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IN SEARCH OF WANDERING COCONUTS: THE AVALANCHES THUNDER DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

BY MARK VON PFEIFFER



SETTING: Interior of The Los Angeles International Airport. Late afternoon.

FADE IN: Pale light filters through the windows of an abandoned terminal. A lone, furtive figure paces to and fro. Sweat beads and breaks on his shaven head. Wearing a thick, leather, fur-lined hunting jacket, he looks more like a half-mad Daniel Boone than a professional journalist. He gestates wildly. He is speaking with furious intent into a pay phone, which, via an intricate series of wires, is jacked into a sinisterly high tech DAT recorder. Two National Guardsmen stand nearby, shifting uneasily.

AT THE SAME TIME... In the land of Oz, Darren Seltmann, co-founder of the contemporary electronic pop collective The Avalanches sits in a comfortable chair, his leg enmeshed in a bionically-powered cast with which he was awarded when his Evil Knivel stage antics led to the shattering of just about every bone in his leg. "Are they wearing gas-masks?" he asks from across the world.

"Of course not! Our boys are armed to the teeth with M-16A1 machine guns, flash bangs and more testosterone than Lou Ferrigno bombed out on Angel Dust! Gas masks? Bah!" I retort, eyeballing the troops.

Introductions are followed by a long-winded planning session on how I might make myself more suspicious, hoping for the Golden Fleece of all true travel connoisseurs: *The Full Cavity Search*. Eventually we decide that a short trip to the bathroom when I would inhale two and a half gallons of coconut whiskey; fueling a spastic, staggering rant—such a fierce craziness they'd be bound by honor to give me the full treatment.

BPM: Do you believe in time travel?

DS: I've seen documentaries. It's possible.

What's the secret of their success? "There's forces at work that we don't really comprehend." A lurid, thought-provoking answer. Do The Avalanches

have something to hide? Is the Furbiesque popularity of their first album: *Since I Left You*, due to the meddling of some unseen presence? Perhaps a brooding demi-god of the arts who has, indeed, plucked the laddies outta the boiling stew of up-and-comers to bestow upon them his dark gifts. Although they are not as of press time admitting to any debts to Mount Olympus or Asgard, the inside sleeve of *SILU* reads like the book of lists; conservatively speaking over nine hundred samples are given the nod in magnifying glass-small print. Indeed, the album is one great mosaic, lashed together by their own live instrumentation, programming and post-production wizardry. A Tower of Babel motherfucker to end all samples.

BPM: Are bathroom signs sexist?

DS: In Australia we don't have signs per se. We use holograms that say M or F. Sometimes they'll switch it on you. You'll head to a bar you like and they'll have rotated it. "They" try and confuse you,

which simply results in unisex bathrooms.

BPM: An imperative which is, even as we speak, acting as a sort of clarion call for gender equality across the whole of Australia. Bastards.

DS: Yes.

Since the dawn of time, bands like Kraftwerk, The Beastie Boys, Pink Floyd and the Art of Noise have made their contributions to the sacred discipline of using samples as instruments in-and-of-themselves and now, many many lifetimes later, the prophecy has been fulfilled. *Since I Left You* is a nut-cutting masterpiece, a product made up almost entirely of other products. Kind of like a hotdog or Chicken McNugget™. Kind of. Christ, don't take me so literally! Just because they're using other people's melodies and voices doesn't lessen their claim to artistidom! Remember Andy Warhol (cough)! "There's a very predetermined, conscious aspect to how the songs are constructed," Darren confesses. Try and delve further into these clan-

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destine methods of production and Saltmann shuts down, sworn to silence by a blood oath.

Shades of hip hop, house, '70s funk, blues, rap, disco, punk, laït...just about every goddamn genre rears its head somewhere on *SILU*. "We want to make pop records where there's the most extreme noise involved. We're lucky to be Australian; our culture is so cross-pollinated. We would be dreaming about playing steel drums in the Caribbean, Astrid Gilberto, De La Soul and The Beach Boys all at once," Saltmann recalls. Madcap indeed, but there is a vital sincerity that echoes throughout the album—a melancholy, for instance, that makes lyrics from the LP's title track: "Since I left you, I've found a brand new world," seem less a haughty epitaph to a vanquished lover and more like a telegram to a good friend sent from a fantastic, far-off place.

"I hate the tendency in modern art and music to be ironic or not serious. Some of our fellows spray over the notion of making shit music cool. That irony is a far cry from what we believe in." No irony on this album eh? Equipped, as I was, with the knowledge the first manifestation of The Avalanches was dubbed Swinging Monkey Cocks, I was leaning towards the skeptical side of dubious until Saltmann demurely whispered, "There's a whole other side to the record that never got released...stuff we would make to let off steam during the really intense periods of production. Ridiculous stuff. *Frontier Psychiatrist* was the best of that bunch. So there were times it could have gone a silly route, but by-and-large we tried

to steer clear of it." Ahhhh. Supposedly Saltmann will be sending me a copy of said sessions. Supposedly I haven't heard of Ebay.

It's been a year of achievement for The Avalanches; their champagne wishes and caviar dreams have been answered. The lads' "colorful" live show—is in demand across the world, their waxmaster Dexter Fabay won second place in the world DMC contest, *Frontier Psychiatrist* took best in show at the MTV Europe video awards and the album has blown past platinum status in the UK as it's poised to drop stateside. What looms on the rose-colored horizon for the fab five? Another album. "There were so many bases covered on *Since I Left You* we're lucky that we can't be too pigeon-holed. Our follow-up can't be the same as this album. It was very time consuming and frustrating to make this kind of record—almost inhumanly so (belch)."

BPM: Is figure skating a legitimate sport?

DS: Absolutely. It's the organ music that legitimizes it.

BPM: The males radiate masculinity.

DS: Exactly, they probably spend their weekends playing ice hockey and killing people.

BPM: With blunt kitchen utensils!

DS: Yes.

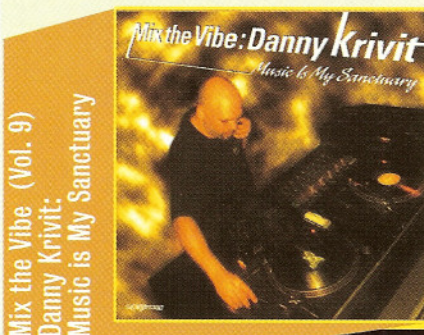
BPM: Goodbye.

DS: Goodbye.

Since I Left You is out now on Modular recordings

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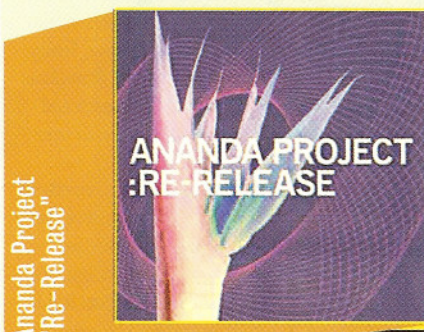
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FLYER DESIGN

ANALYSIS

OVER THE YEARS, club flyers have seen more permutations than a menopausal schizophrenic on a bad hair day. Sewer art or cultural cipher? Maybe both—depending on which critical hip you're shooting from. At times both original and derivative, stealing elements of pop culture whilst simultaneously inventing new abstractions thereof.

Club flyers are a coagulation of art, party and commerce; three elements that even the most optimistic of mousekeeters would readily admit constitutes a dangerous, ill-tempered ménage à trois. That said, on this page we will have the audacious temerity to take the piss and drop the props on the offspring propagated by this unholy union. Singling out stellar flyers that we deem worthy of our learned scrutiny and valuable time...basically whatever sticks to our shoe as we stagger home from the club.

Please note: All flyer submissions will be reviewed by our crack (headed) team of researchers, cultural academics and art historians who will render whatever crap opinion drifts sluggishly across their drug-diluted consciousness. Since flyers and porn can often be difficult to distinguish we suggest you send both, better safe than sorry is our scholarly motto.

This month our thoughtful semi-conscious gaze fell on these six eye catchers:



1

1 & 2 We're on a Ritalin kick this week after we saw a rerun of a 20/20 episode that called into question the use of the drug on children 2 years old and younger. Stone Phillips seemed so concerned...we laughed, we cried, we mud wrestled hermaphroditic midgets.



2

3 An absolute, brainpan-frying epiphany. After years of allowing his canned corn to travel the full length of our digestive tract, we had never noticed the Jolly Green Giant was both profoundly stoned and anatomically challenged. It all seemed so innocent and wholesome just yesterday. To the untrained eye the fellow smoking the harmonica looks simply to be fresh eye candy. We, in our towering omniscience, know him to be a sinister wizard—a servant of the Dark Prince on the lamb from the Church of Bob. We have no opinion on this clear and shameless use of religion in pursuit of commerce.



3

4



4 - We like the way the Tide box looked taped to the fridge. We have yet to actually wash our clothes with detergent since our budget has been squandered on copious amounts of clubbing, and buying subscriptions to Oprah's new magazine, which bears the sensibly creative title: *Oprah*. We enjoy the smell of irony in the morning.

6



6 - "Achtung! Achtung! Look deep deep DEEP into my eyes human! I command you to open yourself to the domination of my *Mind Power™*. Those tarot card-reading feminists are correct when they said, 'Cats are more intelligent than dogs, because they don't answer when you call their name. They have their own agenda.'" Those same women, although ignorant as to the extent of our sinister machinations, are to serve as our willing slaves whilst we install ourselves as Earth's master species! We have watched you degenerate into mindless zombies, watching Sweating to the Oldies and eating your filthy fried chicken! The time of reckoning has grown nigh! Focus on the runes inscribed on my head and you will be imbued with the collective unconsciousness of all house cats since the dawn of time. It will allow you to decipher the secret message upon the tablet that I hold in my paw...and perhaps the first letter of the event this flyer is advertising. Echo my salute! Felis Domesticus UBER ALLES!" (MvP)

5



5 - She can keep the fairy princess wings. Take away the lace and leaves, vanquish the "futuristic" bidet chamber, rotate the camera angle 180 degrees and WHAMMO! You've created the perfect flyer. On second thought, the fact that I've stared at this thing, slack-jawed and drooling for over five minutes and still have no idea what's being advertised, indicates to my razor-sharp journalistic sensibilities that this particular piece o' propaganda might be more suited to the pages of *Anime Fantasy Fetish Monthly*. All I can say is 'Mommy!' Make her into a life-sized doll and call BPM for my shipping address. I've got a week of vacation time coming up. Make haste damn you! (MvP)