

= Black Francis =

Charles Michael Kittridge Thompson IV ( born April 6 , 1965 ) is an American singer , songwriter and guitarist . He is best known as the frontman of the influential alternative rock band Pixies , with whom he performs under the stage name Black Francis . Following the band 's breakup in 1993 , he embarked on a solo career under the name Frank Black . After releasing two albums with record label 4AD and one with American Recordings , he left the label and formed a new band , Frank Black and the Catholics . He re @-@ adopted the name Black Francis in 2007 .

His vocal style has varied from a screaming , yowling delivery as lead vocalist of the Pixies to a more measured and melodic style in his solo career . His cryptic lyrics mostly explore unconventional subjects , such as surrealism , incest and biblical violence , along with science fiction and surf culture . His use of atypical meter signatures , loud ? quiet dynamics and distinct preference for live @-@ to @-@ two @-@ track recording in his career as a solo artist give him a distinct style within alternative rock .

As frontman of the Pixies , his songs ( such as " Where Is My Mind ? " and " Debaser " ) received praise and citations from contemporaries , including Radiohead 's Thom Yorke and Nirvana 's Kurt Cobain . Cobain once said that " Smells Like Teen Spirit " was his attempt to " rip off the Pixies " . Thompson reformed the Pixies in 2004 and continues to release solo records and tour as a solo artist .

= = Biography = =

= = = Youth and college = = =

Charles Thompson was born in Boston , Massachusetts . His father was a bar owner , and Thompson lived in Los Angeles , California as a baby because his father wanted to " learn more about the restaurant and bar business " . Thompson was introduced to music at a young age , as his parents listened to 1960s folk rock . His first guitar was his mother 's , a Yamaha classical guitar bought with money from his father 's bar tips , which he started to play at age " 11 or 12 " .

Thompson 's family moved around , first with his father , and then his stepfather , a religious man who " pursued real estate on both coasts " ; his parents had separated twice by the time he was in first grade . When Thompson was 12 , his mother and stepfather joined a church that was tied to the evangelical Assemblies of God , a move that influenced many of his songs written with the Pixies , which often refer to the Bible .

He discovered the music of Christian rock singer @-@ songwriter Larry Norman at 13 when Norman played at a religious summer camp that Thompson attended . Norman 's music influenced Thompson to the extent that he named the Pixies ' first EP and a lyric in the band 's song " Levitate Me " after one of Norman 's catchphrases , " Come on , pilgrim ! " Thompson later described the music he listened to during his youth :

Thompson lived in Marblehead , Massachusetts , in an apartment . Just before Thompson 's senior year , his family moved to Westport , Massachusetts , where he received a Teenager of the Year award ? the title of a later solo album . During this time , Thompson composed several songs that appeared in his later career , including " Here Comes Your Man " from Doolittle , and " Velvety Instrumental Version " .

After graduating from high school in 1983 , he studied at the University of Massachusetts Amherst , majoring in anthropology . Thompson shared a room with another roommate for a semester before moving in with future Pixies guitarist Joey Santiago . The two shared an interest in rock music , and Santiago introduced Thompson to 1970s punk and the music of David Bowie ; they began to jam together . It was at this time that Thompson discovered The Cars , a band he described as " very influential on me and the Pixies " .

In his second year of college , Thompson embarked on a trip to San Juan , Puerto Rico as part of an exchange program . He spent six months in an apartment with a " weird , psycho roommate " ,

who later served as a direct inspiration for the Pixies song " Crackity Jones " ; many of the band 's early songs refer to Thompson 's experiences in Puerto Rico . Thompson failed to learn to speak Spanish formally , and left his studies after debating whether he would go to New Zealand to view Halley 's Comet ( he later said it " seemed like the cool romantic thing to do at the time " ) , or start a rock band . He wrote a letter urging Santiago , with the words " we gotta do it , now is the time Joe " , to join him in a band upon his return to Boston .

= = = Pixies = = =

Soon after returning to Massachusetts , Thompson dropped out of college , and moved to Boston with Santiago . He spent 1985 working in a warehouse , " managing buttons on teddy bears " , composing songs on his acoustic guitar , and writing lyrics on the subway train . In January 1986 , Thompson formed the Pixies with Santiago . Bassist Kim Deal was recruited a week later via a classified advertisement placed in a Boston paper , which requested a bassist " into Hüsker Dü and Peter , Paul and Mary . " Drummer David Lovering was later hired on recommendation from Deal 's husband .

In 1987 , the Pixies released an 18 @-@ track demo tape , commonly referred to as The Purple Tape . Thompson 's father assisted the band financially , loaning \$ 1 @,@ 000 in order to record the demo tape ; Thompson later said that his father " wasn 't around for a lot of my younger years , so I think he was doing his best to make up for lost time " . The Purple Tape led to a recording contract with the English independent record label 4AD . For the release of the mini album Come On Pilgrim , Thompson adopted the alias " Black Francis " , a name inspired by his father : " he had been saving that name in case he had another son " .

In 1988 , the Pixies recorded their debut album Surfer Rosa . Thompson wrote and sang on all the tracks , with the exception of the single " Gigantic " , which was co @-@ written and sung by Deal . To support the album , the band undertook a European tour , during which Thompson met Eric Drew Feldman , a later collaborator on Pixies and solo albums . Doolittle , with Thompson @-@ penned songs such as " Debaser " and " Monkey Gone To Heaven " , was released the following year to widespread critical acclaim . However , by this time , tensions between Thompson and Deal , combined with exhaustion , led the band to announce a hiatus . Thompson has an aversion to flying , and spent this time driving across America with his girlfriend , Jean Walsh ( whom he had met in the band 's early days ) , performing solo shows in order to raise funds to buy furniture for his new Los Angeles apartment .

The band reconvened in 1990 , and recorded two further albums : 1990 's Bossanova and 1991 's Trompe le Monde ; the latter was Thompson 's first collaboration with Feldman . The later Pixies albums were characterized by Thompson 's increasing influence on the band 's output , as well as a focus on science fiction themes , including aliens and UFOs . These themes would continue to be explored throughout his early solo work . Trompe le Monde includes the song " U @-@ Mass " , which was written about the university he attended as a youth , and due to the keyboard part played by Feldman , signified a move away from the band 's alternative rock sound . Although Deal had contributed on the songs " Gigantic " ( from Surfer Rosa ) and " Silver " ( from Doolittle ) , from Bossanova on , Thompson wrote all the band 's original material . This contributed to the increasing tension between him and Deal , and the Pixies broke up in 1992 ; this was not publicly announced until early 1993 .

= = = Early solo career = = =

While the Pixies ' 1991 album Trompe le Monde was being recorded , Thompson had discussions with the album 's producer , Gil Norton , about a possible solo record . He told Norton he was keen to record again , even though he had no new material ; as a result , the two decided on a cover album . However , by the time Thompson visited a recording studio again in 1992 , he had " plenty of tunes and musical scraps . "

He collaborated with Feldman to record new material ; they began by trimming down the number of

covers to one , The Beach Boys ' " Hang On to Your Ego " . Feldman became the album 's producer , and played keyboard and bass guitar on several songs , with Santiago featuring on lead guitar and Nick Vincent on drums . Francis recorded the album during the hiatus and breakup of the Pixies in late 1992 and early 1993 . He then adopted the stage name " Frank Black " ( inverting his old persona " Black Francis " ) and released the results as Frank Black in March 1993 . Frank Black was characterized by a focus on UFOs and science fiction , although he explored other subjects , such as in " I Heard Ramona Sing " , a song about the Ramones . The album was similar in style , both musically and lyrically , to the Pixies ' albums Bossanova and Trompe le Monde . Feldman later said that the first record connected his solo career with Trompe le Monde , " but at the same time it is an island , like nothing else he [ Black ] did . "

The following year , Black released his second solo record , a 22 @-@ song double album entitled Teenager of the Year . Teenager included the song " Headache " ( sample ) , a moderate success on alternative rock playlists ; critics described the song as " irresistible pop " . The production of Teenager of the Year was markedly different from Frank Black ; in the previous album , MIDI templates were used when writing songs , but in Teenager , Black showed individual parts to band members , the core of which included drummer Vincent and Lyle Workman on lead guitar . Feldman noted that Thompson 's songwriting became " a lot more spontaneous " while recording the album . Thompson had begun to stray from his style with the Pixies , writing songs that covered a variety of genres and topics , and his new @-@ found method of recording was closer to later albums than that of Frank Black and Trompe le Monde .

Both Frank Black and Teenager of the Year were critically well received , although they enjoyed limited commercial success . In 1995 , Thompson left his long @-@ time labels 4AD and Elektra . In 1996 , he released The Cult of Ray on Rick Rubin 's American Recordings ; the album marked a turn away from the elaborate production of his first solo works and was recorded primarily live with few overdubs . His band for this album featured sole Teenager holdover Lyle Workman on lead guitar , along with bassist David McCaffrey and Scott Boutier on drums . Though the album was neither critically nor commercially successful , its stripped @-@ down approach would increasingly define Thompson 's working methods for the next several years .

= = = Frank Black and the Catholics = = =

Thompson dubbed his new band " Frank Black and the Catholics " , and recorded their eponymous first album in 1997 . Recorded live @-@ to @-@ two @-@ track initially as merely a demo , he was so pleased with the results that he decided to release the sessions with no further production . The album was delayed for over a year by conflicts at American , both internal and over its production , and was ultimately released in late 1998 by SpinArt Records in the US . Since leaving American , Black has avoided long @-@ term contracts with labels , and has maintained ownership of his album masters , licensing each album individually for release .

Frank Black and the Catholics became the first album to be posted to the eMusic service ; they claim it is " the first album ever made legally available for commercial download " . Critical reception to the album was mixed , with some writers noting Thompson 's seemingly deliberate turn away from the " quirkiness " of the Pixies and his early solo work for a self @-@ consciously straightforward approach , and the " disappointingly straightforward punk @-@ pop " musical style present on the album .

He would continue to eschew multi @-@ track recording for the live @-@ to @-@ two @-@ track technique for all subsequent releases under the group name . Live @-@ to @-@ two @-@ track recording precludes the use of overdubs to correct errors or add texture ; all takes are recorded continuously , and mixing is done " on the fly " . On later albums , he incorporated more musicians into the sessions to allow for more varied instrumental textures . Explaining his rationale behind the method , he commented :

Well , it 's real . It 's a recording of a performance , of a real performance between a group of people , an entourage , a band , as opposed to a facsimile of that , which is frequently what people do with multi @-@ track recording ... I prefer it . It 's a little more real . It 's got a little more heart .

Workman left the Catholics in 1998 to pursue session and sideman work ; Rich Gilbert was added to the band to replace him . Frank Black and the Catholics released Pistolero in 1999 and Dog in the Sand in 2001 . Dog in the Sand added Dave Philips on pedal steel guitar and lead guitar , and Santiago and Feldman began making occasional appearances with the group live and on record . Both Pistolero and Dog in the Sand were produced by Nick Vincent .

By this time , while dismissing the possibility of a Pixies reunion , Thompson had begun to incorporate an increasing number of the band 's songs into Catholics concerts , as well as including Santiago in his solo work again . Black and the Catholics continued to release records ; two separate albums , Black Letter Days and Devil 's Workshop , were released simultaneously in 2002 . Devil 's Workshop included the song " Velvety " ( sample ) , a version of the Pixies song " Velvety Instrumental Version " ( written by Black as a teenager ) with lyrics . The song was one of the first signs that he had acknowledged his past work with the Pixies in his solo output . A sixth album with the Catholics , Show Me Your Tears , was released in 2003 . Show Me Your Tears ' title and many of the songs in it were inspired by Thompson 's recent divorce and entry into therapy .

= = = Pixies reunion , Nashville and the return of Black Francis = = =

In late 2003 , following long @-@ standing rumors , an official announcement was made that the Pixies were rehearsing for a reunion tour . The band played publicly for the first time in 12 years in April 2004 , and went on to tour extensively throughout the U.S. , Canada and Europe in the same year . They also recorded one of Deal 's compositions , " Bam Thwok " , which was released on the iTunes Music Store . Frank Black Francis , a double album bridging the gap between his two personas , was released to coincide with the Pixies reunion tour . The first disc consisted of solo demos of Pixies songs recorded the day before The Purple Tape was recorded , and the second contained studio collaborations , again of Pixies songs , with Two Pale Boys .

Also in 2004 , Thompson began to collaborate with a group of Nashville session musicians , including Steve Cropper , Spooner Oldham , Reggie Young , and Anton Fig , as well as producer Jon Tiven . In July 2005 , the collective released Honeycomb under the Frank Black name , to generally favorable reviews . Entertainment Weekly described the album as " spare , graceful , [ and ] in the pocket " , while Billboard noted it as " One of [ Thompson 's ] finest hours " . A second volume of Nashville sessions , a double album entitled Fast Man Raider Man , was released in June 2006 . Thompson appeared at a concert by Christian rock pioneer Larry Norman in June 2005 in Salem , Oregon . Norman and Thompson performed a duet on " Watch What You 're Doing " , which later appeared on Norman 's album , Live at The Elsinore .

Thompson continued to tour with the Pixies through 2005 and 2006 . Though the Catholics were effectively defunct , they released two separate albums of B @-@ sides and rarities , Snake Oil and One More Road for the Hit , on iTunes , with an eye towards a future CD release . Thompson was also working on more new solo material with Feldman in the first part of 2006 , some of which they performed live . In the fall of 2006 , Thompson began his first solo tour since 2003 , taking Feldman , Billy Block , and Duane Jarvis along as his backing band . In October 2006 , Thompson announced plans for the Pixies to start rehearsing and recording a new album in January 2007 , but it is believed that no recording took place because of the reluctance of another member of the Pixies to commit to the project . In December 2006 , he released the compilation Christmass album ; a collection of new studio tracks , hotel room sessions , and live acoustic recordings from a solo tour the previous summer .

A Frank Black " best of " compilation , Frank Black 93 @-@ 03 , was released in June 2007 . Concurrently with that release , Thompson undertook a European tour with a new band , featuring Salem 's Guards of Metropolis members Jason Carter and Charles Normal , as well as bassist Ding Archer . For this tour , Thompson eschewed his usual rhythm guitar role and performed solely as a frontman and singer . In September 2007 , a new album entitled Bluefinger was released under his former stage name of Black Francis . For this album , he was inspired by the life and works of Herman Brood , a Dutch musician and artist . He also released a new " mini @-@ album " entitled Svn Fngrs as Black Francis in March 2008 .

In February 2008 , Thompson was taken away by the Irish police in Dublin , Ireland after staging an impromptu " precore " acoustic solo gig at St. Stephen 's Green . He was later released and performed that night in Vicar Street as planned . However , a similar event planned for London was prevented by police and had to be re @-@ arranged for a small indoor venue .

Thompson currently lives in Amherst , Massachusetts , and is married to Violet Clark , his second wife , with whom he has three children , along with her two children from previous relationships . The couple formerly lived in Eugene , Oregon , where they met . Thompson and Clark currently compose the band Grand Duchy . Their debut album , Petit Fours , was released in February 2009 .

In 2008 , Black produced Art Brut 's third album , Art Brut vs. Satan , which was released the following year . Black gave several joint interviews with frontman Eddie Argos about the album , and Art Brut supported the Pixies at their 2009 Brixton Academy show . In 2010 , Black worked with the group a second time on their album Brilliant ! Tragic ! .

Black Francis released NonStopErotik in March 2010 and contributed the song " I Heard Ramona Sing " to the soundtrack for the film Scott Pilgrim vs. the World released in August 2010 .

In the fall of 2010 in Nashville , Thompson recorded an album of new songs written and performed with collaborator Reid Paley , as Paley & Francis ( Reid Paley & Black Francis ) . The debut Paley & Francis album ( also titled Paley & Francis ) was produced by Jon Tiven , and features Reid Paley and Black Francis on guitars and vocals , accompanied by Muscle Shoals legends Spooner Oldham on piano and David Hood on bass . The album was released in October 2011 on Sonic Unyon in North America , and on Cooking Vinyl in the UK & Europe .

Paley & Francis debuted live in early September 2011 with club performances in Albany NY , Buffalo NY , and Hamilton , Ontario , and as one of the headliners of the Supercrawl Festival . The band for these performances consisted of Reid Paley and Black Francis on guitars and vocals , Eric Eble on bass , and Dave Varriale on drums . The pair toured again from February 8 to 22 , 2013 , with the shows including solo performances by each artist .

Black Francis performed at The Coach House Concert Hall in San Juan Capistrano , California on March 22 , 2013 . The Pixies , minus original bassist Kim Deal , reunited for a United States and world tour in 2014 .

= = Musical style = =

See also : Pixies ' musical style

Over the course of his career , Thompson 's musical style has grown to encompass a large number of genres ; however , he is considered to produce rock or alternative rock compositions . Whereas songs such as " Here Comes Your Man " ( Doolittle ) , " Velvety " ( Devil 's Workshop ) and " Headache " ( Teenager of the Year ) expose a more light rock side , others such as " Something Against You " ( Surfer Rosa ) and " Thalassocracy " ( Teenager of the Year ) hint to a more heavy rock influence in his material . A strong country music influence is also increasingly evident in his style , most notably in his Nashville albums , Honeycomb and Fast Man Raider Man .

Thompson has said that he acquired his vocal style as a teenager , when a Thai neighbor asked him to sing " Oh ! Darling " by The Beatles ( from their album Abbey Road ) and to " Scream it like you hate that bitch ! " Thompson 's powerful screams were a signature of Pixies albums , along with the band 's typical song structure of quietly paced verses followed by thundering chorus lines and repetitive guitar staccato .

= = Influences = =

Thompson has drawn influence from a number of musical genres . As a teenager , he mostly listened to 1960s folk and religious music , including the Christian singer @-@ songwriter Larry Norman . For playing on his junior high baseball team , he was given Leon Russell 's 1970 debut album , which he says influenced some of his vocalizing . Later in high school and in college , he discovered punk music ( Black Flag ) , along with bands from other genres , such as the new wave band The Cars and the obscure Angst . While in Boston in 1984 , before starting the Pixies , he

listened to Hüsker Dü 's Zen Arcade , The Spotlight Kid by Captain Beefheart , and I 'm Sick of You , an Iggy Pop bootleg . Thompson was also greatly influenced by the Beatles self @-@ titled 1968 release ( known as White Album ) with regards to the experimental nature of his compositions ( especially those featured in Doolittle ) .

Thompson 's lyrics have also featured references to the Bible , especially in his career with the Pixies ; most notably in the incestuous tale of " Nimrod 's Son " , the stories of Uriah and Bathsheba in " Dead " , Samson in " Gouge Away " and references to the Tower of Babel in songs such as " Build High " and " Old Black Dawning " . He cited surrealist films Eraserhead and Un Chien Andalou ( as mentioned in " Debaser " ) as major influences on his work with the Pixies ; however , surrealism was less of an influence in his solo career . He commented on these influences ( which he paid tribute to most in the Pixies ' Doolittle ) , saying he " didn 't have the patience to sit around reading Surrealist novels " , but found it easier to watch 20 @-@ minute films .

= = = Songwriting and lyrics = = =

During his stay in Puerto Rico , Thompson acquired a fairly fluent , although informal and at times incorrect , use of Spanish , which he has continued throughout his career . Several early Pixies songs , including " Isla de Encanta " and " Vamos " , reference his experiences in San Juan , and the lyrics are often heavily seasoned with the island 's slang . The island 's influence in his work is most notable in the song " Isla De Encanta " , named after the island 's motto , " Isla Del Encanto " . Other Pixies songs drawn from his experiences there include " Vamos " ( Come On Pilgrim ) , " Oh My Golly ! " , " Where Is My Mind ? " ( Surfer Rosa ) , " Crackity Jones " ( Doolittle ) and the B @-@ side " Bailey 's Walk " . Several of his songs contain Spanish lyrics , most notably in the Pixies ' first album , Come On Pilgrim , and a Spanish translation of " Evil Hearted You " by The Yardbirds . From his later works with the Pixies onwards , his use of Spanish drifted westward , reflecting places and aspects of the state of California and its culture .

Thompson 's lyrics are noted for their obscure references to off @-@ beat topics such as outer space , UFOs , and The Three Stooges ? the last of these being the subject of " Two Reelers " , a song from Teenager of the Year . Lyrics with a focus on science fiction were particularly prominent on the later Pixies records , as well as his early solo albums . With the Catholics , his lyrics have tended towards historical topics ; for example , the song " St. Francis Dam Disaster " ( from Dog in the Sand ) details the catastrophic collapse of the St. Francis Dam near Los Angeles in March 1928 , and the All My Ghosts EP featured an account of the Humboldt County Massacre of Wiyot Indians in 1860 near Eureka , California .

= = Television appearances and videos = =

See also : Pixies ' television appearances and videos

Thompson has appeared on a range of television shows solo and as part of the Pixies , ranging from 120 Minutes and The Late Show in the United States , to The Word in the UK .

As part of the Pixies , he was reluctant to film music videos for singles . Elektra Records ' Peter Lubin commented that " to get videos out of them was a major ... undertaking and it only got worse over time " , citing the fact that Thompson refused to lip @-@ sync ; the video for " Here Comes Your Man " features Thompson and Deal opening their mouths as the vocals are being heard , mocking the practice .

In his early solo career as Frank Black , his videos were more professional ; he became more willing to take part in them . " Los Angeles " is an example ; the video features Thompson riding across a desert on a hovercraft . They Might Be Giants ' John Flansburgh , who directed the " Los Angeles " video , later commented on the change in Black 's attitude to music videos :

I think the Pixies had made enough anti @-@ videos that Charles was ready to do things that were more visually hopped up . The " Los Angeles " video that we did , the last minute and a half of the song is this open field of grey over which hovercrafts are floating . It 's about as tripped up as any video I 've ever been involved in , and it was also realizing a dream of Charles ' , getting him in a

hovercraft .

Thompson has released few music videos since leaving 4AD , one being a low @-@ budget video in Germany for Dog in the Sand 's " Robert Onion " . The last widely released video produced for his solo material was for " Men in Black " , from Cult of Ray .

In 2013 , Thompson appeared in a video promoting McSweeney 's children 's book Lost Sloth .

= = Discography = =

= = = Studio albums = = =

= = = Pixies = = =

= = Equipment = =

Frank Black 's 2014 Pixies guitar rig is well @-@ documented .