (Ipecac)

Having witnessed King Buzzo and cronies lay waste to Koko at last year's Don't Look Back *Houdini* nostalgia trip, listening to the original artefact becomes a contrastingly tame experience. Enter a slightly misleading 'live' document of that venture, actually captured at a specially booked warehouse party. Pedantry aside, ... *2005* is a true snapshot of the Melvins' awkward, guttural metal, and a clear indication of how they outlasted grunge's plaid-clad years. 'Set Me Straight/DCH' might lumber through early Cobain-esque clunk, but the remainder is shockingly vital, surprisingly energetic,

and rocks harder than Stonehenge. Turned up to 11, to the power of a million gonzo clichés. Magic.

Adam Anonymous

Juana Molina

Son (Domino)

Approximately one minute into 'Un Besso Lega' is one of the most sickening mistakes ever committed to tape/computer/wax in musical history, when Molina's trademark soft purring is digitally manipulated into an actual chorus of howling mange ridden cats, and it's genuinely appalling. Outside of these disastrous few seconds, the rest of this album makes for some gently wonderful listening.

From album to album, there's never been a huge sense of artistic advancement in Molina's glitchy acoustic world, but rather than sounding stale and repetitive it's more that the lady has found and burrowed herself into an amazing niche and there's no way she's done with it yet, each visit finds her unearthing buckets of amazing new songs. For once, more of the same please!

The Corpo

New Buffalo

The Last Beautiful Day (Kooky)

The sleepy world of Sally Seltman (for New Buffalo is she) finally sees its 2004 debut album receive a welcome UK release, complete with Jens Lekman on the bonus track.

"I'm all alone/And trying to go to sleep/But I lie awake with coloured lights/And ideas stacked up high", she coos woozily amid her DIY Disney soundscape of dreamy synths and tipsy samples. While her pastel-pure girlish singing is nothing new (Nina Persson and Stina Nordenstam spring to mind), what sets Ms Seltman apart is her inventive array of sherbet-like backing arrangements, coming across on 'No Party' like a one-woman My Bloody Valentine in an oneiric sample sweetshop. 'Recovery' is an achingly good pop song, while the unusually stark 'Come Back' is a pin-dropping emotional highlight. Despite the album's lullaby qualities, the skittish, skittering percussion, giddy horns, underwater strings and backwards toy organs keeps the attention piqued, if somewhat anaesthetised.

Dickon Edwards

New Flesh

Universally Dirty (Big Dada)

The reason a lot of UK hip hop is admirable rather than incredible is that so many of the people involved are concerned about 'keeping it real', and their interpretation of this code is almost entirely concerned with distancing themselves from US commercial hip hop.

So yeah, they're all intelligent and conscious and articulate, and yeah, they're not thugs like Fiddy or hos like Kim, we get it, but, y'know, gimme something I can shake my ass to dudes!

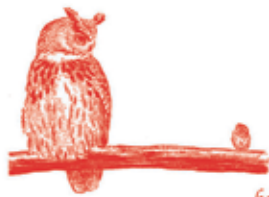
Luckily this is exactly what New Flesh and producer Part 2 do: opener 'Backyard' is a dirty dancehall banger with production as buff as any Sean Paul hit, all about how hott girls are, while 'Arms House' is all about that brilliant combination of thuggish gun talk allied to super-commercial hip hop beats. More please.

Alex Macpherson

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don't call it a comeback

Words: **Neil Kulkarni**
Illustration: **French**

**Celtic Frost
Monotheist (Century)**

Yeah, we've been here before. Celtic Frost have made comebacks before. Everyone in metal tips the hat to these Swiss-American gods of goth-grind (to hear why, check out '85's *To Mega Therion* and '87's *Into The Pandemonium*). But absurdly, it's perhaps better, and certainly more helpful to your enjoyment of *Monotheist* to hear this as a debut salvo. The last time I spoke to Tom Gabriel Fischer (CF's mainman and co-founder alongside bassist Martin Eric Ain) was in 2000 and he tantalisingly hinted that Celtic Frost were gonna record again but he was debating whether to release it under the Celtic Frost moniker, "Cos it feels so fucking new".

Six years on, he's clearly twigged that such boundary-busting innovation is precisely what Celtic Frost exist for, and *Monotheist* finally seeps out with a retooled CF ready to roll stagewards worldwide till the end of 2007. And fuck me, I don't want them to play any of the old stuff. Cos *Monotheist* is so damn good.

Understand – there have been so many rip-offs of CF's elemental sound (epic doom riffola, swathes of orchestral beauty, sudden ambient ruptures of synth) you'd expect them to be backed into a position of repeating not just themselves but the rest of metal's current cutting edge. but what's so great about *Monotheist* is that it never really feels like a retread, always seems to be emerging from a brand new, even more richly cinematic vein in Fischer's



Can't see metal getting any better than this in 2006

songwriting, informed by the degradations of age and with its intimations of mortality brought even closer up now we're all so much older.

The opening triumvirate of 'Progeny', 'Ground' and 'A Dying God Coming Into Human Flesh' take in the most sublime fantasies of romantic Europa, the most aggravated impulses of industrial decay and the bluesiest, folkier black depths of doom in that order and play them better than anyone else out there. And by seemingly perfecting and surpassing both themselves and the generation of copyists in their wake, Frost are then free to go wherever the hell they like.

'Drown In Ashes' is aggressively camp suicide-balladry for the police to find playing next to the corpse/open window that ends on a lovely caesura of drone, warping into the clanging apocalypse of 'Os Abysmi Vel Daath' wherein Fischer and co out-Sab the mighty Sabs, slap on Diamanda Galas-style b-vox, pull doom/death's preoccupation with evil and holy war into the very body politic itself and then unleash Armageddon in your bumgut.

Awesome awesome shit. Check out the closing 'Triptych' for 22 minutes of epic widescreen heroic bloodshed that takes in Goblin, Skinny Puppy, Godflesh and Ligeti without ever deviating once from the feeling that Celtic Frost are looming over your town, writ across the sky, hovering over your house dropping lightning bolts, skittering around your ceiling, watching you sleep and licking their lips.

Can't see metal getting any better than this in 2006. Don't miss.

Oakley Hall

Gypsum Strings (Brah)

It's entirely understandable that hipsters, after a Devendra-inspired journey through folk music's dusty catalogue should emerge at the southern cross of roots rock clutching a copy of Fleetwood Mac's *Tusk* and looking like Eagles roadies circa 1978. But no one should accuse Oakley Hall of being hipsters. Their love of MOR rock is too authentic. And though their songs stretch out like roads disappearing into the desert, it's in the air-conditioned comfort of a fast German car that Oakley Hall travel. 'Lazy Susan' is particularly successful in this respect, moulding male/female folk harmonies with some guitar-driven motorik trance.

Unfortunately, though this alchemy offers promise, Oakley Hall never venture quite far enough into experimentalism. Consequently, while these songs threaten to take flight, straining on the edge of greatness, *Gypsum Strings* remains frustratingly earthbound.

Merek Cooper

The Paper Chase

Now You Are One Of Us (Southern)

No words from non-murderous mortals can quite encapsulate this, the fourth LP from Texan sickos The Paper Chase, quite like the wild-eyed intermission title 'Delivered In A Firm Unyielding Way Lingering For Just A Bit Too Long To Communicate The Message "I Own You"' featured within.

Sentence-length smart-assery doesn't make a throat-slittingly brilliant album alone, however; for that, John Congleton and wonderfully deranged backing family cox blood-chilling gallows admission of Charlie Manson recoil. The themes may echo previous outings – a fact even knowingly nodded to on '...And All The Candy You Can Eat' – but the lurching results remain gruesomely satisfying. Come join us.

Adam Anonymous

Dudley Perkins

Expressions (2012 a.u.) (Stone's Throw)

AKA the second instalment of Madlib co-conspirator Declaime's dissonant soul side

project, and this time it's just not right.

Oh, it's very pleasant and all, mellifluous, perky, smooth and wacky in tasteful measures, but it ain't the Technicolor mindfuck of his last, utterly splendiferous 2003 LP *A Lil' Light*. See, back then our Dudders was on some wackoid shit. He sounded fried, the words dribbling out his mouth like some ecstatic anal dissonance. And Madlib's beats were appropriately random, eschewing tired notions of melody and formal (predictable) structure.

But that was then, and this is square to the point it'd hold comparison with Gnarl Barkley – castrated with polish. If you were scraping about for compliments you could say opener 'Funky Dudley' wouldn't disgrace a 'Gloryhallastoopid'-era Parliament b-side. Beyond that pickings are barren, with the worst tracks ('Separate Ways', 'Inside') effectively doing for tasteful intelligent hip hop and Seventies pop soul what Jamiroquai did for Stevie Wonder.

Ringo P Stacey

Planningtorock

Have It All (Chicks On Speed)

Imagine a grand theatre in a bad area. A spotlight on a red curtain. Hundreds of empty seats. Very late or very early. Music from unseen musicians, perhaps a machine. The approximation of strings wax and wane, drumbeats set something in motion, a distempored clockwork shuffle, and a sudden panic of multi-tracked falsettos keen like wolves raised by humans. "*Ich bin ein Bolton Wanderer*," croons a woman who blinks into existence in the centre of the stage.

She has a Pierrot face and a glummy catsuit. She is Janine Rostron, Planningtorock. From Bolton via Berlin, performance art operatics and self-made surrealist films. Think Outsider Music: The Musical.

This is parallel universe 21st Century cabaret for people who've tried everything – and I mean everything – else. Sit down. She's just about to start.

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kool things

Words: **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**
Illustration: **Lucy Bailey**

Whirlwind Heat
Types Of Wood (Brille)

Three years ago, when they released *Do Rabbits Wonder?*, Whirlwind Heat were cool. They were also hot, capturing that sweaty, nervous post punk paranoia that had become so fashionable again. 'Orange' (for they had given their songs colours for titles – how cool is that?) was constantly looking over its shoulder, a squeaky, shrill fellow in flight, while 'Tan' (obviously the coolest colour, so cool it was banned from the M&Ms packet sometime in the Nineties), only slightly more grounded with a heavy bass line, nonetheless sounded like a mental patient banging his head on a wall covered in imaginary stickers full of secret messages only he could see. This time around, the 'Heat are just cool, not even distilling, because that would be too much of an effort for cool, but kind of meandering into the vicinity of that slacker vibe Beck used to capture so well. Coolness implies indifference, passivity, reserve, the opposite of the over-excited male hysteria of the 'Heat's debut. In *The Birth Of Cool*, Lewis MacAdams writes that cool, originating

We like our paranoia served hot

in Afro-American slang, was "The ultimate revenge of the powerless. Cool was the one thing that the white slaveowner couldn't own. Cool was the one thing money couldn't buy. At its core, cool is about defiance." The slacker (non-) ethic of the Nineties adopted this form of cool in defiance of the consumer culture of the Eighties, but coming from the mouth of the slaveowner, this position is far less convincing. The 'Heat keep it cool, with musical references to the Nineties holy trinity of Sonic Youth, The Pixies and Nirvana and a production team borrowed from one-hit hipsters Cake. David Swanson's laidback vocals are casually juxtaposed with crisp bass and drums, in a style that might be considered minimal if it had any of the rigour associated with the term. The effortless goofiness pays off in lyrics about sperm donation, but the 'Heat are better off with the heat turned on for 'Kill Me' and 'My Electric Underwear'.

In 10 years time, even the chilled romance of 'Reagan' will inevitably be most fashionable all over again, but at the moment we are not ready for a slacker revival. We like our paranoia served hot.

honky tonk Tardis, to take a paisley trip to the late Sixties where raw and radiant power-pop oozes out of the speakers like it was raised solely on The Small Faces and The Move. Spectres of *Austin Powers* naffness are thoroughly chased away by the droning crunch of 'Intimate Secretary' (I asked Jack, and he's not sure either) and the swamp-footed prog of 'Store Bought Bones', while the Waterloo paper sunsets of 'Yellow Sun' are so infectiously joyful you wouldn't be surprised if Jack got gladly jammed in this timewarp for a while longer.
Stevie Chick

Rod Stern
Give It Up For Rod Stern (Tapestry)

Beckoning the audience to "come to my feet" at this live recording, Rod Stern displays an arrogance completely at odds with the world of the confessional singer-songwriter. With good reason though, as Stern's ditties are fictional, surreal and portray – in gasped faux country drawls and snatched guitar strums – a realm that lies between Leone's Spaghetti Westerns and Bosch's portrayal of Hell. Warted strumpets make for confidantes, and epiphanies lie at the bottom of the whisky tumbler. His songs are engrossing and, thankfully, stuffed with melodies.

With a tempestuous talent and a tongue sharper and more lucid than an on-form hack, this album demands repeated visits.

Jonathan Falcone

Strip Squad
The Adventures Of Strip Squad (Fuck)

There is something so wrong about this record. Twee Swedish indie boys and girls sing cutely about erect penises and air-fucking over a crystalline drum-machine beat and toytown guitars, sounding ever more innocent the dirtier the words become.

"When he masturbates he thinks of pretty things, like the arch of your eyebrow, your almond-shaped eye," the boy coos on 'Unreliable Narrator', over a melody so chirpy that even Belle & Sebastian might think twice about using it. "Your name won't mean a bit when your tongue's against my clit," the girl rejoinders on 'Hairless Youth Of Bosnia'. Another song boasts 'If You Don't Take Me Right Away You Might As Well Fuck Off!'. Yet the music is so bouncy, finger popping...sexless: a lurid contradiction, like imagining the Powerpuff Girls having sex. (No. Stop right there.)

www.stripsquad.se

Everett True

Tender Trap
6 Billion People (Fortuna Pop)

If indiepop's über-girl Amelia Fletcher ever publishes her autobiography – and she really should, as an inspiration for so many bands for so long she must have a pretty unique perspective on the changing musical tides – she should call it *How To Remain A Girl And Not Die In The Attempt*. This distaff Peter Pan first made her mark in 1986 with girl-group paradigms Talulah Gosh, and her distinctive gurgling, sighing teen cutie-pie voice is still startlingly intact from those days.

With this second Tender Trap outing, there is, however, a lot less butterfly naivety and more motherly world-weariness; even a certain sagely sadness evinced on the more downbeat numbers 'I Would Die For You' and 'Dead And Gone'. The electronic sketch-

SCSI-9
The Line Of Nine (Kompakt)

Maria Kirilenko is the world's No 23 tennis player at the time of writing. She's Russian, and immensely talented; has the delicate footwork one would expect of a girl who originally trained as a ballerina; outfoxes her opponents with guile and finesse rather than pummeling them into submission; can hit any shot in the book; but many believe that she's too lightweight and too prone to mental walkabouts to contend with the elite. SCSI-9 are to techno what Ms Kirilenko is to tennis: *The Line Of Nine* starts off elegant and laidback, but is soon zooming hither and thither at all sorts of delightfully cute tangents. This may be at the expense of big dancefloor anthems, but the life of a top 30 tennis player is a good one too.
Alex Macpherson

inhabited in his previous releases and emerge into the sunlight. However, as the title and Steve Quenell's Roerichesque cover art make clear, this new recording takes us back to the moments before the dawn. And that's still a dark place. There's a strange coldness to the music here, despite frequent evocations of Seventies transcendentalists Popol Vuh. 'Bless Your Blood' contains echoes of the late Florian Fricke's more triumphalist work, while the frozen epic, 'River Of Transfiguration', is a tributary of their 1971 full-sider 'Vuh'. Elsewhere 'The Desert Is A Circle' references, though in title only, Alexandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo*. So could the cover be Six Organs' own 'Holy Mountain'?

Nicholas Roerich, Popol Vuh, Jodorowsky – Ben Chasny is, truly, a modern man in search of a soul.

Mark Pilkington

The Stabs
Dirt (Art School Dropout)

When you push The Stabs over the edge, a swamp-fed, beastly sound will emerge

and sheet metal riffs will leave dark bruises upside your head. Your viscera will be returned eviscerated. The guitars here have been mutilated and it's any wonder they can stab back but they can and let me tell you baby it hurts. These three Australian men sing songs about girls and boys and man-sized rats and the evil things people do to each other. They didn't choose the name The Stabs; the name chose them. I imagine it being recorded in an open grave, and that grave is mine and yours.

Shane Moritz

The Raconteurs
Broken Boy Soldiers (XL)

Dressed with a beguiling flamboyance becoming his fellow time-traveller The Doctor, professional anachronist Jack White first surfaced at the dawn of the 21st Century, proffering an agreeable potion drawn from ancient blues relics and the autistic early thrusts of rock'n'roll. Taking moments out of The White Stripes' ongoing mission of World Domination, White drags a bunch of his grrr-idge rawk buddies into his

songs of their 2001 debut have given way to a more relaxed, bubblegum garage band sound, with the Magnetic Fields' Claudia Gonson on drums and backing vocals. Sly pop dispatches from the dating game 'Talking Backwards' and 'Amperсанд' are as refreshingly infectious and as downright fab as anything she's done in the past.

Respect is entirely due.

Dickon Edwards

Tunng

Comments on the Inner Chorus (Full Time Hobby)

This makes me want to be a small beast: a baby deer or a woodland animal, maybe – with yellow flashing eyes and a hard brown body. "I'm looking for a man to turn me into a hare," a nymph croons on naturalist lullaby 'Woodcat', and it's a nice song from these Derbyshire folk rogues – who sound like *The Wicker Man*, The Books and The Beta Band – so I agree. And the man with the beard at the front of the band sings that he wants to befriend all the animals. And I'm under his spell, still, so I want to be one.

But when he sings that he is missing my edges, I fear that in truth he is missing his own.

Nicola Meighan

TV Smith

Misinformation Overload (Boss Tuneage)

Turn away. See if I care. TV Smith? Who? He was in The Adverts? Who? Literary, surprisingly post-modern punk band from 1977, notable for such searing singles as 'Gary Gilmore's Eyes' and the deprecating 'One Chord Wonders'. No, Gaye Advert was the *Sounds* pin-up (black mascara, leather jacket and – all-importantly – female). Smith was the singer. Great band. Those who know will tell you. Since then...? I have no idea, and don't care much, either: except I happened to listen to this, a new solo album featuring the vitriolic anti-war, anti-censorship 'Not In My Name' and I left it running for the entire duration, my soul filled with a searing fervour and righteous indignation, rarely felt these days. It's fucking great, not tired, not grey, but old school punk, still informed and smart and impassioned and full of spunky anthems.

Look away. I told you I didn't care.

Everett True

Various

James Holden At the Controls (Resist)

On *At the Controls*, James Holden scans the breadth of post-minimal house/techno, pulling together tracks from artists like Apparat, Skugge & Stavöstrand and Kalabrese. While this positions his mix disc within a certain continuum, these functional tracks ultimately work as interlocking cogs for Holden's historical revisionism. At the heart of *At the Controls* is a wistful, sun-struck motorik drive, perfectly captured by the fleeting blissfulness of Aphex Twin's 'Xtal', Fennesz's 'Rivers of Sand' or Harmonia's 'Watussi'.

Holden's greatest skill, however, is an ability to hold the mix together while letting each track have its say: the weird fissures and seizures of Petter's 'Some Polyphony' are all the more startling when dropped among tracks from Death In Vegas, Massive Attack and Issikadis.

Jon Dale



post traumatic stress

Words: **Daniel Trilling**
Illustration: **Laura Hughes**

My postman hates me. My housemates hate me. My neighbours hate me. From my bedroom to the front door lies a trail of promotional CDs, some ripped in a frenzy from their envelopes, others gathering dust in a corner, unloved and uncared for.

Walk into my room and you are blinded by the rainbow-tinted reflections from small silvery discs of plastic. I can't put a foot out of bed in the morning without treading on Adam Green's face (that feels good, let me tell you), and the last thing I see before I go to sleep at night is the gaping maw of a jewel case, ready to consume my entire being, or at least leave those annoying bits of plastic that always break off the round thing in the middle in between my sheets so they scratch my legs and give me dreams of being attacked by a thousand little record label ants until I wake up screaming, "No, no, sorry, we had to cut the review for space, please, sorry, fuck no, please, not the facenotthefaceohgodno..."

But that's all gonna change. Listen up, losers, it's time to get tidy.

First, I need some motivational music. I stretch out my hand and grab the nearest object. Apple core, no. Tissue, no. Ah yes – a CD.

It's *Psychic Secession* by **Yellow Swans**, a noise duo on Load Records. Another couple of hardcore kids have decided that it's much more fun to make electronic drone scree than rip off Black Flag, and the result is decidedly pleasant, if a little scary. Listening to the pulsating bass and mangled vocals is a bit like staring at the ink-blot cover art: pretty patterns that no doubt would reveal themselves to be some sort of Oedipal nightmare if you look too closely. But this is far too all over the place to help me tidy.

So is *Pregnant Babies Pregnant With Pregnant Babies*, by **Fat Worm Of Error** (also on Load), which makes me want to set fire to things. It begins with the clatter of pots and pans and quickly descends into a cacophonous, chattering mess of children's voices and distorted warbling – it's as if someone has let the Chuckle Brothers loose on Wolf Eyes' equipment.

Time for something completely different. **Loene Carmen** is an Australian singer and multi-instrumentalist, whose album

I can't put a foot out of bed without treading on Adam Green's face

Slight Delay (Reverberation) is laidback, bluesy, and features Dirty Three's Warren Ellis on violin. This is more like it – Loene's dreamy, echoing vocals are the perfect accompaniment to dusting down my fossil collection. But I'm getting lazy now. Any more relaxed and I'm going to steal some of Chris Houghton's aromatherapy kit and run a nice hot bubble bath. I need something to perk me up – I've still got to alphabetise my socks, for chrissakes!

Trust **Simon Bookish** to come up with the goods. *Unfair/Funfair* (Use Your Teeth) is a dark, insistent album of electro-pop that takes you to a bizarre world of medieval kings and Fantastic Piss Experiments. There's a slightly deranged edge to Simon's voice as he intones spoken word poetry and I don't know whether to dance or cry.

So this tidying, I'm off down the disco.

albums

Various

The Tomorrow People: Original Television Music (Trunk)

This collection of offcuts and incidental music hails from a glorious period of British TV history when it was perfectly acceptable to scare the shit out of children and send them to bed with phosphene images of pain and distress burned into their retinas. Thinking back to my childhood experiences of TV-related terror, it was probably as much the sound design of programmes like *Dr Who* and *Sapphire And Steel* as the rubber monsters that made me hide behind the sofa at crucial points (this isn't merely a rehashed cliché – I actually did hide behind the sofa). Delia Derbyshire, David Vorhaus and Brian Hodgson of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop created the contents of this disc in 1969 as library music and it was later used for the Thames Television series of the title between 1973 and 1979. It's fucking terrifying, like Can's 'Augmn' or PiL's 'Radio 4', protoplasmic death music from the outer regions of time and space.

Essential hauntology from the acknowledged pioneers of tea-time weird.

Joe Stannard

Vetiver

To Find Me Gone (Fat Cat)

Held up against the mild-mannered but achingly lovely eponymous debut of a couple of years ago, this almost rocks out in places. The blissful desert sunset gallop of 'You May Be Blue' – a tried and tested live favourite – is present here at last; shooting hot lap-steel arrows into the dusk, as does the heart-rending whisky-soused country waltz 'I Know No Pardon'. Vetiver's impeccable starlit violin-kissed acoustic webs are woven with the same beautifully deft craftsmanship of friend and colleague Devendra B (present here, as before) in

his quiet moments, and like the black-bearded and bugged-out one, this here crystalline labour of love effortlessly warms way deep from start to finish.

James Papademetrie

Wasteland

All Versus All (Transparent)

Yet more surprises courtesy of Londoner Toby Reynolds of Ambush Records infamy and New York's I-Sound. *All Versus All* coruscates with tangible energy, dipping below the radar into subsonic atmospherics, then weaving through clouds of grime-spattered beats and emaciated electronic discharges with an ominous sense of ultimately peaceable purpose.

The duo step nimbly across the divide between unsettling paranoid soundtracks and immersive industrial dubscares, and move with sinister poise through the album, stalking on ponderous rhythms through echo chambers of indeterminate volume and Lovecraftian dimensions. Brimming with viscous – sometimes vicious – noise while also evoking a sparseness which nudges unstopably a few places along the scale of geological motion, *Wasteland* occasionally strip their harsher dissonances into reshaped forms of unexpected, fractured beauty.

Richard Fontenoy

Bill Wells and Maher Shalal Hash Baz Osaka Bridge (Karaoke Kalk)

The most noticeable feature of this record is its wilful awkwardness. All the elements here are askew – from the queasy, seasick brass section to the listing, lurching time schemes. That's not to say that the arrangements are unsuccessful or, indeed, that the album presents its audience with anything like a difficult listen. From the glorious pure pop of 'On The Beach Boys Bus' to the halting lit

of 'Cowtail Calypso', *Osaka Bridge* is a joyful and rewarding collaboration, with Wells' compositions given the perfect outlet in Maher Shalal's exquisitely jumbled, tumbledown delivery.

Alistair Fitchett

William Elliott Whitmore Song Of The Blackbird (Southern)

Iowa-born William Elliott Whitmore has a voice as fibrous as a frayed rope; old-young, fervent and weirdly canine, he growls, rasps and croons through his third album. Via his quietly confident arrangements of banjo, guitar and occasional Hammond and piano, Whitmore inhabits *Song Of The Blackbird* with a kind of cold, clear, almost puritanical poise that's refreshingly singular. He brings a hardcore fan's asceticism along to the table where his folk lyricism and country-blues sentimentality are already set out, and the result is a recording where little is wasted and everything is played good and hard. The well-rounded production on country-rock swingers like 'The Chariot' is bravely slick, disobeying the lo-fi diktats of much new folk music. On the sparser voice-and-banjo numbers the recording is, again, kind of cold, but in a good way: his music holds you at arm's length, the better for you to appreciate what you hear. It also feels much happier and more at peace than last year's deliciously tragic *Ashes To Dust*, but don't let that put you off, you can still get pretty melancholic to this one, should you wish.

Frances May Morgan

Wolfmangler

Dwelling In A Dead Raven For The Glory Of Crucified Wolves (Aurora Borealis)

Wolfmangler is another project from the Polish Moustache otherwise known as D Smolken, also of *Garlic Yarg* and *Dead*

Raven Choir. This sludgifest follows the chamber doom quartet lineage of their previous releases, the bass/bass/double bass here being augmented by what sounds like a flute and maybe a French horn. And a big drum. The drum and flute give songs like 'King Guthrum' an almost Korean court music feel, but the French horn pulls the soupy bass throb closer towards Noggin The Nog territory. There's also kind of a Ray Harryhausen feel, something reminiscent of the awakening of a plasticine dragon or the approach of clunkily animated skeletons holding swords, maybe one skelly has one of those spiky ball and chain thingies. If you could sonically render the effect of heavy rags being hypnotically stirred into a cauldron of molten pitch with a severed antler this is the sound you would get. All the while Smolken hisses elegies, spits dirges and generally growls one off, rolling his Rs like a proper movie baddy. Totally book.

Andrew Clare

Zombi

Surface To Air (Relapse)

Creating a link between the squinting-at-the-sun synth washes of Vangelis and the sharp arpeggio analogue stabs of horror soundtracks as perfected by John Carpenter, Zombi then take this link and rock the fuck out with it. So it's a battle between good and evil, it's Deckard having his fingers snapped by a replicant and Michael Myers nightstalking with a butcher knife.

SPOILER: Evil wins.

Like the Halloween masks in *Season Of The Witch*, listening the whole way through this record will climax with you lying crumpled on the ground with snakes, molluscs and darting locusts pouring out of your ears and mouth. That's what happens when you let the Zombi tell it.

George Taylor

brief notes

Abiku

Location (Automation)

Nasty, shouty, full-frontal electronic assault – a duo from Philadelphia, Josh provides the animal brutality, Jane provides the operatic, Boredom-esque screaming.

Kath Bloom

Finally (Chapter)

Collection of Nineties recordings from obscure, Richard Linklater-championed, 50-year-old folk singer: quite beautiful – lovelorn and true.

The Delgados

The Complete BBC Peel Sessions (Chemikal Underground)

Double CD. Is exactly what it says on the tin.

Arrington De Dioniso

Breath Of Fire (K)

Dude from Old Time Religion blows down a bass clarinet, throat-sings and twangs a Jew's harp – and blows, and growls, and twangs, and blows and twangs and growls. Quite ecstatic in a strange way.

Extra Golden

Ok-Oyot System (Thrill Jockey)

Thrill Jockey types team up with Kenyan musicians to make music that alternates between the sublime and the ridiculous.

The Fever

The City Of Sleep (Kemado)

The singer spells his name 'Geremy' and this album is pitched somewhere between 1974 Bowie, *The Paper Chase* and the ubiquitous Dresden Dolls.

GNAC

Twelve Sidelong Glances (LTM)

Beautiful, haunting, instrumental, imaginary Miss Marple murder mystery music from a Montgolfier Brother.

The Knights Of The New Crusade

A Challenge To The Cowards Of Christendom (Alternative Tentacles)

Jello Biafra decides to take on 2,000 years of oppression – caustic lyrics, genius packaging, and a musical mishmash that comes off halfway twixt Dead Kennedys and *The Make Up*. Yup, that good.

Like A Stuntman

Stan Places EP (Highpoint Lowlife)

Electronic indie rock from Hamburg – of the off-kilter Pavement-y sort.

Alex Lukashevsky

Connexions (North East Indie)

Nicely strummed and plucked and mumbled folk.

Man Man

Six Demon Bag (Ace Fu)

Like Dresden Dolls, only demented – and, erm, nothing like Dresden Dolls. More like Danielson Famile, now we think about it.

Mexico City

Black Comedy (Reverberation)

Classy rock'n'roll, of the Afghan Whigs variety.

Mr Tube And The Flying Objects

Listen Up (Sweet Nothing)

How warped would you like your blues? Planet-stomping music for embittered penguins.

The Ohsees

The Cool Death Of Island Raiders (Narnack)

Formerly OCS, also a Coachwhip: disturbing in a dusty loft adventure/ Danielson way.

Pan For Punks

A Steelpan Tribute To The Ramones (www.panforpunks.com)

R-i-i-ght. Just what the world needs. Ah fuck it. Tommy Ramone grooves on it, and hell. So does ET.

Polaris

Polaris (Gringo)

Gringo sorts do what Gringo sorts do best. heavy, harmonious and angular.

Ponies In The Surf

Ponies On Fire (Asaurus)

Gentle, sweet, bedroom melodies from Cambridge, MA duo – very much Alistair Fitchett territory. Expect to see a three-inch CD-r release on Unpopular shortly, if there hasn't been one already.

Pumice

Yeahnahvienna (Soft Abuse)

Delicate New Zealand guitar pop à la Flying Nun records.

Sinner DC

Mount Age (Ai)

Swissstronica; sounds a bit like Isolee and candyfloss and high-speed trains.

Various

Still Unravished – A Tribute To The June Brides (Yesboyceream)

Unfairly overlooked mid-Eighties South London indie pop band receives due kudos: features Manic Street Preachers, TV Personalities (crap as ever when it comes to covers), Jeffrey Lewis, The Tyde and The Legend!

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simon says

Words: **Everett True**
Illustration: **Adrian Fleet**

Various

Rip It Up And Start Again – Postpunk 1978-1984 (V2)

The title is an Orange Juice reference. Orange Juice started life as a punk band in Glasgow, 1977. Early shows were shambolic, singer Edwyn Collins and cohorts falling around laughing as they found themselves unable to start a song for the fourth time, voices frequently cracking and breaking as they strained to reach upward. The song the title references was one of the OJ's biggest hits, early Eighties, came about after Edwyn turned his back momentarily on The Velvet Underground and the art school boys, and embraced the New Pop that was being so thoroughly championed in the British music press by writers such as Paul Morley and Ian Penman.

New Pop basically included any artist that attempted to incorporate the fluid dance rhythms of black disco into the oddly asexual post-No Wave template, and that had also been motivated by the immediate fall-out of punk rock '76. It was a broad term, a meaningless one – it included artists as disparate as Duran Duran, Simple Minds, The Redskins, Pigbag, U2, The Human League – but it was beloved by the critics of the day, and their impressionable readership. Some folk still hold onto it, 20 years later, as proof

I understand the need for tribes

that the music of *their* youth – and no other – was among the most invigorating, ground-breaking musical escapades in pop. Well, they would say that.

I have no beef with Simon Reynolds. He's a talented, tricky, enthusiastic, sometimes too self-important writer who has never lost sight of the fan at his core. If he wants to put together a collection of some of his favourite sounds from between 1978 and 1984 and attempt to justify their juxtaposition to one another by extrapolating a common link between them – post-punk, natch – then that's fine by me. I grew up on this music, too: I'm also a fan of edgy, politically-charged, jagged music: he and I share a common regard for the meticulous, soulful melodies of The Raincoats, the teasing funk of Pulsallama, Honey Bane's precocious and chilling dissection of street reality on 'Violence Grows', The Specials' bleak Wurlitzer visions on 'Friday Night, Saturday Morning', Young Marble Giants' spooked beauty, bang fucking bang the mighty Fall, The B-52s, Cabaret Voltaire, Josef K, The Slits...

I understand the need for tribes. I don't necessarily hold much truck with them these days,

but, Jesus fuck! You think I lasted this long as a music critic without kowtowing to society? Anyway, this compilation (a companion piece to the book of the same name) is intended as an introduction to a much broader world – as Reynolds explains in typically sardonic sleevenotes – and a link to the present-day wherein every other group seems to reference the term 'post-punk'. (You may care to check out Rough Trade Shop's incredible 2003 comp *Post Punk Vol 1* first – more comprehensive, nicer packaging, and the link between past and present is seamless.)

The only quarrel I have with Mr Reynolds on this otherwise impeccable trawl is in his inclusion of a handful of tracks from the aforementioned New Pop bands (a pointless Thomas Leer doodle, the overrated Associates, Heaven 17, Critti Politti)...because I really do think this is the one place where his love for a well-reasoned argument has overridden his fanboy lust. There again, Simon may just have different taste.

Orange Juice aren't represented here. Neither are Essential Logic. Nor are (fill in your own names).

Otherwise, recommended.

Antena

Camino Del Sol (LTM)

Will I be forever fated to like things that sound a bit like bloody Stereolab, I wonder? Will I always have a bit of my brain that goes "ba-ba-ba!" along to things? It seems so. However, I'm not complaining when that thing is Antena, the French electro-space-bossa trio whose 1982 debut has now been agreeably re-presented (with tons of extra tracks) to a more understanding listenership.

Because Antena – Pascale Moiroud, Sylvain Fassey and Isabelle Powaga – were always a bit of a cult concern. It's hard to see why. Granted, their odd little indie sambas were vivacious, wispy and possibly out of kilter with the dour post punk times. OK, they did blend drum machines with Brazilian percussion, and Kraftwerkian synths with Astrud Gilberto/Francoise Hardy vocals, and perhaps it wasn't so easy to get Tropicalia records back then so no one saw the obvious parallel. Maybe they seemed kitschy: too happy, too light, too frivolous.

According to the sleevenotes, it's the UK's fault. Antena just couldn't make it over here, possibly because they were singing in French (although there are so many la-la-las and ay-ay-ays that it shouldn't have been a problem). More likely, they didn't quite fit in anywhere: too lush and feathery for the indie scene, they also eschewed the big production of the Eighties in favour of a lovely retro studio sound, minimal, spacey, delicate and – as demonstrated by a very sugary cover of 'Les Demoiselles De Rochefort' from the Jacques Demy musical – influenced by both yé-yé girls and classic film music.

Whatever, Antena would have been perfect in the early to mid-Nineties, around the time of St Etienne and the 'Lab. But they're also perfect right now: a reminder that the early Eighties weren't all about yelping and 'angular' riffs. Standout tracks include 'Spiral Staircase', with a frantic motorik and cheap drumrolls framing a breathless, detached vocal and a twinkling synth straight off Gary Numan; and 'Achilles', a brilliant, sinister, synergistic masterpiece that sounds like Kraftwerk doing 'Showroom Dummies' in a São Paulo jazz club, with Alison from Young Marble Giants and Os Mutantes on vocals.

Frances May Morgan

A Witness

I Am John's Pancreas (Euphonium)

This is bloody brilliant. An album recorded on an eight-track studio in 1986 for under £1,000 – one side went missing for 12 years before being discovered in a former drummer's attic. It's so bloody Northern, so gritty and full of deadpan humour. It's so bloody English, circa John Peel early to mid-Eighties, every song a miniature sardonic masterpiece, tongues competing with guitars for laceration value, a drum machine band with attitude, from Manchester. Articulate, passionate, angry and very, very danceable.

A Witness appeared on the *NME's* pivotal *C 86* compilation cassette – pivotal inasmuch as none of the bands ever went onto sell anywhere near as many as they deserved – and occupied the exact same scruffy corner of their mud-churned football field as Bogshed, Big Flame, The Nightingales, The Membranes and Pig Bros. My heart still leaps when I hear this.

The Legend!

Hawkwind

Live 74 (EMI)

Undisputed overlords of psychedelic space rock and perhaps the first British group to really get a handle on what the Germans (and The Velvet Underground) were doing with the motorik, Hawkwind also adopted the levitational chanting and escapist philosophy of Sun Ra's Arkestra to create an audio-visual experience that could only feasibly be completed by the gyrations of a large-breasted naked dancer named Stacia.

This CD captures the Hawklords in fine, filthy form, their apocalyptic boogie festooned with analogue swoops and gurgles from the colon of the cosmos. Despite what some idiots think, Hawkwind were never prog, and this is brutally direct music: at the end of 'Master Of The Universe', bass destroyer Lemmy declares "You've been experiencing the imagination of Hawkwind", and it's like a playground bully explaining why your face hurts.

Joe Stannard

Isis

Sgnl05 (Neurot)

This EP brings us back to the Isis of 2001, before the release of Oceanic. At this point they owed more to Neurosis than Foucault, and these five tracks hint at the other landscapes and tools that they would later include in their sonic vocabulary. It is nevertheless a refined document of mapping one enclosed space.

At points it is stifling: their version of desperation is underpinned by a foreboding repetition, cyclical patternings that tighten and encircle the untangible. It is a spatially constructed response, an exploded view where the detailing of the weave slackens and expands with finesse.

The final track, a remix of 'Celestial' by Godflesh, is worth it. Electronically stripping bloated walls of guitar and vocals into a more delicately considered form, it proffers a glimpse into Isis' current position.

Miranda Iossifidis

Edu Lobo

Sergio Mendes Presents Lobo (Rev-Ola)

Although Edu Lobo is one of the central figures of Sixties and Seventies post-bossa Brazilian pop, he rarely receives the respect accorded to compatriots Caetano Veloso or Gilberto Gil. Far from the brickbat to the head of Tropicalia's more riotous moments, Lobo favours a subdued avant-gardism. His voice is feather-light and slightly droll, the better to keep his maze-like melodies understated.

Accompanied by members of Sergio Mendes' Brazil 66, who filter these spectral songs through diffuse light, Lobo is on winning form through *Sergio Mendes Presents*. Hermeto Pascoal's singsong flute traverses the arrangements as though he is following the logic of balloons skimming across the skies, with Lobo's 12-string guitar unravelling spooling melodies before breaking the surface with sudden strikes of discordance.

You could probably survive without hearing the starchy closing version of 'Hey Jude', but this 1970 album is a classic example of the other face of Brazilian pop music.

Jon Dale



the real thing

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Illustration: **Phil Elliott**

Ear-candy rarely came so delicious

The Pretenders

Pirate Radio 1979 – 2005 (Rhino)

Chrissie Hynde has the kind of voice radio waves were invented to carry. She washed up on these shores a refugee from deadsville Akron, Ohio, floating on a raft fashioned from Stooges and Velvets vinyl, to find London on the cusp of punk. She wrote for *NME*, almost married a Sex Pistol for an immigration visa, then hooked up with some rockers from Hereford to form The Pretenders.

For the post punk/new wave era, The Pretenders were anachronistically classicist, James Honeyman-Scott's guitar a chameleon of Spector-esque sugar, rockabilly venom and a chiming 12-string sound he lifted from the Byrds and make his own. But it was Hynde's voice that vaulted The Pretenders' records from affectionate pastiche to pop classics in their own right; her sonorous vibrato escaped transformed the kohled-eyed, razor-thin Hynde into a one-woman Wall Of Sound. The group's faultless brace of early singles spliced together crashing, exultant moment of pop gold with a magpie-eye for detail: 'Stop Your Sobbing' recasting a Kinks album track as girl-group glitter, multi-tracked Hyndes harmonising over the jangle like tremelo sirens, 'Kid' weaving an amiable embrace from Chrissie's long, drawn-out sighs, 'Brass In Pocket' rewriting 'Uptown Top Ranking' for

chicks in leather jackets banishing their insecurities with the same swagger that Chrissie invests her feline yowls...

There's an abiding darkness that underscores The Pretenders' perfect pop: 'Thin Line Between Love And Hate' wrung every painful poignancy from The Persuaders' deep-soul domestic violence ballad, its litany of tragedies borne aloft by Hynde's heroic, subtle vocal. Tragedy stalked the group itself: Honeyman-Scott died of a freak drug overdose in 1982, bassist Pete Farndon fatally overdosing eight months later.

But The Pretenders survived this, and survived the more risible production trends of the Eighties; this exhaustive box (and it isn't faint praise to say this is all The Pretenders you'll need) finds that voice still intact on such late-period gems as the stadium-jangle of 'My Baby', or the deliciously playful 'Don't Get Me Wrong', or the still-resonant 'Hymn To Her', while her vocal for 1994's 'I'll Stand By You', particularly on the keening choruses, was a career peak.

There's a case to be made for Chrissie's iconic status as a Woman In Rock. Like Hynde herself, this box mostly sidesteps the issue in favour of celebrating that voice, and the affectionate pop-literacy that makes the lion's share of this lush retrospective such a treat. Ear candy rarely came so smart, so wise, so delicious.

Arthur Russell

First Thought Best Thought (Rough Trade)

Modern composers often express a desire to 'go pop' or use its forms and ideas, but they lack the commitment required to make the final leap. Arthur Russell's great achievement was the collapsing of those petty boundaries, treating pop, classical, disco, folk and improvisation as hints on a treasure map. *First Thought Best Thought* documents Russell's instrumental pieces, culled mainly from two rare albums released on Les Disques Du Crepuscule and Philip Glass' Chatham Square label. As with Russell's other music, it is breezy and benign, liberated by his natural gift

for circuitous melody, wistful and inquisitive by turns, and full of light-hearted humour.

Steve Knutson's liner notes observe that Russell's music is geographically rooted, evocative of the surrounds of Russell's Midwest America birthplace in Oskaloosa, Iowa. What is even more powerful about *First Thought Best Thought* is its suggestive capabilities, the way the weave and thread of these gracious compositions map previously unseen or unimagined topography before your eyes. Perhaps the great pleasure in Russell's compositions is their translation of exterior space to interior dialogue, the tracings of

the land reconfigured on staves and scores. The further you walk into *First Thought Best Thought*, out along the cornfield plains of the mid-west, the more you jettison the structuring of the self – or rhythm, tangled melody, full band arrangements – and dissolve into the intimacy of the wide open sheath of grain, dirt and sky.

Listening to *First Thought Best Thought* is like unpeeling an onion, the compositions sloughing off layers of skin to reach the tartly gorgeous core. Ultimately, though, it is sweet, benign music: the most striking thing is its effortlessness, balanced between joy and melancholy. A salve for the sadness of reality.

Jon Dale

soul survivor

Words: **Frances May Morgan**
Illustration: **Emily Twomey**



Karen Dalton

It's So Hard To Tell Who's Going To Love You The Best (Megaphone)

It's so hard to tell who's going to love you the best. No one ever tells you how much harder it gets, either. It's like you get one thing sorted, and another thing slides. Anyone who tells you otherwise, who tells you there's peace to be had without compromise, who swears that there is happiness without holes in it, they're a fucking liar and they've probably never listened to Karen Dalton.

I was given her album (one of only two that she made, recorded in 1969 after a decade of playing live) before its most recent re-release. I think the man who gave it to me knew we'd need *It's So Hard To Tell*... Its songs were resigned, slip-sliding, bittersweet: in awe of beauty and accepting of pain and desire in a way that would maybe come to help smooth ours out. More prosaically, I guess he also knew I loved blues, and women who'd survived all kinds of shit and acted the way they oughtn't and went off into the mountains with three of their bottom front teeth missing and played a Gibson 12-string with metal fingerpicks, like you see in the DVD that comes with this reissue.

It will break your heart, and then mend it again by morning

I don't think either of us were prepared for *It's So Hard To Tell*... though, with its sense of gravity and space, and its loose, absolute musicianship. I'd read up on Dalton, the half-Irish half-Cherokee country girl who turned up in early-Sixties Greenwich Village aged 22, with a five-year-old daughter and a banjo and the aforementioned 12-string and a nascent drink problem, and I expected flaky, vulnerable trad. arr music, strung-out and outsiderish. I expected a high voice, and some of the mannered feyness of that period's folk revival. Instead, here was a dusty brown autumn leaf of a voice, curling in on itself then opening out with delicious clarity on the higher notes, placing each word naturally as conversation, but carefully, slowly, too; delighting in melody before tailing off into tiny tuneless tremors like barely heard birds. Here was the blues – "I'll never get out of this blues alive" – as raw as it's ever been, but re-interpreted to represent the toil of the inner world in a way that slays and heals in equal measure.

Yet, however devastatingly straight and simple the initial impact of the songs (by Fred Neil, Tim Hardin, Jelly Roll Morton – none 'by' Dalton herself), their arrangements are mesmerising and idiosyncratic. The instrumentation is minimal but oddly jazzy: acoustic bass, occasional percussion. Dalton switches from loose, tentative blues to jingling folk; her guitar ostensibly changes style but never loses its voice – and its voice is both as labyrinthine and as achingly direct as her singing one. *It's So Hard To Tell*... is an album you fall into like an infatuation, but that turns out to be as complex and messy as any collision of two grown humans ever was. It will break your heart, and then mend it again by morning.

The Mark Of Cain

Battlesick (Feel Presents)

The Unclaimed Prize (Feel Presents)

It's long been accepted among the rock cognoscenti – me, Mudhoney, the dude from Queens Of The Stone Age, Corey Rusk from Touch And Go, in case you were wondering – that when it comes to a certain kind of gritty, grungy garage rock, certain Aussies take some beating; even when they're vaguely Gothic. Take these two excellent reissues from 1989 (*Battlesick*) and 1991 (*The Unclaimed Prize*) from Adelaide's Mark Of Cain: full of potential repetitive guitar strain injury, the riffs brooding with menace and a post-Warsaw/Killing Joke darkness. This is where Dostoevsky met Scientists, festering, malignant and so fucking powerful. The Mark Of Cain even had the foresight to hook up with Albini, pre-Nirvana on the latter album. Brutal.

Think of them as Australia's answer to Mission Of Burma.

Everett True

Pufnstuf

Original Soundtrack (E1)

Bugaloos

Bugaloos (E1)

Pufnstuf was the big screen spin-off of the surreal, beloved Sixties children TV series *HR Pufnstuf*, starring Jack Wild (The Artful Dodger from *Oliver!*). Imagine *Hair* meets *The Wizard Of Oz* meets the Banana Splits meets *The Magical Mystery Tour*, with loads

of oblique male operatic voices and blasts of brass instruments dropping in and out of the psychedelic dreamworld. It was all very Joe Meek, *I Hear A New World*, sophistication meets naïve wonder meets the odd jazzed-up guitar break.

The Bugaloos – *HR Pufnstuf*'s follow-up – were even more neat to look at: a singing butterfly, grasshopper guitarist, ladybug drummer and bumblebee keyboard-player living in Tranquillity Forest, 10 miles from Rock City, where their arch-nemesis, the music-hating Benita Bizarre, lived in a giant jukebox. The music was anodyne, pre-Brady Bunch fare – but the programme was anything but. This was prime LSD territory, Technicolor splendours of imagination and lo-fi sets. The Bugaloos were far sweeter and less anarchic than the Splits or The Monkees, but terrifyingly strange nonetheless.

Everett True

Sebadoh

III (Domino)

It's amazing Jason, Eric and Lou left their bedrooms long enough to meet each other. Indeed when Sebadoh first started out, those guys were spending a great deal of time in their bedrooms, developing compositions caked in hiss with their heads full of cheeba. *III* is partly known as Sebadoh's partial escape from the bedroom and into a proper studio. It's even better known as a masterpiece.

The reissue of this 1992 classic contains two CDs — a grand total of 41 tracks.

There's rip-roarers, utter hoots, acoustic gems discovered like diamonds in the rough, divine one-take stumbles, unsteady drone marches and a feast of heartfelt, noisecore delights. The mood here is like four seasons in one day.

In other words, at some point during *Sebadoh III* you will let your guard down and grin stunningly.

Shane Moritz

Slum Village

Fan-Tas-Tic Vol 1 (Scenario)

A JayDee production, hence the re-issue. But this ain't mere coffin-chasing greed – 'Fantastic' is a pocket-miracle of modern hip hop production, especially when you consider that SV did all their vocals with only a guide-click for company, JD adding his slice 'n' dice afterwards but so astonishingly responsive to each track's emotional journey and lyrical trajectory. And, of course, great music throughout from 'I Don't Know's' psyche-folk, Bosworth-archive-ripping funk all the way through to '2 You 4 You' and it's underwater Casiotone wooziness. 'Beej N Dem' and 'Give This Nigga' are the highlights here, but even the moments that don't work never stick around for longer than two minutes and with judicious programming there's a half-hour of stone-cold brilliance to be had. RIP.

Neil Kulkarni

Swell Maps

Wastrels And Whippersnappers (Overground)

The official histories of the Seventies Punk explosion always mark it as a Year Zero. It's a seductive idea, which is why it has been repeated so often. But many of the genuinely intriguing figures of Punk's first bloom were influenced much more by the esoteric early Seventies art (and even, whisper it, 'prog') rock scene as they ever were by the thought of bondage trousers. Julian Cope would later cast light on the wonders of Krautrock that these kids were digging prior to (and probably secretly after) seeing The Pistols, though the evidence of the connections has always been harder to see in the music they made. Not so, however, on this collection of early Swell Maps recordings. For here, the band that recorded some of the genuinely strangest of prime time Punk records experiment by throwing the likes of Henry Cow, Can, Van Der Graaf Generator, Stockhausen and T-Rex into the mix. The results are as bizarre and wonderful as you might expect, like leafing through aural sketchbooks of the craziest kids in the art class. Far out.

Alistair Fitchett

Various

Music From The Films Of Orson Welles Volume One (E1)

I know I shouldn't, but every time I hear that delightfully playful zither Harry Lime theme

that underpins the dark foreboding of Welles' post-Second World War vision of Vienna in *The Third Man*, I'm reminded of the comedic genius of Jacques Tati's Monsieur Hulot, on vacation away from, and hopelessly at odds with, society.

There's the same deadpan expression of emotion, the same slight knowing glance at the ridiculousness of café life. It doesn't lessen either film for me: indeed, it increases my enjoyment, knowing that two such incredible visionaries are linked, however tentatively.

Three pieces from the film, performed by Anton Karas, are present here, alongside Bernard Herrmann's stirring orchestral strings from *Citizen Kane* and *Jane Eyre* and a handful of other delights. The other delights are all fine: moody and brash and suitably loveswept, voices raising and falling in a clamour of political indignation, but it's the zither I'll be returning for.

It's the zither that gets me every time.

Everett True

Various

Som Imaginario (Rev-Ola)

This slice of psychedelia comes from Brazil and a 1970 where the ruling dictatorship and persecution of fellow tropicalistas was probably more serious than the impending doom of Messrs Lennon & McCartney. Formed to back Milton Nascimento, 'Imaginary Sound' nevertheless carve a typically Beatlesque niche. As you'd expect, there is also more than a touch of bossa, batucada and gentle samba and there's a surprisingly country Byrds feel about the whole thing.

This is fine stuff indeed and, especially on 'Hey, Man', the reassuringly spaced out and friendly eclecticism solidifies into a shuffling dancefloor groove that becomes more and more noticeable the more you let this beautiful curio share your head space.

LJ Oddman

Virus Syndicate

The Work Related Illness (Planet Mu)

Second time out for Virus Syndicate's debut album and there are, perhaps, concessions to maturity, but it's still enormous fun. OK, so we've lost the cartoon cover, in favour of a more *Guardian*-friendly black & silver sci-fi shot of the band with spooky eyes, but the gleeful juvenilia of recklessly hedonistic anthems such as 'Girls' and 'Wasted' remains intact.

A trio of new darker tunes tip the balance and make this an altogether more sombre affair. The chipmunk soul of 'Ready To Learn' and stern morality play of 'Catch 22' are fine enough, but the real gem is the shamelessly Raskitt-esque fake gangster posture puncturing 'Gun Talk'.

Thankfully, some things haven't changed. 'Slow Down' still comes out the gate as if the sampled chorus were hailing an apocalypse, like Hype Williams and Ken Loach fighting over the finer points of directing *Coronation Street: The Grime Opera*. 'Clockwork' is still gleefully unapologetic, and 'Taxman' with its skronky squelches and quasi orchestral flourishes still gleefully farts on cowering, submissive tradition like a less contrived 'Urban Classic'.

You can't afford to miss this a second time.

Ringo P Stacey



the true report

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **Nick White**

Age doesn't increase knowledge. I eat home-baked pizza and listen to the same three records from the past, eternally stuck on repeat. Essential Logic. This Heat. **Blurt**. Essential Logic. This Heat. **Blurt**. I grew up believing a saxophone to be more revolutionary (sonically) than a phalanx of guitars, that within its capricious confines and slinky metallic curves it was possible to blow up a storm of revolution, jarring, grating and lithe. My hands hit the wrong keyboard. I have no control over fate. My contact with the outside world extended as far as games of *Dungeons And Dragons* wherein fearsome sax-wielding creatures called Uncle Ted popped up unexpectedly, spouting scary gibberish, dancing an obsessive/compulsive dance – always covering the same three slabs of concrete. Don't put your nephew in the microwave. Don't put your hand in the blender. There's no way out of this spiral: when I walk along the street I can only hear a low motorik hum, a flexing of society's muscles.

I liked to dance, y'know. Uncle Ted was based on the former anarchic puppeteer and twisted, demented, gurning, intense frontman of **Blurt**. See? The same three groups. **Blurt**, This Heat... oh, you get it. His minimal, devilish, dry humping, confrontational three-piece has been blowing shards of discontent and No Wave rhythmic splendour since 1980: as *The Best Of Blurt Volume 2 – The Body That They Built To Fit The Car* (Salamander) proves. Imagine being Ted Milton for 26 years! Jesus, fuck! Imagine being Everett True for 16. It really doesn't work. None of the 'hits' are present. This is some of the most extreme, danceable music this side of the

good Captain (Beefheart), this side of ESG, of the past three decades.

Here's a cliché.

OK. Got over it yet? Let's discuss my past. Dancing. Not fucking. Not snogging. Scared of most anything concerned with adult life. (What's changed?) My impressionable self looking for leads, for causes, for mentors. Let's switch cities; Birmingham, late 1978. Ferment and provocation; the jagged yet irresistible white funk of James Chance, Gang Of Four, the DiY ethos of Mekons, the politics of the three-day week, rats crawling through garbage in city centres, the innate sexism of rock'n'roll. Along come **The Au Pairs**, righteous and filled with a desire to help change society at whatever level they encounter it. Fifteen years before the equally inspirational Bikini Kill created a furore within the male-centric music press by pointing out the gender imbalance at gigs, The Au Pairs were actively confronting it – at a time when violence and boneheaded skins were endemic. The fact their music – a heady rush of blood to the head, a searing, forceful dissemination of gender politics, a brittle, angular, guitar-based rock music led by the intimidating figure of Lesley Woods – was so incredible, easily the equal to more feted post-punk groups like Delta 5 and (yes) Essential Logic was some fucking bonus. There's a kick-ass double CD compilation out, covering both albums and various singles, absolutely all you need to know – from the caustic 'We're So Cool' to the bluesy, full-throttle live cover of 'Piece Of My Heart' to the deadpan cool first single 'You' – called *Stepping Out Of Line* (Sanctuary). It's not This Heat.

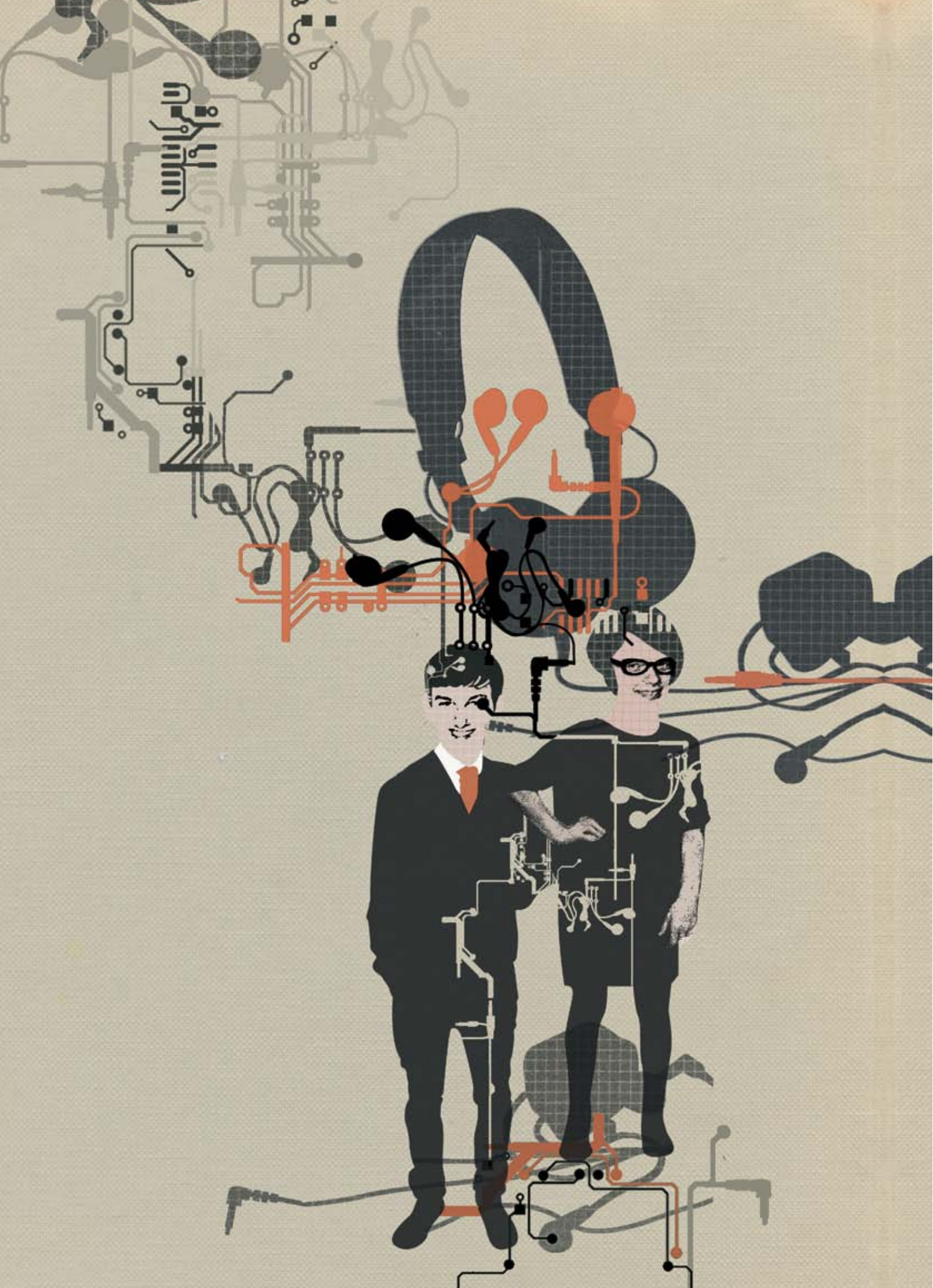
Little is.

Music isn't all sexually frustrated astrangency, though. Every day, it seems, another five or six intriguing, oddball and

downtight delightful CDs from Rev-ola drop onto my doormat, there to be excitedly pored over and examined. **Fats Domino's** goodtime swing piano. **Ruth Brown and Lavern Baker's** bluesy belters. **John Jacob Niles'** Appalachian folk. **Ravi Shankar. Don And The Goodtimes'** Beach Boys-esque Seattle pop. Man, they're so cool. They sooth my fevered brow – and this without recourse to either sax or rudimentary dance electronica – and none more so than **Julie London's** peerless *Julie Is Her Name* 1955 debut, the album that invented torch singing; just a whisper of instrumentation and breathy enunciation. It's more than enough. Eerily seductive and consummately sexual, especially the timeless reading, never bettered, of Arthur Hamilton's 'Cry Me A River' – this is pure gold.

The Hi-Lo's first album, 1954's seamless melding of doo-wop, pop and jazz *Listen!* (él) predated *Pet Sounds* by a decade, but squint a little and it will sound so familiar, so redolent, like you're living in a Fifties ad salesman's dreamworld of the perfect American post-war home... who didn't have crush on Samantha from *Bewitched* anyway? It's easy listening, but Muzak? No way.

And finally, a brief mention for the captivating prog-rock of **Rita Lee**, a member of the spaced-out and weirdly awesome Sixties Brazilian psych group Os Mutantes. (Think of Acid Mothers Temple's more spontaneous moments. You'll be some way there.) Her second solo album, 1972's trippy *Hojo E O Primeiro Dia Do Resto Sua Vida* (Rev-ola) is as confusing and skewwhiff and fucked-up as you'd expect: some Zappa-esque absurdity here, a little bossa nova there, a touch of 'The White Album', a smidgeon of funk... a whole load to explore.





the last seduction

Words: Miss AMP

Illustration: Emily Alston

Last.fm joins Flickr and MySpace in creating a portrait of your real-life activities in the liminal realms of cyberspace

The website tells me that at 11.15 on Thursday morning we were both listening to 'A Little Longing Goes Away' by The Books. Does she miss me? Is she thinking what I'm thinking?

Friday night. I'm at home in my bed. It's three am. I check Last.fm again. I know she – Jane – went to a dance-music club that night. I know she went with a girl who likes to wear hats with veils and shoes with Louis heels; a girl whose nail-varnish probably never chips; the kind of girl I'll never be. How do I know? It's written all over her space.

3.30 am. I guess they just got back. She's put a record on. It's Final Fantasy. Jane likes to make out while she's listening to it: I should know. Are they making out right now; on the red vinyl sofa from the Sally Army thrift store? Did the other girl take off her shoes? Is Jane running her hands up the long seam on the back of the other girl's stockings?

On Sunday the weekly charts are updated. I've played the album 'Infinite Love Songs' by Maximilian Hecker 23 times that week, and listened to 'You Were Always The One' by The Cribs 148 times. I look at my tags. 'Breakup'. No shit, Sherlock.

Yeah, that's right. The broken-hearted and online have a new weapon in their stalking/self-torture armoury: Last.fm. 'A man without a MySpace is like a man without a shadow,' a friend once said: now Last.fm joins Flickr and Myspace in helping create a digital footprint, a portrait of one's real life activities in the liminal realms of cyberspace. Want to see what your ex is up to? Simply check through their MySpace comments, read their blogs, see if they've changed their 'in a relationship' status yet. Fancy torturing yourself with pictures of your ex kissing your replacement on the mouth? Wander over to their Flickr and knock yourself out. And now: soul-divining through music. Does your ex still listen to that CD mixtape you made them, or do they have a new soundtrack these days? Are they wallowing in misery-tunes or kicking out the jams in jubilation? Last.fm will tell you all you need to know.

Last.fm uses a small plug-in, called 'Audioscrobber', which you download and install in your media player. When switched on, it submits the ID3 data for each track to your online music profile. It will then build a page for you – an online representation of your music taste. This page shows your recently played tracks, your weekly top artists, and your overall most listened to artists and tracks. There is also an associated radio player, which will then stream tracks stored in the Last.fm database, so you can listen to playlists based on user tags, or choose a particular user and listen to exactly the music they've been listening to.

Like Flickr, Last.fm's information is user-generated and user-classified – and as such, can tell us a lot about the ways in which people are listening to music. A tag – a piece of data about data – helps categorise large amounts of information on the internet. If you've got, say, 2,000 pictures of your friends in Flickr, how will you find that stupid picture

of Indie Dave wearing his hat? If you've metatagged that particular shot with 'David' and 'hat', the chances of locating the image are greatly increased.

Similarly, you can tag web links on del.icio.us (which collects and categorises your bookmarks) with 'feminism' – and then click on the 'feminism' tag and see what other links have been classified under the same tag on that particular day. This method is sometimes referred to as a 'folksonomy' – a combination of 'folks' and 'taxonomy', meaning 'people's classification system' – because the tags are generated by users, and are community-driven rather than designated an editorial overlord.

It's impossible to be into music without getting involved in spats about genres. Can a particular record be considered 'emo', when the word now describes music that's strayed so far from its hardcore roots? Is IDM a relevant term these days? How useful is it to classify this artist as 'blop-hop'? And so on. Last.fm sidestep this issue by handing classification over entirely to its listeners. "We were wary of introducing genres because we had endless arguments," explains Last.fm founder Martin Stiksel, "so we decided to let our listeners do the tagging.

"Lots of tags are based around genres, but there's also a lot of stuff around mood and time

social networking aspect. Last.fm presents users with a list of their 'neighbours' – people listening to similar music to your own – and then generates recommendations for you based on stuff they've heard that you haven't played yet. If I've been listening to a lot of Kim Hiorthoy, it's quite possible that I'll like Finnish computer musician Puola, suggests Last.fm – and it's right. If I check out my neighbour LeightonJ's profile, I'll see he's been listening to a lot of the same shit as me (DFA 1979, Lo-Fi-Fnk, Jackson And His Computer Band, Numbers). I might put on his radio and start listening to his tracks, thereby discovering the klezmer/Balkan brass music of 19-year-old Brooklyn solo artist 'Beirut' – and so on.

I'll also probably develop a bit of a boner for LeightonJ. Who, I'll wonder, is this 20-year-old UK male with the awesome taste? If he's linked to his Myspace, maybe I'll check that out, see what he looks like. His playlist will subtly start to influence mine. I've never met or spoken to LeightonJ, even on the internet, but he's had an effect on my life.

This is what Web 2.0 (a term used to describe second-generation web applications, usually tag-driven and collaborative) is all about: a feeling of closeness with other users of the internet. The days

Who, I wonder, is this 20-year-old male with the awesome taste?

of day. Music tagged 'Saturday evening' and music tagged 'Sunday morning' will be very different. Or music can be tagged as 'Christmas', or 'Break-up'. Genre-ification basically existed so that record stores knew how to stack their shelves. But when you talk to the artists themselves, this has very little to do with the process of creation; and these tags are making explicit just how much mood has to do with the process of selection."

Of course, user-generated tags aren't perfect – if I'm listening to a stream of music tagged with the words 'Arabic', and then some retard has tagged some reggae with 'Arabic', this will disrupt my experience of listening to that stream. Likewise, I might like to listen to The Books or Maximilian Hecker after a break-up, whereas someone else might like to listen to Celine Dion. You can't encode emotion – so questions arise as to how useful this method of classification actually is. Many journal entries on Last.fm slag off other users for instances of poor tagging, while there are groups called things like 'Get Your Damn Tags Right', where exemplary taggers can discuss the worst tags they've ever seen, and suggest ways to help others improve their tags.

There's the thing, you see, that makes Last.fm and other community-driven sites so addictive – the

when people hid behind assumed identities and funny-sounding names on the net are receding. Online friends and acquaintances are no longer anonymous users hidden behind a keyboard – we can see the world through their eyes on Flickr, share their social lives on MySpace, listen to their music on Last.fm. And music, of course, is linked to emotional states – so Last.fm users aren't just sharing info about their favourite bands; they're providing a picture of their interior worlds and state of mind.

"Nowadays," says Martin, attempting to sum up the appeal of Last.fm, "everything is available, so the question is how to find what's relevant to you. This is where Last.fm is useful. New records, new bands, new labels – everything's based on specific, targeted recommendations. Maybe you want to find someone who listens to a certain combination of music – say, S Club 7 and My Bloody Valentine. There are one or two people who listen to this combination of artists. Last.fm's not a dating site, of course – but just as you're more likely to meet someone you get on with at the concert of one of your favourite musicians rather than in the street, so too are you more likely to find like-minded people on Last.fm. Everything that exists in the world of music can be reflected on Last.fm."

dvd



jawbreakers

Words: Tom de Ville

Paul Morrissey takes on Dracula and Frankenstein

Don't ask me why, but when I was at college I took it upon myself to see every vampire film ever made. Stupid, I know. For 10 days, I trawled my way through a seemingly endless reel of genuinely creepy German Expressionist *Nosferatu*, hopping blue (!) kung fu bloodsuckers from the Far East, and softcore lesbian euro-vamps from the Seventies. My waking life became a hallucinatory miasma of bared necks, heaving chests and Peter Cushing's indefatigable stare.

The only film I could not bring myself to watch was *Blood For Dracula* – Paul Morrissey's Warhol-produced take on the Dark Prince. This is probably because the only Warhol film footage I'd been previously subjected to were stultifying dull snippets of various glassy-eyed Factory girls wandering around in their pants trying to say outrageous things (which, come to think of it, is quite a good start for any vampire film).

This is something of a shame, because both Morrissey's take on Dracula and that other Gothic staple – the corpse-juggling mad scientist in *Flesh For Frankenstein* – are refreshingly stupid fun. Kinky, gory and extremely camp, they are both sharp, almost satirical spins on the Hammer House Of Horror formula.

Blood... opens on a seedily beautiful Count (the note-perfect Udo Kier) being told by his bulgy-eyed manservant that he has to travel to find 'wurgin' because apparently every single barmaid in Eastern Europe has been defiled.

So our lovable wurgin-hound settles on wooing the four rather gamey daughters of an Italian Marquis and it quickly becomes clear that Morrissey and Warhol are intent on heaping every indignity on him possible.

Far from the sexually-predatory antics of Stoker's Dracula, Udo is a whiny bitch who attempts to seduce his prey while wheedling around in a wheelchair and throws odd little fits when he doesn't get his wurgin-blood fix. Worst of all, he is revealed as a closet vegetarian who at one point bemoans, "I guess I will have to eat the rest of the Romanian lettuce".

he's like to 'rape the hell out of 'em' in his stilted Brooklyn accent. Of course, at least two of the girls have fallen for the charmer – regularly engaging in a semi-incestuous *ménage-a-trois* with him.

This is its own problem for the Count, who suffers from a particularly nasty bout of food-poisoning after feeding on one of the less-than-wurginal virgins. In a memorable scene he literally turns green before vomiting blood into a bath like a drunken worm and exclaiming, "Ze blud of seze hoors is keeling me!" Poor guy – I feel your pain.

If *Blood For Dracula* was remade now it would very possibly be a romantic comedy with Hugh Grant playing the effete Count. I'd like to think it would end in the same way – with our foppish hero meeting death by dismemberment.

At first, *Flesh For Frankenstein* appears to be far more traditional fare – the big creepy castle is there, as is the mad scientist's laboratory. But then the opening credits feature two children disembowelling their teddy-bear before guillotining its head off – and yet again we know that we're in for something completely different.

It's a treat to see that the gang's all back, Udo Kier playing Frankenstein and Arno Juerging yet again taking on the role of his mad assistant (now with 10 per cent added eye-bulge).

This time, the terrible twosome are on a mission to find the perfect head for their male creature so they can mate it with their female creature and give birth to a lot of little baby creatures. The head must not only possess a magnificent nasum (!) but must also belong to a man who craves women. It looks like local sexy misogynist peasant Joe D'Allesandro could be in a lot of trouble.

Fortunately for Surly Joe, Udo once again screws up royally – instead selecting the head of his secretly gay best friend for involuntary transplant. Naturally, this is accomplished by the not-at-all scientific method of hedge-clipping the man's head straight off his shoulders. Yum.

Once more, the plot devolves into a perverse *Carry On*-style comedy of errors with Surly Joey falling into the clutches of the Baron's scary sister/wife (Morrissey plays the incest card a little more confusingly here), the male creature deciding he wants nothing to do with the female creature and Frankenstein himself deciding to explore his predilection for dead meat with perhaps the finest line of dialogue ever committed to film:

"To know death, you have to fuck life in the gall bladder!"

Paul Morrissey, I worship at your altar.

What's more, Morrissey has a far worse enemy in store for the Count than Van Helsing. His regular muse Joe D'Allesandro plays the family's handyman – a surly David Beckham-alike who wanders around with his shirt undone and a permanent scowl on his face. D'Allesandro is perhaps one of the most unappealing leading men in film history – spending much of the picture telling the four daughters that

**'Ze blud of seze hoors
is keeling me!'**





hell on earth

Words: Mark Pilkington

Reissued Russian classic *Come And See* is a devastating document of the chaos of war

There are war films, then there are films about war. The former revel in the myths of war: heroism, firepower, awesome spectacles of destruction; some of them are very good. The latter portray the effects of war on the people and places visited by it. *Come And See* (Nouveaux Pictures/Russico) falls into this second category and, like its distant cousins Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and Peckinpah's *Cross Of Iron*, captures a sense of war's cruelty, its strangeness and even its beauty.

Elem Klimov's devastating 1985 film was inspired by his own childhood memories of fleeing a burning Stalingrad (now Volgograd), and by the fears of nuclear annihilation that loomed large over East and West during the mid-Eighties. The name is drawn from the Book of Revelation in which the four horsemen, harbingers of destruction, are made manifest to St John.

It's 1942. German brigades are advancing through Russia towards Stalingrad, leaving in their wake a trail of appalling brutality and devastation. The Russians put up an intense resistance and by the year's end succeeded in temporarily driving the Germans back, marking a turning point in the war. But Russia's losses were horrific. According to *Come And See*'s closing title card, 628 Belarusian villages were raised to the ground and their inhabitants – men, women and children – slaughtered.

The film follows a fragment of this history through the eyes of Florya (15-year-old first-timer Alexei Kravchenko), a young teenager who dreams of joining the Russian partisans and protecting his people. Accepted into a makeshift platoon, his hopes are frustrated when its battle-hardened leader Kosach orders him to hold the fort,

accompanied by the mischievous young maiden Glosa. But their adolescent, sylvan idyll is obliterated by a German bombing raid, starting Florya on a journey through a nightmare landscape of war.

From the moment the first shell explodes, it's clear that this is a film like no other. For one thing, the explosions are real: deciding that regular pyrotechnics didn't pack enough wallop, the production team used real military munitions for the explosions, and real bullets in the guns. Then, as Florya and Glosa scabble and stumble around in the burning earth following the blast, for several minutes the soundtrack is filled only with the hollow, metallic ringing of burst eardrums. Suddenly, we are there with them. And, as horror piles upon horror throughout the film's two-and-a-half hours, we never, even for one moment, leave.

By the end we understand why Kosach kept Florya back from the troop. Never has a fiction of war appeared so brutal, harrowing or real. The film regularly achieves a state of such transcendent intensity that the membrane between our world and the film's is almost permanently breached. Nobody should ever have to witness the things that he sees, but they happen every day in wartime.

Several scenes make for extremely difficult viewing, particularly a horrific German raid on a Russian village. But the storm-clouds do part for occasional moments of unquiet ecstasy and hallucinatory beauty, thanks largely to stunning Steadicam work from Alexei Rodionov and Oleg Yanchenko's understated yet powerful electronic score.

It took director Klimov eight years to get the go ahead from the authorities to make his masterpiece and, though it was globally lauded on its release, and he was still only in his forties, he never made another film. After watching this, it's not hard to understand why. Meanwhile, Alexei Kravchenko was given hypnotherapy to protect him from some of his more traumatic memories of the arduous nine-month shoot.

Without doubt one of the most intense films you will ever see in your lifetime – and this is coming from one who has spent a lifetime seeking out intense films – *Come And See* exposes the majority of war films for what they really are: disingenuous betrayals of war's countless victims. Watch it, then show it to your friends. Any fool who's donned Nazi paraphernalia in petulant rage at their cosy suburban existence should be forced to view it down their local goth cave.

Horror piles upon horror



dvd



'All females must have an escort.' So says the sign on the door of the 'Terminal Bar'. It's a directive that Luke Morris, the curator of *Cinema 16: American Short Films*, might consider for the cover of his new DVD collection. Just as a light hint, you understand, a guidance note to the chosen films. Including Tim Burton's 'Vincent' (below, the secret world of a lonely boy), RM Dodgeball Thurber's 'Terry Tate', 'Office Linebacker' (office workers terrorised into civility in the workplace by a crazed American football player) and Stefan Nadelman's photo-montage documentary 'Terminal Bar' (left), this collection deals with what it is to be a man in America, and what those men think of women.

While the boys are lost, confused, angry, questing and dying in the name of freedom (see George Lucas' 'Freiheit'), the mothers are neglectful and abusive; the girlfriends are whores. The little girls are manipulative and sly, pretending to be women when they are still unselfconscious enough to crouch down and piss in front of a boy while still holding hands.

From boys on the verge of manhood in 'Five Feet High And Rising' by Peter Sollett (*Raising Victor Vargas*), Alexander Payne's version of 'Carmen' in which the femme fatale suffers death by spurting



petrol pump, and Todd Solondz's fat mom weeping at the suicide of her geeky son in 'Feelings', Morris' selection says loud and clear: it's a man's world.

As curator, Morris was "conscious of the issue". Maya Deren's experimental classic 'Meshes Of The Afternoon' is the only female voice in the piece, and even in that, the lady doesn't speak. "Unfortunately," says Morris, "this (DVD) is a representation of the industry, not just the US. The films just aren't there. Who are the female directors?" He wanted the best of the best. Miranda July didn't make it.

But watching this DVD I was overwhelmed by naughty girl thoughts... Chocolates! Yes, this DVD is like a perfect Hershey box selection. Each chocolate is as different as the films are: black and white, Super 8, animation. Yet the shared theme means they all taste the same somehow, just like the different chocolates made by Mr Hershey. As Morris wanted, there is something for everyone, and you have to eat them all to find your favourite. And then (just like a woman) go to the next layer and eat them all again, to make sure.

In the first layer, I loved a hauntingly moving animation by Adam Parrish King (this year's Sundance winner). 'The Wraith Of Cobble Hill' is a dark chocolate full of a bitter coffee crème, for which read love and loss. Second time around, feeling the kind of guilty sugar rush that means No! No! Don't stop!, the crisp class comment of DA Pennebaker's 'Daybreak Express' (above) was my toffee crunch – it carried me through the gleaming industrial towers of man's achievement, shot through with the merest sliver of sky.

My gold wrapper, however, goes to the one film in Morris' selection that doesn't take sides or make statements, and doesn't need to get dirty with the detail of human existence – Standish Lawder's 'Necrology'. Nibble on the corner of this film, then settle down and lick it slowly. Let it melt on your fingers and lick them too. This film is the centrepiece of the box and it's a girl's perfect selection for one more reason – you can keep on eating, and it won't run out.

boys in their shorts

Words: Preti Taneja

The best of American micro movies?

'Who are the female directors?'



PJ Harvey

On Tour – Please Leave Quietly (Island)

This is impressive. As she matures, Polly Harvey becomes ever more challenging, open to new sounds and techniques and ways of expression. She's captivating on stage, whether she's coercing several shades of blue out her guitar, or strutting in stilettos: controlling, cajoling, devastating. This, her first DVD release, is taken from the *Uh Huh Her* 2004 tour: snippets of mundane backstage banter and movement are interspersed with riveting live performance, the idea being to provide some sort of visual 'diary', remove some sheen from the finished presentation. It works, mainly because the

songs thus showcased are so fine: one moment Polly is belting out shards of truth on 'Uh Huh Her' like Beth Ditto from The Gossip, the next (on 'Taut') her guitarists are wrenching and pummelling their instruments like they're trying out for Sonic Youth.

In between, we see Polly drunk and smiling (no secrets: she's too experienced an artist for that), stage sets being constructed and dismantled (yawn), soundchecks (double yawn) and the occasional trip through a recording studio. It's worth it, though: Polly long since transcended her debt to Patti Smith and the Delta blues guitarists, and seeing her like this is truly sublime.

Everett True

Nico

All Tomorrow's Parties (Cherry Red)

Live, Nico was terrifying. I saw the doomed ex-Velvet Underground chanteuse play a handful of shows in the early Eighties, sometimes accompanied by the remnants of fiery Scots post-punk band Scars, sometimes solo with her whining pump organ providing sombre, spooked atmosphere. I found her clipped, Germanic pronunciation fascinating, loved the funereal tone of the songs, the torpid ennui. But she was so unnerving! She'd long since finished being a 'Femme Fatale'. Now she was just fatal. I was drawn to – and simultaneously repulsed by – the aura of death that

surrounded her, without knowing why. I had no idea then about her heroin addiction. I had little knowledge of her past. It was her *presence*, her Gothic grandeur, that thrilled me so, not her history.

This live video – grainy footage of an acoustic show at Manchester's library theatre in 1983, a concert with full band back-up, a chilling reading of 'Orly Flight' at the Hacienda's birthday party – captures the feeling well. Indeed, the lo-fi, no frills filming adds to the air of hopelessness. Highlight? The devastating, despairing version of The Doors' 'The End'. Nico totally believed in her own myth.

Everett True

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The first 15 new subscribers also receive an exclusive Rolling Stones CD

Here at *Plan B*, we aren't so down with the male rock icons. Fifties calypso stars, yes. Sixties rock dudes, no. But fuck it, if you're going to tap into that whole rock'n'roll mythology (sunken cheekbones, velvet cuffs, cars in swimming pools), you may as well go back to the originators, **The Rolling Stones**. And to show we ain't biased, to coincide with the 40th Anniversary of the release of the Stones' *Aftermath*, *Plan B* have got 15 copies of the new, judo-hip, doll-cute, limited edition Japanese 'paper sleeve' vinyl-replica reissues of the ABKCO Remasters to give away to subscribers...

To qualify for this offer, please mention **PB12** with your cheque, or in the Paypal comments box.



The next issue of *Plan B* is in independent newsagents, Borders, HMV, Virgin Megastores, and all good record shops the week beginning 7th August, 2006. From the first week of September 2006, *Plan B* will be monthly. If you have difficulty finding a copy, please enquire at your local record shop. For independent newsagents, you can ask them to order it at the counter, or email andrews@warnersgroup.co.uk

A new direction for DIY publishing

DIY publishing: a term redolent of a hands-on, rough-edged, let's-do-the-show right here approach to the creation of literature, right? You know: a bunch of crusties sitting around in a squat, scribbling manuals on bike maintenance and cranking them out on a stolen lithograph machine. An A-Z guide to looking after your girl parts, from drinking raspberry leaf tea to tone the uterus to inducing a miscarriage with parsley and goldenseal, produced by a Brooklyn feminist collective in 1978 and in (self-)production ever since. A punk kid's travel writings, all hand-drawn in pencil, fed through a photocopier, and distributed via underground distributors from Merseyside to Montreal. Wacky shit: wierd shit, too out there to be considered good enough for a 'real' publisher; stuff with deliberately low production values; stuff with a confrontational

books aren't trust-fund babies, rich kids pissing around producing vanity projects to promote themselves and their friends. They're people like you and me, they had an idea and they made it happen.

"Simone and I were visiting our friend Linda in Istanbul," explains Corinn, as we sit in her attic apartment surrounded by proofs for the book she's working on. "She's an artist, and she was awarded a grant to live out there and work with. She's an avid photographer as well, and had a huge collection of images from her time spent living in Istanbul, Birmingham and Zurich. At the time, the discussion around the EU was very active, and the images can be seen to be a part of that – all of these cities are in Europe, but only one of them is in the EU; what does it mean to be from Europe in this day and age? In what ways are we united or divided?"

Ah yes, the money question. As someone who spent a good few years pouring cash into a fanzine which was then given away completely free, I feel entitled to ask. *Birmingham, Istanbul, Zurich* is a hardcover art book with glossy, thick pages and full-bleed photographs. How do you fund all this?

"The first book was funded through Linda's grant – but printing costs in Istanbul are very reasonable. We published 1,000 copies and paid a very cheap price for everything, including high-tech scans. The books are sold throughout Europe and I can combine this with my day job as a bookseller. But even so, it's not so much about numbers of sales – and we can afford that, because we all have full-time jobs as well as running Passenger Books. What's important to us is the books themselves – the design, how they look, how



aesthetic; stuff that is – in the eyes of the mainstream – shitty, shoddy, lame. Right?

Well, yes. And no. While seizing the means of production in order to disseminate all that crazy subversive jive-talk is of course an excellent and time-honoured offshoot of mainstream literature (though somewhat redundant since the popularisation of Old Mama Internet), there's more to independent publishing than this. There's the magazine you hold in your hands, for one thing. Sniff those shiny pages – tasty, huh? Stroke it across your cheek. And then there are the beautiful art books put out by Passenger Books, a new pan-European publishing imprint that has its roots firmly in the underground/DIY scenes – though you wouldn't necessarily guess it from the three beautifully printed and bound books they've put out so far.

Passenger Books was founded in 2005 by sisters Corinn and Simone Gerber, and their friend Peter Gorschulter. Each resides in a different European city (Corinn lives in Cologne, Simone in Zurich, and Peter in Dusseldorf) and their books are printed in Istanbul, with production overseen by Linda Herzog, an artist and friend who currently lives out there. So far, so swish. But the people putting out these

"So we decided to publish the photographs as a book (*Birmingham, Istanbul, Zurich*, Linda Herzog, Passenger Books 2005). We began researching printers in Istanbul straightaway, and I was astonished – the companies out there have very high-tech Heidelberg machines, so they can produce beautiful books; but at the same time they don't really know how to use them, so you have to be very careful when overseeing the production."

Publishing a hardback book with little experience isn't the easiest thing in the world, of course. "Production was a bit of a nightmare. I was in Cologne, while Linda, who didn't speak Turkish at the time, was trying to liaise with the printers. We both didn't know much publishing lingo – and of course my first language is German..."

But this, she explains, is part of what the whole project is about. "Passenger Books is not just about the object you hold in your hands. It's about the social aspect – working together despite being based in different countries – and also the method and means of production. It's important to us that the books are produced in Istanbul. It's not just about going for the cheapest printers, which is usually the deciding factor... though of course, that was a consideration."

the reader interacts with the text. We want to make stuff that is special."

The second book they distributed, a collaboration with Cologne label Tomlab – is certainly that. Called *The Empty Sleeve*, it's an album by artist/illustrator David Shrigley, except – well, there's no album inside. The publication looks like a normal gatefold album sleeve, but then you open it up – to be greeted a couple of bright, impasto paintings spelling out the words 'UGLY' and 'CUNTS' – and there's just a songbook, and an empty paper sleeve. The sleeve has a drawing of a record on it with the words "I DIDN'T MAKE A RECORD/I COULDN'T BE BOTHERED TO MAKE A RECORD/IT WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO DIFFICULT/IT WAS EASIER NOT TO MAKE A RECORD" in distinctive Shrigley handwriting.

"There were 2,000 of these, and they're all sold out now. This is a song book with song text, and the idea is that you can sing the songs if you want. It's an art-object, this one – it costs €25 – but we're thinking of making a soft-cover book, a cheaper one, that everyone can afford. Tomlab are currently getting submissions from various bands who've recorded songs with the lyrics Shrigley has written, so this time, the book will include a CD of these

songs with the soft-cover version – and maybe a full-sized LP as well.”

Passenger Books’ next project – is a collection of the drawings of Ingo Giezendanner, the artist behind GRRRR.net. These are highly detailed black-and-white felt-tipped pictures – reportage of industrial scenes done with such intricacy that it sometimes tips over into eye-wateringly beautiful surrealism. They’ve also just produced a series of limited edition buttons featuring works by Maurizio Cattelan, Peter Fischli and David Weiss, GRRRR.net, Wilhelm Hein, Diango Hernández, Linda Herzog, Jörg Immendorff, Mickry3, Jonathan Monk, Linda Neutral, Daniel Roth, Allen Ruppersberg, David Shrigley, and AK Wehrli – “something tiny, that everyone can afford,” explains Corinn.



With *Birmingham*, *Istanbul*, *Zurich* recently awarded Most Beautiful Swiss Book 2005 and selected for the German Photography Book Award 2005, the existence of Passenger Books is testament to the fact that independent publishing, DIY ethics and high production values can make very happy bedfellows indeed.

www.passengerbooks.com

call for submissions: the riot project

Were you involved in riot grrrl in the UK or Europe? Were you in a band, or did you set up a label, run meetings or picnics, create fanzines? I'm currently researching for a book on riot grrrl and its modern-day legacy, and am seeking interviewees, archive materials, etc: everything from press coverage, zine excerpts, and diary entries to album/tape sleeves and flyer and manifesto designs. Please drop me a line if you can help! ampster@gmail.com.

Miss AMP



'We want to make stuff that is special'



single minded

Words: Greg Smyth

Brian Wood goes back to his indie roots with two new comics series

In the post-*Watchmen* rush to establish the graphic novel as a legitimate medium in its own right and the ensuing flood of articles on how comics had 'grown up', it seemed that somewhere along the line the simple, visceral thrill of picking up a comic had been forgotten. Just as the music business became increasingly about flogging albums rather than singles, so the comics market eschewed the humble charms of the pamphlet.

Luckily, a band of like-minded professionals is reclaiming the single as the weapon of choice and chief among them is comic writer, artist and graphic designer Brian Wood.

Wood burst onto the scene in the late Nineties with futurist anti-propaganda screed *Channel Zero*, a hyper-hip and politically opinionated blast of Orwellian prescience. Its success pushed Wood front and centre but, after a brief flirtation with the mainstream, he returned to his indie roots with a number of books, most notably the critically acclaimed mini-series *Demo*.

"The initial concept of *Demo* came from some old ideas I had when I was writing [X-Men spin-off] *Generation X* for Marvel," he explains, "but I was going about it in an entirely different way, very indie and down to earth, without any of the more fantastical, idealised elements that typically make up a standard Marvel book. I burned through those ideas pretty quickly, and that's when the themes started to get a little broader. *Demo* is 12 stories written over 18 months – it seems natural that it would evolve."

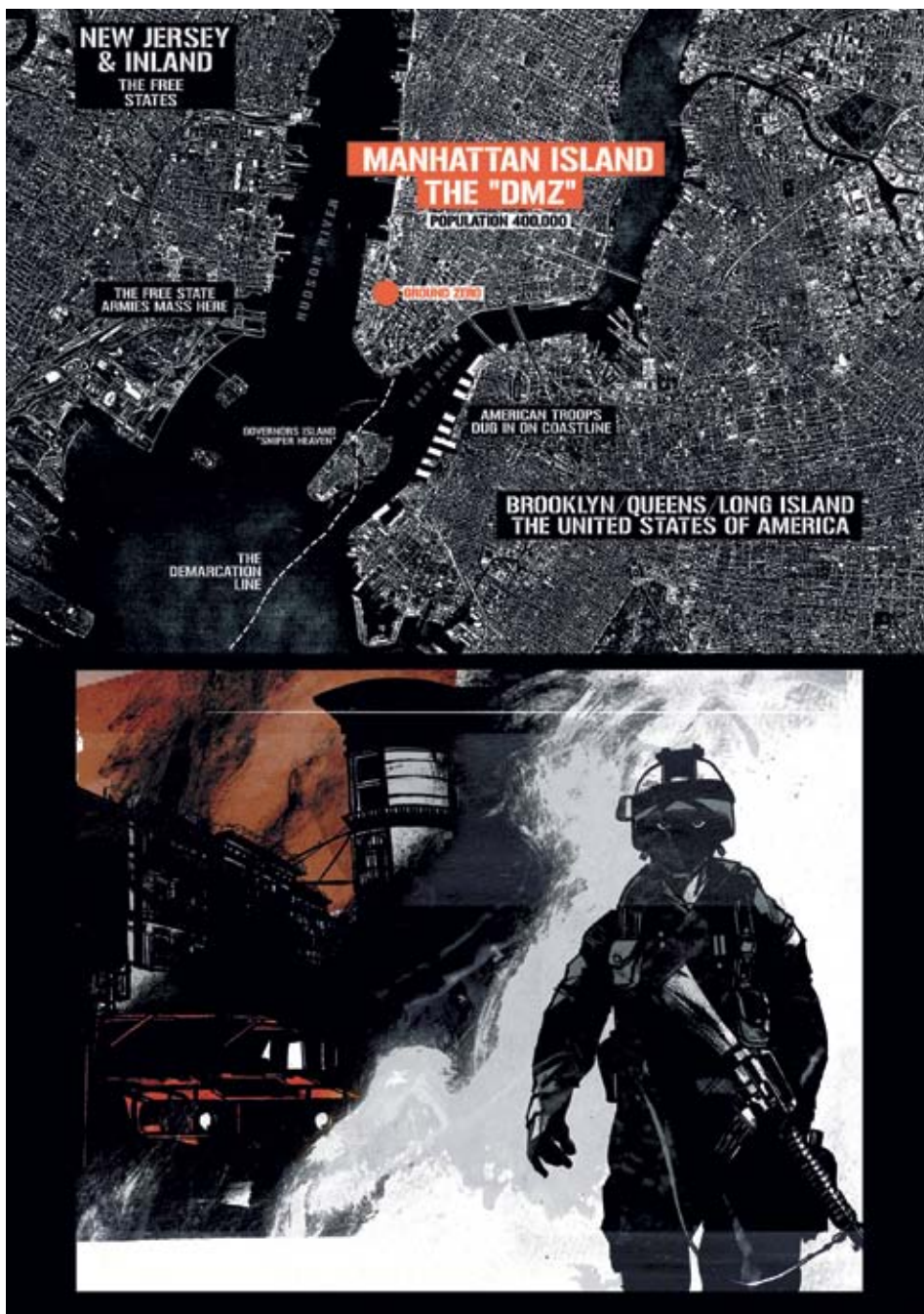
Through a judicious combination of word of mouth and keeping the issues in print, *Demo* became a sleeper hit. Did Wood expect such a positive response to the book?

"I was surprised. At the time it was peaking, [*Demo*] was by far the most successful of my indie books. I knew the readers would be able to connect with it, but I wasn't sure how much the retail community would support it. As it turns out, they embraced it right away."

Following up *Demo* was never going to be an easy task, but Wood has risen to the challenge with two new monthly series. *DMZ* (with Riccardo Burchielli) is a dystopian vision of Bush-era America, boiled over into full-scale civil war.

Following trainee photojournalist Matty, left stranded in the demilitarised zone of downtown Manhattan, it's a finely balanced book, careful not to take sides. The crux of its appeal is the way Wood ekes out the little personal stories amid the guerrilla war.

"People read it as biased and partisan anyway, so it doesn't seem to have mattered what my intentions were. The point of the book was to create a huge scenario [around] the clashing of two extremes, and focusing on the 'normal' people caught in the middle. I'm not deliberately trying to take a middle road for the sake



'Writing comics for others to draw is incredibly satisfying in its own way'

of a broader readership; the story lies in the middle road."

Local (with Ryan Kelly), meanwhile, is closer to *Demo* in execution: 12 one-shots, linked by the cross-country travels of lynchpin character Megan. Often, though, Megan is merely a bit player in the stories Wood has to tell, which deal with notions of family or, in a particularly tender issue, the deteriorating friendships in a band long run dry of any common interest.

Both books show a real fondness for location. How important is his environment to Wood creatively?

"I moved from NYC to San Francisco a few years ago and immediately hated it and regretted the decision," he admits. "Not too surprisingly, it was shortly after that move that the idea for

Local came about, as well as *DMZ*. I moved back to NYC after about a year [but] the experience really got me thinking about how notions of home, hometowns and where you live can shape your identity, and even your actions."

Key to each book's success is the strong art team, especially on *Demo*, where Beccy Cloonan's style flowed effortlessly from the cute and mangae-sque to impressionistic thick lines and heavy blacks. But with all these collaborations, doesn't Wood long to get back to drawing?

"I would love to draw more, but I'm not very fast," he says. "Writing comics for others to draw is incredibly satisfying in its own way. I feel blessed to be able to collaborate with so many great artists, and they've only made the stories better."

In an industry that for too long has been about the overlong cocaine-fuelled double album, Brian Wood might well be the master of the single – the 22-page Phil Spector.

The collected edition of Demo is out now on AiT/PlanetLar. Monthly instalments of DMZ (DC/Vertigo) and Local (Oni Press) are available from all good comic shops. www.brianwood.com

boy's own adventures

Words: Alistair Fitchett

Alistair Fitchett owns up to some guilty pleasures and old favourites

I don't know if it was the unusually elongated chill of winter, the upheaval of a house full of builders or the imminent approach of my 40th birthday, but the past few months feel like they have been ones of guilty pleasures. By that, I mean that my spare time seems to have been filled with culture that makes few demands on my deeper cerebral functions. It's been music that keeps me warm, moves my feet and brings a smile to my chapped lips, and comics that make me laugh and that thrill my senses, that take me out and away from the harsh realities of life and growing old.

So no tortured autobiographical angst for me. No, instead I've been reading lots of *Asterix* books. As a kid I always wanted to read *Asterix* but never had the chance. Books were meant to be about words, and I was too clever for picture books. I went along with that. So my friends read *Asterix* while I read... *The Three Investigators* and *Hardy Boys* novels probably. Which is another story entirely.

But *Asterix*. Fantastic. What's not to love about *Asterix*? French dudes drink magic potion, go on adventures, beat up the Italians, come home, eat boar, get drunk. It's such a great formula; simple and effective, no nonsense. Well, lots of nonsense actually, which is part of the appeal. *Asterix* is something you either love or loathe, but you'll rarely find a comic as perfectly paced or as wonderfully drawn. Illustrator Albert Uderzo throws in lots of visual jokes and puns to compliment René Goscinny's classic stories, and everyone lives happily ever after. Except the Romans of course.

Part of my (re)discovery of *Asterix* was down to a frame from Philippe Dupuy and Charles Berberian's *Mr Jean* stories. It was just a throwaway reference, but it was enough to make me want to explore, to make me warm even more to the Drawn And Quarterly-published *Get A Life* collection.

Another treasure from a past that was only tangentially my own was the discovery of Titan Books' *The Steel Claw: Vanishing Man* collection. These treats of classic Sixties British comics were originally published in the *Valiant* weekly, and while the character has surfaced at times in the intervening years (notably reprised by Grant Morrison in his *Zenith* strip for *2000AD* and as a fleeting cameo as The Iron Tallon during the Alan Moore and Alan Davies run with *Captain Britain*), it's these collected early tales which really tell the story of both the cultural context of the times, and of the awesome drawing style of Jesus Blasco.

Speaking of Alan Moore, this issue's essential Moore reference has to be the *DC Universe: The Stories Of Alan Moore*. It's a classy collection that superbly showcases Moore's plotting and story telling skills, not least in the legendary Superman tale *Whatever Happened To The Man Of Tomorrow?* and the award winning *Batman: The Killing Joke*. For the dedicated comics' fan, there will be little here that they haven't already rabidly devoured, but for piqued newcomers and those sceptical of picking up something featuring men in tights, this is a fabulously seductive and convincing collection.

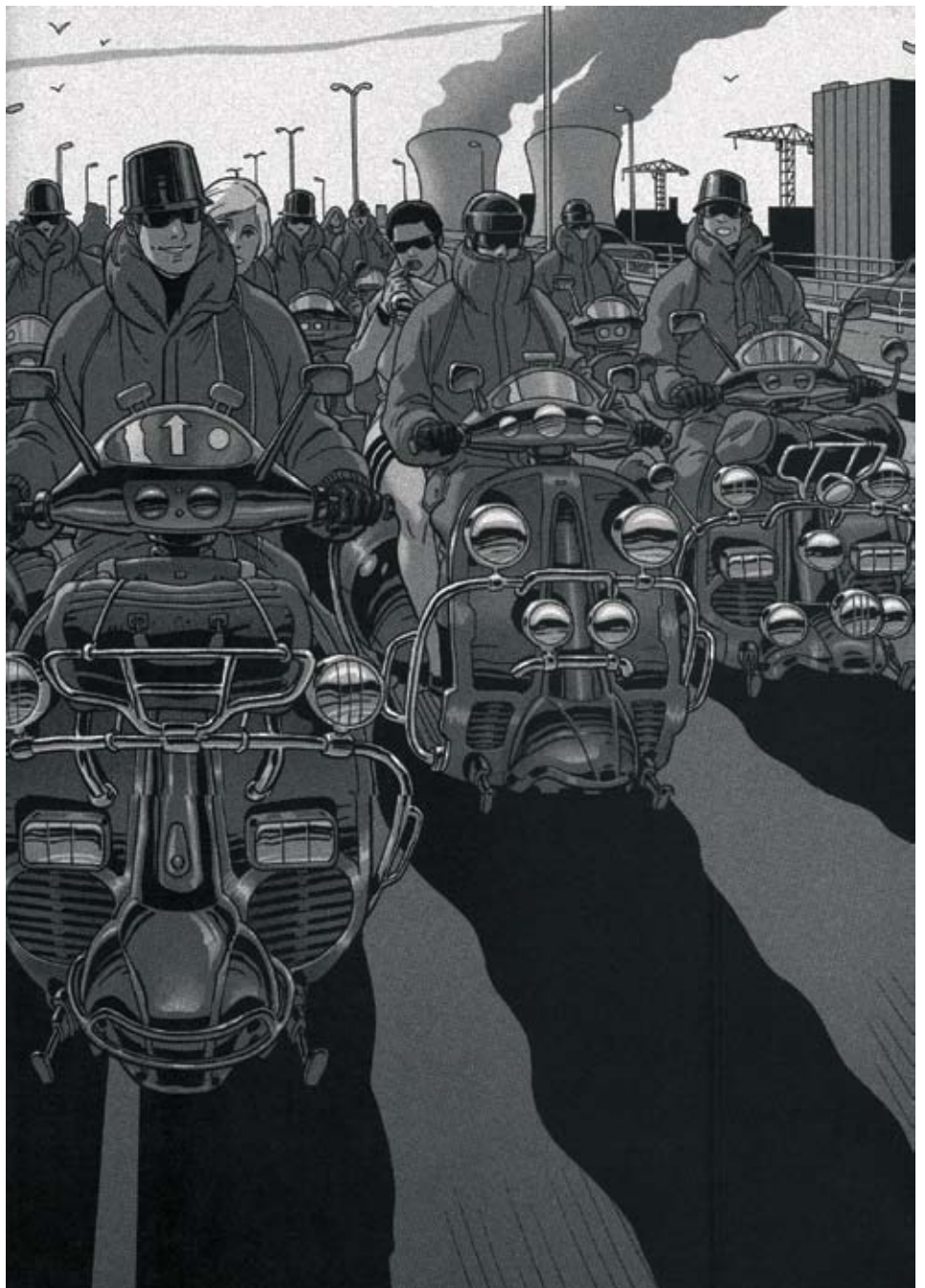
And since we're on a superhero kick, what about the recently published *Batman* tomes *Year One: Ra's al ghul* and *The Omac Project*? OK, so *The Omac Project* is perhaps not strictly a *Batman* book, being part of the *Infinite Crisis* collection, but it's a fantastic, gripping read, and has The Blue Beetle featuring strongly, so what more do you want? Since you ask, I could certainly want for more of

the *Batman* spin-off *Gotham Central*, which closed its doors recently after 40 issues. Greg Rucka, who was responsible for the gritty *noir* stories of the Gotham Police Dept, has now taken over the reins of *Supergirl* and that, along with the demise of *Batgirl* (Cassandra Cain bowing out with more of a whimper than a bang in issue 73) is almost enough to have me surrendering my caped loyalties.

The Originals is basically Quadrophenia with a retro-futurist slant

Finally, it's been a case of back to the future with the Eisner award winning *The Originals* from *Watchmen* co-creator Dave Gibbons (illustration below). *The Originals* is basically *Quadrophenia* with a barely disguised retro-futurist slant. The Mods are The Originals, the Rockers are The Dirt and they all go down to the seaside (the pleasuredome of Drinkwater) for a weekend of music, dancing, pill-popping, sex and fighting. A throwaway and utterly Pop tome that presses all the right buttons, *The Originals* is a stylish tribute to the original Modernists and to the fabulous folly of youth. The last to one page sees main character Lel standing alone against a wall. "It's my birthday next week," he says. "I'll be 18. Fucking 18." And then, over the page, in tiny letters, the finale: "Suddenly, I'm Old."

I know the feeling.





how naked are we gonna get?

Words: Sophie Mayer

Unbuttoning *The Notorious Bettie Page*

"Finally, and crucially, in an affront to costume drama's tender sensibilities, the costumes come off."

So concludes Julianna Pidduck in *Contemporary Costume Film* (BFI). What we really want to see, she argues, are the modern, naked bodies (proof that people in the past had bodies, too) beneath the layers of petticoats or pantaloons. Elaborate costumes and stuffy historical eras just make the striptease more fun.

Jane Campion and others have undone the corset of the 19th Century, which leaves viewers casting around for a new repressive era whose uncomfortable underwear and furtive sexuality can educate and titillate us: the Fifties. *Vera Drake*, *Good Night, And Good Luck* – and *The Notorious Bettie Page*.

Unsurprisingly, given the climate of censorship in the US right now, Mary Harron's film begins with a customer in an adult store in Fifties New York asking in a whisper for the 'hard stuff'. The store and its racks of naturist magazines are lovingly recreated, suggestive of an era more innocent than our own: his hard stuff – pictures of the title character in knee-high patent boots – looks like contemporary high street advertising. Page is a kitsch icon, but the film seems almost nostalgic for a time when posing naked was at once frisky fun for church-going gals and a weighty matter of censorship.

The feverish anticipation surrounding the film suggests that women taking off their clothes – or rather, costumes, given the claustrophobic accuracy of the reproductions – still gets viewers (and censors) hot under the collar. Yet the film raises questions

about costume drama while not raising the temperature in the theatre one bit. Harron, whose overly precise recreation of (the novel as) *nouvelle cuisine* sucked the paranoia and political critique from *American Psycho*, creates a Bettie Page that the viewer *cannot* find sexy, despite the lush black and white cinematography and Gretchen Mol's assured performance.

Costumes spend a fair amount of time coming off, but the film eschews the rhythm of a striptease, offering Bettie's first nude shoot early on. After that, it's less about what she takes off and more about what she puts on. Even in the nude shoot, both Mol and the film seem more attentive to the period-perfect halter bikini than to Bettie's sense of her own body. Pidduck's idea (taken from Stella Bruzzi) that these are really dramas of 'costume fetishism' is doubled in the scenes of Bettie's shoots with Irving and Paula Klaw (Chris Bauer and Lily Taylor), who are closed down for indecency by Senator Estes Kefauver (David Strathairn, reprising his speech patterns and hairstyle from *Good Night, And Good Luck*, albeit on the other side of censorship).

Boots, cuffs, bodices, blindfolds: these become the stars of the show as Bettie, coached by the wonderfully complex Paula, who claims that her 'special clients' are men whose buttoned-down lives give them an interest in restraint, happily accedes to scenes without comment, just as the film literally makes no comment in its elliptical references to Bettie's abusive husband, gang rape and (possibly) incest.

As Pidduck points out, there are hardly any films about women creative geniuses that aren't also victimologies: Agnès Merlet's *Artemisia* – like Julie Taymor's far superior *Frida* and the Virginia Woolf segment of *The Hours* – focuses on the creative woman as injured victim rather than impassioned artist. Sally Potter's *Orlando* ends with the protagonist presenting her manuscript to a publisher in contemporary London, but there's no point in the film at which we see him/her writing this *magnum opus*.

As in *Bettie Page*, the plot of *Orlando* turns on a moment of nudity, in which Orlando (Tilda Swinton) contemplates the reflection of her (newly-female) body with the same dry wit as s/he addresses everything else in the film – and proceeding to wrestle with the entrapping hall of mirrors, symbolised by paradoxically flouncy costumes, imposed on women in the 'costume drama' era. Bettie, as legendary photographer Bunny Yeager (Sarah Paulson) notes, is never naked, even with

'Boots, cuffs, bodices, blindfolds: these become the stars of the show'

her clothes off, because there's no sense that she is revealing anything: the only insight that we have into Bettie's subjectivity is her belief in an alternately benign and vindictive God, whose bondage and domination seem far more unpleasant than Bettie's work for the Klaws.

The final section of the film begins with Bettie arraying herself for work as a missionary, with the same attention to detail as any of the restaged shoots. As a man who recognises her as she is reading from the Bible in Central Park tells her, Bettie will never be free of her photographed body. Its 'tender sensibilities' are the costume that she is trying to take off, like Queen Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett) at the end of *Elizabeth*, disguising her body's naked history – as we watch these films eager to recover exactly that.



get me away from here, i'm dying

Words: SF Said

Christi Puiu on comedy, tragedy and *The Death Of Mr Lazarescu*

OK, be warned: this film's a hard sell. But since when was *Plan B* about selling? For me, it's about sharing discoveries and passions, spreading the word on stuff which the mainstream would never deem to notice.

The Death Of Mr Lazarescu, the second film from young Romanian director Christi Puiu, pretty much defines that category. It's a two-and-half-hour film about an old man dying alone in the Bucharest night. And it's brilliant.

This film's a hard sell, isn't it?

"I know, I can't imagine how to sell a film like this."

How did you get people to see it in Romania?

"Very few people go to the cinema in Romania; we have 20 channels of TV, and people watch sitcoms. So we promoted our film by relating it to sitcoms. When the film was presented at the Transylvanian Film Festival, the audience thought they were coming to a comedy. It was like they were watching *Mr Bean*: they laughed from the beginning to the end, almost. Ten minutes before the end, they stopped laughing, because then they saw that this was no joke."

There were times I laughed too, but I don't see it as a comedy – do you?

"No, I don't. Though the film does have some comic situations, even if they are black. And some people were laughing to escape the painful situation they were dragged into. You can laugh this way; protecting yourself. But some

people cried. Everyone has different reactions."

I've been watching someone close to me dying recently, and it's horrible. I don't see any redemption or anything, like you would in a Hollywood film; it's just horrible.

"I see it like this too. I'm not very optimistic. I think we are doomed; we are condemned to this absurd life, and there is no way out. The traditional picture of departure – as an old man, like 120 years old, lying on your bed, surrounded by your family – this has nothing to do with real life."

'I'm not very optimistic. I think we are doomed'

How would you like to die, if you could choose?

"There are some hills outside Bucharest that I like to visit, and the idea of death seems so normal there – I'm part of this cycle of regeneration, nature and so on. But we don't dare to face death in town; we just want to get as much pleasure as we can. That's probably why I am so afraid of death. And because I am afraid of it, I would prefer to die instantaneously."

Me too! I'm all for having a big heart attack, before my body starts failing.

"Yes. Big heart attack, all in one second, and bye bye."

Three...Extremes

Japan/South Korea/Hong Kong, 2006

This East Asian portmanteau movie gives three of the most inimitable directors from the region the opportunity to express what they believe horror to be.

Japan's Takashi Miike is the master of cinematic provocation. His works range from love-and-torture tale *Audition*, through incest essay *Visitor Q*, to any number of subversive yakuza flicks. He's less acknowledged for his lyricism, which is striking in 'Box', the claustrophobic tale of a writer who fears being buried alive. Miike's compositions are uncharacteristically static and spare, yet he displays his usual disregard for narrative structure with unmatched flair.

Where Miike is subdued, South Korea's Park Chan-Wook (the *Vengeance* trilogy) is hysterical with the meta-film 'Cut', in which a movie director protagonist is forced to watch his wife's fingers being cut off by a disgruntled extra.

Most mesmerising is Fruit Chan's 'Dumplings'. Its horror lies in the hyper-everyday, with much of the action occurring in a run-down area of Hong Kong. Yet Christopher Doyle lenses the film with the same sort of sensuous clarity he's brought to Wong Kar-Wai's work. The story of an aging woman who'll do anything to remain young enables Chan to blend the horrid crunch of sinewy flesh and bone with the pleasure of eating. It's a boldness that pays off, and one he elaborates in the equally successful full-length feature, *Dumplings*.

Stewart Gardiner



Access All Areas

June-July 2006, NFT, London

Stack of great rock movies being shown during this season. The jaw-dropping *Abba: The Movie*. The evil that lurks within the hearts of men in *Gimme Shelter*. Funk maestros strutting their good stuff in *Wattstax*. *Ziggy Stardust*. And so on...

There are also more recent offerings – the caustic, insightful dissemination of mid-Nineties Seattle music in *Hype!*, Sub Pop founders Jon and Bruce absolute stars; the electrifying and downright painful insight into on-the-road indie life, *Dig!*; the fine Undertones movie *Teenage Kicks* – worth seeing if only to catch John Peel talking with customary enthusiasm, *The Fearless Freaks* starring The Flaming Lips (pictured right); and the excellent 1994 Jeff 'Daniel Johnston' Fueerzig documentary *Half Japanese: The Band That Would Be King*.

See Jad explain his theory of music: there are only two types of songs, monster songs and love songs. See Jad explain precisely why The Beatles pale into insignificance next to his jarring, beautiful, adrift music. Watch Matador Records founder Gerard Cosloy come across as the ultimate rock nerd.



Marvel at Penn Jillette's hair. A funny, touching and inspirational couple of hours spent in the company of the sweetest man in America, and his brother. What could be better?

Everett True

art



fellow americans

Words: Jack Lewis and Marci LeBrun

Jack Lewis reports from New York City's Whitney Biennial

Day For Night

Curated by Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne

The historically problematic Whitney Biennial is meant to embody an array of contemporary trends in American art. The curators of this year's edition smartly decided to question the idea of what it means to be an 'American' artist.

Upon entering the museum, at the elevator, visitors are greeted with Aaron Young's large rock sculpture with the words 'LOCALS ONLY!' spray-painted on it. Young, a surfer, has in the past created similar ad hoc signs at secret surfing spots in order to claim them for his own. In this show, his sign reads as a comment on America's conflicted immigration policies and also as an attack on casual art viewers, drawn to the Biennial like rubber-neckers to an accident.

Just when I thought photo-realism had become repetitive, Marilyn Minter shows two dazzling, photo-realistic paintings full of sweaty glitter, high-heeled dirty feet and garish charm. Hannah Greely's 'Silencer' (above) is a sculpture of a baby hiding its head under a winter coat. It looks how I imagine many Americans feel: infantile, helpless and scared of the world.

In a room all its own, there's a group of work including Jamal Cyrus' 'The Dowling Street Martyr Brigade'. The piece collages a Black Panther image on top of the cover of Cream's *Disraeli Gears* album, as if the Panthers are reclaiming the guitar licks Eric Clapton 'borrowed' from the blues. Also hidden away on the fifth floor mezzanine is the evocative 'Down By Law'. Curated by the Wrong Gallery, the mini-show features over 40 artists and includes a hidden pipe bomb, a classical portrait of the Unabomber, mugshots (OJ Simpson, Eddie Murphy, 9-11 terrorists) and other work about what it is to be an outlaw in America.

On the fringe of the art world lives the black magic practitioner and Sixties film icon Kenneth Anger. Here, he shows a selection of work including stills from past films (*Invocation Of My Demon Brother* with Mick Jagger) and his new video 'Mouse Heaven', a series of four erotically charged music videos featuring

'We wanted to tell people about America's neverending struggle between order and disorder'

vintage Mickey Mouse toys performing choreographed dance routines in compromising positions. Meanwhile, Daniel Johnston and Jim O'Rourke battle it out for best musician/artist. O'Rourke's dull video piece about doors called 'Door' pales in comparison to Johnston's disturbing id-inspired illustrations.

With so many artists, it was easy to overlook Robert Gober's subtle '1978-2000', a black and white photo essay about a drive to the beach; a classic all-American activity. At the centre of the work one can see two re-photographed newspaper articles about the murder of a man who was presumed gay. It's an eerie comment about America's quest for entertainment/escape (a trip to the beach), freedom (choice of religious views) and its hidden demons.

Impatient viewers looking for immediate satisfaction are drawn instead into a makeshift theatre with plush seats. There, they are treated/punished with Francesco Vezzoli's 'Trailer For A Remake Of Gore Vidal's *Caligula*', a trailer for a non-existent B-film referring to the Bush administration's abuse of power.

Although this isn't an overtly political Biennial, one can't deny a subversive undercurrent in a lot of the work. It feels playful and raw and even hopeful at times. Gioni, from the Wrong Gallery, sums up 'Down by Law', and I think, the Biennial when he explains: "We wanted to tell people something about America's neverending struggle between order and disorder, between control and freedom... I think America is many things. The great thing about it is that people imagine it and live it in different ways". (Thanks to Kate Wolf)



Dada's Boys: Identity And Play In Contemporary Art

27.05.06–16.07.06, The Fruitmarket Gallery, 45 Market Street, Edinburgh

There has recently been much debate about 'reactionary modernism' – the continuous lines that connect the spirit of European utopianism (and its negation) between the two World Wars and American neo-liberalism (free market capitalism, personal fulfilment through universal democracy, etc), which has ruled the waves since.

Duchamp and Picabia, the original Dadaists in this show, which documents the preoccupation of the post-Dada tradition of American artists with "male identity... irreverent humour, self-consciously laddish repartee, preoccupation with taboo bodily processes... ", would probably roll in their graves laughing upon hearing the words 'post' and 'tradition' in relation to Dada. Sadly, the tradition of the avant-garde as a groovy old dad(a)dy that teenage boys are busy rebelling against has managed to suppress the amazing forgotten female artists of the Modernist period – where are all the Mama's boys? Nevertheless, an exploration of infantile humour as a critique of American values of normality doesn't sound like a bad way to spend an afternoon.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv



Future City: Experiment And Utopia In Architecture 1956-2006

15.06.06–17.09.06, Barbican Art Gallery, London

If politicians had not stood in the way of Utopian architects since the Sixties, we would all be living in fully automated palaces in the sky floating above an ocean of metallic liquid by now. Your parents would probably be living in a satellite suburb over Florida, and Hackney would have its own underground service.

In *Future City*, the Barbican celebrates the beautiful, visionary and occasionally naïve dreams of the life that could have been after the abolishment of war, poverty and famine. Lebbeus Woods imagines parasitic structures precariously dangling from the ruins of postwar European cities, ready for occupation by upwardly mobile squatters, while Zaha Hadid borrows geological forms to rewrite urbanism. Perhaps not a single structure featured in this exhibition will ever be built, but the influence of these radical re-thinkers of the way we live reaches beyond concrete and MDF, and it sure looks pretty.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv



Staalplaat Soundsystem: The Ultrasound Of Therapy

24.06.06–30.07.06, Cornerhouse, 70 Oxford Street, Manchester

After having their details taken by a woman in nurse's uniform, visitors to Manchester's Cornerhouse will be admitted to a cubicle, complete with hospital bed, where artist 'doctors' and 'nurses' will treat their 'patients' with personalised sound therapies. These include the 'Hot Shaking' therapy in which the patient lies on a bed with an electrical blanket and a massage machine controlled by sound. AEG takes body sounds and two bass shakers are mounted under the bed, while a soundtrack of Seventies porno is heard through headphones, apparently. Although this sounds like a cross between an art guerrilla intervention and *Carry On Nurse*, the Staalplaat art collective explores quite serious issues such as the physiological and therapeutic aspects of music, the link between performance and medicine, art and healing.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv



Mike Nelson: Amnesiac Shrine

07.06.06–30.07.06, Matt's Gallery, 42-44 Copperfield Road, London E3

Although in the last five years or so labyrinths have become far too fashionable in the art world – from Gregor Schneider's to Gavin Turk's – nobody does them as well as Mike Nelson. Over a succession of shows at the ICA and the Venice Biennial Nelson has constructed complicated sites in which half-forgotten fragments of fiction are set out through stage props, allowing the viewer to walk through an abandoned film project and become its unintentional protagonist. Like a hellish theme park operated by William Burroughs' gangs of wild boys, a Mike Nelson labyrinth can be anything from old governmental offices occupied by bikers on acid to a Moroccan street market in a disused cold war nuclear bunker. 'Amnesiac Shrine' promises the return of the Amnesiacs, a mythical biker gang, and the construction of, naturally, a shrine. You are invited to come, worship and try not to forget.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

games



Guitar Hero

(PS2)

This is to other rhythm-action games as *Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure* is to anything else, ever. 1) An awesomely dumb thing best appreciated by smart people and 2) Just better, fucko. What is it? It's a plastic guitar you plug into your PS2, press its buttons in time with assorted Rock Classics and then have random friends arrive at your door post-pub demanding to have a go. That's what it is. It also deconstructs each song acting as a piece of interactive criticism which... oh, fuggetit! You can talk big-brained about it all day, but it's just more fun than having a Fascist Dictatorship all of your own.

Now, there's people online with heads full of binary-spangles who've worked out how to plug the plastic guitar into a PC and get it to work as a proper instrument. It can only be a matter of time until we see someone on the cover of *Plan B* totting a tiny Plastic Guitar provocatively. And it will be a better world. Mark my words.

Kieron Gillen



Singstar Rocks

(PS2)

The PS2-does-karaoke-but-better game reaches the world of rock. That is, just stuff with guitars.

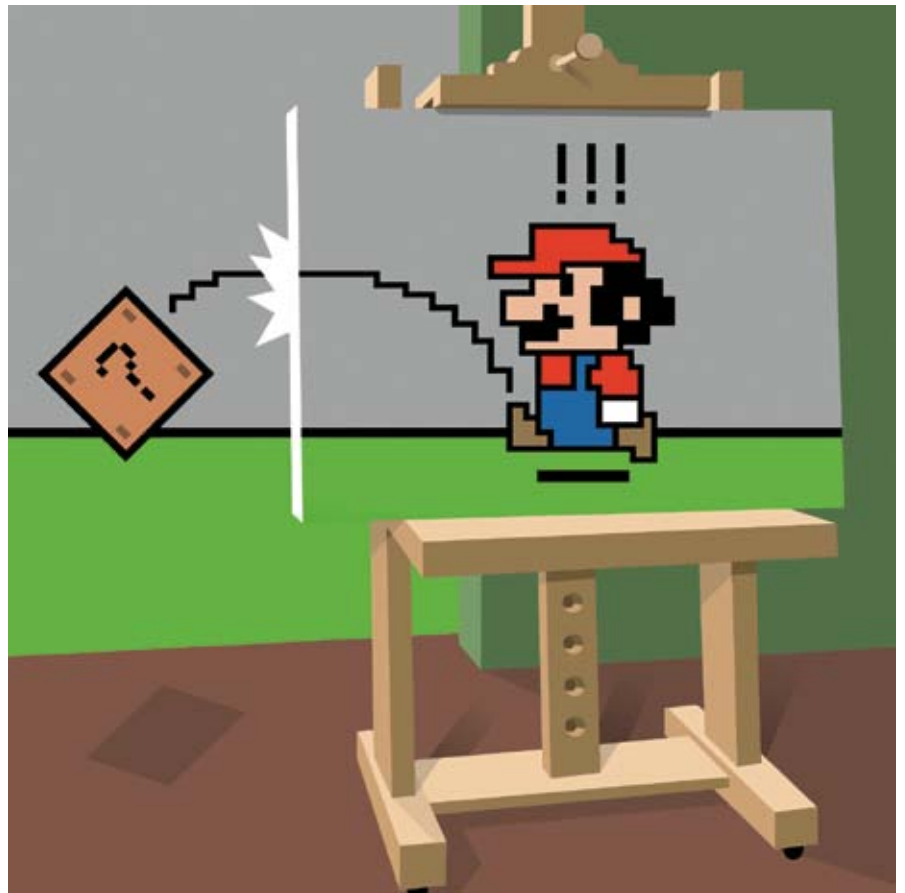
Heavy weighting towards the sort of fatty deposits building up on pop's great vessels preparing for the final blood-shooting-from-eyeball coronary death spasm of modern culture, which means far too much time is spent flicking past tracks trying to find the handful you dig (or are willing to admit you dig, for the more elitist parties).

There are too few sausages on sticks, too many bad fringes.

Perhaps useful as a critique tool — you really have no idea how bad Razorlight are until you actually have to sing their lyrics — but nowhere near as overwhelmingly life-affirmingly essential as the Singstar Eighties edition.

In short: Should have been brilliant. But it has Keane on it.

Kieron Gillen



Super Mario Brothers and the human condition

Words: **Mathew Kumar**

Illustration: **Matt Pattinson**

I've been playing *Electroplankton*.

Like many other people disappointed with the current trends apparent in videogames, where you aren't having fun until you've shot a hooker through the head to increase your street credibility-o-meter, I hoped for a gaming experience in which I was allowed to just play.

Yeah: Still hoping.

Japanese media artist, Toshio Iwai, has created a piece of software that no matter how hard you try, you just can't call a game. It's little more than a collection of quickly boring sound-creating art pieces. Even the potential-filled 'Beatnes', in which you can create delightfully quirky tunes from NES sounds effects, is scuppered by an inability to record your creations or sustain a tune for any length of time. No matter how much I wanted to like *Electroplankton*, in its attempts to be art, it didn't succeed in being a game. It doesn't even succeed in being art.

Kind of works both ways. I found myself at the reception for a small art exhibition at the InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre in Toronto. *Controller: Artists Crack The Game Code* was an exhibition showing works from artists working in the field of videogame modification. I hoped to be far more impressed than I was with *Electroplankton*.

That hoping word again. Bastard hoping.

Walking into the small gallery just on the edge of the fashionable Queen West artist's district, I was caught off

guard by what appeared to be a Ms Pacman machine. I was two syllables off. Ms Pacmondrian, the creation of Toronto-based media collective Prize Budget for Boys, was an arcade machine conceived to use Piet Mondrian's 'Broadway Boogie-Woogie' as a map for Ms Pacman. If you're aware of the piece, you'll understand how obvious that is. But as a piece of art, it had very little to say or offer about either of its sources. An entirely unplayable game and a trivial piece of art, it seemed to establish that games don't become art through simple combination.

By far the most well known works on show were presented by Myfanwy Ashmore. Her *Mario Trilogy*, simplistic modifications of the original NES title *Super Mario Bros*, removes all features and architecture from the levels, leaving an empty landscape in which the player is invited to take Mario for a walk. As a gamer, I found the pieces quickly boring, but was that because I'm too used to being told what to do in videogames?

Faced with the futility of Mario's existence in 'Mario_battle_no1', Ashmore told me how others chose to deal with it: "One person spent the entire time trying to get at the only question mark block I left that is inaccessible, until they died. Another person ran as far as possible until they died, others danced, jumped, were silly, and one guy shoved a floppy into the controller to wedge it so that he wouldn't actually have to play, and

walked away. I figured he was probably in upper management."

Other pieces included RSG (Alexander Galloway's 'Prepared Playstation', an installation with several television sets each displaying a heavily glitching copy of *Tony Hawk's Underground 2*, and *Apollo Shrapnel Part 1* and *Restless>Wrath*, hypnotic and terrifying videos of Atari glitches created by Tasman Richardson.

Yes, very clever. But the more I interacted with these pieces, the more I became aware that rather than subverting gaming to create something more, they merely subverted gaming to create

Games don't become art through simple combination

something less. While a copy of *Mario* with no aims could conceivably be asking us to consider the meaningless of our existence, does it really have the gravitas of a work like Rene Magritte's 'The Human Condition'? More than that, does it even have the gravitas of the original *Super Mario Bros*? Or is it just an elaborate, one-note joke that says nothing? And, in the case of *Electroplankton*, is the punchline just us being expected to pay for it?

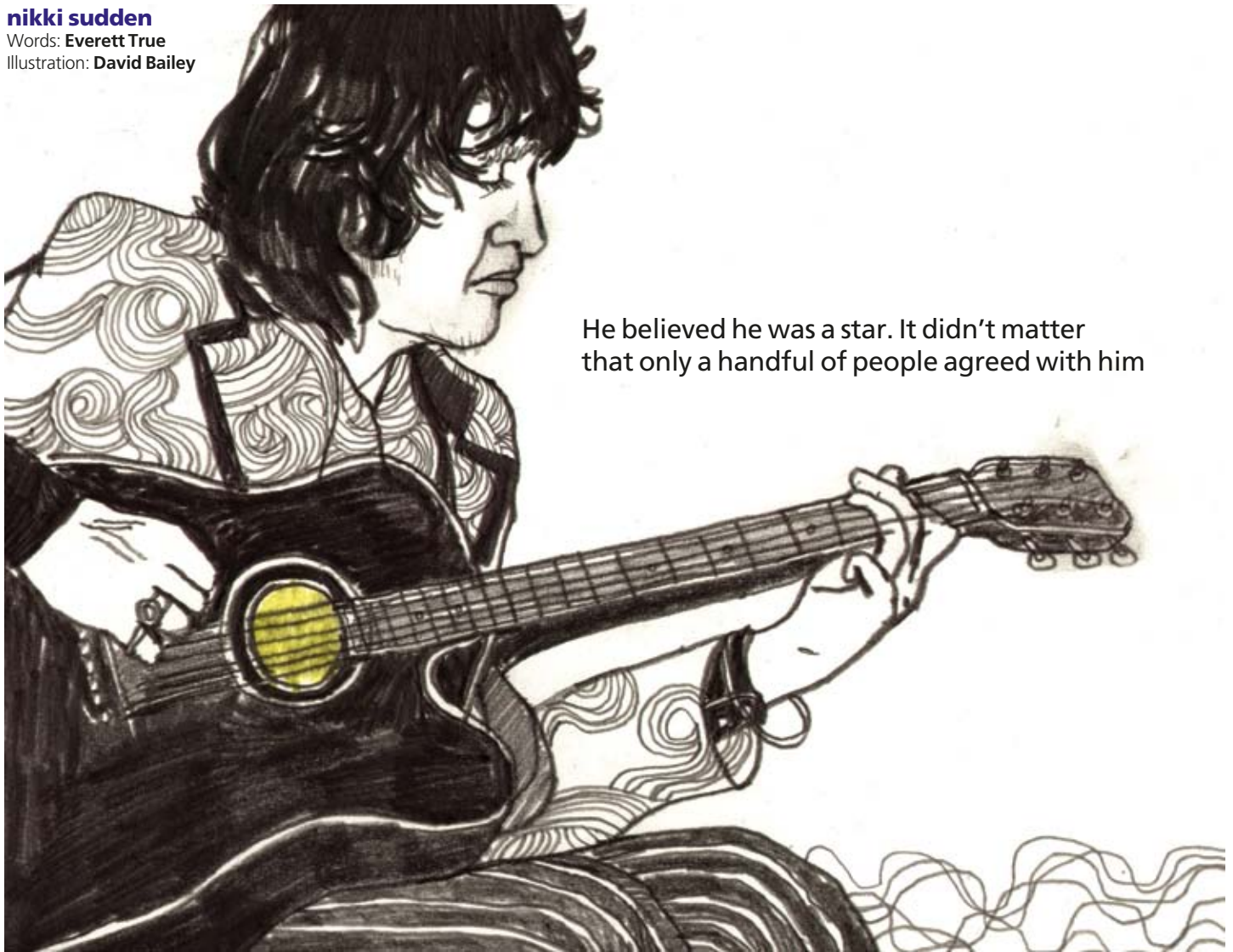
I hope not.

<http://www.interaccess.org/>
<http://pfbf.ca/pac-mondrian/>
<http://www.student.ocad.on.ca/~myfanwyashmore/trilogy.html>

nikki sudden

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **David Bailey**



He believed he was a star. It didn't matter that only a handful of people agreed with him

The last time I met him, he was dressed like Johnny Thunders – lace cuffs, velvet sleeves, a scarf carelessly slung round his neck – hanging round the front of a Mercury Rev showcase in New York: tousled-haired, smiling, maybe a touch of mascara. His face lit up when he saw me. “It’s The Legend! – (!) – very nice to see you,” he said, the pinnacle of charm; suave, and with the ability to make even a pauper feel like a king. “Shall we get drunk?”

Well, of course.

The following day, Nikki played an in-store at a small Lower East Side record store, and I went down with Kid Millions from Oneida to watch him perform. As usual, he was magical: his voice cracking and wavering with emotion, joking with the crowd, with his guitar held high and jangling. He asked if anyone present would be willing to

‘Shall we get drunk?’

share drugs with him afterwards. Someone offered him dope. “Sorry,” he laughed. “I only do hard drugs.” He spotted me lounging at the back, and waved his guitar in my direction, trying to entice me to play a few numbers.

I shook my head. I was enjoying myself too much.

Nikki was a true gent – too beholden to rock’n’roll mythology, for sure: too taken with the spills and frills and empty whisky bottles of the early Seventies – but a true gent. He believed he was a star. It didn’t matter that only a handful of people agreed with him. He believed he was, and so he was

a star his entire adult life. Unlike most self-proclaimed stars, however, Nikki made the people he was with feel like a star themselves – not by patronising, not by bullying, not by proselytising – but by treating each moment as special.

Nikki and I went back two decades or more – but not to the time of his first group, the lo-fi skronk pioneer kings, London’s Swell Maps. I discovered their homespun magic, late, a few months after my peers – months, years, it didn’t matter because back then every minute seemed like an age. Swell Maps. Their name is lore. Started by 15-year-old Nikki and his 12-year-old brother Epic Soundtracks in the early Seventies, a group that grated and spun with insouciant glee, a group that unconsciously grabbed hold of the punk DIY zeitgeist years before Mark P headbanged his way into experimental freefall.

Swell Maps. What wasn’t there to love? ‘Read About Seymour’, ‘Another Song’, ‘Midget Submarines’... a hundred other miniature, unruly, racketeering pop songs, rushing and bubbling and shouting with unconscious élan, London in turmoil, Rough Trade record shop the centre of the universe, scruffy suburban types clutching plastic bags and forming groups full of imagination and birdsong with names like Animals And Men, PragVEC and 12 Cubic Feet. Oh, and The Marine Girls. Let’s not forget The Marine Girls.

It was in the mid-Eighties that I most knew Nikki. Swell Maps had long since departed and Nikki had taken to walking around central London with a swaggering gait, incontrovertibly in love with The Rolling Stones and rock’s central mythology of decadence and bandanas and a thousand other relics I couldn’t even begin to comprehend. He

formed the Jacobites with fellow freewheeling spirit Dave Kusworth, and proceeded to reinvest the tired old clichés with freshness, with further layers of legend. The songtitles gave it away: ‘Death Is Hanging Over Me’, ‘The Last Bandit’, ‘The Ragged School’... Nikki was (or wanted to be, which amounted to the same thing) a doomed romantic, fatally damaged by rock’s spinning web of beautiful lies and complicit deceit – and for a short while, I fell under his spell, hanging with his bohemian, eccentric, carelessly elegant English crew. Nikki was nurturing, enthusiastic. There are a handful of albums from that era – *Texas* and *The Bible Belt* foremost among them, rediscovered by a new generation a couple of years back, thanks to some Secretly Canadian reissues – that still hold a special bond in my heart.

After the Jacobites, Nikki continued to strum and sing and take drugs and romanticise across the far corners of the world – a troubadour indeed – solo, with Kusworth again, with R.E.M., with likeminded enthusiasts and starry-eyed dreamers such as Sonic Youth and Rowland S Howard.

Earlier this year, I was booked to play a show in Berlin at an art gallery – a former haunt of Nikki’s as it transpired. I turned up, thought maybe I could sing his heartrending ‘Jangle Town’ a cappella by way of tribute, with words printed out hours before from the Internet. Just five words into the first line at soundcheck I was drowned out by an effusive vocal from the man who’d arranged the concert for me. I sang it later anyway, the occasional clink of a wine glass breaking the hushed reverence.

I know Nikki would have been smiling.
Nikki Sudden 19 July 1956–26 March 2006

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