



P l a s t i c F u z z

Mark Shahid is Plastic Fuzz and Plastic Fuzz is Mark Shahid. If you've stumbled across the Plastic Fuzz website you'd be forgiven for thinking that Plastic Fuzz is actually a close knit collective of like minded friends who spend their spare time crafting inventive pop songs using whatever musical tools they have to hand. The website is splattered with images and artwork that suggest Plastic Fuzz is also some kind of corporation with its own logo, marketing and advertising departments, artistic director, studio and CD production plant. Wrong. Plastic Fuzz is Mark Shahid and Mark Shahid is Plastic Fuzz.

And at the centre of the whole edifice is Dots, a four CD, one hundred song, four hour plus genre and style hopping extravaganza of musical invention that took Shahid just two years to write and record. Shahid played all the instruments (apart from the sampled orchestra parts), designed all the artwork and the logo's and even puts together all the CD packaging himself.

"I've been writing songs since I was about, er.... 11. But the one's that ended up on Dots were written in a two year time period." So it was always a deliberate project, then? "Yeah, it was always a project. I used to hand out little demos with four or five songs on to my friends. And, cos all the songs are short, one of my friends joked 'It's good, man, but...there's just not enough!' and I was like 'Well, I'll show you....I'll write a hundred songs!' and I did! But I had to give it a time frame. There's no point in 'I did a hundred songs in fifteen years!' Originally it was supposed to be one Summer, one hundred songs in one Summer, but then it was by Christmas, then by the next Summer, then by my 23rd birthday. That was October last year, and I finished it in September."

One question hangs heavy in the air - Why? "There are so many reasons I did a hundred songs. Like,

the standard twelve song album, where bands record about thirty songs, they put twelve on an album, and they go 'You're not gonna hear the rest of them...they might make B-sides!' And I go 'Well, I wanna hear the rest of them'. If I'm a fan of the band I wanna hear everything, cos I might like the ones that didn't make the album.

And in these days of iPods, you rip your album onto your computer, and you pick your best songs and put them on your iPod. And with Dots, you can do the same thing. You can make your own Plastic Fuzz LP, you know what I mean? The idea was, I'm gonna give you all my songs and you choose which you like. It's like interactive art, if that makes sense. And when I've sold a good number the idea is to get a little log in thing on the website and have a competition where you pick your favourite twelve songs and the one that's closest to the ones that I think are best wins a prize."

Clearly Shahid has a hyperactive imagination, which fortunately he lets rip when it comes to writing songs. The songs touch on most musical styles but always have their own individual integrity and purpose, and Shahid is happy to admit that it "isn't that instrumentally brilliant, technically".

Dots could have formed the basis of an entire career. Why release the songs all at once? "But it was supposed to be done as one and released as one. A lot of people said 'What you should do is release it in ten volumes'. Releasing them in dribs and drabs would have been the wiser, more commercial thing to do. Present my self to a label and say 'I've got a hundred songs...you've got me for life! Larra money!!', but I didn't want to do that." Being commercial isn't something you consider then? "No, because I like to have control and I think I would lose control of it if it was commercial. It would be nice for the money, because I want money for an

orchestra and big fireworks and shit at my shows. But to write songs that got played on the radio that much, I'd be so saddened if that happened to my stuff" Really? You don't think it would be good for Plastic Fuzz songs to be played on the radio? "Oh, fantastic, but as an underground hit! I'd love that. Like Elbow, they've always struggled with commercial success but they've been going for 15 years now and using orchestras and that's what I would like to be. If it appealed to everyone I don't think it would be a good thing. That would mean that I was doing something so watered down that there's gotta be something wrong with it. Whereas if I'm doing something that people think 'This is fucking brilliant!' and they tell their friends that are passionate about that kind of thing, then I'm reaching my target audience."

I ask the question that was supposed to be my first: Mark Shahid, are you a musician, prankster, an artist or a marketing exercise? "All four, yes!" he cheerfully admits. Shahid talks openly about deliberately constructed aspects of Plastic Fuzz and as such there's not an ounce of pretension to him or Plastic Fuzz. Of course, it helps that the songs that actually make up Dots are of such a consistently high quality. Since Dots was released, Shahid has been developing the Plastic Fuzz brand in the live environment, naturally as a one man band. Early shows were chaotic but more recent outings have featured elaborate multi media backdrops that certainly enhance the visual appeal of a one man show but do come close to detracting from the music. I for one hope he manages to keep the balance right.

Dots is available from Plastic Fuzz gigs or from www.plasticfuzz.com

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