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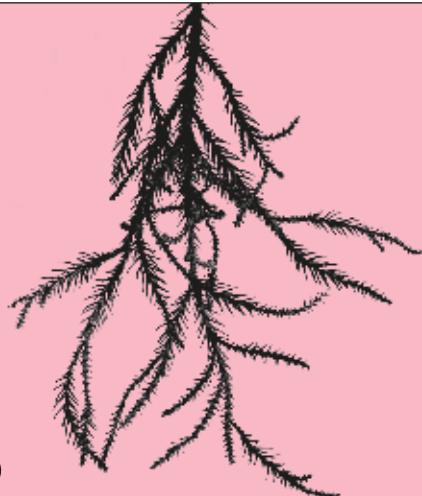
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september/october 2004

fonna newton
total eclipse of the harp

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juana molina *tres cosas*



tres cosas

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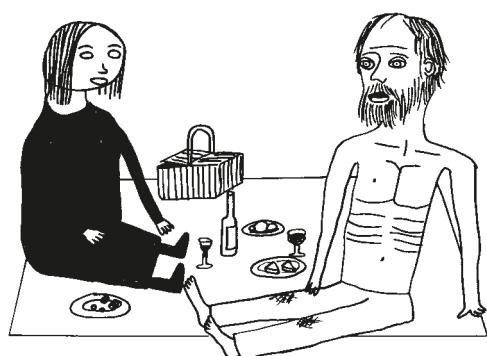
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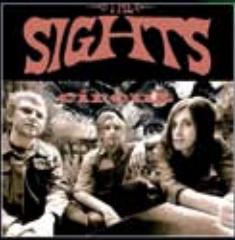
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**CARGO
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editorial

'life spirals out of control'

Friday 20 August

Tonight! Oh my god. Two shows in Brighton within five minutes' walk of each other – and both so incredible. Joanna Newsom makes all the girls go weak at the knees and the boys dreamy-eyed with pleasure at the harp and a cappella shouting.

Rush over to The Beach with Ben Blackwell in tow, for The Dirtbombs' second night. Oh my god. There are 20 of us fanatics down the front, during one equipment breakdown taking on the entire song with just drum support – Ben and Pat on fucken fire – and, well...it's how I always want my rock'n'roll to be. Spontaneous, raw, brutal and mod (check the narrow lapels next to me). Vincent does his French boogie, and many cigarettes are smoked. The encores were entirely gratuitous and very much appreciated.

Life lurches in fits and starts between long periods of abject boredom and a welter of activity culminating in performing the songs of Mr Daniel Treacy in front of a crowd of mildly interested indie sorts in a queer-themed Belfast nightclub. I tell a story of prison boats off the shore of England. I tell a tale of a punk band that once supported Nirvana, big show, big date, big chance – and slowed all their songs down to third-speed to fuck off the grunge kids. I speak of beauty, and try to emulate what I speak of, through the sound of my voice singing words of defiance and outsider status, love and heartbreak.

The sound you hear is silence rushing around my head, concentration and good humour broken by yet another sleepless night spent fermenting plots of revenge against everyone I know, but especially my friends.

I vow to stop writing.

I vow to stop listening to music.

I vow to move to Australia.

I vow to never leave my house again.

I vow to be like Howe Gelb, and be loved only for my sensitive brutality.

The sound you hear is the silence of my basement, broken only by the rumble of distant cars and trains, a clock ticking on the kitchen wall. I spend one week in a hazy largesse of train journeys and insomnia: many men with nice smiles give me CDs and seven-inch singles, some of which are even by bands I like. Many men with nice smiles pat me on the back (not literally) and tell me how good *Plan B* looks, like they have any fucking right. Many men with nice smiles buy Chris Houghton and I food, and I realise that Chris has a nicer smile than all of them combined. The only parable I remember from the age of 10 runs thus: the smile you see is on the face of a tiger. I am hailed as a prodigal son in Rough Trade Records – outside of which I once danced my ass off to the sweet sounds of The Violent Femmes on their debut acoustic busking tour of London: outside of which I once busked myself as The Legend! And The Swinging Soul Sisters, regaling passers-by with a cappella versions of 'Papa Was A Rolling Stone'.

I am given a James Kochalka single, for which I am very grateful, because it is – indeed – exactly what you'd expect. I meet two dudes from Fatcat Records on the rooftop café of Brighton's Duke Of York cinema, and they exchange gossip about Sigur Rós. On the way, Chris engineers a moment whereby his mobile rings and we're offered a full-page clothing ad for *Plan B*. I accuse him of getting an intern to call.

Another evening, I DJ at an architecture party in Farringdon – Electric Six, Throbbing Gristle, Dance Disorder Movement – and try to live up to my reputation for being a mean drunk. One man is excited to hear Shock-headed Peters.

The sound you hear is the gorgeous, enflamed tone of Ms Rachel Nagy of Detroit Cobras, sweating and sweltering but never once losing her poise. Steve Gullick phones, to let me know *Plan B* looks like *Careless Talk Costs Lives* from the back: and it's lacking him. I tell him I know that already. Steve drunkenly emails the forum to complain at both our magazine and Bright Eyes – he doesn't do this overtly, but I'm fully aware of his intentions. I like Steve.

After a *Plan B* night at Borders, a bearded man who produces television pilots suggests I drop a copy over to the Sussex Arts Club where mainstream critic Julie Burchill has a residency. He thinks she'll hold court. Lovely. I also enjoy films made about people who make films. Not. Through familiarity, eager media students taking notes of my lecture bullshit no longer disconcert me.

Life slows down to a crawl.

I'm stuck on a train up to London. I'm stuck in London. I'm stuck playing a Gameboy on a train stuck somewhere in London. I want to throw some words in about beauty – beauty and the riotous, geeky, pure dancing of the two brothers from Herman Düne with their stories and travail, and their chugging stop-start rhythms and four-second guitar solos and clouds of cigarette pluming above their bearded, beautiful heads, and their laconic dry wit and enflamed harmonies, and the way everything got stripped so gentle, so beautiful, during that cover of Tom Waits with the singing saw...

I had Herman Düne pinned down as somewhere between mediocre and Belle And Sebastian but – oh my god, the laconic wit, the brief brutal-sweet interludes of plangent guitar ringing like The Modern Lovers raised on a solid diet of The Velvet Underground, like all the dream New Zealand bands of the Eighties back for one last great hurrah, the brothers Herman dancing so gracefully, beer bellies hanging out, and tales of debauched weed-infested train journeys and remembered loves seeping out, the harmonies so fucking beautiful. It's like Calvin J and Jonathan R and all your other cool male friends got together and decided not to scare you, only make you happy-sad with the cute, ghostly wonderment of life.

Someone grabs my hand. It's my wife, and we're dancing to the Sixties sound of Brighton's own Phil Spector-tribute act, The Pipettes (matching polka dot outfits, hand movements, perfect two-minute self-aggrandising pop songs and all).

Man, I'm a fucking lucky bastard sometimes.

Keep the roaring silence away.

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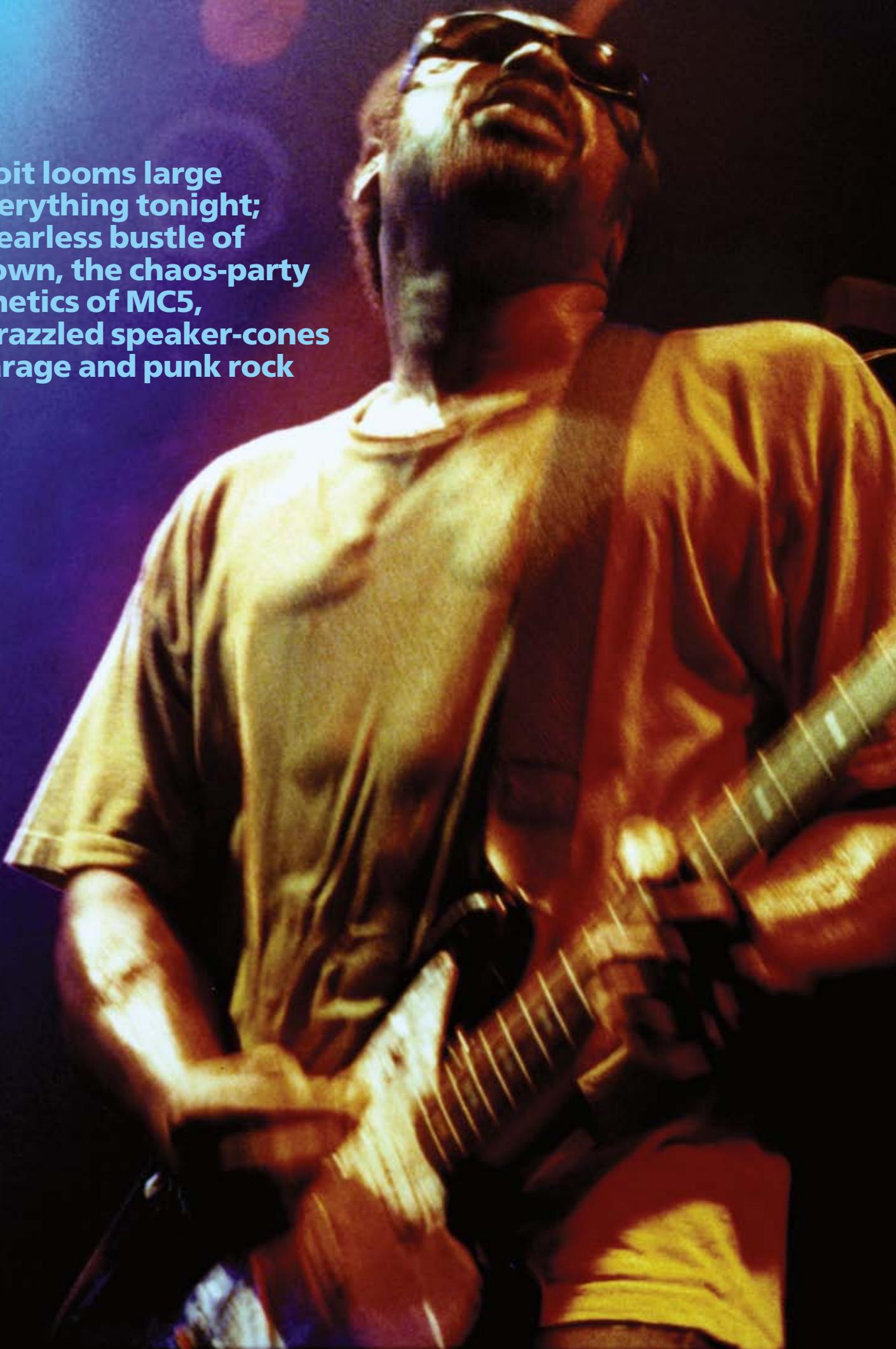
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**Detroit looms large
in everything tonight;
the fearless bustle of
Motown, the chaos-party
aesthetics of MC5,
the frazzled speaker-cones
of garage and punk rock**



dance to the music

Words: Stevie Chick
Photography: Sarah Bowles



The Dirtbombs The Beach, Brighton

All we can hear is the jackhammer beat, drummers Ben Blackwell and Patrick Pantano pummelling the traps with hypnotic, metronomic klang, cowbell and bass drum thud and hi-hat rasp and ride cymbal chime all slamming down on the one, like this were the Apollo and that was Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks up there, lost in an unending groove. It's not the Apollo, it's not even The Zap Club, where this sweaty shindig was originally s'posed to go down. A misunderstanding somewhere means The Zap is tonight host to a drum'n'bass night, while we – hunkered together under these arches, the sea breaking upon Brighton beach only metres away – well, right this very second, we're getting something less than drums and bass. All we can hear is the beat, but that's good, because the beat quickens the blood, makes the body writhe under these gloomy arches, trying to chase the pace, match the feet to that proclamatory thud, faster and faster.

All we can hear is the beat, because the venue's power cut out a couple minutes ago, a few bars into 'Get It While You Can', one of those party-damaged Dirtbombs barnstormers that grabs you and twists you into shapes without mercy. Broken down to just bare beats and, later, be-shaded garage overlord Mick Collins' exhortin' soul bellow, it's almost enough, until ex-Knockout/Comedown Ko Shih (fuzz bass) and Troy Gregory (heavy bass) get juiced enough to lay a scorched-rubber backline in among the barrage. That's when the greatest party band

in the world hit high gear – and it's a beautiful thing to be party to.

The background, if you need it: The Dirtbombs are perhaps the greatest band Detroit boasts. Sure, king zoot Collins don't write ballads that make your aortas melt like Jack White did with 'Apple Blossom', and success of a more mercenary kind has so far eluded them while favouring The Von Bondies and Electric Six. But right now, zero hour, a cold room, no electricity and a party due to start, hmm, right about now, there is no one else you want on your side. And the Dirtbombs are on your side. There's Paul Westerberg's proverbial 'long-haired girl shaking way past her years' standing beside me, eyes scrunched tight and screaming Mick's name. Dirtbombmania. What the fuck is going on?

The delicious twin bass pulse of Phil Lynott's 'Ode To A Black Man' is what's going on, right now, and damn straight if I don't want songs for plants, I want songs for me. That's what The Dirtbombs give you, full on, one-on-one attention, those twin squalling bass lines probing you like vibrating massage machines, rising and sinking and writhing and reeling, the sound of rubber on rubber, those two kits wrapping breakbeat into breakbeat, the floor beer-sluiced jelly just begging similarly trashy moves. If The Dirtbombs were white art-school cats from Brooklyn then they'd be proclaimed godheads of the new indie/dance crossover; but could !!! wield the falling-scaffolding riffs of 'Start The Party' with all the desperate grace of a shiv-stabbing Stooge backed into a corner?

And did they ever lean into the audience while a stream of Funk Brothers-scored Motown seven-inchers melted into one glorious capillary-flushing moment behind them, bellowing "What does a kitty say?" for the crowd to meow crazily back at 'em, the whole episode coming off like the greatest novelty bubblegum-garage sortie ever. Goddammit if Collins and his band can't fashion treasures from trash, like The Dirtbombs are the very sharpest of a lean and hungry record-hunting collective seeking out the rarest grooves and feasting on dust and spitting out diamonds.

Detroit looms large in everything tonight; the fearless bustle of Motown, the chaos-party aesthetics of MC5, the frazzled speaker-cones of garage and punk rock. Where else but in the forgotten, disregarded wastelands of Detroit could a band like The Dirtbombs just percolate and grow so damned good without some corporate cunt stepping in and saying that a rock'n'roll band fronted by a 40-something black guy and starring two complete rhythm sections will never 'work'? The Dirtbombs' loose tumble approach to dancefloor rock'n'roll convinces you that this is in fact the perfect blueprint for sweaty soul nirvana, and isn't it about time all bands sounded like this?

It ends, with Ben Blackwell's slurring, glorious take on The Stooges' 'Dirt', Blackwell stage-diving and then receiving a mid-song dry-humping from a perhaps overly-ardent admirer. In Brighton, it seems, the message has been received. And that message is dance, you fuckers. DANCE!

pastoral splendour

Words: Everett True

Photography: Sarah Bowles

Joanna Newsom

Komedia, Brighton

The girls are chattering, talking in hushed whispers: "God, but she's so beautiful." Yeah, but it's a strange idyll of beauty, so Southern USA, so *Gone With The Wind*, so delicate, both womanly and childlike. It's divorced of artifice and purpose, existing neither to impress nor to corrupt but of itself. It's that rarest of beauty: feminine, one that other women, in particular, appreciate and admire. (Men are much more base.)

The lights are darkened: no fancy light show here, no flashing amber and grey, no smoke clouds pluming and curling up to the ceiling, just a lady in a summer dress cajoling and plucking at a harp that dwarfs her petite frame. Just a smile and a wide open mouth, words tumbling and top-tailing one after another, sometimes astonished, often playful, always charming. There's just Joanna Newsom and her Nevada City vision of life and romance and boughs and ghostly places: ice cream churns exposed and heavy on the travail, taking up an entire porch on a lazy summer's evening, cities made out of hay and friendship, the plumage of a male peacock vibrating.

There's no lights, no between-song chatter – just a black ether where strangers, unfamiliar with the work of this ethereal harpist, applaud reverently, taken off-guard by such pure, ragged-sweet grace. Well, not everyone...

"I didn't come here tonight," remarks one cruel boy to another in the toilets, "to hear someone sing like a thalidomide child."

Man. These evocative, homespun stories of Joanna Newsom are many things: rambling, beguiling, full of a naïve joy at the absurdities and wonderment of life, backed with a solitary harp. And not even that, for the first song, when Joanna stands stage-front and reduces a throbbing Komedia to silence with an a cappella, shouted lament that baffles and excites simultaneously. But impeded by fate? No fucking way. That's like saying Tom Waits can't sing.

A whole other world opens as you immerse yourself in Joanna's music and her 2004 album, *The Milk-Eyed Mender*, a world of "rough, straggly sage", "palaces and storm clouds" ("En Gallop"). She's hardly been stifled from birth: quite clearly, the opposite holds true – Joanna is one of those privileged few given the space and time to develop and to breathe freely. If her music and folksy way of singing and harp-playing sometimes seem to hark back to 'simpler' times (which

were never simpler, of course, just more brutal and uncaring), it's because she genuinely seems to have sidestepped much of the bullshit and detritus of modern day society.

As with her mentor, Will Oldham (who discovered Joanna from a cassette she made of her Appalachian folk/bluegrass-influenced music), you feel immensely privileged to be privy to such secret delights. Unlike Mr Oldham, however, Joanna never lingers too long in sorrow. There's too much to be discovered: too many whalebones and molluscs and pies to mull over and enjoy.

Sure, if you want to be cynical of innocence, you could wilfully misinterpret Joanna's way of enunciating certain syllables as childlike, retarded even. But unlike, say, CocoRosie's studiously art-laden mysteries (their beguiling 2003 album *La Maison De La Rêve* is a superficially close parallel), you never get the impression that this is a temporary phase Joanna is going through. And, unlike Will Oldham himself, you never feel this is an act. This is pure Joanna: harp and all.

Also. Step back a second. Ignore the voice. Concentrate on the harp. Concentrate on the magic (with a 'k' if anyone's taking notes – and someone should) of songs like 'The Sprout And The Bean' and 'The Book Of Right-On': tumbling, febrile, hypnotic, assured, making full use of both range and silence.

What I know about harp-playing could be written on the tiniest string of Nicanor Zabaleta's cast-offs, but this is incredible. I hold no truck with specialists or virtuosity, goodness knows, but Joanna makes her harp sing in disparate pastoral splendour. Creative, alert, alive, always looking for a fresh way of explaining. Again, it's her childlike playfulness and curiosity that is her greatest asset. She plays the harp like a troubadour, but never once forgets how special the gift of music is.

You could lose yourself in Joanna's stories for an eternity. She transports the listener into a world far from mundane Brighton rain and the shouts of lads on the streets outside. And yet you know that, through Joanna's eyes, those very streets and shouts themselves would turn into something magical, possessed. This is her gift: the gift of transport and delight. This is the ability to put across her other vision.

The girls whisper, excitedly, about the harp, the voice...but most of all, the untrammeled beauty.

And the boys?

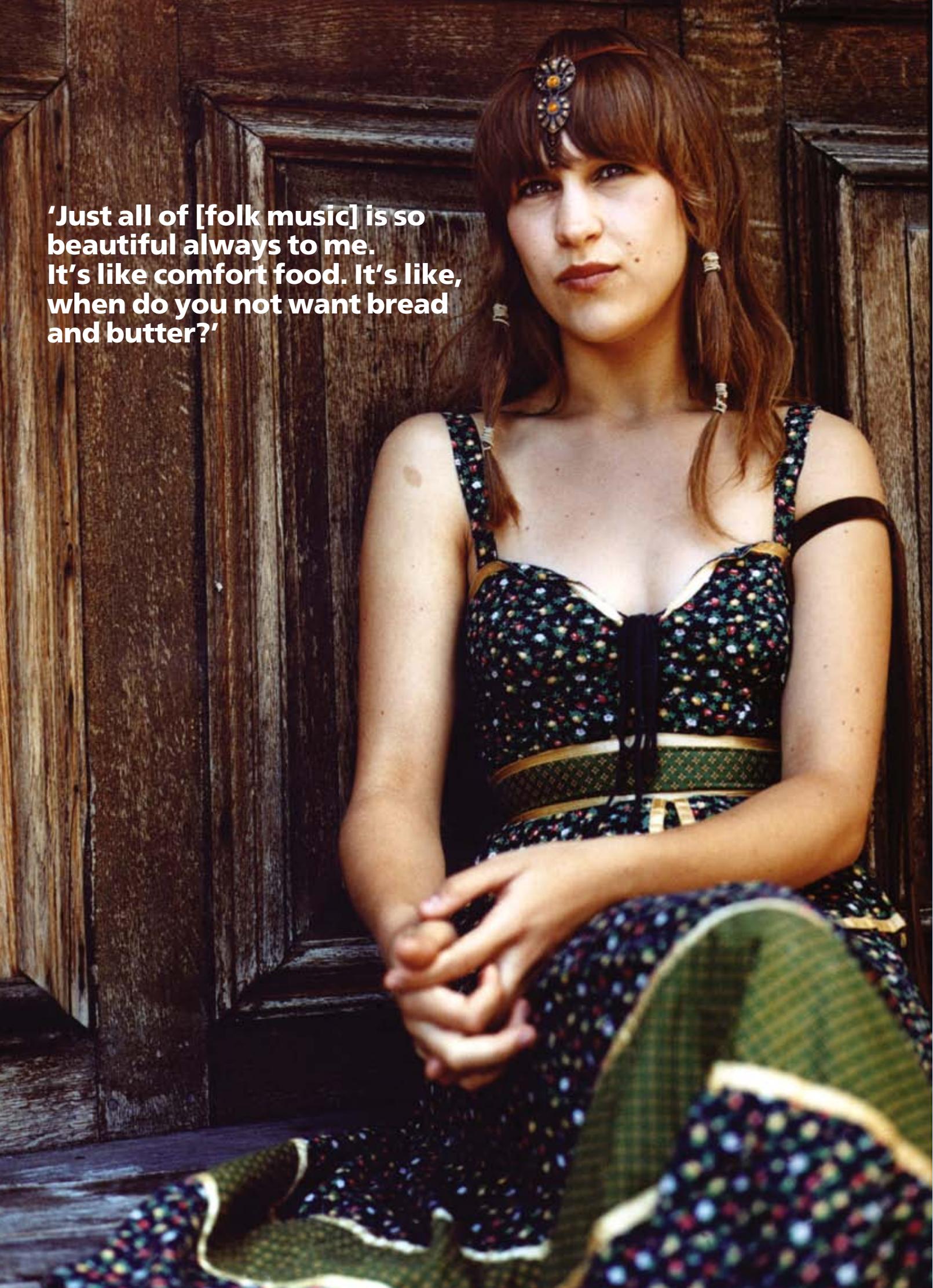
The boys keep quiet, for fear of exposing themselves.



A close-up photograph of a woman with blonde hair, singing into a black microphone. She is wearing a light-colored, striped garment. In the background, a harp with many strings is visible, though slightly out of focus. The lighting is warm and dramatic.

**She plays the harp like a troubadour,
but never once forgets how special
the gift of music is**

'Just all of [folk music] is so beautiful always to me. It's like comfort food. It's like, when do you not want bread and butter?'



daydream believer

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

Joanna Newsom is a new kind of folk heroine,
plucking out spells and lullabies on 46 thrumming strings

"Then gentle music may your mind withdraw
From the toil and care of trade and law;
Then oh, how soothing is the fa fa fa
And the do, re, mi, sol, la!"
('Crows In The Garden', Traditional)

"This is an old song, these are old blues.
And this is not my tune, but it's mine to use."
('Sadie', Joanna Newsom)

The little house – a park-keeper's lodge – stands at the Lancaster Gate entrance of Hyde Park. It's a Gothic-revival charm of pointed gables and sugary stone twists and leaded windowpanes. We are moving towards it dreamily in the hot late-summer afternoon. It's no wonder that the girl in the thrift-store prairie princess dress and high-heeled brown leather dancing shoes is drawn to it. It's the house an observant songwriter/harpist could surely live in: with the rolling park and squirrels and fountains on the one side, the busy city on the other side, and (no doubt) myriad little rooms and low lintels and old wooden cabinets on the inside.

"That kind of house could make me cry if I was in the right mood," says Joanna Newsom, as we settle in the shade of a chestnut tree.

tales to tell, tears to shed

I've cried to the music of Joanna Newsom: once on a rainy station platform; once, early one morning, derailed by a confounding muse; once at a crowded club, watching her play with a delicate muscularity and discipline that stunned the audience into confused and respectful silence. It is not that her music is sad – although sometimes it may well be. The tears were more those strange tears induced by the perfect symmetry of a perfect song played perfectly. The happy-sadness brought on that sweet, snagging feeling of the past linking hands with the present, the 'real' with the imaginary, and all your little stories with the collective big stories.

When something strange and beautiful fills your soul a little too quickly, the leftover beauty has to drain away somewhere.

At 22 years old, with a debut album slowly and surely becoming a 'classic', an unusual instrument she plays both distinctively and beautifully, and a voice that perplexes and beguiles in equal measure, it makes perfect sense that Joanna Newsom should have become a new kind of folk

heroine, photographed against backdrops of trees and fields like a dryad in cowgirl boots, plucking out spells and lullabies on 46 thrumming strings. We love our fairytales. Yet, despite the immediate, unarguable emotional impact of Newsom's songs, and the immediate, unarguable charm and loveliness of Newsom herself, it doesn't hurt to question what it means to have your art and craft and life embroidered such; what it means to be cast in the role of *naïf*, of pixie, of child-woman. I wonder if a fairytale is the right kind of story to be spinning when the prosaic, rough reality of folk music is equal in importance to its whimsical beauty, and when Joanna Newsom's well-documented story – while rich enough in esoteric detail to satisfy the most legend-hungry listener – is also a story of hard work, scholarship and an intensely thoughtful and intelligent young woman.

Growing up in Nevada City – twinned with Bodmin in Cornwall, she tells me within minutes of our meeting (much to my delight) – she began studying the harp around the age of nine. Hers was a nurturing, creative environment, within both the family and the community in general. It evidently fostered the love and confidence in writing her own music that took her to Oakland liberal arts school Mills College and its acclaimed composition course. But, upon realising there was "no place for songwriting" in contemporary composition ("there's a sense that everyone does everything at the same time and then they move onto the next thing"), Newsom switched majors and left to concentrate on her own material, circulating CDs among friends.

The trajectory that followed – Bay Area performances, a tour with Will Oldham, two EPs, and then *The Milk-Eyed Mender*, an album that gathered momentum in my heart so gradually and naturally that I now can't imagine not having a copy – can be read about elsewhere, and will soon be eclipsed by what looks set to be a busy, strange few years for Newsom, as she navigates the inevitable mainstream success.

In September, she's supporting Neil Young in Berkeley, at a benefit concert for local arts centres, dance troupes and a radio network.

"I am so excited!" she enthuses. "He's honestly my favourite... I don't know what to follow the word 'favourite' with... singer, songwriter, pop star, rock musician? He is very special to me. I associate him with really good conversations with my dad, because I talk to my dad about music a lot, and he

and I have talked about what makes Neil Young so special, and we both agree that he's got the most beautiful voice probably ever in rock music. It's his sense of melody, the way he caresses his voice around his melodies. His voice has the same effect on me as an oboe has, it has a similar timbre – it's high and kind of rough, but really rich and velvety. It cuts through the music, like in a symphony when you hear the oboe cutting through everything else."

She goes on to giggle at her first phone conversation with Young; how nervous she felt speaking with him:

"You know when you sit around with your friends and talk about, 'Who is the person you'd be the most starstruck to meet? The top of my 'starstruck' list has always been Neil Young."

frontier ballads

It's a good time to be making American folk music: a good time and a bad time.

Good, because there's a receptiveness both in the US and elsewhere to the countercultural properties of traditional musics, and an interest in the raw, the old, the weird, the magical qualities of close-recorded wood and strings, and the acceptance of lyrics that touch upon archaic, romantic themes.

Good, because performers such as Newsom and her friend Devendra Banhart country-dance their way into our clubs like a couple of shy, flamboyant unicorns, and set up in the corner with those of us who've been squirrelled away our charity shop June Tabor records and Shirley Collins box sets and our *Book Of Frontier Ballads* and our *Texas Piano Blues 1927–29*, and show us that the music we love is coming out of real breathing people.

The English equivalents of this have been less arresting – more about boys with guitars rehashing their teacher parents' Pentangle records and namechecking the goddamn *Wicker Man* than any real attempt to get to the fen-dark, dawn-light heart of this country's traditional songs – but the recent welcome given to Banhart and Newsom here bodes well.

But what happens when the hipsters no longer believe in unicorns? Will they just ignore them, or will they actively try to destroy them? What happens when you impose time limits on this timeless music? While Newsom's confident in the progression of her own work, the creation of a 'scene' of which she's an unwilling member perturbs her. She's read of a 'movement' including herself, Banhart, CocoRosie, Faun Fables and others.



"If there is any commonality, it is the idea of self-containedness in the music, so it seems contradictory to make a movement out of it," she says.

"I feel no affinity with a lot of the music that's being lumped in with this movement. With Devendra, it's hard for me to separate whether I feel close to him musically or just because we've been friends since before either of us was playing music. I'm not shaky on what my sound is. I know it may change over the years, but I know what I'm trying to do. And I can't necessarily lump my sound under a particular label."

What happens when the hipsters no longer believe in unicorns?

knitting needles and harps

We should not try to categorise Newsom whatsoever, because her music is disconcertingly strange yet as familiar as a museum or a family photograph.

In trying to pin down its strangeness, you fall back on juxtapositions, saying that her voice is both young and old, both beautiful and rough, its instinctiveness juxtaposed with the assured harp playing.

You say that the harp lines contain more juxtapositions – stylistically, melodically – as she touches upon minimalism and the beautifully mannered classic songwriting style of, say, early Van Dyke Parks (another Californian 'non-singer' whose subverted classical training sat beautifully with his funny, smart little voice and intricate lyrics), as well as the more obvious folk themes. You say that to play folk music on a Lyon and Healy harp is itself a little contradictory. Newsom is discovering that reactions to her are equally polarised. This surprises her.

"I feel confident to an extent," she says. "At this point, I'm doing it the way I want to be doing it. But especially now that I'm in England and there's more of a chance that people will just wander into a show and have no idea who I am, there's this recurring fear that people are gonna start throwing things at me! Because of this thing that's been hammered into my head that you either love my music or hate it, which, incidentally, I hadn't even considered when I started playing music. I've had some really violent reactions where people have said, 'That's the worst thing I've ever heard, her voice is horrendous'.

"I think it is a lot more difficult to swallow that kind of rough-edgedness and unruliness in a female voice than in a male voice. But there was a review that came out in an Austin newspaper that said, 'You can only shove a knitting needle down your ear for so long before sweet unconsciousness sets in'. It's been seared into my memory because it was my first bad review.

"I've always known I had a strange voice, because there has to be some reason I didn't use it for years and years. I think it was an understanding I picked up that I didn't have a voice people wanted to listen to. It wasn't until I was much older – just two years ago, or so – that I decided I would use it anyway."

It's the intimacy, I say to her. You don't use any effects and your voice is right there,

in the listener's ear. But, later, I realise that's not what I mean at all. By 'intimacy', I think I mean the unaffected dramatic momentum and uncompromising directness of all the best folk singing. These features are hard to swallow indeed, unless you're lucky enough to have them speak right to your soul (as Newsom experienced on first hearing a recording of the Virginia-born ballad singer, Texas Gladden).

This drama and directness is present in Gladden's ballads, Blind Willie Johnson's fervent fire and brimstone growl; in the lusty Yorkshire laments of the Watersons and in the piping ethereality of Shirley Collins. It's in Newsom's mountainside poetess lilt and Banhart's witchy vibrato – and it embarrasses the hell out of most of us. Those who love it, meanwhile, can't understand how anyone could fail to.

early one morning

Many people have a violent antipathy towards folk music in general.

"They do!" she agrees. "I don't know why. Just all of it is so beautiful always to me. It's like comfort food. It's like, when do you not want bread and butter? You can have too much bread and butter, I can listen to too much Texas Gladden and then I have to go listen to silence or some pop music or some Fleetwood Mac, but you always want to start your day out with it."

Another deep strand of influence running through Newsom's music is rooted in the early to mid-20th Century work of composers such as Henry Cowell, Charles Ives and – Newsom's personal touchstone – Ruth Crawford Seeger, in asserting a new American musical identity that had little to do with the established European art music tradition.

Newsom's fascination with Seeger is twofold. She obviously relates to the composer's interweaving of folk tunes with theories of dissonance. Less obviously, she's intrigued by Seeger's decision to make her family, rather than her composition, her main life's work. Newsom's empathy with the uneasy relationship between the personal and creative is apparent in her lyrics, which combine a punchy vigour with immaculate rhymes; insomnia, frustration and awkward bodies with palaces, canaries, and constellations.

"I always have a hard time thinking what influences my lyrical style," she states. "I love Nabokov, to a sort of obsessive degree. It's the combination of giftedness with words and stringing them together in the most amazing ways, and also an immense attention to what happens when different words bump up against each other.

"I do choose words very deliberately. Sometimes it's because I like to play with syllabic emphases and where they intersect with the downbeats. Or maybe I like to think of the sung part as a contrapuntal line, so sometimes it'll syncopate with the music and other times it'll be parallel to it. Word choice has a lot to do with the sound of the music, and word length too."

yarn and glue

To give full prominence to the complexity of both lyrical and musical arrangements, the recording of *The Milk-Eyed Mender* was kept admirably simple. The only multi-tracking was Newsom's eerie, layered voice

that pops out occasionally like an entreating choir – and this, apparently, was a happy accident. She and her partner and producer Noah Georgeson concentrated instead on recording the harp as effectively as they could, positioning microphones differently for each song: "Creating a kind of self-contained, specific space for each one... that was such a consuming endeavour we didn't feel it was necessary to bring other instruments in. If we could just have the best possible verisimilitude for the harp, and also have this shifting landscape it was inhabiting, that was enough."

The shifting landscape... it's another thing that helps create your own musical world. Your music has its own mythology – its own folkloric world. Are you interested in folklore and myth?

"Absolutely. Something that is really interesting about personal mythology, you know, which every person has, is that we accumulate this collection of symbols. We accumulate a set of associations with objects, and they run deep, and it's a whole lifetime of memories that imbue these objects with enormous symbolic strength. And those symbols appear again and again; these sort of symbolic stutters happen. I keep catching on certain ideas, and I don't even realise I'm doing it until people quote them back to me and say, 'You talk about bones a lot' or something."

"With the album sleeve, I was specifically thinking of the alchemy of closeness, of all of these enormously loaded, personal things bumping up at the edges, crammed together in this sort of airless, lush, dense collection. It's an embroidered piece that my friend did, and we collected bones and hair and butterflies... everything on there has specific meaning – all the cloth is from pieces of my mum's dresses."

"I wanted there to be a sense equally of something a child would make for a Mother's Day present, but also of a shrine to someone who's died, like in a lot of Latin American cultures. And then I wanted it to have this sense of something you'd find in an attic or in a thrift store and wonder, what is this, this is like the weirdest thing I've ever seen..."

down where I darn...

The homespun voodoo of *The Milk-Eyed Mender*'s sleeve, with its owl and aeroplane, spider's web and narwhal motifs, feels like a tribute to the forgotten handiwork that was once so much a part of female experience. Like the music, the artwork is bound together with a traditional sense of craftsmanship.

"It's actually a direct reference to that: the 'Milk-Eyed Mender' is in a line from 'Sadie' which invokes that notion. The line about stitching something: '...Stretched – on the hoop where I stitch – this adage/ Bless our house and its heart so savage.' You know, when girls used to cross-stitch phrases to hang on the wall. That whole set of lines is full of references to handiwork and sewing and darning."

These things fascinate me, because I can't do them, or I'm really bad at doing them –

"Me too!" she agrees. "Oh, well, I can crochet..."

I can't crochet. But I can cross-stitch. Actually, I'm quite good... It fascinates me as an idea, that there's this world of female

'We collected bones and hair and butterflies... everything on the sleeve has specific meaning'

art and craft that's always existed and is very beautiful. But as much as I like to look at it, I'm really glad I don't have to sit and do it!

She nods: "It stands for all of the things you can't do. Just having a parlour craft, something to while away the hours. Which is actually where the harp got started – the Western classical harp, obviously: the kind of harp I play started as a parlour instrument for wealthy young girls to play so that they could become accomplished young ladies."

And there you are, I say. Very accomplished.

We both laugh. It's such a pat conclusion. But there's a truth in it, for I'm yet to hear a contemporary interpretation of folk music as female-centred, intellectually rigorous, wryly humorous, instantly iconic, utterly beautiful and, yes, accomplished as Joanna Newsom's.

There's no yearning for a prelapsarian time and place (except for the Edens of our imaginations); her music hides uncanny awareness beneath its simplicity. While Newsom might have stopped formal

study, she's a natural scholar. And, maybe, a born teacher.

song cycles

Throughout the middle of the 20th Century, John and Alan Lomax collected folk songs of the United States. Most were songs of struggle; songs of working and living in harsh times.

It would be disingenuous for a young woman of Joanna Newsom's background and personality to take such songs as they are and sing them to us straight. Instead, she narrates different struggles – albeit she channels the ghosts of the old songs, the old blues. (They're not always her tunes, no, but damn sure they're hers to use.)

Listen, and you'll hear the patterns of a sea-shanty here, and the epic narrative of an old mountain lament there. But Newsom is singing the work songs of our inner worlds – the dragons that rant and rail and beset us as we find our voices – and the ballads of her own daydream journeys into self-knowledge.



Help She Can't Swim

Words: Hannah Gregory

Photography: Simon Fernandez

Dancing is important. No. Essential. In dancing, lies liberation from the mundane and the depressing, escapism as absolute as sex, happiness free and unbound. So says Leesey, one half of the vocals of Southampton quintet Help She Can't Swim, a band who possess a ticket to righteously fire up the dancefloor. "But there are plenty of bands out there who make me want to dance," you say. "What's so special about this one?" Assertiveness and brevity, for starters. Rebellion and spontaneity. Unaffected attitude. Oh, and fun – lots of fun.

'I want to hear stuff that makes me fierce. Fuck nice music'

"*Un, deux, trois, quatre!*" goes the opening roll call of 'Knit One, Pearl One', off the debut 'Suck Our Band' EP. Vehement handclaps blaze their way through siren-like guitars. "*Don't you dare point your fucking finger at me!*" warn Tom and Leesey's call-to-action vocals. It's the commanding sound of this male-female affront that lies at the heart of the band's dynamism, tearing through every abrupt blast of song, a decade of anger and frustration off-loaded into fearless critiques and sexual backchat: "*You might have my wardrobe, you don't have my sty-hy-hy-hy-hyle!*"

"I know I must come across as this crazed loner," says Leesey, "but it's not that I don't care – I do. It's just I find it liberating to shout about things that matter to me." Like protesting against bland, uninspired music and refusing to follow anyone's rules? "It seems like everyone who goes out in Southampton thinks Ian Brown is a saviour. I mean, find yourself a new icon!"

"I want to hear stuff that makes me fierce," she adds. "Fuck nice music."

On the almighty-titled forthcoming album, *Fashionista Super Dance Troupe*, (due out in October on Fantastic Plastic), fierceness and fun certainly prevail. "We are sensitive, we are sensible", they claim, the words soon to be adulterated by vindictively scrawling guitars. Elsewhere, sexual advances are spelled out beguilingly; after-dark antics are revealed behind the curtains. So what of the dance troupe? "I've thought about recruiting my friends to do synchronised dance routines – all these fat-ass girls just being amazing and completely overshadowing every male there!" she says.

Go fetch your dancing shoes, girls and boys.



the VOID

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(by) Ian Svenonius**Trencher**Words: **Tim Dellow**Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Trencher provoke, and you have to react. Having invented their own genre – Casio grindcore – the manic three-piece have torn up stages across the country. This is music your parents will never like. It's perverse. To quote my girlfriend, "I wake up in the morning and think it's going to be a lovely day. Then Tim puts on Trencher."

But there are brains behind the noise as Trencher back up their horror spazz with a cerebellum that would send any zombie drooling.

"Trencher: it's kind of nasty, but funny at the same time," states Milk Shit. "Humour and horror. The two compliment each other like an apple goes with cheese; which is my favourite snack. Something really fresh and [something] really mouldy shoved together."

"Like hummus and vanilla," adds Lock Monger who, together with Shit and Pox make up the screaming triumvirate.

Part of Trencher's appeal lies in the stupidity of their style, a direct reaction to the number of metal and grindcore bands that were taking themselves too seriously. "Absurdity definitely becomes paramount in terms of our music," they claim.

But Shit, Monger and Pox are serious enough about Trencher to take their epic (14 minutes) debut, *When Dracula Thinks "Look At Me"*, to Europe: "We started playing London and Brighton and this just seemed like a logical conclusion. Otherwise we'd be stuck playing London, which would be awful."

But that's not to say the local scene proved useless when Trencher needed some DIY strength to distribute their debut.

"This producer approached us to do the album, and he's recorded, like, Paradise Lost, Eminem and Metallica...it was pretty fucking hilarious to hear that he wanted to record us."

Claiming connections with Earache, the producer said the company would buy the recordings upon completion, but no sale was ever made.

"So we came up with the idea of buying them ourselves and releasing it through friends. We got six labels we were friendly with, split the costs and used the excess for pressing. It worked out really cheap for them and they aren't lumbered with stock. And it worked for us."

It is this honesty, along with their rawness of expression, that most fascinates.

"None of us are professional musicians. We taught each other to play and so don't have a lot of respect for the patterns of music."

Indeed, their refusal to enter into a conventional musical system symbolises one of the most natural forms of expression. Despite their eloquence in conversation, refusing to learn a dogmatized musical language has forced them to invent their own, one in tune with their true nature.

As de Saussure described the arbitrariness of language, and the way it can colour, cloud, and construct our reality, Trencher are an organic machine, digging their way across the field of empathy and churning up the proscribed filth of our ancestors. Trencher are truth.



'Humour and horror. The two compliment each other like an apple goes with cheese'



my first record: Spektrum

Interview: Everett True

Photography: Sarah Bowles

Isaac (drums): "The first vinyl record I bought was by Twisted Sister, *Under The Blade* or something. It was so good. It had a logo of Dee Snider eating this massive boner with all the make-up on. The first cassette I bought was by The Police."

Teja (bass): "Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. All my mates had it, so I had to have it as well."

Gabriel (keyboards): "When I was about 13. I won a £25 WH Smiths token and bought a Walkman. I'd listen to my sister's copy of

Wham!'s *Fantastic* on it. It sounded amazing. It had all these twinkling guitars, and percussion. Then my uncle gave me a cassette that had Grace Jones *Nightclubbing* on one side and Sade's *Diamond Life* on the other. That was a big influence. I wish I'd bought Twisted Sister now.

Lola (voice): "My first record was (sings), 'Girl, I been missin' you...and the way you make me feel...' I bought that and then swapped it with Mary Jane Girls 'All Night Long'. It might've

been Cameo. It might've been Japan. I can't quite remember. We adored Japan. We went to the house of Steve Janson [Japan drummer] and David Sylvain [Japan singer – the pair are brothers], somewhere around Victoria. We knocked on the door and no one came. Then we saw Steve Janson walking towards us... He was absolutely gorgeous.

"We would bunk school and go to Saturday Superstore, and see everyone. We went to Simon Le Bon's house as well."



The Thermals

Words: Manish Agarwal

Photography: Jeff Mawer

The Thermals are a twenty-something trio from Portland, Oregon, who play fast, distorted and very catchy punk-pop. Their two albums on the Sub Pop label, *More Parts Per Million* and *Fuckin' A*, both sound as if they're going to make the stereo overheat. You could say their reference points are Guided By Voices and Buzzcocks – but you'd likely be too busy punching the air to bother.

The band's singer, guitarist and songwriter, Hutch Harris, a charismatic fellow who was born in Manhattan, is sipping whisky sours in the car park of London venue, 93 Feet East. "My father is a professional piano player," he says. "He was in the air force band in Vietnam, then he played off-Broadway shows. He tried teaching me piano when I was seven, but neither of us had the patience. I took up guitar when I was 15. I was really into Van Halen, Guns N' Roses and Led Zeppelin. Then when Nirvana came out, I realised those were songs I could actually play." The Harris family moved to San Jose, California when Hutch was eight. There he met future Thermals bassist Kathy Foster.



Misty's Big Adventure

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Lindsay Wright

Oh, I love them. Nine members, sax, egg whisk, scratching, a carrier-bag full of riotous melodies and swingtime hooks (the trumpet on debut EP 'I'm Cool With A Capital C' even echoes The Specials' 'Ghost Town')...natty antidisestablishmentarianism lyrics, paeans to the night time, idiot controllers and biscuit tins...but, most of all, Grandmaster Gareth! Here's the Brummie frontman now – a surreal cross between laconic indie icon MJ Hibbett, balls-busting DJ Shitmat and Seventies *Playschool* presenter Derek Griffiths – talking about his debut SL album, *And Their Place In The Solar Hi-Fi System*.

What motivates you to get up on stage and perform?

"Growing up, I just listened to Top 40 radio," she remembers. "I made up dance routines and did my own radio shows on cassette tape. When I was 16, I made friends with people in a punk band."

Hutch and Kathy moved to Portland in '98, impressed by the low cost of living and DIY music scene. Having gigged around town in various ensembles, they recorded the demo tape that would become The Thermals' first album. The pair then met kick-ass drummer Jordan Hudson, a Florida native who'd also spent time in San Francisco. His dad was a dancer

on friendly chaos. "This kid in Cleveland asked us to play 'Astro Zombies' by The Misfits," smiles Jordan. "As soon as we started, he grabbed the mic and brought it into the crowd and everyone sang along."

The band's next cover will be 'From Out Of Nowhere' by Faith No More. But what inspires their own songs?

"When I was writing the first record, Kathy and I were breaking up," says Hutch. "Politics in America is great for inspiration right now. There's a thousand reasons to get pissed off."

'There's a thousand reasons to get pissed off'

for 15 years, so he was always around music.

"I tried the saxophone when I was seven, but it made my lips puffy. I started playing drums when I was 12. There was a school dance and my band was allowed to do three songs. Our new singer went to sing the first note... and lost his voice!"

In contrast, The Thermals are a powerful live outfit who get off

'God And Country' sounds especially angry: "Pray for a new state!/Pray for assassination!"

"Yeah," Hutch sighs in agreement, "it's not a rational treatment of the subject. Assassinating George Bush would not solve the problem. It's supposed to be emotional: when you can't think of any rational solution, you can just scream out the most intense thing."

"To confuse, annoy and occasionally entertain! It's good to see audiences smiling. Sometimes, people come up to me and say they were down before they went out, and we cheered them up. Like a human anti-depressant!"

What's your favourite kind of music?

"I like a lot of Thirties jazz, the screwier the better. Raymond Scott has been a big influence on the brass stuff I write. A lot of his melodies got stolen for the *Looney Toons* cartoons. I'm also into psychedelic records like The Incredible String Band and The Holy Modal Rounders. Any band with a stupidly long name that isn't too blues rock! But it doesn't have to be from the late Sixties. Joe Meek,

Esquivel and Moondog are equally as psychedelic as Timothy Leary. I'm a stupidly big fan of Julian Cope, and got into Krautrock because of him. Faust are the second greatest band after The Beatles! No one ever agrees with me. Not even Faust fans! But the music I'm most into is Outsider Music like Shooby Taylor The Human Horn, the world's weirdest scat singer, or Luie Luie, a sleazy Mexican guy who invented his own dance called the touche where people can get together and touch, and The Shaggs who sound like they recorded in three separate rooms!"

Where does the band's name come from?

"A Magic Roundabout annual from 1968."

www.mistysbigadventure.co.uk

my favourite rock'n'roll book: Ikara Colt

Paul Resende (vocals): "Nico's *Songs They Never Play On The Radio*. Apart from being one of the funniest things I've read, it's also a rarity for a rock'n'roll book, being written by someone who was a) there and b) can write."

Tracy Bellaries (bass): "Songs They Never Play On The Radio. It's about Nico's last years as a touring heroin addict and is hilarious, but also tragic. It's written by an Oxford graduate loser who endured all the touring nightmares, amplified by 100!"

Dominic Young (drums): "The Stones Across America. They walked it like they talked it."

Claire Ingram (guitar): "Patti Smith by Victor Bockris. No one really sounds like her and this

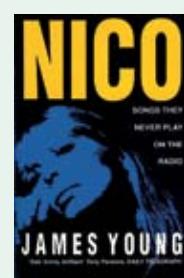
book explains why. It shows she could be one of the boys, even though her music had great femininity."

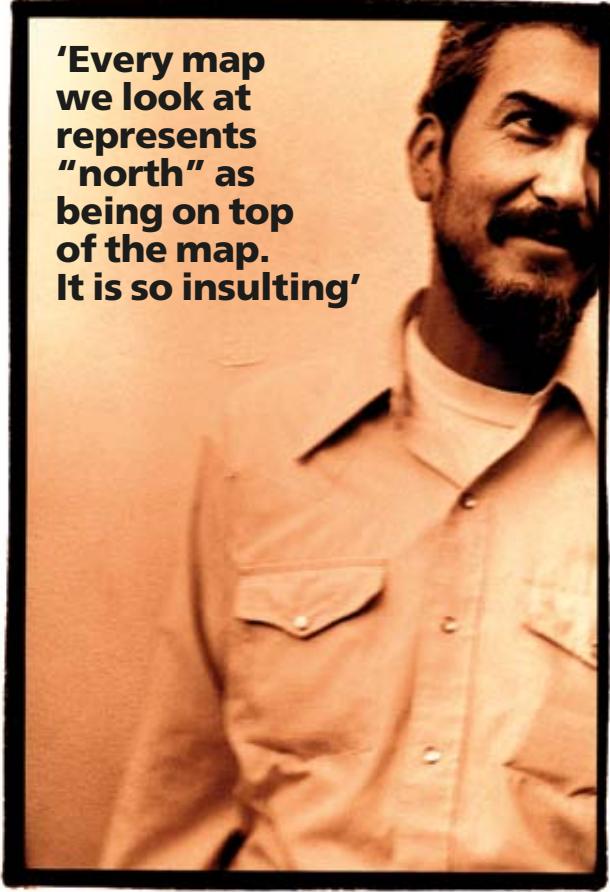


rarities: Cornershop

"I used to work in a record-pressing factory, so I've got a few white labels and really rare singles – for example, a test pressing of the first Oasis album *Definitely Maybe*, as it was originally intended: as a single (not double) album. That must be worth a bit. I've also got a Kate Bush single that never came out, worth £750. And a test pressing of Bob Dylan's *Self Portrait* that I found being sold by an army fanatic at a car boot sale for 50p."

"The records I value most aren't the most expensive ones, but the ones that inspire me. Like my 'New Star' seven-inch by Tappa Zukie, or my Jonathan Richman records, or Pussy Galore... too many to mention." (Ben Ayres, tamboura)





'Every map we look at represents "north" as being on top of the map. It is so insulting'

hate to hate: Howe Gelb

Photography: Steve Gullick

"Every time I hate, I set myself up for actually not hating the thing I thought I did. There is a supreme reverse order to the universe; a universal reverse psychology is employed upon us constantly. The moment you manage to make up your mind about what is definite, an equal and opposite kind of reaction begins to work itself up. You see it in movies all the time, which is a tiring warning of the way things are here on this Earth.

"In the movies, the moment you say you have finally 'made it', something happens to prove you have not. If you are a cop about to retire, then you will get shot. If you are about to win a race and shout it before crossing the finish line, someone else will beat you. That kind of thing. And it's only represented in films because we already understand this feeling. It is universal. In itself it is not something to hate. If you do, you will end up loving it.

"It's part of the fabric of our lives. It is irony; and life is mostly that. I think it has something to do with a pendulum effect that pulses through our days and emulates the system of time we rely on while we are here. If you 'tick' then you will 'tock'.

"So I hate to hate because I will only end up eating those words, and that becomes bothersome at worst, entertaining at best.

"The proof is in this writing. I hate to do these things. I do them because I dare myself to find the back door of Zen into them. The worst things I hate are 'best of' lists. I just hate lists. Especially set lists; they are absurd. They all celebrate a kind of restricted portioning which I really can't stand. Why am I asked to list only 10 favourite records of all time? Why stop at 10? What is wrong with the number 13 or, better yet, the six best records of all time? I think we all can handle it. I don't think anyone will freak if we start disassembling the notions that every list must end in 10 or five. Prime numbers are our friends too.

"Most of all, I really hate that every map we look at represents 'north' as being on top of the map. It is so insulting. There is no 'north' or 'south' in space. When we look at a map, we are essentially looking at it from the perspective of being above our own atmosphere. We are seeing it from space. But if we really were, then the chances of 'north' being exactly up, as it appears on the pages of a map, is extremely remote. This is infuriating. It also softens the brain. Stop making maps for imbeciles. We can handle it. It will make us better people. Better Earthlings. It will begin to give us a much better sense of our own place in the grand scheme of things.

"Meanwhile, I suppose, I will continue to hate doing this 'hate' article just as much as I love to love finishing it."



my first band: The Dirtbombs

"The first band I was in eventually settled on the name The Rags. Me and my buddy Nick were both 15 at the time. I was given a drum set by my uncle and Nick had a Mexican Stratocaster and a practice amp. We threatened to cover Nirvana's *Nevermind* in its entirety, but all we ended up with was a shoebox filled with tapes made on a boombox with a condenser mic. We never even played a show. Totally separate, but the first lyric I wrote to actually accompany a song I wrote was years later: 'I'm not a man/I'm not an island/Nothing in my hand/Nothing in my head'. " (Ben Blackwell, drums)

"We were called TSS – for Toxic Shock Syndrome. Like 15-year-olds everywhere, we thought we were the only people in the world cool enough to come up with such a unique name. Duh. We formed to enter a talent contest, which we never got around to doing. TSS didn't have any real instruments; we borrowed some and only had one real rehearsal. We talked a lot, and then the thing suddenly turned into another band called The U-Boats, which lasted a whole summer. I played organ. I sucked at it, but it didn't matter 'cause the whole band sucked. We got our lyrics from comic books. Almost all of The U-Boats' lyrics came from a guy named Steve Skeates, who wrote for several of the *Mad* clones of the Seventies and early Eighties: *Cracked*, *Crazy* and the like. We thought he was a genius. I heard he does a web-comic now. " (Mick Collins, vocals/guitar)



i want: Electrelane

Photography: Greg Neale

"Verity brought some tiny bells back from Mongolia about three years ago, but I only played them for a couple of shows. I've been listening to a lot of Rembetika music this last month, and my friend Jeremy, who plays in A Hawk And A Hacksaw, has been encouraging me to learn the bouzouki, but that could take quite a while. I also like Moroccan instruments like the oud and kenbri and have always loved banjos but, since no one plays the banjo like Chet Atkins, I have never tried to learn.

"I also like trying out different types of rock on my guitar; you can get some amazing effects by smashing rose quartz on the strings and listening to them pop and sizzle. " (Mia Clarke, guitar)

"The instrument I'm hankering after at the moment is a Toe Tek Chanter. It's a reeded pipe and I first heard one being played by a girl in the Polly Shang Kuan Band. The name is really new age and puts me off but I like the nasal rasping sound it makes. " (Verity Susman, voice, keyboard)

"I'd really like to have a harmonium and a banjo. I saw Xiu Xiu once and I really liked the harmonium, and Verity has one that I had a go on and it was really fun.

"I also want a ukulele. I had a plastic toy one in Spain and I miss it. I used to want to play the sitar but only because when I did GCSE music, our teacher had one and we used to spend all our music lessons eating chocolate, burning incense and listening to him playing the sitar, but really badly. It would be quite fun to have a hurdy-gurdy. " (Ros Murray, bass)

synergy: Har Mar Superstar

Words: Miss AMP

Photography: Steve Gullick

So, if your music could soundtrack any film in the world – and it was a film you were making – what would the song be, and what would be happening?

"The song would be 'Transit', and the film would be about a bunch of people leaving on an airplane to go on a holiday adventure on an island."

What, like Ibiza?

"Yeah. It's a really joyous trip, and they're all really happy and excited. Only then somebody gets murdered. Murdered on the party island. You could soundtrack the murder at this club –"

Like Manumission.

"Yeah, you could use the song 'Body' to soundtrack this girl getting strangled on the dancefloor."

Oh yeah? This girl's getting choked to death in public while she's in all her sexy disco wear?

"Well, it could be a boy. Doesn't have to be a girl."

But boys are boring. It's more sexy and exciting if it's a girl.

"OK, it is a girl, but...she's not killed. She gets...kidnapped!"

Yeah!

"But they find her in the end."

Who is the murderer – who chokes and abducts the girl? It should be you.

"Me, or...Crispin Glover."

What, that bloke out of Kula Shaker?

He's not very scary.

"Um, no. Crispin Glover is an actor."

Anyway, at the end, they find the girl, and of course he's in love with her, that's why he strangled her and tied her up. And at the end the song that's playing is 'EZ Pass'."

So, now that you've fucked Kate

Moss, how can you possibly ever

fuck a normal woman ever again?

You're setting yourself up for a life of disappointment there, boy.

"I never fucked Kate Moss."

Did you make her do a bit of salad tossing? I read that when she did it with Goldie she totally salad tossed him.

"I never fucked Kate Moss."

But you did! And Sadie Frost at the same time! I read it on popbitch.com so it must be true.

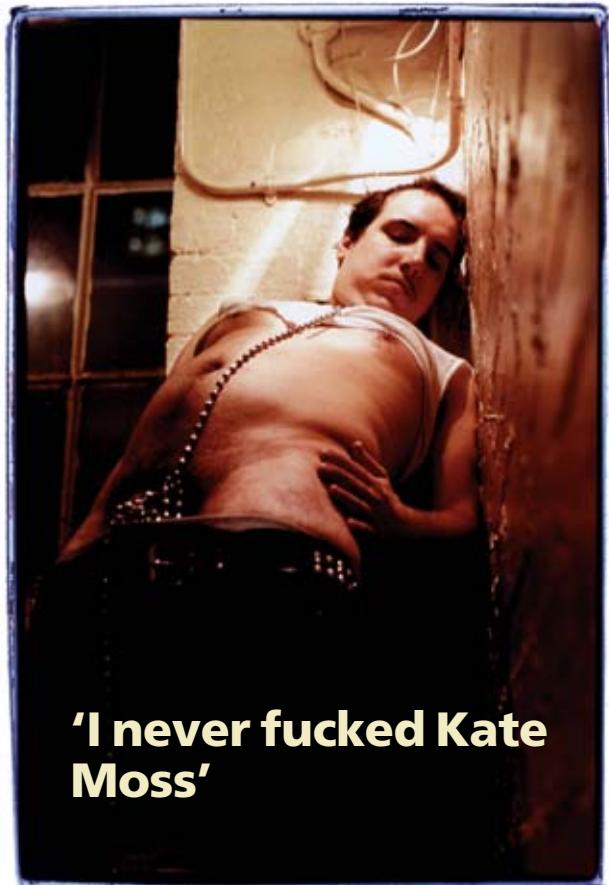
"I never fucked either of them."

You should get together with Eve, those people who make 'feminine hygiene products'. You should make Har Mar Vaginal Deodorants. Because the ladies get all excited when they see you – so you could offer to give them a free little squirt. 'For the girl who wants a little Har Mar in her area.' That could be the slogan. Now that would be cool.

"Heh. That would be."

You like that idea? I'll let you have that one. I've got millions.

"Thanks."



'I never fucked Kate Moss'

on tour: The Seconds

Photography: Greg Neale

"When I'm bored on tour I usually pick at zits on my arm. At our show in Offenbach (outside Frankfurt) we met a girl that wanted to hitch a ride with us to Amsterdam; she was headed to Brussels, and Amsterdam is only a short train ride away. She comes to

customs official that his children probably smoke dope. We got lost trying to find the train station in Eindhoven, which gave us a chance to admire Dutch architecture. Most of the structures are made from brick (the red brick is from Leiden, yellow from Utrecht, and grey from Gouda), usually laid out in unexpected patterns.

'That morning, I took a massive shit and left it on the shit shelf...'

Offenbach once a week to host a club night, which takes place in a public bathroom. Her club is partially funded by a city social works program. As we were in the van on our way to Amsterdam, I asked her if we could trade glasses. I have a pretty strong prescription, but hers is slightly stronger. She told me that my lenses were 'infinitely filthy' and that no matter how much I tried to clean them they would still be dirty. At a rest stop (*rasthof*) she bought a copy of *Der Spiegel* to read on her train ride.

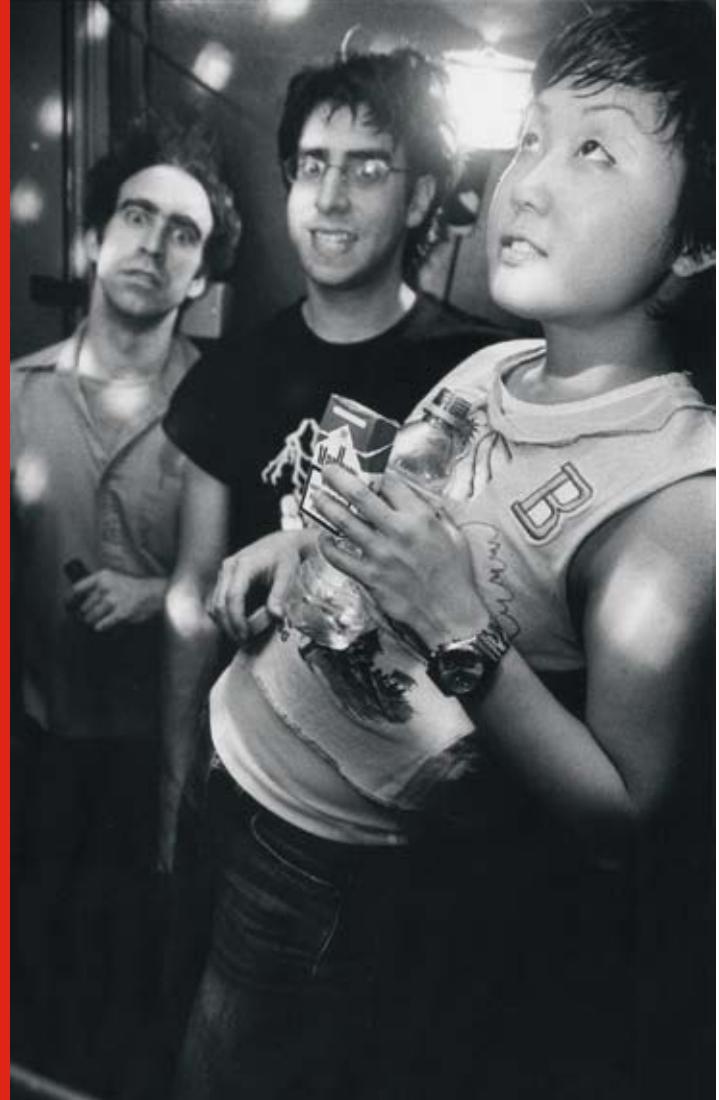
"About a week and a half before this we were pulled over by German customs because we were driving a suspicious looking van – it had Dutch plates and it looked a little like the Scooby Doo van. The customs officials brought out the dog and they found our weed. Our very English driver (from Leeds) told the very German customs official that there was an article in *Der Spiegel* that spoke of the 'Cannabis Disease' and the widespread use of marijuana among young people. Our driver told the

"My favourite tour joke is more of a prank. In Oerlinghausen, our show and accommodations were in a youth centre that felt like a squat though it wasn't functioning as one. The men's bathroom had the worst piss and shit smell I'd come across in a long time. For my morning shit I had no choice but to use the women's bathroom since it stank considerably less.

"The funny thing about German toilets is that they have a little shelf for your shit to fall onto – uncharacteristically functionless, for something identified with Germans. That morning, I took a massive shit and left it on the shit shelf. My other bandmates were disgusted and offended when they encountered it by surprise."

"So my funny tour joke is to take a shit on the shit shelf and leave it there for your bandmates. I guess that joke is what would you'd call 'toilet' humour. It's gross, and only children find it funny."

(Brian Case, drums)



a 10-point plan for a better 2005

Words: Neil Kulkarni
Illustration: Vincent Vanoli



all DJs watch kids, but this DJ hates them

Sometimes it seems people invite me out just so they can call me a miserable sod and blame me for ruining their evening. I wish they'd phone and tell me; drop notes. They should know by now that summer kills me, that my spirit dies when mercury rises. I only go out when I have to, but at the weekend I'd be skint as a badger's runt if I didn't DJ. So every Saturday night I press the flesh, and every Sunday morning I try and scrub myself dirty again.

There's these kids, see. They're loyal. They're on the dancefloor every Saturday night. Don't ever let me live anywhere where Saturday night doesn't matter. They dance to Pixies, Breeders, Pavement, Fugazi, Dinosaur Jr, Sonic Youth, Belle & Sebastian, The Smiths, Sebadoh, Mudhoney, Grandaddy. A circle of boys and girls committed to a certain pantheon that can't be questioned but does strike one as terribly precious.

One of them moans the guy in the main room is playing Prince, so they've come into my side room to hear some 'proper music'. I scowl and dig out 'Hot Thing'. See, they don't even dance to The Specials. They're not from round here. They're students from dahn sarf. They're

beautiful, but this week I kill the room an hour early and tell them all to, "Fuck off into the main room – the people are prettier." A holler of disapproval. "We want real music," they whine. "POP IS REAL MUSIC, Y'DICKS!" I bray, and then I pull the plug. It's a gimmick thing.

It's all jealousy on my part, of course. Being into that music never got me friends, but there they are, loved up and moshing to 'Teenage Riot', surrounded by gorgeous androgynous replicants. Fuckers. Where were these sexy, young, thrusting, weird people when I was their age?

I reassure myself by thinking that something's lost now the underground rock of my youth is the 'classic' floor-fillers of my present. Listening to Dinosaur Jr's 'Don't' when you've got a rockin' social life is one thing – listening to it in a bedroom is another. One implies a shared joy and the interpersonal flow of substances both emotional and physical. The other implies self-explosion and crystallised spunk on your jimmjams; it's about me and FUCK you.

It's nice turning your natural repulsiveness into an aesthete's self-exile. Now that people insist on talking to me, forcing me to cough up words so sour they almost make me retch at my repetition, I want

that young fogey, frigidaire, hemmed-in, mute virginity back again, big style. I want to go back to when I believed in nothing but a future, rather than the grisly horror the present always seems to end up being.

give up on keeping up

Modern life demands you think about such colossal trivialities. In 2005, don't ponder Franz Ferdinand or Tracey Emin or whatever mediocrity is being jabbed in your face. Think about the following: JS Bach. Shakespeare. Leonardo. Picasso. Michaelangelo. Miles Davis. Jean Renoir. The Slits. Y'know, the greats. Depressing gods, all the above, because they created new things but destroyed any possibility of originality for everyone since.

Realise always that art, all art, great art should always endeavour to explain and describe. When it loses sight of this transcendent purpose, when it simply wants to keep up with the overladen, eager meaninglessness of the mass media or instant fix satiety of consumerism, it's proper fucked. The past contains so many futures we ain't even got round to yet. And Goya didn't do owt decent till his sixties, so bear up, bison.

There's time to change the world yet.

life's additives keep you alive

Listen to pop music greedily; on the radio anywhere except Radio One. It'll make you happy like Haribo. Sour. Buzzy. Hopeful. Tragic. Immortal. Dead in a week.

take stock. y'fat knacker

Go on. Really take a long, hard, brutal look at yourself. Take your clothes off. Pinch your rolls. Tweak your tits. Make fun of your carcass. Put into place a mental block that stops you yearning for what can never be. The myriad lust-objects you see everyday, see through you to real people. You're a chubby ghost of an urge. You're no longer a participant in silly games, unless we're talking Janet Kay, and only the emasculating horror of self-realisation can save you.

stay in. talk less

Disconnect all your phones. Open letters, but forget how to read them. Look at and through them like a monkey would. S'a lot easier being the idiot you are than the smart arse you're meant to be.

answer the call of the wilderness

Go to the beach. Look at a hillside. See the curvature of the earth. Look at the moon. Get foetal in cathedrals. Realise your place in space, the little speck you're stretching at every opportunity. And the sodding sun can stay across the street.

consider the true majesty of *Trout Mask Replica*

The way you can always feel it raising your expectations on life. The subconscious and mathematic and stellar and here and there and reality and dreams all rushing out at you. And the beauty. The primal kick of the fucking

'POP IS REAL MUSIC, Y'DICKS!' I bray, and then I pull the plug

thing. The goodbye paid in 'Frownland', the mutterings of a man who's gonna walk up the high street for 2,000 miles until he's out in the world, the real world (matched by the Magic Band's unrepeatable stumble-ass, L-plated progress). Where he can gather his thoughts about *this* world. See the damage done and wield the scalpel, finally let his heart's tenderest aches find voice.

'Trout Mask' is a documentary of what happened to these people while they were making it. Yet it's a transcendent triumph of the imagination as well, charging connections in your brain possibly dead since puberty. There is a sense of wonder at nature and the unnatural – and the way words can come so close to both.

It's not such a bad thing for a poet to make you feel things again. Or provide a picture of his nation so thoroughly sensual in its enjoyment and brutal in its disappointment, so total in its understanding and compassion. There's venom here. And words that knead your shoulders like the first drink of the day. At once outwardly futurist and inwardly ancient, the earth's first and last song.

Take it monthly.

swear down that you'll address your addictions

Not the harmless ones like crack and Terry's Chocolate Orange. I'm talking about the habits you picked up randomly from no one, but you can't shake because they don't occur to you as addictions. Like cracking your fingers arthritically. Taking corners too fast. Listening to your mother. Shaving your mono-brow. Saying 'sorry' after cumming. Saying, "Erm, yeah, give us a couple of days on that" when you know you have no intention of doing a fucking thing. Arguing. Getting out of bed. And of course, the most difficult habits of them all to shake: pornography, and hope.

now, more than any other time, is the right time to finally go mad

It doesn't mean you have to be a full-on, sectionable, lip-diddling loon. It just means relaxing a little. When you see someone buying *The Daily Mail* in a paper shop, don't resist the shout of 'NAZI' that comes to your lips. Release it. Enter competitions. When the beer-lads stare, stare back, pull faces, front the fuckers out. If you feel like drawing on your face before you go out, do so. Show off your hickies in your child's school playground. Scan your face onto 40 A4 flyers and hand them out on the street asking for help in tracing your identical twin. Commence a long-running correspondence with a local free paper. Commit yourself to every moment and kill the false modesty: when someone asks you what you do, tell them plain that you're the new messiah.

take out some insurance in case none of the above work

A bomb's good, but a sponsored suicide for your favourite chardee's even better. Failing that, promise yourself you'll look into the opportunities of monastery/convent life. Try and get yourself hid, or die trying in '05. Cos by 2006 you'll be too nuts to think straight. Imagine that.



i sing a darkness

Words: Alistair Fitchett

Photography: Owen Richards

The secret magic behind Gravenhurst's (sub)urban storytelling

"You don't like Black Sabbath? I love Black Sabbath."

Gravenhurst singer/songwriter Nick Talbot is not what you would expect. Listening to his *Flashlight Seasons* album on Warp, you might form a picture of a slight, lonely young man hiding in the shadows. But things are seldom what they might seem. Scratch the surface of Gravenhurst songs and you discover a quietly seething sea of disquiet, a blistering anger seeping out with the finest of precisely focused power. But Black Sabbath? Maybe not.

Musically, it's easier to neatly nudge Gravenhurst into a folk revivalism slot than into dark proto-metal. Their sound is certainly one that often recollects some of the finer moments of the Sixties English scene like Fairport Convention, Pentangle, Soft Machine even.

"Well, yes, I have a few of the early Fairport Convention albums," says Nick, "a couple of Bert Jansch records, but nothing much really. I'm not really into the whole thing. It's quite a superficial connection. Same with all the Nick Drake references."

Well, quite. The Drake references certainly are just too easy and also wide of the mark. A more valid link can be made to the late Sixties songs of Ray

'You don't like Black Sabbath? I love Black Sabbath'

Davies, in particular, the masterful collection that made up the *Village Green Preservation Society* set. It's to do with the way Davies consciously constructs and deconstructs the myths of the English country idyll, creating a mediated space inside which dreams and narratives can form. Nick Talbot does a similar thing: he creates carefully sculpted songs that breathe on your neck and weave strange paths through your psyche, songs that make reference to (sub)urban geographies and reflect on mediated realities, rendering those 'realities' questionable. Which means it's all somewhat surreal – though in the vein of Joseph Cornell's assemblages as opposed to Dali's preposterous landscapes.

One of the most important elements of Pop is that, as the consumer, you are able to take ownership of the artefact and subsume it within your own world. Naturally not all Pop manages this as well as others. It's a difficult line to walk, one that's about leaving hints, about dropping references that reverberate with an emotional vibrancy of just the right intensity so that you are neither swamped nor left out in the cold. There are doors left open a shade, windows into lit rooms viewed from passing trains or automobiles. Flashes of light, lakes of shadow, like the suggestive ghostliness of MR James' stories, or Edward Hopper's paintings of urban emptiness.

"Yes," says Nick. "Lyrically, there has to be just the right amount left open to interpretation – it has to allow the listener in, has to allow them the opportunity to get inside the song."

That Gravenhurst songs achieve this with admirable ease is testament to the mature craft of Nick Talbot and his instinctive understanding of the magic of music. You could do much worse than letting yourself go and feeling that magic for yourself.



The Barcelona Pavilion

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Till Thomas

The first CD is shaped like a small blue business card. It makes this quirky Canadian band sound like a chirpy, cheesy WASPy synth-led version of Numbers, bad drum machine and distorted fuzz guitar all over the shop, before leading into a more erratic Wedding Present. The second song is pure indie dancehall: "How are you people going to have fun if none of you people ever participate?" someone yelps, not unreasonably, over a bargain basement beat. The first show Barcelona Pavilion played was at Joel and Maggie's house, December 2001. The T-shirts said 'anal'. The party got written up in local Toronto papers. Hidden Cameras swirled in giddy abandon.

The second CD is shaped like a small red eyeball. It samples and speeds up The Fall's 'Rowche Rumble' with a delighted abandon, and stops very suddenly in just over a minute. There are also two German language songs. It's available via Meccico over here, and took Steve Malkmus by surprise just as he was about to go onstage at Domino's 10th anniversary celebrations. The song is called 'New Materiology' because that's how the lyrics go. The eighth show Barcelona Pavilion played was at 37 Oxford St,

The first CD is shaped like a small blue business card

August 2002. It was the 'Our house is your ashtray' eviction party, and the T-shirts said 'R'. Oh No The Moderator played, among others.

The next couple of CDs are due soon. Hopefully, they'll be yellow and ochre and shaped like a cow's intestine – to accompany a projected book about eating. Last I heard from singer/bassist Steve Kado, he said the Minister For Information would be in touch...

The 43rd concert Barcelona Pavilion played was in London at the Spitz, with The Gossip, Hawney Troof and Hello Cuca. It is not recorded what T-shirts were worn.

Just say yes to bands with a cheap drum machine, one laptop, two singers and two basses, especially if they change their shirts every show.

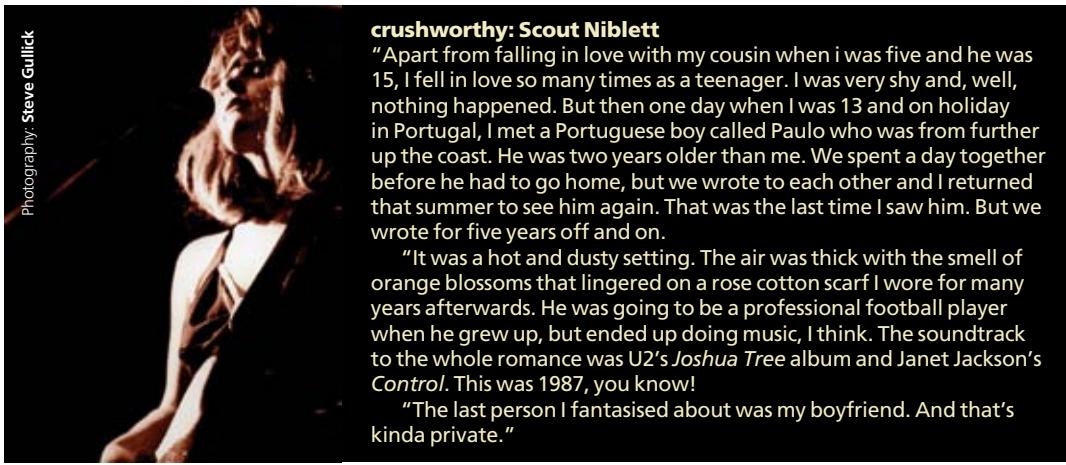
crushworthy: Scout Niblett

"Apart from falling in love with my cousin when I was five and he was 15, I fell in love so many times as a teenager. I was very shy and, well, nothing happened. But then one day when I was 13 and on holiday in Portugal, I met a Portuguese boy called Paulo who was from further up the coast. He was two years older than me. We spent a day together before he had to go home, but we wrote to each other and I returned that summer to see him again. That was the last time I saw him. But we wrote for five years off and on.

"It was a hot and dusty setting. The air was thick with the smell of orange blossoms that lingered on a rose cotton scarf I wore for many years afterwards. He was going to be a professional football player when he grew up, but ended up doing music, I think. The soundtrack to the whole romance was U2's *Joshua Tree* album and Janet Jackson's *Control*. This was 1987, you know!"

"The last person I fantasised about was my boyfriend. And that's kinda private."

Photography: Steve Gullick



NIN vs the pAperchAse

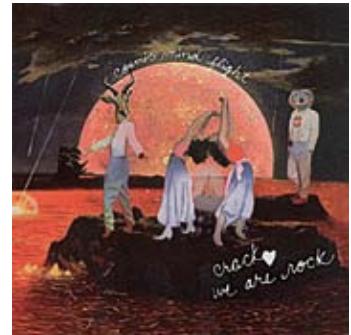
Words: Gracelette

Photography: Owen Richards

There is no such thing as locking pAperchAse singer John Congleton in too many dark rooms, poking him with too many sharp sticks or showing him too many pictures of grotesque female forms.

For this is the charm behind the third long-player *God Bless Your Black Heart* (kill rock stars), and the dude is still red-faced and angry, shooting out elaborate revenge fantasies, grand pianos that fall from third storey opera balconies and crash apart improbably into chalk outlines on suburban doorsteps below. Young bodies are still healing quickly. Young bodies are still gonna get it. And their pain and sadness has never sounded quite so good.

See, I'm not being gratuitously callous when I call on the women of this world to continue to do whatever it is they're doing that is causing so much emotional pain to the ringleader of this Texan quartet. And it's certainly not that I quite like the idea of being menaced by boys with knives, and feel that such fucked-up-ness is to



do you wanna dance? Numbers

"The Felix Kubin record makes me wanna dance. That guy is totally fascist Sixties spy soundtracks plus a heavy Kraftwerk vibe – and he's all alone. He's a super hip-nerd, German-style, so you know he's one hell of a ladies man. He charmed the pants off us, nearly literally. I heard that at his shows in Hamburg (his hometown) all the kids come dressed to the nines like fascist spies.

"The new Die Monitr Battss record, out soon on Troublemance, makes me wanna dance, too. Very sexy bored teenagers, huge beats plus intense skronking; all added to a guy who likes to destroy public property during shows. Everybody dances and has to duck a lot. Forget the pants with these people.

"And Crack: WAR's *Cosmic Mindflight* (above) definitely makes me wanna dance. That record is a masterpiece of scary electronic pop music. It is tragic more people don't know about it."

(Dave Broekema, guitar)

be encouraged in our menfolk, at least to a point. It's just that, on the strength of this album, being emotionally wounded by girls is never gonna stop suiting Congleton and, fuck it, I say, "Pick up the ball and run with it". Accentuate the positive, you know?

After all, life is complicated these days. It used to be textbook. Impossibly damaged woman breaks your heart because that's who she is. and who you are is someone stupid enough to let her. You stick on 'Reptile' or 'Ruiner' and hit repeat, letting Nine Inch Nails' *The Downward Spiral* play over and over as you terrorise yourself with violent daydreams and hate yourself for being too weak to see them through. Like Adam in the Garden of Eden, you hide your face from Nietzsche because you are ashamed. You're young and callow and never been hurt like this before. Trent Reznor, man, he knows what you're going through.

But, a few years on, the dude releases *The Fragile* and, while the arrangements are flawless, he's repeating the sentiments of *The Downward Spiral* like some old man's Viagra mantra, even though you know he's gotten over whatever it

was that fucked him up so bad in the first place.

In contrast, three albums on, and, with two economic lines, Congleton can still capture the fear and loathing of the recognition scene, the paranoia of what you know is to come and the egotistical tenderness that characterises the best revenge fantasies.

"Kiss me like you mean goodbye", said the spider to the fly. 'All those times you thought you were wrong, you were right.'

Nothing Trent wrote after *The Downward Spiral* is ever gonna compare to a line like that.

But that's the trouble with time. It heals all pain. Except, apparently, Congleton's pain, and for this we must be grateful.

After all, the pAperchAse easily make better music than Nine Inch Nails to get fucked over to. They understand that keyboards aren't always the preserve of long sensitive gothic fingers. Sometimes – those times when you really fucking need to be hearing The pAperchAse, for example – keyboards are doors slamming and cold sweats waking you up and fists making meat contact in an unscientific but thoroughly effective manner. Oh sure, there's

some 'achingly beautiful' keyboard playing in the gloriously entitled 'Abby You're Going To Burn For What You've Done To Me', but this quickly gives way to the discordant insistence of 'Your Pretty Head', those long sensitive fingers smashed up and

Long sensitive fingers smashed up and bandaged together with black gaffa tape

bandaged together with black gaffa tape, still forcing some noise, any noise, from the black and white keys.

Moreover, as the years have passed, I've come to realise that I'm never going to be so hurt that I will spontaneously grow a cock with

which to fuck over the people who've done me wrong. I have now mastered the art of cumming all over someone should the hatefuck situation demand it. But it's hardly inclusive and who wants to talk cocks and cum anyway when you can talk knives and spiders and heads on poles?

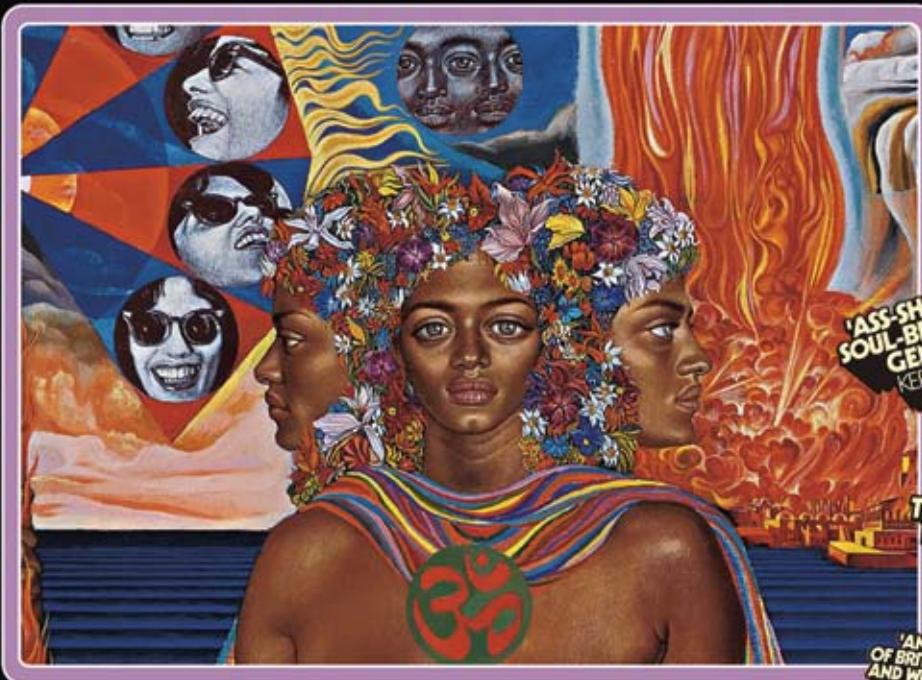
Much more fun.

John Congleton never discusses his cock. Trent would never shut up about his. Congleton is therefore the better lyricist and thus needs to take another dose of emotional misery for the team.

Long may he refuse to heal.



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'SIMPLY BETTER
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THE FLY

'AN UNHOLY AMALGAM
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Errors

Words: Stewart Gardiner

Photography: Mark Connolly

Bear witness, for this is the sound of the synthetic made flesh, the biologically programmed amalgamation of man and machine. What Errors urge out of their glacial metal boxes – with the help of wood and string contraptions – is so human you can almost feel the existential strain tearing at arterial structures.

'So far we've had more gigs than practices'

Jacking into their grid system to communicate via fluctuating binary coding, I encounter three of them holed up in a Glasgow lab. But as you may expect, they reply as an autonomous unit. The voice does, however, indicate its constituent parts: laptop, synths, programming (Simon); synths, bass (Steev); guitar (Greg).

Simon and Steev began producing tracks together while still at school, but admit that it was mostly 'cheesy Eighties synth-pop'. The shift into

darker territory was not precipitated until an introduction at an unnamed rock concert in the Barrowlands led to a meeting of minds in WH Smiths. Greg thus joined proceedings, and the embryonic Errors went online.

Having just signed to the fiercely eclectic Rock Action label, Errors will be gearing up to unleash their instrumental Germanic electro thrash meets post rock doom and gloom upon a largely unsuspecting world. Sample their 'Hans Herman' number for a lesson in uplifting nihilism.

In locating their enticing sonic domain, they followed no conscious blueprints, instead allowing ideas to filter through from their surroundings.

"We are all into similar stuff. As for the post-rock thing, it comes as a result of living in Glasgow, and being surrounded by bands that fall into that criterion. We have probably been most influenced by the music of Pavement, Sonic Youth, Shellac, Kraftwerk and New Order."

And it is all in there, glistening beneath the surface, yet moulded into something they

indisputably have the right to call their own. As with much of Glasgow's current crop of sonically dissimilar bands, Errors have been almost subconsciously predisposed to dismiss monostylistics by attending club nights like Optimus or any number of Art School events. The sense of community is contagious in the city, with all manner of individuals being exposed to wildly varying permutations of musical information that, by extension, then feed into the databanks of the future creators and manipulators.

Becoming a functioning part of that community was the obvious next step, and it is indeed through the live forum that Errors have since made their name.

"So far we have had more gigs than practices. So you'll hear more mistakes live. You might also witness the laptop breaking down if you come and see us. It happens a lot."

Through such errors, machine edges closer to man. And under those conditions, if it's broke then don't fix it.

my first show: Jeffrey Lewis





Four Tet (aka Kieran Hebden), wildly regarded as being responsible for some of the most cutting edge electronic music of the past - or indeed any - year, releases his first-ever compilation as the newest addition to Azuli's 'LateNightTales' Series.

Taking in the far-flung reaches of Kieran's legendary expansive musical map and unveiling many of the influences behind his 'Pause' and 'Rounds' albums, this collection pitches warm psychedelia against cool jazz against free floating folk against hardcore hip hop against straight up experimental lunacy, and emerges with a cohesive game-plan...after a fashion.

Featuring tracks by:
Tortoise, Gravediggaz, Rhsaan Roland Kirk, Koushik, Manfred Mann's Chapter 3, Terry Riley, Jef Gilson + Malagasy, Madvillain, Smoke, Fairport Convention, J Saunders, Icarus & Manitoba

Exclusive Four-Tet cover version of Jimi Hendrix's 'Castles Made of Sand'

This CD also features exclusively - 'Bits and Bobs' written and performed by David Shrigley.

"The sophisto's choice"

i-D

"This series just gets better"

Time Out

"Seriously, they're that good"

The Sunday Telegraph

"The Rolls-Royce of compilations"

GQ

LateNightTales

Four-Tet

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LateNightTales music and stories worth staying up for.
Released October 2004

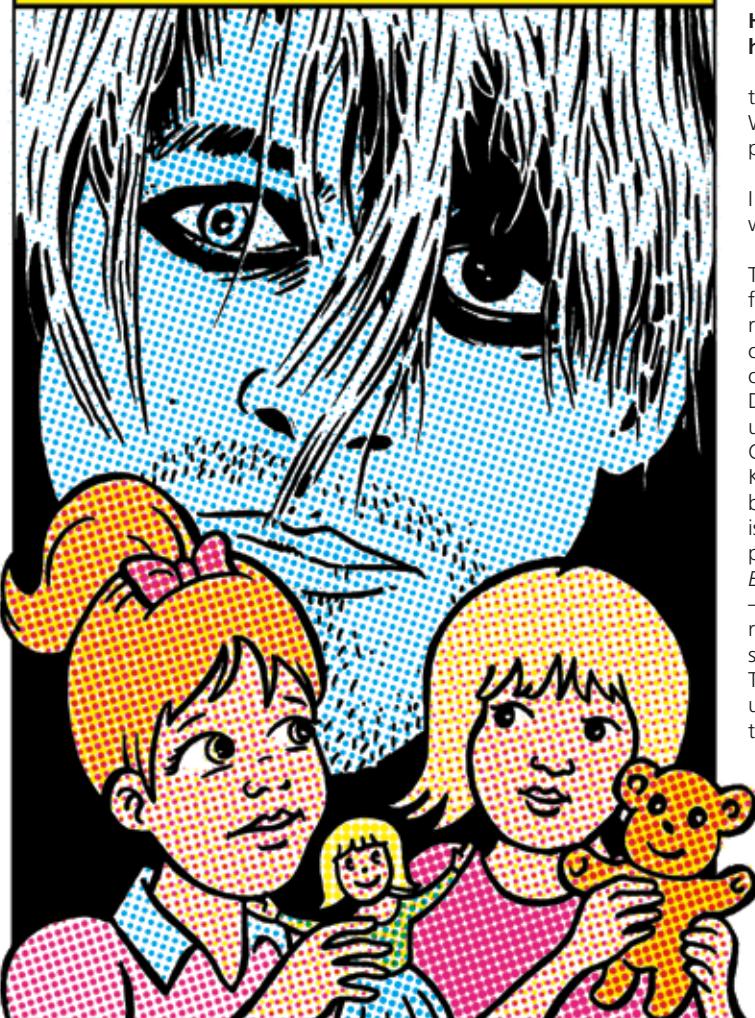
video diaries: Deerhoof

Photography: Cat Stevens



'Yeah! The drummer's got this enormous drum set with double bass drums and all these toms, and then all he does is goes "doo-doo-doo-doo-doo" on the snare!'

THE SISTERS HAD A STRANGE FEELING THAT THEY WANTED TO FORM A BAND...



Greg: "Chris, you're the only one that had MTV as a child."

Chris: "Before I had MTV, me and my sister watched a show called something like *Friday Night Videos* on public television. The first video I saw was Joan Jett's 'I Like Rock 'N' Roll'. My sister said, 'That's a music video'."

Greg: "I might've seen that. That one's not in black and white, it's in blue and white."

John: "It was in black and white, and that's not what it was called."

Satomi: "I used to watch this children's programme where this bear was speaking with a (*makes cuica sound*). He constructed paper buildings and stuff. Why do we have to do this interview together?"

Chris: "One time when I was little, I told someone at my dad's work that I liked Falco. But it wasn't even true."

Greg (sings 'Der Kommissar'): "I bought the sheet music!"

Chris: "I can't really remember the videos we're talking about. I just have these weird disconnected images: Huey Lewis's head sticking out of the sand or something."

Satomi: "I like the Jane Fonda exercise video. When I went to high school in Surrey, I had an after school activity where I danced to that video. In the dark."

Greg: "The whole class had to do that? In the dark? Staring at the TV screen? The same video each week?"

Satomi: "Every week (*sings 'Livin' For You'*)." "

Chris: "I watched Captain Beefheart's 'I'm Gonna Booglarize Ya, Baby' recently."

Greg: "Yeah! The drummer's got this enormous drum set with double bass drums and all these toms, and then all he does is goes '*doo-doo-doo-doo-doo*' on the snare! Winged Eel Fingerling looks like he's having a nervous breakdown. He just plays one guitar note over and over, but has this elaborate dance that keeps changing throughout the song that has nothing to do with what he's playing."

Chris: "Whenever I think of music videos, the first that comes to mind is 'Thriller'."

Greg: "Satomi does the dance *perfectly*. It's 17 minutes long. There was probably more dialogue in that MTV video than there was in all of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *2001* is my favourite music video (*sings 'The Blue Danube'*)." "

Satomi: "I don't think it's a good idea to talk about *2001*. So many people talk about *2001*, and it's always a turn-off for the people."

Chris (makes buzzer sound).

Smoosh

Words: David McNamee

Illustration: Phil Elliott

Hello, Asya and Chloe, what has happened today?

Asya: "I had a soccer practice today, we had to run a lot though! We also picked up our CD release posters. Yay! I really like them."

Chloe: "I had a soccer game and I am really happy, because I played well and scored a header goal!"

The most genuinely fascinating facet of pop music is its inherent rootlessness. Pop is the ultimate outsider music because it operates outside any atavistic canon or code. Despite their recent adoption by the uber-indie league of tourmates Death Cab For Cutie, Cat Power and Sleater-Kinney, Smoosh are the ultimate pop band. Two sisters from Seattle, Chloe is 10 and hits drums, Asya is 12 and plays keyboards and sings. *She Like Electric* is Smoosh's debut album – the first 14 songs they have written, released by US indie Pattern 25. It sounds genuinely unlike anything. This is pop music stripped down, unfiltered and incapable of appealing to a straitjacketing set of reference points.

She Like Electric runs on pure, unfettered imagination and the sheer joy of filling in noise with colour, paint and stories.

What is your favourite Smoosh song?

Chloe: "I like 'Massive Cure' and 'Bottlenose'. I like the louder songs. It's more fun to play hard on the drums. 'Bottlenose'

started by us just messing around. It's about like getting into the music and putting your hands in the air."

Although the closest musical comparison is probably, well, Hanson, Smoosh are gloriously uninhibited by domineering producers and parents. Consequently, their songs open up a Smoosh micro-world where Asya and Chloe's perceptions and ideas about the world are framed in surreal, funny, sweet song doodles. Despite their righteous minimalism, this is shockingly intricate music, showcasing the girls' extraordinary ability to make up their own rules and

'I don't really write songs depending on what I'm feeling'

sounds as they go along – the only language capable of expressing their own brilliant, unique characters.

How do you write songs? Where does the inspiration for the words come from?

Asya: "Umm, whatever I think of that is interesting and sounds good with the songs. So I don't exactly get inspirations for them but when I'm playing the piano and making up words I just sing and whatever comes out, if it is good words and makes a story, then I finish it."

**guilty pleasures:
Gravy Train!!!**

Chunx: "I love movies – or, rather, films on the Lifetime network. I cry during the more tender ones. I put on miniskirts and strut to Def Leppard's 'Pyromania'. I've been to a Tori Amos concert and I loved it. I watch Home Shopping Network for hours waiting for something I wanna buy. I love trans fat, in all its delicious forms."

Hunx: "Watching the entire series of *The OC* over and over again, wanting to get gay blowjobs in public and not feeling guilty about it, eating huge blocks of cheese right before going to bed, watching TV all the time, smoking weed and doing gaba calm (hot new street drug in the USA!!!)."

If you were feeling sad would you write a sad song, or a happy song to cheer you up?

Asya: "Umm, I don't really write songs depending on what I'm feeling cause if I'm really sad I wouldn't make a good song."

The truth is, if you give any bunch of 11-year-olds instruments they always make a noise that sounds like The Shaggs. Right now, Smoosh work because they take the form and purpose of the pop song and the world, and what songs are meant to say about the world is so much more interesting than anything they could learn from their musical heroes, if they even have any. Songs like 'Bottlenose' and 'Make It Through' are weird, jarring, inventive and oddly affecting – dreamlike playground poems that sound like nothing else and seem to come from nowhere.

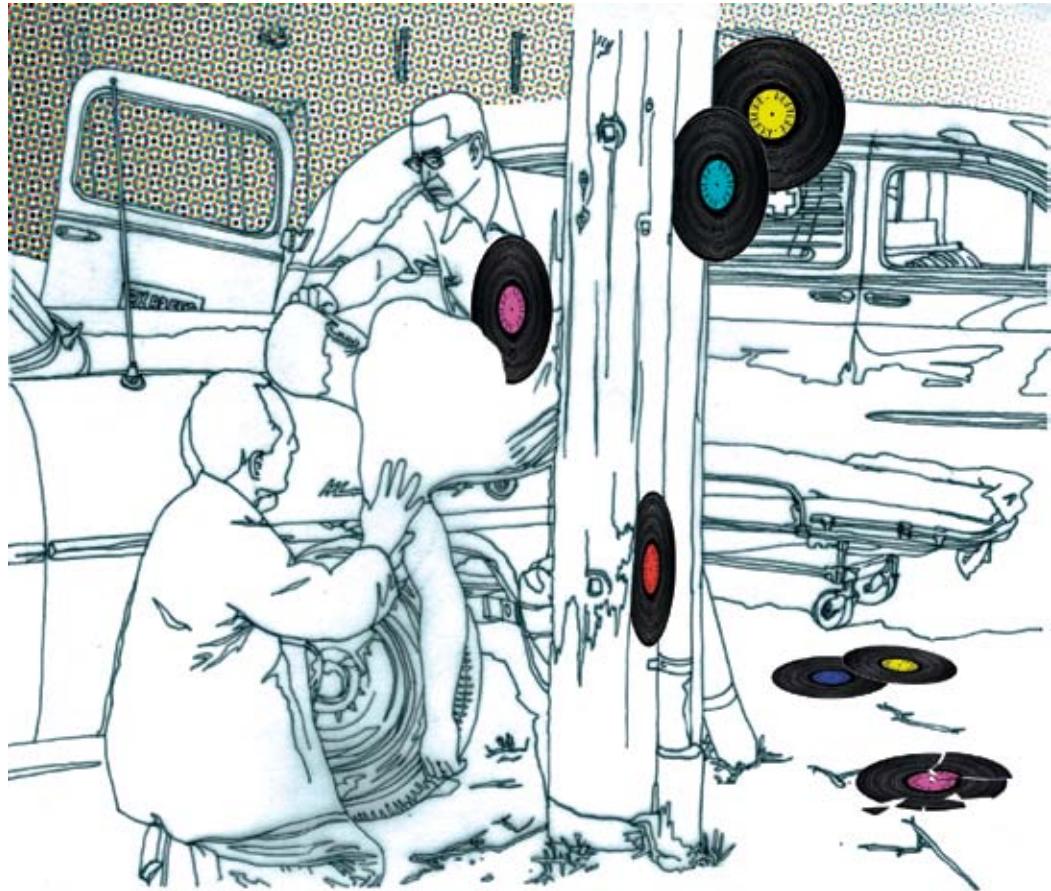
What is your favourite song at the moment by another artist?

Asya: "I really like 'Float On' by Modest Mouse."

Chloe: "I like 'Roses' by OutKast."

When was the last time you guys had a fight?

Asya: "Today, we were drawing paper people and cutting them out to be like puppets. She was drawing like cartoon girls and I had to try to copy hers and I couldn't. Because my guys were like a different style. She wouldn't change hers so I told her she had to change. We were kind of arguing and then I was hungry so I had an ice-cream and then mom called me outside so we kind of forgot about it."

**DJ/rupture**

Words: Miss Amp

Illustration: Jussi Brightmore

So you know when you develop an obscure obsession, like, say, Japanese facial bondage? And first you spend hours on Google to find images of your thang? And then you purchase back-to-front manga books with drawings of girls in said bondage? And then that's not enough, so you buy special wire to create your own nose hook? And then you enrol on a leatherwork evening class, ostensibly to make saddles and bridles and shit, but really so you can create a special harness for your nose hook so you can turn your girlfriend into a pig-faced slut?

Course you do. My equivalent was when I started learning Raqs Sharqi (Egyptian dance). One moment, you're happy studying the moves and investing in your very own jingly-jangly coin belt, the next you're hankering after week-long workshops in Luxor, and special costumes with sequinned bras and skirts that fly out to here when you whirl about, not to mention your own drummer to follow you round for whenever you feel the urge.

Even centuries-old sha'abi, sharqi and baladi rhythms aren't enough, and, goddammit, you want your traditional Arabic folk music updated with glitchy little IDM beats and a hint of bass-heavy dancehall, because, well – you're greedy like that. But of course you can't get everything you want, and that last one has evaded me until

recently, when I discovered the music of DJ/rupture.

DJ/rupture uses a 'triple turntable mix' to combine Middle Eastern folk music – not to mention hip hop, dancehall, breakbeat and dub – with twisted-sounding IDM beats to create a glorious musical stew that intrigues, informs and, most importantly, make you want to shake your ass. Bored of samples, he's started working with live musicians as Nettle, a project that reinvents traditional Arabic song structures in an electronic context.

I hear dancehall's all about the Egyptian Riddim these days.

"Yes, there's been a trend within Jamaican dancehall music of late of using fake Arabic melodies, and Middle Eastern percussion. They've been looking to the East for their inspiration, and the Egyptian Riddim is really popular right now."

Is this exchange a two-way street? Is Arabic music affected by outside influences?

"Not really. There's been an increase in the amount of vocoders used on the vocals in Arabic and Rai music, but that's about it. Arabic music is a huge world, with its own history and depth and genres: it's very multifaceted. In Morocco, for example, there are so many different languages – why go elsewhere, when there's still so much to explore there? You need ex-pat communities, such as the Algerians

in France, to really create change. Although they're mainly working with hip hop..."

So you're using your own production methods to imitate the improvisational patterns of the taqasim?

"Yes. A taqasim is the point in an Arabic song where one instrument will come to the fore – usually the oud – and will improvise. There will be vigorous shifts of key, and it'll be very free flowing. When I play live with Nettle, there will be a string player from Fez, someone playing violin and oud, and a percussionist, who will be linked up to me. I'll be doing some real time sampling and processing of the live music, using percussive bass and a combination of beats. It's based upon traditional Arabic music, but I'll be fucking around with it at the same time."

Where do notions of authenticity come in?

"I've been listening to so many different types of music for the last 10 years that I don't worry about authenticity. I'm not a tourist in any of the cultures I'm drawing on. Music is always crossing borders. As the winds of change push people around – the diaspora – they will take their music with them. Any kind of essentialism in music is against the nature of music itself."

Nettle will be touring the UK in October as part of the Streetmusic Arabe festival

www.cmntours.org.uk



radio hades

Words: **Anil Bawa**
Photography: **Sheikh Ahmed**

The Bug produce triple-x gunman techno-ragga animal music. Seriously now

This is a story about a man called Kevin. For as long as he could remember, Kevin had liked the idea of loud. The idea that loud could be a force unto itself. What was loud? Loud was the blast of a furnace, but in sound. Loud was an urge magnified, spun out of control, extrapolated and unwound. That was loud. It could be subtle, a deep rumble or a high hum, or it could be big and bold, the throb of echoed bass but it was always primal and shook you in ways you couldn't say. Loud was like an exponential curve the teacher once showed Kevin when he was a child, a curve about which an inquisitive pupil might ask, "But what happens here?" – pointing to the edge of the graph paper – to which the teacher may reply, "Ah, I'm glad you pointed that out, that's where it gets interesting..."

But that's not what usually happens. Usually, the teacher blathers something about asymptotes and gets on with the class. And I forgot the part about Justin.

One day Kevin met Justin and they built a big dam. The dam stopped all the clumsy artefacts of life from clogging up their little

corner of the world. This left them free from spring-cleaning and able to concentrate on loud. They did loud for a while – they scrubbed at it, got up to their elbows in it – and they did it good. They bore an animal from loud, which they tamed and fed, and every day it grew. They nurtured it with Alec Empire and with Beans, they took it for walks with El-P and Iggy and William Burroughs. They toured their animal to all places, unleashing it high and low; they broadcast it to the underworld – Radio Hades, it was called – and it was good. People tuned in, people understood.

Then, one morning, quite by accident, Kevin metamorphosed into a Bug with a capital 'B' and a lowercase 'me'. The Bug came fully formed, with its own prefix and everything. The Bug was a virus and The Bug was a bug. The Bug was new and Kevin felt fresh, as if having awoken from a long dream. Now, The Bug bit Kevin in the ear and made his body move, and it bit other people too, and made them shake all over, like a fever makes you shake, only more so. So Kevin started building a sound system so

big as to make a dancehall of the world, and to make of humanity a troupe of frenzied dancers, driven by a primal urge to loud. That was how he saw it. The Bug would play loud through the biggest sound system humanity had ever seen, and everyone would shake. It would be sexy and violent and loud.

By now Kevin had come so far that he could afford himself a rest. He sat back and thought: "The Bug is me. When will The Bug be we?"

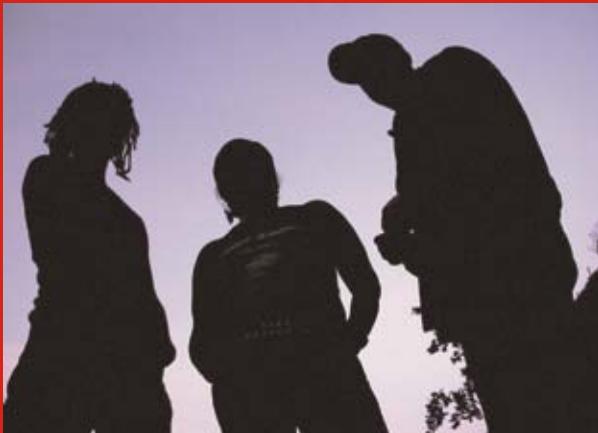
Which brings me onto Simon and the Warrior Queen. The first time Kevin met the mighty Warrior Queen she called herself a Toaster, but not that kind of toaster – the Jamaican cussing kind. Legend has it that it went like this,

"What lyrics do you do?"

"I do triple-x and I do gunman, which you want?"

"How about triple-x gunman?"

And so it was that they produced triple-x gunman techno-ragga animal music. That is what the journalists, with their pens poised and their thoughts locked in their minds,



'What lyrics do you do?'
'I do triple-x and I do
gunman, which you
want?'
'How about triple-x
gunman?'

that is what they spilled onto the page. That is how they dubbed The Bug. But The Bug fought through the dub because The Bug dubbed far more dub than they could ever dub. The Bug proclaimed a dub war on all the tenets of the brain, because The Bug was a virus that hijacked your head.

Now with this trio – Kevin, Simon and Warrior Queen – the chemistry was good. Every time the Queen talked there was a lyrical flow of patois verse unleashed upon the world – lovely and impenetrable lyrics to rival the most painstakingly crafted haiku – and the others loved it. In fact, anyone who ever met her loved it. She had a way like that. She was shy and delicate, like a real Queen, and when put on the spot always opted for looking down at the ground; this was her get-out clause. But onstage she was fierce, and serious like a judge: she was a Toaster, born and bred, was the Warrior Queen, with no time for fun and games. Simon, he had a persona too: jovial and relaxed, but onstage sharp as a wet razor glinting in the sunlight.

Together they were really something, and The Bug was getting bigger every day. People were liking it, out in the open. What a daring thing to do, to publicly love someone else's Bug, right out in the open! But brave people did (and yet more in secret, I suspect): Aphex Twin and Andrew Weatherall and one of those chaps from The Specials. They all sent public approval, and Kevin was happy, because Kevin wanted all the people in the dancehall of the world to hear his loud.

"There are no prerequisites to liking my loud," thought Kevin, which was very generous of him, considering lots of other people bred loud too, and that each one of those was so very precious with their loud; so much so that they huddled it and cuddled it, protecting it from the ears of the dancehall of the world. Not so Kevin. Kevin wanted the whole world to hear the sex and the violence in his loud, to hear it and to say,

Ah. Everywhere there is sex and there is violence in the dancehall of the world, and it is a beautiful thing. This much we affirm.

And so the story goes, into the world, of Kevin and the Bug with a prefix, of Simon and the mighty Warrior Queen, of a radio station in the depths of the underworld and of the biggest sound system on Earth. There we must leave our three protagonists, broadcasting to the dancehall of the world, ever growing in scale – off the scale – in exponential leaps of life-affirming loud.

The Bug's latest single, 'Aktion Pak' is out now through Rephlex. An LP is to follow, spring 2005. The Pressure LP is still available



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beach party

Words: Everett True
Illustration: Andrew Clare



20 years ago, **Marine Girls** made two albums of beautifully minimal girly pop based round a shared love for flapjacks, Young Marble Giants and the seaside

"20,000 leagues under the sea/That's where my baby said he'd meet me"
— '20,000 Leagues'

Remember when you used to write your name over everything, in case your friends or relations half-inched it? I still have my copy of *Beach Party* with 'Property of Alan McGee' scrawled across the label. Alan had just gotten a copy from Cherry Red or somewhere that day and I refused to let him stop playing it, so in desperation – and in kindness – he gave it to me. I still think it's about the most heartwarming minimal pop ever. It was the sparse, beautiful melodies that got me, the shy female voices – the seaside imagery and innate Englishness of Tracey and Jane and Alice and Gina's early Eighties school project. I loved what Sportique's Mark Flunder calls their 'un-rock'n'roll', appreciating Marine Girls are as spontaneous and life-affirming as rock gets.

In 1983, I played a show as Everything But The Penguin – two large inflatable penguins looking benignly on as Paul Platypus and I ad-libbed our way through a cappella versions of 'On My Mind' (Marine Girls) and 'Night And Day' (Everything But The Girl's first, torched single). I exchanged postcards with bassist Jane Fox during the Eighties, and played a show in a village town hall with Beat Happening and The McTells, co-promoted by original singer Gina. Yet I have no idea where to start my appreciation of Marine Girls – the stung melodies, the bittersweet lyrics of boy betrayal and stolen travelogues, the beach party sandcastle.

I finally met Jane last Christmas in Brighton, and was lost for words.

Young Marble Giants; Beat Happening; The Slits; Shop Assistants; Half-Japanese; Huggy Bear; The Pastels; Some Velvet Sidewalk;

Quasi; Josef K; Orange Juice; Marine Girls; The Raincoats; Talulah Gosh; June Brides...

(Partial list for a proposed book on the International Pop Underground, 2000)

I recently exchanged emails with singer Alice Fox (sister of Jane). She's prickly. Nicely so. Wanted to know why I wanted to interview her. ("Had to make sure you weren't a blood-sucking journalist," she explained.) Asked me three questions:

1) What is it you find interesting about the Marine Girls?

"DUDE! Only one of the single most important bands in my own personal history, for the *tunes*, the silences, the warm feeling, the fragile strong vocals, the imagery, the humanity, the harmonies and the knowledge that less is more, it's what you leave out that counts... I did a search on the Internet and discovered that although I've never written a proper appreciation of the Marine Girls, I've made 27 comparisons to them for other groups I love, trying to explain precisely why I love those groups."

2) Did you come to any of our gigs?

"A couple of times, but I'm wondering where. ULU, almost certainly... you didn't play out that much, from what I recall, and I was shy of seeing a band I loved so much."

3) Do you think there are many people who still listen to the music or are we now just a part of pop history?

"I have many students come round to my house, wanting to discover how to be a music critic or something (I tell them they're idiots) and – well, maybe I move in rarefied circles because of who I am – but I'm still amazed by how many know who Marine Girls are, and actively listen to them. Recently, my wife has been playing her Marine Girls tape in the car nonstop. Going further back, some of my former famous friends in Seattle and Olympia LOVED

Marine Girls...and me! Jesus. Me. A single year doesn't goes by without me playing my vinyl version of *Beach Party* to death.

"Why do I love Marine Girls? For the same reason I love early Ramones, Beat Happening, Misty's Big Adventure, early Blondie, growing coriander plants from seed, making blackberry crumble, cycling downhill to Hove Library... Marine Girls make me happy, make me appreciate the very act of being alive."

Jane: When I was a kid, I was introduced to music through the school system and cello lessons, both of which I loathed. It was a classic hideous experience. I decided I didn't want any truck with music.

Gina: I've always loved music, and remember even when I was tiny how it could effect your emotions. I especially loved, 'These Boots Are Made For Walking' and 'Grocer Jack', and jumped up and down on the sofa to them. Later on, I picked up on chart stuff, then Siouxsie And The Banshees, Buzzcocks, X-Ray Spex... finding John Peel led me onto early Rough Trade records. There were a lot of local bands, too. But I didn't do anything musical myself until I met Jane and Tracey in the sixth form.

Alice: Music was everything, politics, friendships, love, hate, clothes and hairdos when I was a teenager. I was 14 when I did my first gig and I enjoyed the buzz and attention. I've always liked showing off, so singer was good for me. I loved The Clash, Young Marble Giants, Au Pairs and The Slits. My big sis Jane took me to my first gig at the Electric Ballroom and I loved it.

Jane: The whole music thing exploded when I was a teenager and I was suddenly really into listening to music and going to gigs. At the same time, we went into the sixth form at school and there were all these new, exciting people I hadn't met and was



making friends with – mostly Gina and Tracey, actually. Also, there were local bands all over Hatfield and St Albans, and the people I was making friends with were all in bands.

Gina: I'd seen Tracey wandering past my classroom with a Virgin carrier bag and nice shoes, and thought she looked interesting. Somehow we all became friendly and, as I'd been corresponding with Nikki Sudden from Swell Maps, we thought we'd do a fanzine, *The Wacky Hop*. While we were doing this, I said to Tracey that I'd like to form a band. We decided one lunchtime to start Marine Girls. We liked fishy-themed stuff and remembered the cartoon, *Marine Boy* with his air bubblegum...

Tracey: Marine Girls first came into existence in 1980. I'd been playing electric guitar in a band called Stern Bops. The first thing we recorded was for a friend's compilation tape of local bands, a song called 'Getting Away From It All'. It had a very basic drum machine part, Gina singing and me playing rhythm and lead guitar. Then I recruited Jane to play bass. Jane wrote songs too, so that doubled the amount of stuff we had to play. We didn't know anyone who could play drums so we decided to take our cue from Young Marble Giants and play minimalist quiet music.

Jane: It was poetry that brought Tracey and me together; we'd show each other what we'd written. I didn't feel like a musician in any shape or form, but I was happy to make stuff up on a bass. It was taking completely the opposite approach to cello lessons, where my music teacher had gone, "I think it's time you gave up."

Alice: Everyone was buying secondhand guitars and teaching themselves to play. Later, it was pointed out to us, we were the only all-girl band. It wasn't strange to us, since we were at an all-girl school. We had

to be a bit leery at gigs to combat sexism and the sweet image we disliked.

Jane: We were up to our necks in that DIY culture. People would do gigs in the local village hall after the jumble sale. I was obsessed with music: every bit of money that came my way was spent on it – including school dinner money.

"Some girls are really obvious/And with a sidelong glance/You see them smile at every word you say" – 'Tonight?'

Jane: What would happen was that Tracey might have a guitar part, and I would hum along to it and translate it on to the bass. Then I'd put a sticker on my bass fret where that tune started, and learn where I had to put my fingers. Eventually, I got used to the sound that each note produced and was able to find my way around it quicker. Some people say it sounds dubby. At the time, I didn't get it – I was interested in tunes.

Gina: We did our first cassette tape, *A Day By The Sea*, 50 copies, by ourselves, on a ropey reel-to-reel tape recorder from my mum's work (they repaired them). We had a track 'Hate The Girl' on a compilation put together by Mark Flunder.

Mark Flunder: It was originally just Gina and Tracey. They put a song about the Spanish Civil War on a tape of Hertford bands in 1980. They sounded pretty much like Marine Girls – Gina had very girly vocals, so un-rock'n'roll, and Tracey had that folksy voice and strummed an electric guitar. Then we did a compilation LP, *Rupert Preaching At A Picnic*. We blagged a basement in an art centre, got 20 bands in a weekend to record. We weren't so discerning. There weren't enough of us so we included the old hippies – they were 19, we were 18.

Gina: We put out (I think) *Beach Party* on a cassette through In Phaze and spent some

'We liked fishy-themed stuff and *Marine Boy* with his air bubblegum'

– Gina

lovely days colouring in the front covers at Rough Trade, who'd agreed to sell it.

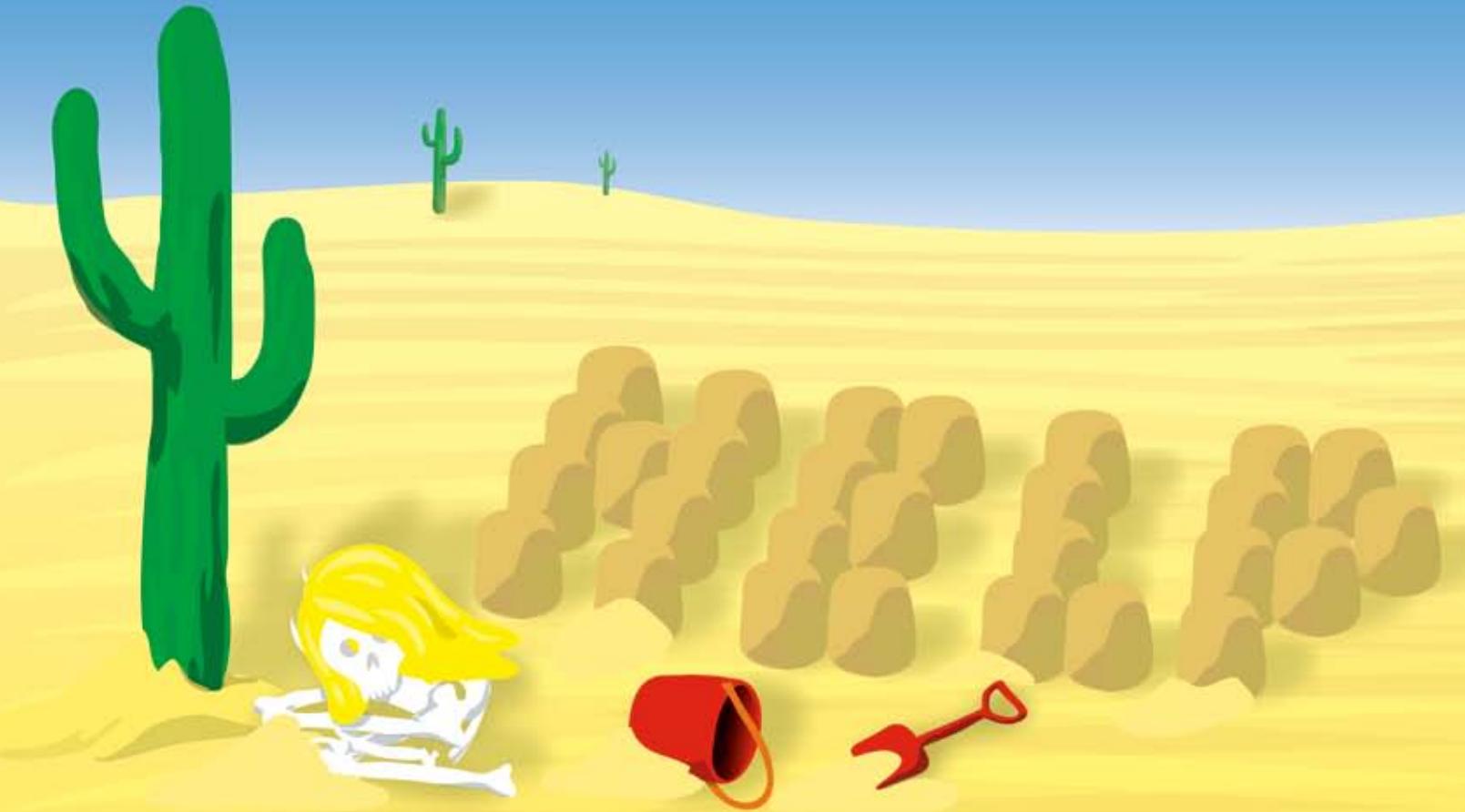
Tell us about the shed where *Beach Party* was recorded.

Gina: It was at the bottom of the garden of a Thirties, semi-detached house in Ilford. It was the home of Pat Birmingham, whose job was driving very high cranes, but he also owned In Phaze. To get to the shed you had to go through the kitchen, past Pat's mum who always tried to get us to have a cup of tea or something to eat.

Mark: I put them on locally, and got people angry with me – saying don't put them on again. It was a similar thing with Young Marble Giants in Cardiff until they got in the *NME*. *Beach Party* wasn't actually recorded in Pat's shed. They rang me up and said they didn't want to do it there, so I found some mates whose parents were away, and they did it in their front room – most of it – and finished it off in the shed.

It was Heather's voice that drew me in to Beat Happening – that, and the simple graphics: the cat on the spaceship! I've always preferred female singers. I was a big fan of Marine Girls, and Jane and Alice's offshoot band, Grab Grab The Haddock, bands that Heather's singing on 'Foggy Eyes' reminded me of. I responded to the minimal instrumentation. I've always hated extraneous noise, especially unnecessary drumming.

(Careless Talk Costs Lives, 2001)



'Tracey wanted to write ballads for estate agents. Jane wanted to throw ping-pong balls onto xylophones' – Alice

Gina: Somehow Mark got TV Personalities to play at the local college. His band was the support and we were, too. [TVPs singer] Dan Treacy heard us, and Pat and Dan seemed to agree that he'd release *Beach Party* as a record. We had little or no say into any of it, just happy to be doing an LP with Dan.

Mark: They did some really good little gigs, Buntingford fire station, Lemsford village hall... I blagged the student union in Hertford to let me put on gigs – and I put on TVPs with Patrik Fitzgerald and Marine Girls for 50p, and introduced Dan to them.

Alice: Dan is a knock-kneed simpering hypocrite. Jane remembers more details than me.

Mark: Dan liked them, reissued *Beach Party* on his label Whaaam!, and ended up selling it to Cherry Red. It's groovy these sounds have been out there for 25 years, even if the people involved don't get remunerated properly. Gina gets 1/2p for every CD. They sell them for what... £13? It goes against the whole tape scene that started it off. But it's nice this homegrown music can still inspire people. Marine Girls' music was so fresh and non-rock'n'roll. It wasn't contrived in any way. It had what was good about real rock'n'roll in there. You didn't have to have long hair and leather jackets. It was refreshing they were women doing it, as well. It didn't matter."

This is a child's cornucopia of found sound. Bedroom magic orchestrated silences: like

the delicate fragile seven-inch singles Jane, Marine Girls and Sarah Goes Shopping released in the early Eighties; like waking up every morning and spotting wonderment in the way the grey clouds shudder.

(Review of Transistor Six's *Johnny, Where's My Purse*, CTCL, 2002)

How did *Beach Party* develop?

Jane: Words first, then a tune. Tracey and I would often write together, although we took separate authorship of the songs that we'd instigated. As I got a bit more confident then I would say, "This is what I'd like the guitar to do".

Gina: Jane and Tracey came up with the songs and then we'd all fiddle around with them and decide who would sing what. We had a lot of conversations at Jane's house chatting about the songs and making flapjack mixture, then we'd practise them at the Water Board social clubrooms (Jane's dad worked for the Water Board).

Tracey: We did our first ever London gig at the Moonlight Club in West Hampstead, supporting Felt. The night before three other Cherry Red artists had played there, including [future EBTG member] Ben Watt. We released a single 'On My Mind', which made single of the week in the *NME*. At some point, Gina left the band and Alice became the main singer.

"Another Friday evening/Staying in tonight// say I don't want to see you/You can't believe

you've heard me right/It's not that I don't love you//It's not that I don't care/It's just that I've had enough of/The same old places, yeah" – Fridays'

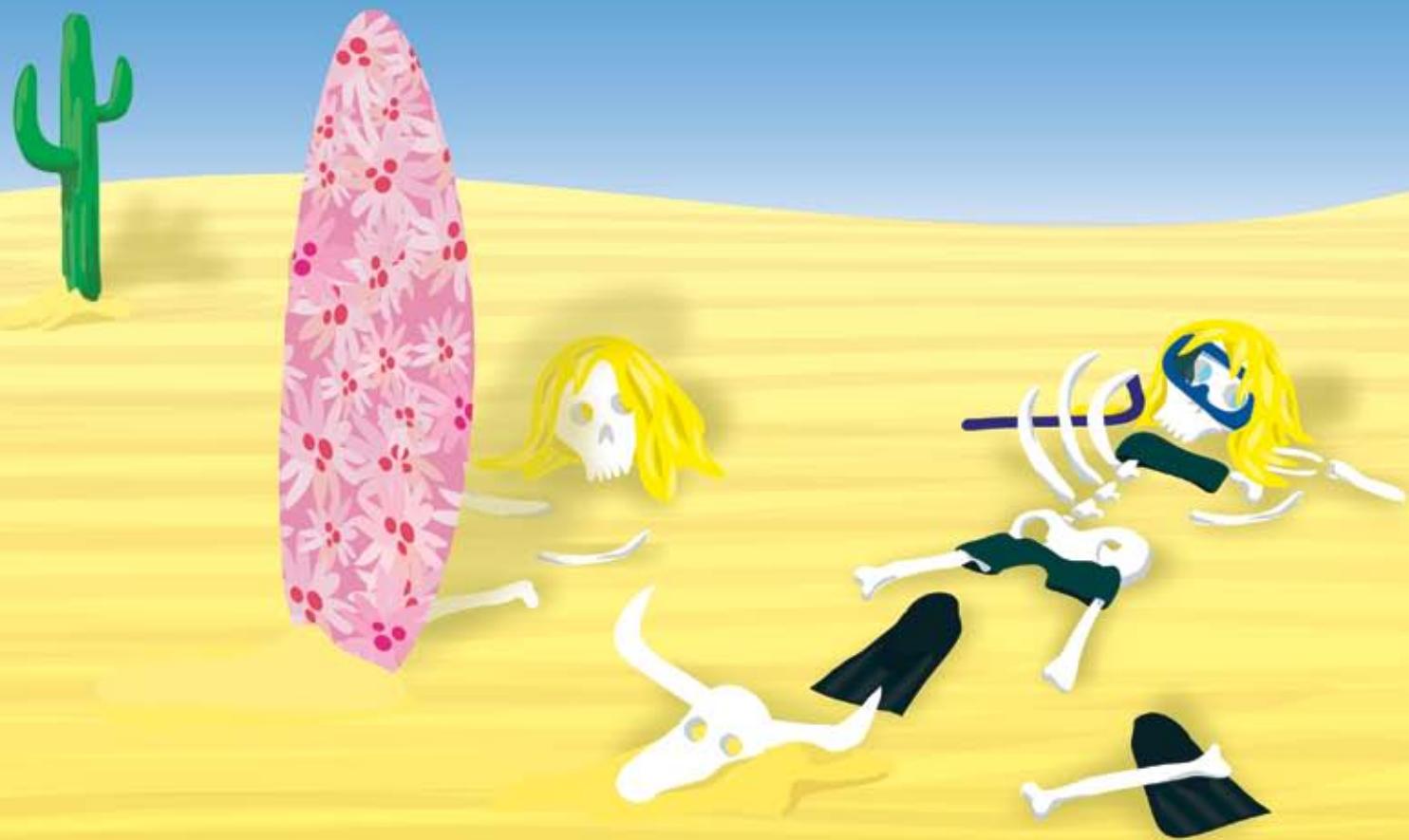
What was your relationship with the musical climate Marine Girls existed in?

Jane: We were just doing what we could in an environment that was massively stimulating and empowering. It was kind of that combination of it being when, mid-to-late teens, you're suddenly going, 'Oh my God'. There was really exciting stuff happening. The whole idea of pop stars had been blown to pieces. It was amazing.

Gina: We were very insular. We were us and that was all that counted. Also, most of the other bands were male, and most females were older than us. When you're 17, someone who's 20 is light years away from you. The only other female bands at the time were The Modettes (older than us), Dolly Mixture (older and too Sounds), The Raincoats (too old), The Slits (too old). It was a lot of fun. My A-levels suffered badly!

Alice: The musical climate was hilarious, both competitive and patronising. We did gigs with varied groups; The Damned, Roman Holiday, Orange Juice, Monochrome Set (very cool), Colour Field. Gary Glitter chatted me up in a recording studio lounge. Luckily, I used it as an opportunity to take the piss out of 'The Leader'... looking back, what a letch! I was 15!

Tracey: In October 1981, I left home to go to Hull University, 300 miles away. Marine Girls kept going, but only in the holidays. We did more gigs, bigger ones. We recorded another album, *Lazy Ways*, produced by Stuart Moxham of Young Marble Giants. We did an interview with *Melody Maker* and they put us on the front cover. Meanwhile, I was so far away from the other Marine Girls that I started to



record the songs I was writing on my own. The demos I did of these songs eventually became my solo album *A Distant Shore*. Marine Girls did their last gig in Glasgow, summer '83. We were drifting apart. Alice's boyfriend had somehow tagged onto the band playing percussion. We did an awful gig, no one listened to us and we had an argument backstage. It was the perfect excuse to split up, so we did.

Alice: Marine Girls split because Tracey was too square. Jane and I were at art school in Brighton. Tracey wanted to write ballads for estate agents. Jane wanted to throw ping-pong balls onto xylophones. I wanted to do big paintings and make films. The reason Tracey gives about the split is total crap. It never happened.

Forget Belle & Sebastian, already. This is so sweet, shy, and soulful. Dub, like dub has always been played by Marine Girls fans.

(Review of The Microphones' *Tests*, *The Stranger*, March 1999)

What is it, in retrospect, about your music that keeps it going?

Gina: It was heartfelt. The sound was clear and true. And it doesn't date, because it's about the things that affected us – things that don't change.

Alice: I'm amazed at how it does. Kirk Cobaine (sic) put us in his Top 25 Albums list in his diaries! I haven't done a gig for 17 years, yet often people say to me, "Were you in the Marine Girls? I loved them". It is very soulful and human. We deliberately kept in the sounds of fingers on frets, and breaths in singing, and the out-of-tune bits.

Tracey said your sea imagery is incidental, but there are direct references...

Jane: It isn't incidental at all. I was very taken up by this whole idea of being Marine Girls. We used to play the *Marine Boy* theme

tune. I used the idea of the sea to write some of the songs, like '20,000 Leagues [Under The Sea]'. We'd have plastic lobsters and blow-up dolphins on stage. Once, we were billed with this punk band called The Deranged at Welwyn Garden City. We'd spent a day in Southend, me, Alice and Tracey, and brought back bucketfuls of seaweed and threw it at The Deranged, as they'd changed their lyrics to be extremely heinous about us. We had fun bags full of stickers. We had this thing called Colin the Cod. We made stickers with fish on them...

Gina: We all loved the seaside. I was born in Clacton. Mods kept me awake at night on the seafront on their scooters. Being Marine Girls made us love it more. Jane and me always drew sea-related stuff. We liked the tackier side of things, rock breakfasts on plates, etc. Maybe Tracey couldn't help herself. It had got into her...

Alice: It was good for jokes, and I like the mystery of the deep blue sea. We had a group of punks turn up to a gig in a cardboard boat and dance in it all night.

"Thinking of the jokes we used to have/ Wondering if we're laughing at them now/ Somehow don't see how we can be/ So what's a smile between us now"
– 'Times We Used To Spend'

Your opinions on Tracey?

Jane: I wasn't interested in taking the path she took. I was never resentful, either. I never wanted to be a pop star. I just wanted to be in a band and be adventurous.

Gina: I still love her voice and played *A Distant Shore* over and over again when it came out. Whatever she does, even if some things are a bit bland, she has a great voice.

Alice: Square, mainstream, should write a novel, and leave the Rod Stewart covers to *Fame Academy* contestants.

'I'd put a sticker on my bass fret where that tune started' – Jane

Anything else you want to add?

Alice: Being a Marine Girl was the best way to be a teenager. I loved it. My life was shit, but gigs were good. If you're interested in what a Marine Girl does next, watch my short film *Degrees Of Separation* on www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/projects/a2a.

Gina: I'm an art technician at Broxbourne School, in Hertfordshire. I deal in secondhand, vintage clothes. I do my own art, but haven't done much musically recently. Everything went on hold after having a daughter who's now 12. It's a long hold...

It's taken the entire two-year run of Careless Talk Costs Lives to find a contemporary band as wonderful as Marine Girls – minimal, not easily given over to embarrassment about their perceived lack of conventional training, gorgeous two-(and three-) part female harmonies, songs written in under two minutes, soaring violin, whistling, the barest of bare percussion (blocks, shakers, handclaps), infectious sense of humour, enough Pop knowledge to cover TV Personalities and Billy Childish, songs that double up as diaries and are all the more charming for it.

(ET on Lesbo Pig, *Careless Talk Costs Lives*, September 2003)

(Jane Fox interview conducted by Jon Falcone. Tracey Thorn quotes taken from www.ebtg.com/frontofhouse/tracey.html)



Garage rock is a genre of fetishes

play on

Words: Stevie Chick
Photography: Toby Amies

The 5678s are dressing up in stereotypes to invent new slang

A school hall in the early Eighties. Bored kids fidget fitfully as the music teacher waxes rhapsodic on her assembly topic – “The only language that is understood across the whole world.” An earnest, enthusiastic educator who believes children are our future, she asks the blank-faced sprats for suggestions as to what this language might be. Minutes pass. Some cough awkwardly, others silently plan homicide. Somewhere near the back, a cocky girl asks, “Sign language?” eliciting impatient contempt. I’d have answered myself only, as a TV-eyed brat whose most formative years were spent believing there were but two languages, English and Foreign, the whole concept has blown my tiny little mind.

“No,” she announces, somewhat irritably, as a couple more minutes pass. “That language is *music*.” She then spends the next 20 minutes frothing over the Eurovision Song Contest, itself a pop-linguistic Esperanto that ultimately suggests we nations have less in common than we like to think. She plays Abba on a teak-finished tape recorder while we stare on, embarrassed. I hated assembly.

And yet, within her naïve testimonial, there’s a kernel of truth. Music isn’t a universal language, but it’s certainly a means for communication. Maybe it’s better, say, that we share the same alphabet, or echo and appropriate other cultures’ phrases. But the utopian ideal of one shared language precludes too many of culture’s fascinating aspects: the expression and construction of identities through what is spoken by the culture; the peculiar twists and idiosyncrasies of a language, its rules, and how they are creatively broken...

Rock’n’roll is a fine example. Look to its prehistory, the dialogue between blues and gospel and folk, black and white. Look at the British Invasion, the sounds that preceded it, the noise that followed. Rock’n’roll, to paraphrase Walt Whitman, contains *multitudes*. And while its native tongue might be English, it has many other dialects.

Perhaps it’s the DIY, ‘anyone can do this’ attitude of garage rock that’s elicited such an international response. Hook yourself up with the three chords from ‘Louie Louie’ and gear so rickety that it belches feedback and you have what passes for a solid rock’n’roll phrasebook. Garage rock bands hail from the world over, from The Hives, retooling Sixties Midwestern suburbia’s din-of-choice, to proud denim’n’leather sporting The

Hellacopters, to Portuguese hellions The Parkinsons, who deliver a suitably shabby, self-destructing rock’n’roll. And then there are The 5678s.

Formed in 1986 by sisters Sachiko and Yoshiko ‘Ronnie’ Fujii, The 5678s were born from a shared love of the spooky, brutal sonics of classic Crypt Records and the pre-peeing-pervert cool of Chuck Berry, not to mention dressing up in the fashions of classic rock’n’roll. Fur bikinis, weathered biker leathers, Fifties polyester sweaters and bowling alley chic might’ve been rare in their native Tokyo, but rock’n’roll girl groups were bounteous in the extreme. This was the era of Supersnazz and Shonen Knife, Japanese girl groups razoring up sugar among the fuzz, and latterly winning the patronage of grunge godheads like Kurt Cobain.

Such fanboy affirmations from Cobain won instant censure in some corners of the press. These bands were accused of representing a kitsch that bordered on the offensive, playing on cultural stereotypes of Japan that were about as right-on as an early Seventies *Two Ronnies* skit.

And, in the recent aftermath of the infectious, ecstatic ‘Woo-Hoo’ soundtracking a Carling lager commercial and sneaking The 5678s a starring role in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill*, some corners of the press have hitched up to an anti-careerist bandwagon and accused the girls of being a mere ‘novelty’.

These artists undoubtedly fetishise their cultural identities to an intoxicatingly knowing degree, but this is a different beast from irony. It no doubt ties in with the indie/rock’n’roll community’s knowing embrace of Japanese facsimiles of ‘western’ pop culture, where *Hello Kitty* becomes an anti-fashion phenomenon, and so on.

But ‘novelty’ is the stock in trade of bubblegum garage rock, something escaping the less clued-in 5678s-haters. In many ways, it’s a most self-aware genre, with a strictly adhered to recording quality (the more lo-fi the better) and instrumental skill (barely a notch above Neanderthal novice). Garage rock is rock’n’roll operating beneath an impenetrable ceiling, rock on a budget.

It’s a game of limitations that thrills because of the artist’s desperate efforts to play their weaknesses as strengths, and because of the glorious collapses occurring on the outer edges. It’s a genre of fetishes, lifting its aesthetics from rock’n’roll’s raw birth, when a duck’s ass was something to be feared and

a mohair suit was the dream of every moptopped Stones fan.

You can see why the garage rock community embraced The 5678s so tight, with the band wholeheartedly reciprocating The Dirtbombs’ love. You can see why Quentin Tarantino, arch cultural fetishist, chose them to embellish his martial arts epics.

To hear the breadth of their embrace, check out *Bomb The Rocks*, a lovingly compiled singles collection recently released by Sweet Nothing. Check out the cinematic sass of ‘Bond Girl’, or ‘Three Cool Chicks’, the girls playing hard on the phonetics of the title chorus, sibilantly hissing “ssssssreeee! cool! chi’sssss!” Playing up to those stereotypes about Japanese speech idiosyncrasies, it’s also an act of empowerment, taking the insult and spitting it back, better than before. When they cover ‘Ah So’, an insulting Fifties number, it is trampled into the dust beneath the righteous clatter of their wind tunnel guitars.

It’s not hard to perceive an attempt to silence these girls and render them dumb in certain critics’ attempts to call out their success as catering to fetishistic whims. These critics can’t see that, within their interpretations of western rock’n’roll, The 5678s are taking the opportunity to play out many different wrinkles of femininity and Japanese culture. Ronnie intimated as much to me in an interview that struggled past an interpreter and eluded capture by minidisc, hence her own figurative silence in this piece.

Garage rock’s form is simple, accessible enough to be open to everyone’s interpretations, malleable enough to absorb anyone’s fingerprints. And so the feral riffs and gutbucket punch of The 5678s’ music becomes a canvas for them to explore fantasies worn with all the joy of party costumes.

And sure, it all drips novelty, but so do The Mummies with their toilet roll costumes and headgear and purposefully bull-headed stumps. And, like Howlin’ Pelle’s Colonel Sanders neckerchief or Jack White’s penchant for red’n’white duds, these gimmicks merely sweeten the pot, making fresh, unique and personal these overplayed chords and worn-out gestures. No other music is so eager to be remodelled in each artists’ own image. From the clubs of Tokyo to the silver screen to burgeoning stardom, Ronnie and her bandmates have been playacting all the way. The words have been sung before, but never like this.



**'Yeah, we cross the line
– but men do that shit all the time!'**

and in the pink corner...

Words: **Miss AMP**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Straight-talking grime MC **Shystie** on the importance of dick size and representing her ladies

When my best friend and I first heard 'Woman's World' by Shystie, we looked at each other; did this half-laugh, half-gasp. We played the track twice. We rewound bits to make out the lyrics. Over an old school electro beat, a young girl was envisaging a female utopia – and it was stunning.

In her world, men posed nude on Page Three of *The Sun* while she set up a webcam in her room, got a man to poledance on her bed, then posted it on the net so all her friends could see. In her world, men took care of their appearance, washing their ball sacs before sex while ladies walked round with hairy 'pits and unbleached upper lips. In her world, women used men for one-night sex then pushed them away: women pimped guys on the streets at night, and the shop windows in the red light district of Amsterdam were full of men, not naked ladies. "Imagine if men lived in kennels like dogs/And we only let them out to do the difficult jobs. In the street, walk them round/Leads around their neck>Show him to my friends saying, 'He's my new pet'."

It was a gasp of indignant fury from a mind young enough to remember the seemingly gender-free realm of childhood, and it made me and my friend – both older, jaded, too grown-up and cynical now to bother imagining a world where men give birth and women run governments – share a shiver of transgressive delight.

You might not think it if you've seen her glaring down at you from one of those giant billboards on the Old Street roundabout, but Shystie is tiny. Not in terms of musical stature: since she recorded a riposte to Dizzee Rascal's 'I Luv U' and got signed to Polydor – who released her recent debut album *Diamond in the Dirt* – she's massive. She's getting into the Top 40, designing her own clothing range, appearing in a video game, recording with Wu Tang, in talks with Missy Elliot's US record label: all the rags to riches stuff of most grime MCs' wet dreams. But in real life she's little: skinny stick arms poking out of a yellow ragga-girl net top, barely brushing five foot three. The N-Gage game phone and the trusty pink Nokia on which she writes all her lyrics look like they're gonna topple her over through their weight around her neck.

Why's it a shock to see her so tiny? Because she's so goddamn mouthy, of course. Not just because of her flow – she spits lyrics in the Hackney accent I hear every day on the streets of Dalston, her staccato syllables (fastest MC in the UK, it's sometimes claimed) sounding at turns sarcastic, arrogant, playful, furious and

rabble-rousing, yet always clear and sharp. It's more because there's something so audacious about putting a fantasy like 'Woman's World' onto record. These are ideas you share with your best friend when there are no boys around to hear you, when you're able to vent free of accusations of misandry and over-generalisation, and – gasp, shock, horror – feminism.

"I just wanted to show us as women having to see guys do this stuff all the time," explains 21-year-old Shystie. "I hang around with a lot of boys, and I hear them dissing this girl and that girl, going on about football, and I started thinking: what if women did that? What if we used guys? And made them cry about us down the phone to their friends? I just flipped everything about."

"A lot of girls say 'Woman's World' is one of their favourite songs. They're all, 'That song's so true! Imagine if the world was like that!' I thought it was funny that I opened people's eyes to stuff that goes on every day. When I vocalised it in the studio all the boys were like, 'Tell us off man!' but they were laughing about it. They were like, 'Ah, she killed us man!' And I was like, 'Yeah. And you kill us girls every day by doing the same things.'"

And Shystie's not the only straight-talking female coming out of the grime scene. "I don't give head but I give head butts/Punch in the guts for calling me a slut," says 18-year-old Lady Fury, asking elsewhere, "Your tool's too small/How the fuck do you penetrate pum pum at all?"

"Most of the females I know, like Lady Fury, Maihem, they're a bit tomboyish, like me," Shystie explains. "I haven't really met a female MC who's a proper girly girl with their handbag, worrying about their hair every two minutes. We're from the scene, we hang around with boys, we pick up certain things that the boys are talking about, a bit rough round the edges."

It's reductive to listen to any music just for its lyrics, and I wouldn't be writing this if I didn't find Shystie tracks like 'Step Bac', 'Gutter' and the skeletal Eastern groove of 'Get Loose' eminently danceable (rough bass lines, handclaps, whooshing airplane sounds and effervescent synths clattering round with each other like ball-bearings in a cocktail shaker). But the lyric on 'Get Boyed' (it's not on *Diamond In The Dirt* – download it) really does deserve the kind of old school attention we used to give songs whose words failed to appear in *Smash Hits*: tip of tongue between teeth, pen in one hand, the other poised over the pause button of the Binatone tape recorder...

'Get Boyed' is an extremely pissed-off Shystie mouthing off about what she refers to as 'BQS – Busting Quick Syndrome' over the dancehall 'Pum Pum Riddim'. It's so excellently cruel and mean that I almost feel sorry for boys. 'Get Boyed' isn't the first track devoted to the failings of the one-minute, short-dick man, of course, but there's a nastiness here that, after years of misogynistic rap lyrics, is utterly delightful. If 'Woman's World' is the equivalent of the late-night rant after you've been followed home from the bus stop by some skanking creep, 'Get Boyed' is the cruel truth revealed in giggles and murmurs down the telephone line that follows the inevitable post-date question: "So what was his cock like?"

Shystie can't wait to get onto her pink Nokia to spread the word, whether the problem is that his body's not up to par: "What I saw was absurd/When he showed me his chest it looked like a shaved bird/When I saw his body I just wanted to feed him/I had to phone my girls like, 'Can you believe it!', or because he came too fast: "It's our little secret. I won't say a word. Yeah, right! I'll call the boys, like, 'Have you heard?'". And a short-dick man is as superfluous to Shystie's requirements as a small-booty-bitch is to Sir Mix-A-Lot's:

"I wanna know your credentials and your feet size

"Tell the truth baby, please no lies.

"Cuz a small dick to me is like a disability.

"So if you got small feet, sorry, don't speak to me.

"You ain't got a nine-inch so you ain't packing heat.

"Rude boy, I can tell by the size of your feet.

"That what you got there ain't gonna impress I.

"So don't waste your time trying to address Shy."

And men who are packing heat don't escape Shystie's scathing assessments either since, according to her, at least half of them can't use their tools, and come too fast or can't get it up at all. There's also a horror of the male genitals to equal any of the cunt-hatred expressed by DJ Assault and his ilk: "Don't waste Shy's time if you're not circumcised/It's not hygienic, so go get it seen to/Cuz no girl wanna see hood-line mildew." Sounds harsh? As Shystie herself says on 'Woman's World', "Yeah, we cross the line – but men do that shit all the time!"

In a scene built around first-person narratives, where most of the producers and MCs are male, girls like Shystie, Lady Sovereign and Lady Fury provide some



much-needed female perspective. The most obvious example of this is, of course, Shystie's answer to Dizzee Rascal's 'I Luv U', in which she takes on the persona of the 'bitch' dissed in Dizzee's original, portraying herself as a "female don", a "wild renegade" who played him for all he had.

She samples and slows down the Dizzee character's vocal till he sounds confused and ridiculous, and skips around his voice with her whipcrack delivery and arch rhymes, while his friend laughs at him for being fool enough to spend 10 grand on a woman who dumped him.

"Initially, I was just going to rhyme over Dizzee's instrumental," she says. "But then I thought, well, instead of just spitting anything, why don't I do a girl's version of it, where I'm sticking up for the girls."

"There's not a lot of girls that represent for the other females in the grime scene. I wanted to be one of the first to do something like that and it really worked, the girls loved it."

"There's a lot of tracks where guys diss girls, in rap as well as grime. They have lyrics that disrespect girls – but that same guy's going to sleep with that girl, so what does that make him? That makes him a ho as well! I'm gonna keep doing tracks like that that are defending girls. I will stick up for my ladies and do tracks for my ladies and represent them. 'I'll be the voice of the ladies.'

'What if we made guys cry about us down the phone to their friends?'

grime time

Words: **Chris Ballard**

Reacting to the cocaine and champagne comedown that occurred as UK Garage lost its chart focus in late 2001, early grime productions were brutally primitive. **Musical Mob**'s 'Pulse X', was otherworldly music that sounded alien in isolation, but acquired a mutant ferocity when combined with ultra-aggi MCs fighting for the mic. No melody, little narrative, the minimalism acted as maximiser for passion boiling over to the point that it became sheer burning hatred, increasingly vicious, horrible lyrics bending back on themselves until they become comical. It's pop music as urban graffiti: annoyance to everyone but those in the know. The scene's grown exponentially, new producers, MCs and crews (sometimes literally) fighting for attention, **Dizzee Rascal**'s Mercury triumph signifying interest beyond the reach of radio.

Although seemingly in a constant state of flux, currently grime's more disordered than ever. Pirates have been hit hard by another DTI clampdown; violence has scared off venues and promoters, so rave bookings are down. Some of the creative talent has moved on to more moneyed-up pastures, waiting for the music industry to unleash its marketing muscle on their subcultural capital. But there's still astonishing music coming out from the underground. Scratch the surface and find **Ruff Squad**'s 'Bring It Down', forlorn synth sweeps and voices used as chainsaw riffs. Check **Terror Danjah** transforming urban pop into delicate waves of destruction. Feel **Lethal B**'s 'Forward Riddim', set to be the biggest crossover smash since 'I Luv U' (albeit with a chorus of "|||||| crack your skull"). Hear **Essentials**' 'Jenny', a tale of a crew who realise they all know Jenny to the sound of a kaleidoscope imploding. It's just that with Dizzee traversing the globe and burning brighter with every touchdown, **Kano** about to go ballistic with his princely pervo-pop, you can sense history repeating: as the majors sniff out new territory, the soul is being sucked out, another case of underground resistance conquered by over-ground assimilation. Don't let it happen. Immerse yourself in this senseless dystopian daydream.

Good News For People Who Love Bad News

by Modest Mouse

Featuring 'Float On' and 'Ocean Breathes Salty'
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dead men walking

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www.fiberfib.com

Various

Festival Internacional de Benicássim (FIB), Spain

Day One

FIB doesn't kick off 'til midnight. Suits me. Earlier, **Snow Patrol's** jangly sub pop is so inhumanely pointless that I propose heading for the glasses of beer before trying to find the secret swimming pool. But then Neil Tennant emerges on the main stage wearing the first of an impressive array of cloaks. **Pet Shop Boys** understand that headlining slots

continual, circular pacing of electronic music's evolution. Like Pet Shop Boys, Kraftwerk do not expand or interfere with their achievements. Instead, they curate and exhibit them – detached, observant and proud. (DMc)

Day Two

Ew! Morning! Congealed suntan lotion coalesces with sweat. B-but! There is a stall no less than 30 seconds from my tent handing out free bananas. And it's not a mirage. Ace.

There is a stall no less than 30 seconds from my tent handing out free bananas

aren't for difficult new material: they are for Big Pop Anthems and light shows that have UFO watchers scrabbling for their digicams. They put a big gay smile on my face. They are a national treasure.

B-Pitch Control take my night away. The Berlin techno animals ply impossibly cute techno that ranges from hammers on your skull to soft fluffy clouds of ambient loveliness that purr as you puke yourself gently to sleep. (CB)

Today is marked by a huge skipping rope line of **Morrissey** fans waiting expectantly for Their Hero, and him getting in a tangle with his private jet and buggering off home. Bless. **Lou Reed** headlines and is just as rubbish as all the horrid leather-jacketed London numbskulls that have magnified the worst aspects of his oeuvre a million times.

For all the talk of **Kompakt's** sophistication (as much to do with their imagery and artwork as their



Kraftwerk are dead. Ostensibly, a jewel in the crown of a festival that promotes progressive, intelligent and largely Eurocentric takes on alternative and electronic music. FIB's headliners are strange apparitions from the outsider canon. If Kraftwerk are dead then it's because they were never fully here in the first place – a crackle of radio static from a parallel Germany that interfered briefly and inconclusively with the machinations of the pop charts. Watching them now performing the 'hits' almost seems like the ultimate surrender to rockism. But when 'Trans-Europe Express' descends, it's like a mirage – a micro-image of electronic pop, studied, considered, reduced to its component parts and then blown up into hyper-human expressionism. Holograms projected large and loud into the air, these songs are something other and outside of the

Franz Ferdinand have just flown in from Japan, and bounce onto the stage with a jolly 'hola!' Here is the hot-blooded, sexy young group I've been waiting for. Alex looks gorgeous in black. He is pleasant to the audience, giving a wee explanatory introduction to each song, or simply announcing, "You seem to like dancing! Here's another one to dance to!" Hooray! I have no idea what these boys are doing with their guitars as they bob up and down in unison like moptop swingers, but my feet are lovin' it. We get hear a new song Alex has just written. "I still don't know the lyrics," he says, reading them off a piece of paper. It's fab!

Earlier, I spoke to a Spanish student who said he wasn't very impressed by Franz Ferdinand. Are they a girl's band? Alex is the kind of boy you could fuck all night long until you're sore and limping and take home to meet yer mother the next day for scones. If most boys prefer

the endless stream of circle-jerk boy rock arrogant posturing that clogs up the airwaves day in, day out, their taste is up their boring arses. Like all the best acts at the festival, even those who may not be long for this world, Franz Ferdinand are here to entertain us, and they do it brilliantly.

I remember seeing Alex play in the 13th Note, Glasgow in between mopping up stale lager from the floor. He was playing mellow ballads on acoustic guitar, far too sappy for my tastes at the time. I wonder if Alex would remember me. It's all a bit of a Grouse and lemonade haze.

A short while later, Anna suddenly points, "There's Alex!" Before I know what I'm doing, I'm running after him, shouting "Alex!" and grabbing him by the shoulder. He flips around, looks alarmed, then laughs. "My God, I haven't seen you for about 10 years." I'm all overcome and blurt out, "I'm so proud of ye, Alex!" I say that, when he

trademark shuffling, gorgeous microhouse), what emerges is far more engaging. That sophistication produces something fast, hard, dirty and danceable. At 7.30am, after 15 encores, I happily surrender, and make mental notes to visit Cologne every weekend for the rest of my life. (CB)

Morrissey is dead. The incident occurs during **Belle & Sebastian's** gently mocking unpicking of 'The Boy With The Thorn In His Side'. Where pop for Morrissey was simply a poisoned pen with which to express immaculate bitterness, Murdoch and co embrace the form; tentatively, gently, but gracefully.

This faith in transcendence is possibly Belle & Seb's only shared trait with the Siegfried and Roy bombast of **Scissor Sisters**, whose cut and paste unpop collage has been honed through body-

breaking touring and self-conviction into a glittering, evil disco super-weapon. (DMc)

Day Three

Brian Wilson is utterly awful. He's on the verge of his last breath, out of tune, unable to remember lyrics without an autocue and leaving the difficult bits to his backing band. It's like extended karaoke to a crowd salivating with nostalgia because these songs *almost* sound like *Pet Sounds* outtakes.

There's a Spanish kid in his early twenties who appears to have swallowed the entire chemical allowance of his region in preparation for this. He has a piece of paper in his hand, hastily scribbled with 'YEAH!' in blue biro. **LCD Soundsystem's** 'Yeah' is the stupidly triumphant highlight of the festival and by the time it finishes I can't find my voice or mind anywhere in this sweltering tent. (CB)

Brian Wilson is dead. There's something creepy and ghoulish about this over-egged adulation – this shell of avant-pop wheeled out for the clapping seals like the Shroud of Turin – so we swap this Wondermints-backed necrophilia for the loose-limbed liquid-funk of **Spektrum**. Where we wilt, Lola just bends herself and her band into the jelly-mould shapes cast by ESG, 'Walking On Thin Ice'

was singing, he reminded me of George Miller from The Kaisers. "Oh, I loved the Kaisers!" he grins. They were an early Beatles tribute band that regularly played The 13th Note. For George, the lead singer, it was performance art that he came to loathe, but perfected with an obsession.

I ask him how he's coping with it all. I mean the fame, the adoration, nutters like me crawling out of the woodwork to praise him. I thank him for saving Glasgow's reputation after the travesty that is Travis. He won't say a bad word about them. I tell him Fran was my first boyfriend at art school and he chucked me after about a month. He goes, "Ah, so it's like THAT!" Well, as much as it would be delightful to be the partner of a millionaire superstar, it really isn't. Travis really are shite. Franz Ferdinand embody all the best elements of underground, gin fuelled, smoky pub, Glasgow, DIY rock, and I'll be a fan girl if I want to. (MB)

and a whole lineage of bass-twisted sex-pop that is yet to be definitively traced but is currently concluding somewhere between Kelis' 'Milkshake' and the Tiefschwarz remix of 'Kinda New'. (DMc)

Day Four

Chris Ballard is dead. I'm dancing on a precarious, shaking platform in a foreign land surrounded by beautiful Spanish strangers. The sea stretches out into infinite black behind me, in front of me is sand, dancing and **James Murphy, 2 Many DJs** and **Michelle Grinser's** immense, elative wrong-funk. After possibly the most painful day of my life – dead dogs, ditches, dust and near-death experiences – FIB's early morning beach party is like being cleaned in black sunshine. I can never go home again. (DMc)

Live

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Black Wire**The Monarch, London**

If I had a little brother, he would be in Black Wire. He'd be super skinny, suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder and wear zebra-print knickers riding three good inches above his testicle-strangling drainpipe jeans. He'd have fabulous towering hair maintained by half a can of Elnett. He'd be fucking cool.

Black Wire make spooky, nightmarish, car-crash music that is utterly terrifying, stupidly danceable and as much fun as a box of fireworks disco dancing with a bag of party poppers. Giving punk-funk's warm corpse the once over, this jittery death-ska covers all possible bases without settling for any.

Lead Wire, Dan, is quite, quite mad. His sullen skin and sunken eyes could be classed as a return to heroin chic were he not speeding off his tits at 1,000 mph. Bounding around the stage, bouncing onto the floor and finally hoisting himself onto the bar, he takes no prisoners. If you hate that bit when the singer comes up to you and tries their darnedest to make you feel uncomfortable, then you will hate Black Wire. If, however, you've got a sense of humour and sturdy eardrums, you'll love them.

Leonie Cooper**Electric Eel Shock****Truck Festival, Oxfordshire**

Not enough bands get naked these days. Tomoharu Ito, drummer with Tokyo's finest Sabbath disciples Electric Eel Shock, seems to be on a one-man (two kick drum) mission to rectify this. Headlining this overgrown village fete in Tory Heartland, he spends the set's duration leaping up between songs so everyone can cop a pike at his swinging sausage. Meanwhile, bandmates Aki and Kazuto embrace every rock cliché going: horn throwing, rigging swinging and, of course, guitar eating.

"Do you want punk rock? Rock'n'roll? Heavy metal? Good! Everything we have!" screches Aki from somewhere within his implausibly large Afro. He bazookas songs like 'Suicide Rock'N'Roll' and 'Rock'N'Roll Zombie' into the crowd. There's one about George W Bush that goes: "Bastard! Why so stupid? Why so serious? Bastard!"

If this were The Darkness or Datsuns – and judging from the riff pillaging, it could well be – then we'd be reaching for the poison pen. But EES bring forth the rock with a charming naivety. Sure, we're laughing, but we're with them all the way.

Jamie Fullerton**Empress Sheema****Orleans, London**

I dip my feet in and wiggle my toes. The water's cold and I don't like the looks I'm getting. *Rasta vibration*. Shit, indie boy has strayed far from home. This needs another approach. How about if I dive in headfirst? Yeah, do it...so what if everyone's looking at my arms flailing incoherently? I want to bathe in Empress Sheema's cauldron of Jamaican dub roots and Japanese techno-syrup. Maybe it's the thundering bass lines, or perhaps the cosmic synth slashes and brass sections, but this music does something to me. Everyone else seems to be doing doggy paddle, but I'm in full-on butterfly stroke. *Jah Rastafari!*

Better get out now, my fingers are going all wrinkly.

Daniel Trilling**Guessmen****The Cluny, Newcastle**

Guessmen are Tyneside's demons of skewwiff beat-butcher. With two engineers transplanted behind a misfiring arsenal of creeping gadgets, and lead yelper Alan Edge pushed out before them, they conjure up an unholy riot of sight and sound. This is a mishmash of electronica, doo wop and jazz jostling for air in a bubble that threatens to splatter. Somehow, Guessmen merge Aphex-mangled mechanics, Herbert-like saxophone swells and Beefheart-y word weirdness into a storm that goes bump, blip and bang in the night.

They are fronted by an insane druid who barks tales of spaceships and animals in suits, lapping up the bewildered catcalls from the crowd while smugly wrapped up in his trademark top hat and straggly tails. Together, Guessmen don't so much perform as play act, slamming their buttons so hard that you can almost feel the walls tightening their hold around you.

Ian Fletcher**Eamon Hamilton****Komedia, Brighton**

He's quirky, smart.

He writes one-minute songs about scenesters, celeb-spotting Karen O and Liars down The Free Butt, and people who won't "shut the fuck up" while bands are playing. He shouts a brutal 30-second hiccup of self-deprecating laughter, waiting for someone to answer the fucking phone. He switches character, and lusts after gypsy life, walks rainswept streets to little applause. He hesitates, looks forlorn momentarily. His

Photography: **Greg Neale****Cat On Form/Sammo Hung****Plan B night @ Le Pub, Newport**

There are days you wake up skull-fucked outta your mind, post-hallucinogenic apocalypse dream, and nothing makes sense. Sammo Hung don't do noise for then. Instead, with Jackie Chan perfection, they kung fu straight at your remaining coherent body parts till everything falls into place. They rock like Shellac, kiss like Blondie, and have a blonde kitten singer who is sex.

Cat On Form don't do women – they used to, before their lady drummer's back was eaten by the ghosts of a thousand multinationals. They prefer regulation crew cuts and maximum angry sloganising, but not in a cheese-stick erection of Manics rubbish. Cat On Form are focused, stripped to the waist and drenched in their own juices. There's a squat scent arrowing through the air. The anguished screaming faces aren't for show either. Everything could tumble into discordant splinters at any time. But it doesn't. Cat On Form are too wired to let that happen, and they vapourise with one final burst of spastic electricity, reintegrating into the masses.

Adam Anonymous

voice is Hungry and redolent of smoke-wearied pub balladeers like Seattle's Pete Krebs, and his guitar is acoustic. He entertains, throws in a few bum notes and a made-up song about all night parties. It is a source of bafflement to me why he should choose to hide his talent in Brighton's own pomp specialists British Sea Power, because solo he is a slightly unfocused yet shimmering star.

Everett True**Horrorpops****Satan's Hollow, Manchester**

Tonight, the hordes of tattooed, Brylcreamed kids seem ready to tear their hearts out for a new sensation. Entering the 360 degrees stage one by one, frontwoman Patricia is pure Bettie Page, clad in a tight red dress with masses of untamed black hair. She spends most of the gig confidently astride

her upright bass, despite claims that she's not used to people, "Looking at my ass while I'm playing". Aided by her greased up, slightly craggy-faced guitarists Karsten and Nekroman, plus wiry drummer Niedermeier, it's no wonder this Danish quartet enlisted two maniacal female dancers to add bounce to their saccharine rockabilly punk. The creeping hiss of 'Miss Take' is pure pop, with Patricia sounding far too much like Gwen Stefani to make us believe this is raw emotion. In fact, it's almost astounding how little horror there is, compared to sheer show time singalongs.

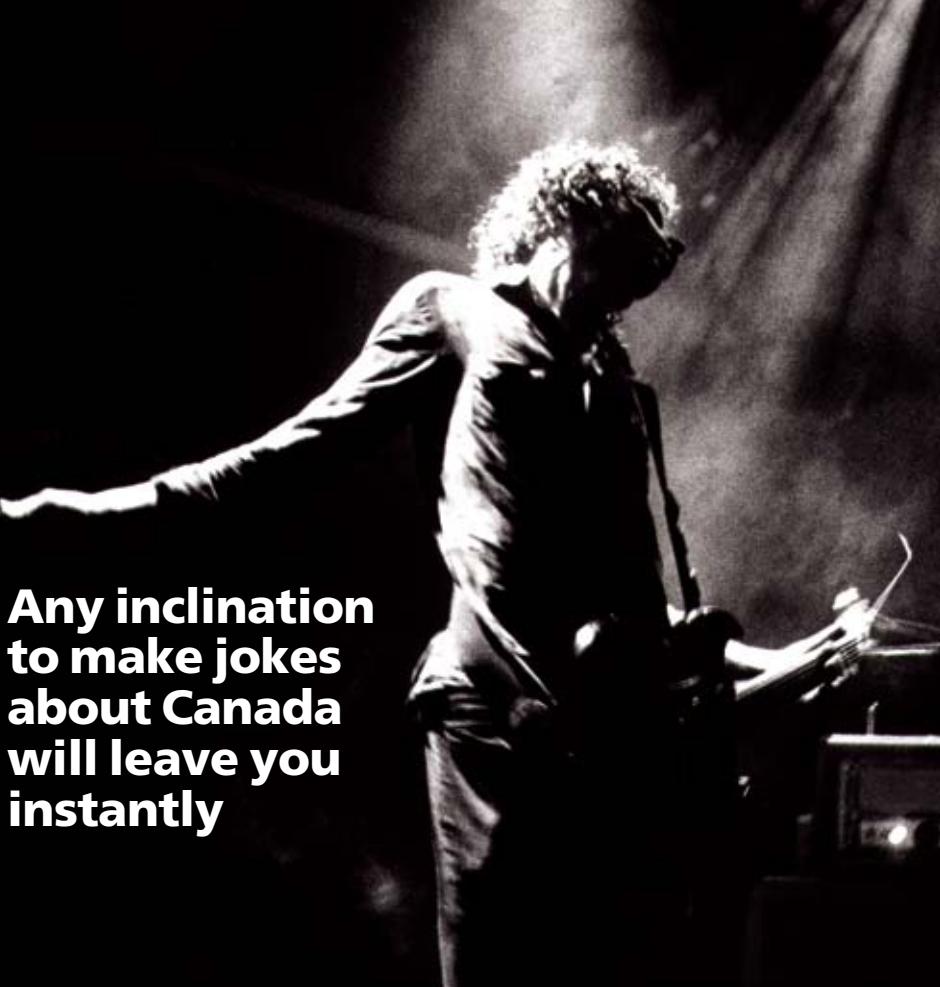
Patricia may look cool as hell, lapping up the writhing attention from the tutu-shaking go-go dancers, but without musical spark and sexuality, this lot are only a great party band, they won't change your life.

Lianne Steinberg

knickerbocker glory

Words: Pil And Galia Kollectiv

Photography: Sarah Bowles



Any inclination to make jokes about Canada will leave you instantly

The Kaiser Chiefs**Chinese Pilots, Moscow**

A girl in braces jerks her elbow violently across her chest. It's hard to tell if she's dancing or executing some strange Moscovite 'fuck off' sign. Guys thrust themselves centre stage wearing fake Burberry and dayglow orange. The Kaiser Chiefs are rattling through a glorious set of awkward, geekoid pop that threatens to pogo this tiny bar into the Baltics. Nobody's moshing, everyone's dancing and no one cares what anyone else is doing.

It's not about the band tonight. It's about realising how notions of cool fly in the face of music. Sure, this sounds *obvious* – but if it's so obvious, then how come you never see abandonment quite like this in the UK? These kids, defying health and safety with flailing limbs, aren't over-privileged retardz like us. Their parents spent their lives buying illegal tapes (or *magizdat*) and watching their gigs on the outskirts of town get raided and shut down by police. Christ, these kids still *do* get the shit kicked out of them by the Russian army at rock festivals. And when their faces are being pummelled against wire fences, they don't even blink or realise that something is seriously fucked up with that. So, if someone's offering to help them dance in the cosy surroundings of a club, what the fuck do you think they're gonna do? Stand there and stroke their chins?

Tim Jonze

Leeeevil**The Purple Turtle, London**

"Battyman! Don't you poke my poo!" he spits from behind two devil masks, skimpy black thong pulled down, position assumed, audience of metalheads invited to light the fag he's clenched between his skinny Essex boy cheeks. 'Course he fucking smokes it before laying down another nasty lyrical cough reflex over the redneck ragga metal mess that's been constipating for too long behind the tight ring of a pre-break circle pit scrum.

By rights, these ugly rhymes and glitchy d'n'b beats belong in the company of Lightning Bolt or Fantomas, but it makes sense that Leeevil is coming outta the tru metal scene. Because a lone man disturbed, skull-fucking himself with a swollen microphone is what happens only when indiscriminately breaking each other's noses becomes an accepted form of cultural bonding. Nu metal's sexual and creative repression demanded that this filthy genius be born to restore the balance. In spite of themselves, they called him out. And then they called him a slag.

And you love it.

Down on the floor, girls with big blonde perms are moving like late night TV adverts for Ibiza beach compilations and men with rhinoceros arms don white hockey masks to do the robot.

This is amazing, like a midsummer night's dream if Puck were armed with

a Kaos Pad, a heavy silver mic and a terribly extrovert knob.

Gracelette**Oxford Collapse****Mercury Lounge, New York**

This Brooklyn art-punk trio specialise in running pop songs ragged. They throw together the same new wave/post-punk influences as all those famous punk-funk bands but end up with something fresher and way more fun. Unlike the aforementioned slicker, borough-buddies, Oxford Collapse aren't too precious about their forebears. They pile their influences high, like a precarious tower of Jenga blocks, and gleefully watch them crash to the floor. Songs like 'Totally Gay, Totally Fat' and 'Grasses Of Anne' mash up straightahead tuneful punk, shards of no wave and a babbling weirdness all of their own, with glorious results.

Playing to a sparser crowd than they deserve, OC fling themselves around the stage, wringing an impressive sound from their instruments. Disappointingly, the vocals are treated as something of an afterthought, with singer/guitarist Michael Pace requesting that his mic be turned down after the first song. Indeed, Pace delivers much of the singing with his back to the audience, which is a real shame. Still, I guess they are a shambles.

Long may they fall apart.

Natalie Moore**The Unicorns****Needles, London**

We were promised puppet shows, theatrics, and costumes, but how did they know that our deepest dark desire was to see Thurston Moore as a cape-wearing keyboard superhero? That's how a Unicorn looks, in case you were wondering. And, even though the puppets were not in attendance, what a Unicorn does is no less mythical.

They will tell you tall tales of strange nights with necrophiliac strangers, haunted houses filled with bones and all manner of mischief. They will squeeze squeaky noises out of old synthesisers. And they will sing such heartrendingly beautiful harmonies that any inclination to make jokes about Canada will leave you instantly. Because Unicorns are people too.

None of this should come as a surprise from a band whose biography features peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, STDs and an electric guitaroo in random configurations, but tonight we are won over, swept away by flickery lo-fi magic. (Unicorns don't believe in lo-fi, but then lo-fi doesn't believe in them, so there.) In spite of the melting heat, we feel like we've just been fed a mountain of multicoloured ice cream. And an unexpected mid-song digression into a rendition of 'P.I.M.P.' feels like finding a psychotropic cherry on top.

"All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move," said Benjamin Franklin, somewhat of a cult figure for The Unicorns. And in the sticky warmth we move to their moving oddball ballads, and jump up and down grinning to their live beat/beatbox, should be on *Top Of The Pops*, hits. Many people are seated on the floor at the band's request but even they seem to be dancing, or bouncing, or whatever it is one does under such circumstances. And, while we may not have been born Unicorns, we're certainly happy to have met some.

Park Attack**Pollock Cricket & Tennis Pavilion, Glasgow**

Glaswegian trio Park Attack like to drop extreme doses of the no wave goodness that you keep reading about but have probably only heard in tiny snippets on compilations. Well, damn those compilations to hell!

For tonight you can be a part of the new 'What Wave' (the band's own title), where a 10-minute stroll through a forest substitutes Hell's Kitchen, NYC for a country cricket club outside Glasgow's city centre.

Too fantastic. I feel like I should be here with my dad. Alien music in alien spaces for alien times – hell, yes! Tribal drumming, electronic pulsing and chug-a-chug guitar collide in the space around us with a vocal that makes you think Ian Svenonius ain't so urgent.

This distorting fuzz cavalcade makes me want to press my brain against the wall just to fucking *feel* it.

If Black Dice were a hardcore band – oh yes! That would be nice.

My head bounces minutes after they finish because I didn't even notice it was bouncing to begin with.

You know when you see a band so unexpectedly remarkable that you think, "Yeah, I need to do this shit"?

Mm-hmm, taste it.

George Taylor

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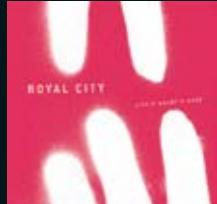
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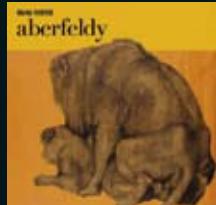
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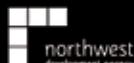
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The moment Satomi and Greg lock eyes, potions are created and vapours released



wildlife on floor

Words: Hayley Avron
Photography: Cat Stevens

Deerhoof

Brudenell Social Club, Leeds

"Deerhoof!"

It's an elementary introduction to an elementary band. You've got everything you need rolled into four easy-to-assemble parts. Take one petite, cutesy bass-playing singer, nervously eyeballing the crowd. Take two identikit, well-dressed, polite-looking chaps wrenching boisterous chords from their guitars. Take one barefoot ruffian hammering obtuse rhythms and offensive beats from a battered drumkit. *Et voilà!* Whaddya got? A melting pot of rock'n'roll fun.

The opening number (and it's a 'number', not a 'song', with their subtle leanings towards theatrics) is a triumph of the stop-start rhythms – à la Erase Errata – that we know and love. Making oriental symbols in the air with her hands during the perfect pauses, Satomi yelps and charms her way through the changes, pogoing, starjumping and generally setting a highly energetic standard for the rest of the band.

I never thought it would be possible to detect such chemistry between two people who spend the majority of their time with their backs together. But the moment Satomi and drummer Greg lock eyes, potions are created and vapours released. And when he leaves his makeshift drum stool (an

upturned crate) to lean over her minuscule frame and share in the vocal duties, it's like watching the most endearing mating ritual never to make it onto a wildlife rockumentary.

The only point at which the intensity fades has little to do with the music and more to do with Deerhoof's presumably well-meaning decision to play on the floor. All very exciting, personal and intimate when you're stood three inches away and can feel their body heat through the fog of a hundred people's sweat. But when nature calls (the bar, that is...) and suddenly the band are out of sight, the passion wanes and the fight back to the front is thwarted.

Regardless, we wander off into the night, happy with what we saw, for the short time that we saw it.

Pelican

The Underworld, London

It's heavy, heavy weather outside, and the bowels of Camden's Underworld offer no respite. And that's fine, because we're on a quest for heavy, fuelled by quick-drunk beer and the not-even-close, futile-sounding tantrum of support act, Jesu, who make us cower in a corner muttering, "It's just not *heavy* enough..." to passing friends. It's not that we want extreme noise, or for our ears to bleed and our lower intestines to fall out. That would be messy, and I'm wearing vintage Fiorucci. No, we just want heavy. Heavy, in our language, means sound you embrace even as it flattens you, not sound you have to stand with your shoulder against, like it's a door keeping out an irritating pet. It's sound that makes you stand awestruck and laugh with shellshocked recognition – the ringing of a huge church bell it took years of mud and toil to build, perhaps. Or the sound of standing inside the bell while the whole town bangs on the outside with sticks.

Hell, how about the sound of you *becoming the bell itself*, swinging and clanging in a vast, bronze-clouded sky? How about that? I'm gonna fall over. Let me tell you about Pelican.

Pelican play instrumental doom metal with more tunes than Henry Purcell. The intricate, major-key guitar interplay between De Brauw and Laurent Lebec is as baroque as it is rock, with all the intimations of enlightenment through logic that this implies. Meanwhile, if you want to get alchemical (the pelican being, of course, an integral part of the alchemist's symbolic menagerie), Larry Herweg's drumming is the vessel in which, before our closed, twitching eyelids, the transformation from the lead of mere notes to the blinding, golden strands of total music take place. This is no trance-out: the rhythmic and harmonic changes that leave you both stunned and tickled at their audacity never let you fully relax into the codeine coma of mere noise.

An hour later, they stop; we want aeons more. Tonight our metal is gloriously burnished and warm, coppery and

labyrinthine, timeless and very lovely. And yes, it is heavy.

Frances May Morgan

Polysics

ICA, London

Q: Are we not men?

A: No, you are Polysics, a group of mongoloids devolved, devoted and devoid only of flowerpots. Garden-sourced headwear aside, you are very much your mentors' children, or biomechanical droids, or the result of whatever Devo do for reproductive purposes. Made in Japan, you have taken your mentors' original tendencies to the extreme, and you perform your twitchy nerd noise at double speed, making a mess of the lyrics along the way. At the ICA, you step onstage in your matching boiler suits and superblack sunglasses (just plain black wouldn't do). You start out well-programmed, your keyboardist's pigtails following her robotic body-popping with precision, but you break out in spurts of feedback malfunction. You leave behind the dry wit of your progenitors' visions of

suburban dystopia, and concentrate on demolishing the remains of the sweet, neat pop music they began dismantling more than two decades ago. By the time you get to picking the bones from the wires of 'My Sharaona', you no longer seem like the stereotyped mechanical Japanese suits in the takeover paranoia films of the Eighties – we see through you and we know that you rock.

Pil And Galia Kollectiv

Q And Not U

The Underworld, London

If George W Bush isn't booted out of the White House, then the only way we'll witness mass dancing in the streets of Washington DC will be if locals Q And Not U play a huge outdoor gig. 'Cause if the great ape doesn't slouch off into well-oiled oblivion then this lot are gonna be even more livid than they already are. And, fuelled by anger, their *raison d'être* is to make you dance like a loon while thinking on your feet.

On stage, they are both spontaneous and tightly wound, tumescent rhythms

Drugs are bad! Pass me that spliff!



ooh sir!

Words: **Miss AMP**

Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

Skinnyman

Fabric, London

Ooh I'm Skinnyman! We've got a new game, it's called Ooh I'm Skinnyman. Don't do drugs! Drugs are bad! Pass me that spliff! Ooh I'm Skinnyman! Go buy my album or STEAL my album from record stores, because they still have to pay for that shit – but don't DOWNLOAD IT! I'm Skinnyman! By the way, if you see something bad, like maybe there's a kid on your estate getting abused or something, bring the kid round to my gaff, cuz I ain't gonna stop till there's no more child abuse, and I ain't gonna rest 'til there's clean water

for every child in the world, cuz I'm Skinnyman! Ooh I'm Skinnyman!

Jesus.

Yeah! I'm not Skinnyman! I'm Jesus! That's right! I'm Jesus. I'm here to save the world via the means of UK hip hop! I'm Skinnyman! I'm Jesus! I'm Skinnyman! I'm Jesus!

OK. I'll stop playing Ooh I'm Skinnyman now. But Skinnyman started it! Rollicking round the stage like a giant baby in a giant fleece, promoting 'solutions' to street crime and inner-city deprivation about as convincing and achievable as a beauty queen's wish for world peace. Stopping every song after two verses to persuade us to go and buy his album, like hearing half a song's any more likely to make us buy it than hearing a whole song – puh. Of course Skinnyman wants to sell units, but we've

already paid £12 a ticket – don't we deserve a proper set?

The boys in the audience, all elaborate facial hair and sparkly diamond earrings, were gagging to do that pointy thing with their fingers and bob their heads to the beat and shout approval when Stratford or Finsbury Park got a mention. But poor them, cuz what they got instead was a whole bunch of patronisingly didactic a cappella raps about the dangers of the streets and crack and whoring and council estates, followed by a second of beats that were then cruelly snatched away from them before they even got their pointing fingers up towards shoulder level. Apparently Skinnyman once flung a thousand bags of weed into the audience at a Legalise Cannabis festival, but there was no sign of such generosity tonight.

spinning out over sweat-drenched brows. This is hardcore that bleeds funk, without any reductive fashionista posturing. Too warmly organic for straightedge slam-dancing, and too ferocious for running on the spot as to your DFA faves, this is something else entirely.

Stop/start angularity flows seamlessly as the trio hurl out a barrage of living and breathing anthems, with the highlight being latest single 'X-Polynation' exploding like the Bill Of Rights into Monica's smudged mouth.

A call to arms that's neither preachy nor trite, Q And Not U deliver a reminder that politics can indeed be cool, despite the fact that everyone's at it these days.

Stewart Gardiner

Alisdair Roberts/ Lucky Luke/Scatter Caledonian Backpackers, Edinburgh

New weird folk isn't just about pixie people from San Francisco – there's a Celtic contingent and tonight they came out of the woods.

Scatter's heady jazz folk makes me imagine Charles Mingus and John Zorn wandering onto the set of *The Wicker Man*. Golden rays of Latin cornet burst across klezmer rhythms as harmonium and bowed bass provide the drone.

Lucky Luke update the acid folk of Fairport Convention for the post-rock generation. Songs begin quietly, in a swirl of flute, violin and pure vocals, building to an intense psychedelic spree.

His natty red outfit suggests Alisdair Roberts is quite the showman but as his stark records indicate, he's fairly reserved. It's left to curly-haired guitarist Gareth Eggie to work the crowd, and he does so magnificently, commanding us to dance and dropping to his knees during a lusty 'Carousing'. Roberts, meanwhile, head down, picks out a reel on his acoustic.

The quiet moments are the most precious. An a cappella 'Banks Of Red Rosey' is extraordinary, and when we're asked to hum along to 'Whole House Is Singing', it feels tingly and sublime.

Stewart Smith

Septembre

Metro, London

Running the gamut from a deserved 'fucking genius' to a petty 'insincere bollocks', Septembre polarise opinion. Frontman Terry Abbott was the songwriting force behind previous, more commercial venture Vex Red, and Septembre is his creative phoenix rising. There's a lot to prove.

The group's close-knit dynamic means they don't put a foot wrong. Abbott's mesmerising, emotive vocal juxtaposes perfectly with his enraged guitar and drummer Sammy-Lee's vicious octopus pounding, creating a passionate, driven and forceful sound. Their apparently short set is due to the kind of memorable songwriting that causes the simmering crowd to erupt at the final song.

Eclipsing expectations and deserving of the chance to prove exactly what they're about, Septembre, it would appear, are the band that Vex Red should have been.

Julia Willis

Spokey/The Priscillas

The Hobgoblin, Brighton

Imagine NYC garage toughs Lunachicks, given a fresh sneer. Imagine The Shangri-La's, made much less sweet through alcohol abuse, rolling around the floor with their skirts around their heads. Imagine a girl gang fight circa 1963 (yeah, that's right, *West Side Story*, ya saps). Imagine drinking at the fountain of Dee Dee Ramone (ugh!) and distilling the above into a welter of bouffants. Don't forget to throw in some songs... fuck, I said *don't forget to throw in some songs...* and you got London's Priscillas.

Spokey are two Japanese gals standing legs akimbo like Johnny Ramone (plus a drummer), backs racked against one another, hair as perfectly teased as The Priscillas' is rough. Their riffs are honed into submission – again, as far away from The Priscillas' raw ramalama as two bands could be, growing up on that ol' Gabba Gabba HEY! I prefer The 5678s' naïve garage to such slick movement, but fuck it. This is rock.

Everett True

How can you *not* love a group who understand the importance of synchronised hand movements?



in love

Words: **Alistair Fitchett**
Photography: **Jonathan Proctor**

The Pipettes/The Legend!

Plan B night @ The Free Butt, Brighton

I'm in Brighton and I'm hot. The Free Butt is sauna-like as a capacity crowd squeeze in to catch the hotter than hot Pipettes top another great *Plan B* night. Being a recluse by nature, I've not heard them before. But within seconds I've got a grin spreading across my face and that 'Oh, I'm in love with Pop music all over again, isn't it great!?' feeling rising in my heart. I want to go scrawl the town with graffiti that says 'The Pipettes are god!'.

I mean, really, how can you *not* love a group whose singers take the stage through the crowd

while shaking blue pom-poms? How can you *not* love a group who understand the importance of synchronised hand movements? How can you *not* love a group who kick off with a song about loving boys in school uniforms and who, like The Monkees, have a song all about themselves? "We are *The Pipettes*, and we'll catch you in our net," they sing, and hey, y'know I am caught, oh how I am caught. And how can you *not* love a group who look and sound like a Phil Spector/Joe Meek girl group backed by The Flamin' Groovies? Or like The Rezillos hooking up with the All Girl Summer Fun Band. Or like The Flatmates snogging Tiger Trap snogging Dolly Mixture snogging Strawberry Switchblade. How can you *not* love a group who have three polka dot dresses up front and two cute chaps in the back shaking tambourines?

Anyone in love with Pop will by default be in love with The Pipettes. Now all that remains is for school kids (and/or possibly their teachers) the land over to be felt-penning the name of their favourite Pipette on pencil cases and covers of French books.

Oh, and The Legend! was great too! ET and Kelly (guitarist who plays with Tricky, as I understand it) having a whale of a time and being immensely entertaining. Highlights were a version of old Legend! 'favourite' 'Talk Open' (well, I recognised it, at least) and a cover of Thee Headcoats' 'We Hate The (Fucking) NME', improvised using a current issue of the rag. It was very funny...Also the reading of some of his text from *Careless Talk* over a wonderful guitar line, at the end of which some wag shouted 'Paul Morley'. It was that kind of night.

Swimmer One

King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, Glasgow

...And here's a pair of jangly electro pimps, sleek of manner, hair and tongue, exposing themselves live for the fourth time ever. With a perky line in shy, wry, poetic synth-pop, Swimmer One groom tonight's audience with deceptively dark tales of frigid ambition and rancorous lust. Joined by glam Fife chanteuse, Cora Bissett, they seduce us with 'How Can Something Like That Be Love'. Less Human League and more Human Lung, it's also, 'The best pop song to chart a rakish case of homoerotic agoraphobia...ever!'

These demi-perv wordsmiths make songs that go: "*I will picture the two of us laughing/On a fake plastic tropical beach/And I'm holding your head underwater/So you can't raise my hopes again.*"

And they make songs that sound like Casio handclaps, egghead bleep-pop, warm guitar, Soft Cell, burbling keyboards. With their measured delivery and drone-fuelled

audacity, they also make the best "*da da da's*" since The Flying Pickets.

And they make us amazed; extorting rapturous laughter when, replete with Bissett, they render a gung-ho, teeth-shattering version of 'Cloudbusting' as a fitting, ebullient conclusion.

Nicola Meighan

The Trachtenburg Family Slideshow Players

Pod Deco, Edinburgh

The Trachtenburgs depart from the great tradition of freaky performing families like the Crankies and Hanson because you'd actually like to be their friend. Probably. Dressed in homemade sparkles, Dad on keyboard/guitar, Mum manning the slides and 10-year-old Rachel on backing vocals and drums, they come from New York's anti-folk scene and soundtrack old slide reels with musical extravaganzas.

'Japan Mountain Trip 1959'. A public execution. Retired military nurses in early Sixties America – their wealth, glossy smiles and glossy antics showing the freedom and

privilege of that generation. Dad's lyrics bite with leftfield intelligence, pointing out elements not immediately obvious to the casual viewer. The crowning reel is a structurally ambitious but haphazardly performed 'six-part rock opera' based on a set of slides from a Seventies McDonalds corporate meeting.

Their main annoyance is also a major selling point – the contrived amateurism shown in the constant (and surely pre-planned) interruptions and mistakes. But the end-of-show request for a ride to Glasgow is attributed to 'our credit history' and shows they are For Real.

They promised grating kookiness but turned out to be truly odd. And that's a good thing. Here's dreading Rachel's rebellion.

Amy Liptrot

Twilight Singers

The Scala, London

With sturdy fingers, he plucks the spliff from the front row and places it to his lips, taking a coy, coquettish puff, then a harder, deeper inhale, then exhaling.

The smoke dances about his head, the enveloping mist illuminated by lingering magenta, mauve and orange lights. He oozes into a delirious shit-eating grin, possibly as wide and carefree as Billie Holliday might've beamed when she was high and singing – the most high. That's how Greg Dulli seems tonight, *most high* – and this is a man familiar with the most altered states.

His Twilight Singers play a bruise-clouded soul'n'roll noise, perfectly in tune with the epic, blood-soaked parties Afghan Whigs hosted towards their end. Tonight's not the two-hour cover-heavy set from a London show earlier this year – no OutKast or Kate Bush covers – but we do get the Whigs' own 'Faded', as molten and ruinous as ever before. And sure, this is a party, even for the dark edge that Dulli himself once denied hanging upon every note like the dope smoke: the bitter truths woven within his ballads, the darkest pockets of his soul, illuminated for us here onstage. Feet on the ground. Most high.

Stevie Chick

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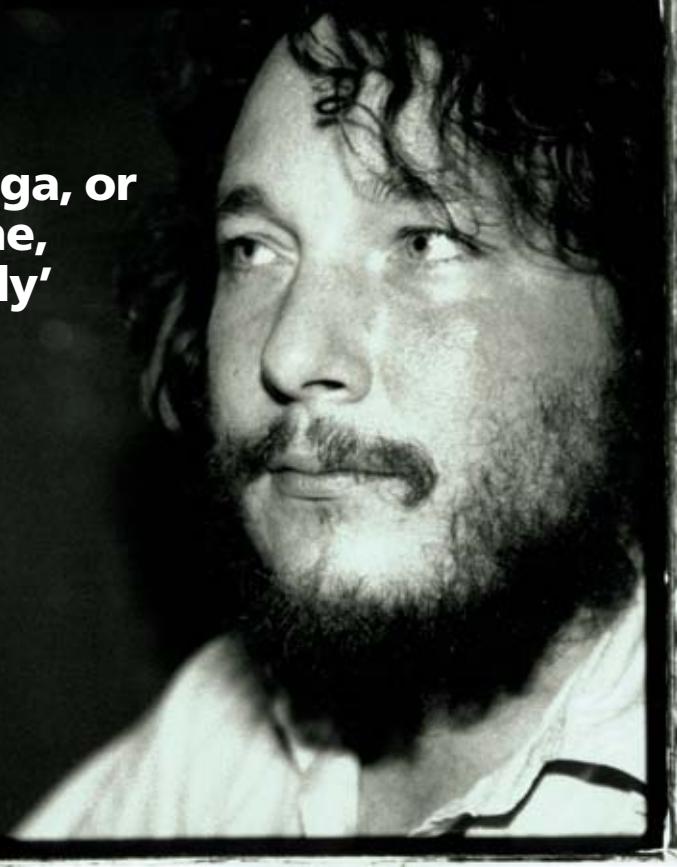


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**'If I am inspired,
it's usually from a raga, or
a Fahey or Basho tune,
or an old time melody'**



encyclopaedia americana

Words: Stewart Gardiner
Photography: Simon Fernandez

Jack Rose makes modernist music in a world where modernism has been all but exorcised

Modernism, as a means of artistic expression, emitted its frenzied death throes at the time of World War II, its final consumptive sputters brought on by the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. In suddenly realising that the heart of man was unfathomable in its capacity for evil, and had been since time immemorial, people turned their gaze away from history, adopting an almost cavalier attitude to what had gone before. Post-modernism would soon be born, and the arts could rest easy in the belief that they could continue to say something cleverly without ever having to say anything at all.

American popular guitar music was no exception. Its solution was to shake off its roots in traditional blues and adopt a revolving doors policy of stylistic reinvention, laying down the foundations of a musical year zero with rock'n'roll.

Jack Rose's fascination with this almost mythological America before the point of crisis seeps through in his musical journeys towards that era. He weaves a rich tapestry of pre-war blues approximations that support his wholly distinctive personal style. Like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Jack's finger-picked guitar can function as an encyclopaedic rendering of the past, but only if you dig beneath the surface. As in modernism, there may be a code available to crack, but the work itself is instinctively emotive even when shorn of reference points.

By no means a copyist, Jack Rose is engaged in recreating the impassioned skill and raw technicality that were once prevalent in American guitar music. But he does not take the easy route.

"No one today can play like Charley Patton, Blind Blake, John Hurt, Jimmie Rogers, Sam McGee, Blind Willie Johnson, and Jelly Roll Morton," Jack informs me through that less-than-dusty information highway. Yet it was through attempting what he views as the impossible – hitting upon a particular way of playing seemingly lost to time – that he discovered his own inimitable voice.

Jack Rose joined Pelt alongside Patrick Best in the mid-Nineties, providing a catalyst that would see Mike Gangloff's group evolve from the more straight-ahead rock into an entity charged with delving into the many possibilities of drawing out sounds through improvisation. The sepulchral drones of *Técheód* (1998) and *Empty Bell Ringing In The Sky* (1999) gradually shifted into the more blues-based acoustic territory of *Ayahuasca* (2001), making it apparent that, at heart, theirs had always been a roots music. Jack now furthers this passage alone.

His recent *Two Originals Of...* collection on VHF Records draws together the hard-to-find LPs *Red Horse*, *White Mule* and *Opium Musick*. Coupled with the odds-and-ends compilation *Raag Manifestos*, they present a mesmerising journey of timeless folk music that gets you straight in the gut. Their

generation-spanning vision is key to understanding Jack Rose's output. "Music that's any good has a blend of the past and present," he says.

The past here is not only the era of pre-war American guitar music itself, but also the more recent past as refracted through the work of the late guitarist and composer John Fahey, that monolithic folk/blues renaissance man. However, Jack is comfortable with discussing his influence, as he speaks of eking out originality in a field that has been largely under the shadow of one man for so many years. In attempting to discover his own voice, he first had to force himself not to play in any style that's directly associated with John Fahey. Now, he says, "I feel more comfortable with incorporating elements of his style into my playing/composing, now that I think I have internalised his music."

Jack furthermore cites the inception of his creativity as coming from secondhand sources, disregarding his emotional surroundings as a direct influence: "I think atmosphere and where my head or heart is at the time certainly affects what I do, but I do not write about anything specific or get inspired by something in particular. If I am inspired, it's usually from a raga, or a Fahey or [Robbie] Basho tune, or an old time melody. It's mostly hard work, repetition, trial and error."

It all comes down to living vicariously through music, for instead of that music



To modernise is to build a future from the stones of the past

simply reminding us of personal past events, we are allowed skewed access to the experience of others. By aiming to recreate a style lodged in time, Jack Rose is staking a claim for existing in a space that is less about the here and now, and more about the there and then.

Art is not born of a vacuum, despite what the solipsistic may claim, and to modernise is to build a path for the future from the stones of the past.

Asked what he wants listeners to take away from his work, Jack succinctly sets out his *modus operandi*: "I hope it leads them to the music that inspired me. I hope the listener can connect with his or her own emotions as well when listening to my music."

Connecting is certainly something Jack Rose cannot fail to do. By joining the dots within the miasmic musical landscape, his work takes on moments of instinctive clarity that reveal shards of meaning to the listener and the artist alike. Windows creak open to worlds that bleed time through time, and let the blustering air of change rush through.

vhf records

Words: Frances May Morgan

Stupendous cosmic surprise rock action!

I heard it in my friend's kitchen, a yellow-walled basement where we'd break from our own hour-long jams to drink tea and stare into space. Emitting from a CD-player that barely worked was a strange recording of scrapes, breaths, drones and oscillations, familiar sounds from the outer edges, a warm but glacial drone that took its precious time in winding itself around my ears. It was alien but also close and gritty; perfect but flawed. It was *Técheöd* by **Pelt** (2000); at that time a trio consisting of Jack Rose, Mike Gangloff and Patrick Best. It had a beautiful cover; soft shades and colours, suggested hues and blurred shapes. It sounded like home, if home means the place where all the sounds fall into place without explanation or coercion. One by one I sought out all Pelt's recordings and, from there, the other treasures released by VHF Records.

I'm yet to be disappointed.

"I don't know how to tell good improvised music from bad, it's a purely visceral reaction for me," founder Bill Kellum emails me. "Reasoning it out ruins it for me in a way, so I try not to spend much time thinking about historical references or genre tags.

"One thing I know that I like about improvised music is that it provides an avenue for happy surprises, accidents, mistakes, collisions – things that I like in the rest of my life," he continues.

Here lies much of the appeal of VHF's output. Started in 1991 ("just as a lark") as an outlet for Kellum's work with **Doldrums**, as well as releases by **Rake** and **Wingtip Sloat**, the remit soon broadened out from atmospheric, mainly electric guitar-based experimentation to include journeys made via a myriad different routes, in particular Pelt's work with Eastern music, and **Black Twig Pickers'** and **Jack Rose'** takes on American folk. If VHF has a 'flavour', a kind of defining theme, it's this: a wholly natural mixture of the psychedelic edges of rock and jazz with the hidden roots of Americana and other traditional musics. There's a blissful logic in the way the Indian ragas of Pelt, the Appalachian twang of the Twig Pickers, the gloriously messy British free-jazz of **Vibracathedral Orchestra** and Scatter's **Alex Neilson**, and the electric freeform freakouts of **Flying Saucer Attack** and **Sunroof!** mesh together, held in some unspoken agreement to take music further and further out, and to take the listener with it, generously and almost kindly.

Via some virtuoso musicianship (Rose, of course, and **Makoto Kawabata**, whose recordings with **Richard Youngs** are released on the label) and some breathtakingly lo-fi soundscapes courtesy of the likes of **From Quagmire** and **FSA**, you discover a collection of records that are as approachable as they are esoteric; as inspirational and transcendent as they are fresh, alive and bristling with energy and tension.

On the subject of VHF's loose approach to genre, Kellum says, "Musicians in the sub-underground tend to be pretty free about using those ideas... I have friends who think it's a sham for rockers to play Indian instruments or to play old time – that it's some sort of cultural imperialism. But I think that's ridiculous – no one is getting any sort of cache or spoils in other than the most esoteric sense from playing a drone for 20 minutes."

Exotic instrumentation aside, it seems fair to say that VHF is a guitarists' label – but one that's host to some of the most exciting, exploratory and innovative electric guitarists of our time; no mean feat in a climate of stolid and self-referential strumming. Aside from the aforementioned Rose, Youngs and Kawabata – and FSA's Dave Pearce – **Matthew Bower**, formerly of Skullflower and Total, is a true hero of the 'sub-underground' whose work is more than adequately represented by Kellum's label.

Bower's **Sunroof!**, an amorphous, prolific entity comprising Bower's extraordinary guitar and assorted primitive drum machines, synths, organs and electronics, was the next VHF act to find a deep, secure and extremely personal place in my ears. Recorded in lo-fi isolation, with way too much high end and too many far-out titles for your more sensitive friends, albums such as *Bliss* (2001) and *Cloudz* (2003) are the aural equivalent of lying on a rock in the hot sun while swallows, damson-flies and bi-planes wheel, cheep and buzz above you in the too-blue sky.

That the music of Sunroof! is available at all makes the world a better, prettier and funnier place. That it's available from VHF secures the label's place as a true original, devoted to 'other' music. Or, in the words of Bill Kellum, when I ask him for five words that describe the music he loves:

"Stupendous
cosmic
surprise
rock
action!"

www.vhrecords.com
With thanks to Lee Nite



revolution girl style, when?

Words: Kieron Gillen
Illustration: Lauren Gregg

Le Tigre are aiming to take their music to a wider audience – will this dilute the message?

I put on Le Tigre's *Keep On Livin'* loud enough to hide the moebius strip verse of the busker outside my window, and start. I've been sitting in this room for the last six days doing disgusting corporate acts, listening to Le Tigre and waiting for a telephone interview to finalise. Schedules fail to mesh in time. It happens. But I'm left with one half of a conversation inside my head, and nowhere to put it. Except – y'know – here.

The problem with Le Tigre, being a popular feminist lo-fi synth-punk band, is context. Riot Grrrl understood context. It owned it completely. This lead to control, and control means a band can make scalpel incisions in a clean environment in a way they simply can't as a particle being blasted around by pop culture's Brownian forces. In the same way you can say something casually among friends without fear of misinterpretation, taking it to a wider stage means that planned order is lost, both in terms of those broadly aligned to their side and those opposing.

Now, I'm not suggesting some kind of cultural anorexia, or that growing and pruning a bonsai scene to avoid this is in any way desirable – but once you head onto a wider stage, you have to deal with it. (*This Island* is Le Tigre's first album on Universal. And that's the last mention of that: c'mon, do I look like Steve Albini?) The motivations of those opposing them are more obvious – though Le Tigre are doing their best to muddy the waters with 'New Kicks', which they've released online in the lead up to the album – but what puzzles more is those inside their fan base.

Take me. Please. Why the fuck am I listening to Le Tigre?

I'm a white upper-lower class functionally straight man with some suspect ideological grounding and a nasty phallo-centric tendency (evidence: writer's occasional pseudonym Minister Drill-cock!). This isn't music for me. In fact, I'm coming close to being a target for much of Le Tigre's ire. Why am I dancing at the party?

What Le Tigre pick up is a reversal of the phenomenon of women listening to music that reeks of misogyny (Stones/Cave/Pistols/Stooges, and on and on, down Q Top 100 lists forever) because – well – partly because dodgy transgression is one of the more basic pop thrills, but mainly because hearing someone state their beliefs with utter conviction is totally compelling. And no matter what the subject matter, when Le Tigre step up to the mic and scream, "10 short years of progressive change/50 fucking years of calling us names", you

catch your breath, in the same way I do when listening to Nina Simone's stridency in being young, gifted and black, while I'm none of the three.

But it goes further.

Le Tigre get this audience not just through the force of the message, but because of the message itself. To a white, hetero, male audience they offer a music powered by justified rage. Male rebel rock is, of course, the sound of a cock shaking in rage that it's not *them* who are in charge. Female agit-prop isn't. Hearing a genuine grievance allows you to sidestep the part of the mind that makes you ask what on earth these rich, white, young men are whining about and just get on with buzzing off the presence of genuine revolutionary zeal. Even worse, there's a tiny flash in this breed of Le Tigre fan who use admiration of the band as a badge to separate them from the rest of their gender, in a music fan's version of nodding while pretending to be listening to show how sensitive you are. Not fooling anyone, sweetie.

But the real nastiness comes when you realise that if Le Tigre ever actually succeeded in their feminist, queer-friendly and leftist aims, they'd immediately become a much less interesting phenomenon. A revolution song only thrills as long as the revolution isn't won. This makes hetero men who buzz off Le Tigre just another symptom of a patronising, paternalistic system, and their presence an actual danger in terms of Le Tigre reaching the people they need to speak to.

Consider a little bit of speculative fiction, and play Le Tigre out according to Public Enemy's career. (Swap 'woman' for 'black' in thread.) Initially a radical pop band, they became increasingly disenfranchised from their constituency while becoming hailed by white liberals looking for a badge to display their understanding of race issues while secretly being thrilled by PE's monolithic righteousness.

Liberals loving 'consciousness' rap is the flipside to teenagers wallowing in black urban violence scenarios – jizzing over unsound or sound politics. Imagine that happening to Kathleen, Johanna and JD, their audience gradually swelling with male, hetero fans looking for a credible rebel-rock alternative...

No, it's not very likely. Their Ladyfest-centred constituency is less fickle than that of early Nineties hip hop, but if you're white/male/straight and you think that it's a possibility even for a second, then if you haven't immediately stopped listening to

Le Tigre in case you blunt their blade, you're just using them as a cheap holiday in someone else's fervour. And you really should realise that.

Not that Le Tigre haven't got enough fervour to set up holiday destinations. Their greatest weakness, in a formalist sense, is when their politics and solidarity walk all over the music.

The most recent experience of this is 'New Kicks', where they apply their commendable belief that the War On Terror Is A Bit Rubbish by creating a collage of protest speakers over ramshackle, tinny beats and a few shouts of "Peace! Now!" and "This is what democracy looks like! This is what democracy sounds like!" It's sanctimonious, blank and dumb enough to make the most ardent pacifist want to join the US army and kill innocent brown people.

More regularly, there's the democratic structure of the band. The problem is... well, one of the band has the most liberated female voice since Poly Styrene, which sounds like the bloody emancipation

A revolution song only thrills as long as the revolution isn't won

of decapitated head-wielding menaeads mixed with an almost hysterical joy whenever it truly lets rip. Johanna and JD sound like people. It's hardly rocket science: Kathleen Sings Lead On All The Songs, thicko. Except she doesn't, and in formalist terms – with rare exceptions, such as 'Viz' from the new album, about butch dyke visibility which could only be done convincingly by butch dyke JD – they're all the weaker for it.

This is both Le Tigre's problem and their power. They're musically torn apart by the irreconcilable forces that drive them, and the majority of their best songs (obvious exception: 'Hot Topic') sound so tightly wound that they could snap any second, like arms warping on an ideological rack.

So there you go. Questions without answers, even – I suspect – if I had actually put them to Le Tigre as planned. Perhaps they're the best kind.

Oh. The busker's stopped.

I turn off 'Deceptacon', wonder whether it's too late to hit a club to dance off these unwanted thoughts, and close the Word document.



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lost blues

Words: Neil Kulkarni

Illustration: Charles Redmond

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds

Abattoir Blues/The Lyre Of Orpheus (Mute)

Hey, look, I believed once. I realised I was buying well-read misogyny, suckered into being controlled by a perfect simulacrum of anarchy. Not a problem, cos I dug being played like that. But now that I feel I'm being played (down) to, granted an audience, nasty Nick can't touch me anymore. Now the protagonist doesn't even want to be out of control anymore, now the icon is content to be an 'artist', whose every word and deed is anticipated to the point where it cannot be criticised, my faith wavers. I don't buy him anymore. What a tarnished brand. The Bad Seeds, I buy. What a fucking band. Opener, 'Get Ready For Love', is as holy and

Menopausal and conservative in its pain and tired in its evocations of love

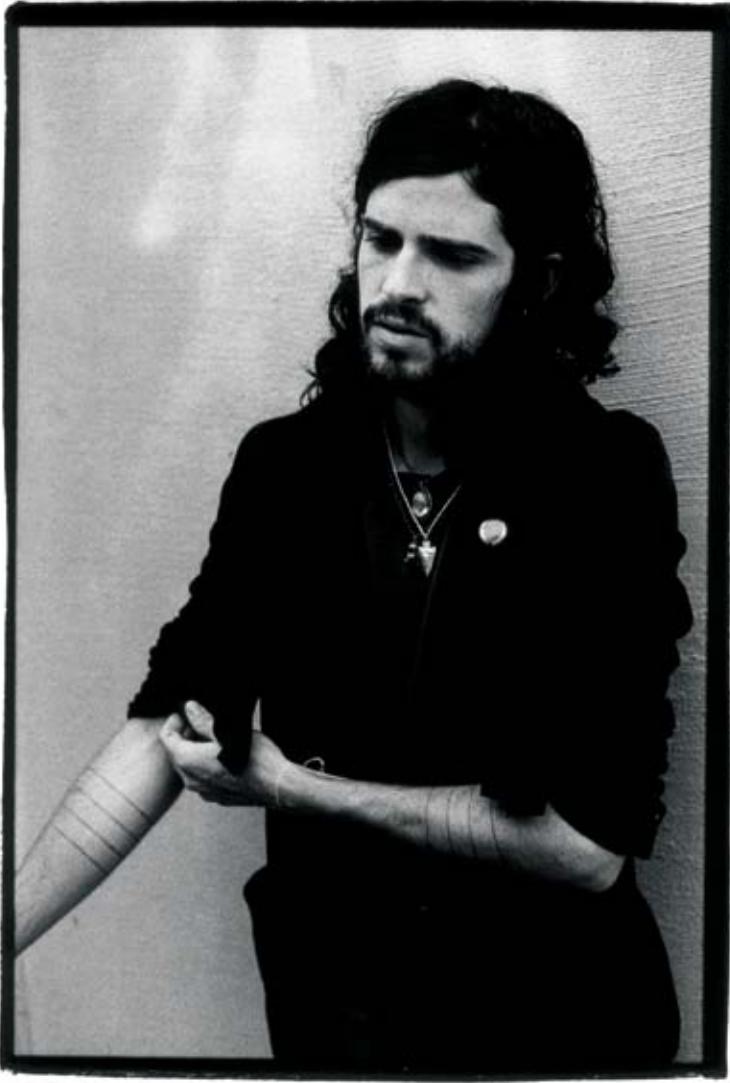
horny a fuzzed-up gospel racket as Cave's got close to since 'Deanna'. There's a thump, a ringing blast to much of *Abattoir Blues* (the first disc of this sumptuously packaged double) that successfully pushes Nick The Stripper into the peripheries. Sure, he's the songwriter, but that only matters if you think that 'craft' is more important than magic: nah, the true bliss lies in Jim and Thom's drums; in Mick Harvey's instantly recognisable sugar and spite; in the colour Warren Ellis always brings; in the unmanned, holy noise of the London Community Gospel Choir.

When you spend time trying to find Cave within all this wondrous collage, you find him telling the same old story he's always been telling. I don't buy that great artists are essentially monomaniacal – or that a career spent writing love songs and blues songs means your obsessions have to be so limited. Nick Cave's brand of macho self-loathing/celebration, inverted racial snobbery/shame, and spiritual hunger/queasiness is sounding so fucking inadequate now, so menopausal and conservative in its pain and tired in its evocations of love. How sad it must be to be so encircled by your own fatalism that you can only repeat your railings against it, with ever-dwindling effect.

A little conciseness, a little breakdown in all this communication would do Cave's genius well. Until then, *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre Of Orpheus* is the masterpiece of Nick Cave the bandleader and living legend. The sooner he cares less about that, and more about the living horror of the moment, the sooner his final resurrection will come about.

I pray for it fervently.



**star of wonder**Words: **Hannah Gregory**Photography: **Steve Gullick****Devendra Banhart****Nino Rojo (Young God)**

Oh, Devendra. Oh, how you enchant. Oh, how you create beauty out of so little. You shine shards of light on the world when it seems too dark to contemplate, teasing out the freakishly linked knots of nature into songs so sweet and suffocating and otherworldly that I dare not breathe, for fear of snapping your spell. Just as the gently plucked, eager melodies of *Rejoicing In The Hands* infiltrated our daily rhythms, you give us this, a fresh dose of equally intoxicating magic. "*Rejoicing in the hands of the golden empress is the mother, the sun,*" you said. And this, *Nino Rojo* (the Red Sun) is the product of the same birth star, still shining, still singing.

It is evident from the way he melds his chords into songs, picking at his guitar strings like a chicken in a courtyard, beginning and ending each piece with a characteristic low murmur, that *Nino Rojo* was recorded at the same time as *Rejoicing...* But while, musically, little is different,

There is a familiar foreignness, the stuff of *déjà vu* and recurring dreams

nothing has been lost, everything gained. There is a familiar foreignness, the stuff of *déjà vu* and recurring dreams; disorientating vignettes painted by the tremulous power, yet fragility, of his voice.

In 'Electric Heart', his voice travels through invisible wires, caught at times on static, magnifying and shrinking before your ears. 'We All Know' is sanctified and wise in every note, "*Like the type of tongue that roots from your breast,*" backed by trumpets in one glorious outro. "*Cook me in your breakfast/Put me on your plate/Cos you know I taste great,*" he sings, not dishonestly. And he does taste so good. I would gladly wrap myself up in this record for hours, allowing it to ease me into peace of mind and reflection.

The thing is, all things magical and beautiful are impossible to avoid when describing Banhart, to the point where this all risks becoming ruined by cliché. This record is so real and sincere, I fear it ever being reduced to such a thing. What's more, it robs me of all power to be even remotely cynical. If you were swept away with Devendra's previous releases, as I was, then you cannot justify not hearing this.

The Album Leaf**In A Safe Place (City Slang)**

Recorded at the invitation of Sigur Rós and Múm in the sparse recesses of Iceland's Western coast, and aided by members of Amina and The Black Heart Procession, this is a life-affirming record. As Jimmy LaValle's introverted atmospheres tap into subliminal mental spaces, you yearn to experience his Icelandic setting.

Similarities with Nordic maestros Sigur Rós are instantaneous, but LaValle's portrait of Iceland is more benumbing and serene than anything his hosts ever came up with. *In A Safe Place* is the barely-realised sound of unhurried life, of muted exhilaration, of teetering on the lip of a skyscraper roof, looking at the blurred traffic below and aching to fly, not giving a fuck about consequences. At the very least, its palatial overtones make you feel like you landed in the middle of some vast icy landscape in a Dagur Kari movie. All beatific drifting should be like this.

When LaValle sings, the tone becomes a little more lugubrious, but the album's holy qualities are still nimble enough to liquefy even the most crystalline heart. Twinkling piano and bewitchingly humdrum strings document a tired journey home, like driving in early-morning light that makes you squint while fighting to stay awake.

Mining the interface of dinky electronica and melancholy instrumental rock, *In A Safe*

Place softly engenders an isolated space where nothing feels entirely real but the winter sun shines forever.

Velimir Pavle Ilic**Anthony****Neu York (Secret Crush)**

You might know Anthony Reynolds' previous work under the pseudonyms of Jack and Jacques. Nurtured by his mother's Scott Walker records, Reynolds' warm croon has always betrayed his love of evocative melancholy and stock influences (Roxy Music, early Bowie, Tindersticks, Jacques Brel, even Matt Johnson). *Neu York* more or less continues with that, including some intoxicating pop songs (try 'My Machiavellian Girl' or 'Lush Life') and the odd boho reference (Basquiat, Capote). Bedroom compositions just took on another dimension – as someone once observed, this is like The Divine Comedy on a budget. That may be, but not a penny has gone to waste.

Velimir Pavle Ilic**Charles Atlas****To The Dust: From Man You Came
To Man You Shall Return (Ochre)**

In the faded world of Charles Atlas, rain drizzles over windows in an endless stream of splattering piss, skies are always the darkest tint of grey and everything exists in exaggerated slow motion.

Dislocated electronica conjugates into resonant viola drones and piano keys traced by slow, aching fingers, recalling the ambient compositions of Harold Budd or the Durutti Column-inspired sketches of Piano Magic. You know that house across the street? The one with net curtains, where someone is always sitting and staring out by the light of a desk lamp? They play this stuff in the background. Intimate music to enhance or alleviate bleak moods. Wishing music. Music that describes the secret films you make in your head.

Velimir Pavle Ilic**Blackout Beach****Light Flows From The Putrid Dawn
(Soft Abuse)**

Under a blood-orange sky comes a cracked, bleating shrill. Our protagonist, the rancid, rheumy-eyed wanderer, has wandered into a bear trap. Add to that a tumble into quicksand, and there's no limit to his misfortune. He unleashes a quivering, bloodcurdling falsetto.

Meanwhile, a harpist assimilates dreamy, mediaeval lairs, and avant-guitars giggle painterly with demonic despair. Shackled beasts in thickets manage demented carousels on antique organs, amid electronic burps. Little by little, the voice grows looper.

These 10 ghostly vignettes are a journey into fear, populated by burglars, witches and

fountain-dwellers. It's a Brothers Grimm exercise, where folk forms are hung, drawn and quartered, and surgery is performed on spine-chilling guitars. An outstanding, unfathomable, bastard-folk nightmare.

Shane Moritz**Brand Nubian****Fire In The Hole (Babygrande)**

Brand Nubian made 1994's smoky, deep, hip hop/soul phenomenon *Everything Is Everything*, and have been kinda floating the hip hop potty since: recently, Sadat (formerly Derek) X came up with some dope soulful beats n' Grand Puba's been getting oral in some sexy places.

This is just a wip off the obese a-hole of hip hop. It turns sampling syndesis into trite statements of masculinist cliché, and recycles bland motifs through worn narratives. Where there is some promise of experimental breaks and odd chord progressions, somehow it all turns into a cycle of repeating blanks.

Melissa Bradshaw**Terry Callier****Lookin' Out (Mr Bongo)**

Many moons ago, Terry Callier recorded a song entitled 'Lean On Me'. It is a beautiful song that has two uses. You listen to it when a) you're that damn happy you need it put into words before you choke on your own emotion, or; b) you've been dumped and need

something to drown out the sound of another cork popping.

While Callier's voice is still that blanket you spend your evenings trying to cuddle up to, the music here is so pedestrian and middle of the road, it's like sitting in the lobby of a crap hotel waiting for an ugly waiter to bring you a warm gin and tonic.

Hayley Avron

Ray Charles

Genius Loves Company (EMI)

On this album, the titular genius shares centre stage with a predictably easy collection of folk: Elton, Norah, Van, BB, Gladys. Only two tracks stand out, both utterly wonderful. One is 'Fever' with Natalie Cole. The other is 'It Was A Very Good Year' with Willie Nelson, drawing beautifully about the passing of time.

You could probably define this LP as a shrewd move, picking up on today's trend the way Charles used to do with soul, jazz, r'n'b, country and the rest. But as a marker on one of the great artists of the 20th Century, it falls sacrilegiously short.

Jim Cassius

Comets On Fire

Blue Cathedral (Sub Pop)

Whatever the nature of your rock'n'roll vision – cantering the plains of Ultima Thule like a herd of woolly mammoth on crystal meth; speeding in your beat-up truck down a sticky road into a phosphorescent dawn; exploring the outer edges of your living-room with dirty bare feet, scorched lungs and a beatific frown – you'll awake with the words *FUCK YEAH!* on your tongue, and your fingers itching for mischief if you choose the Comets as the soundtrack.

Blue Cathedral is a gloriously tactile, filthy crystallisation of all your ur-rock moments, a shamelessly serious document of unequivocally heavy psych action. 'The Antlers Of The Midnight Sun' delivers all that the title promises: age-old scales, fossil fuel riffs, the drums of chaos and an Echoplex serving up a quick, queasy cheap fix of infinity. Bottomless pits of bass, keening solos, vocals intercepted from a cosmic car crash, and the organ sound of the Aurora Borealis blinding you to the horned gods intent on stretching and mangling your space-time perception for all time, and moving your ass in the here and now. You beautiful dirty hippie low-down Californian sick-fuck bastards. I think I'm in love.

Frances May Morgan

Clinic

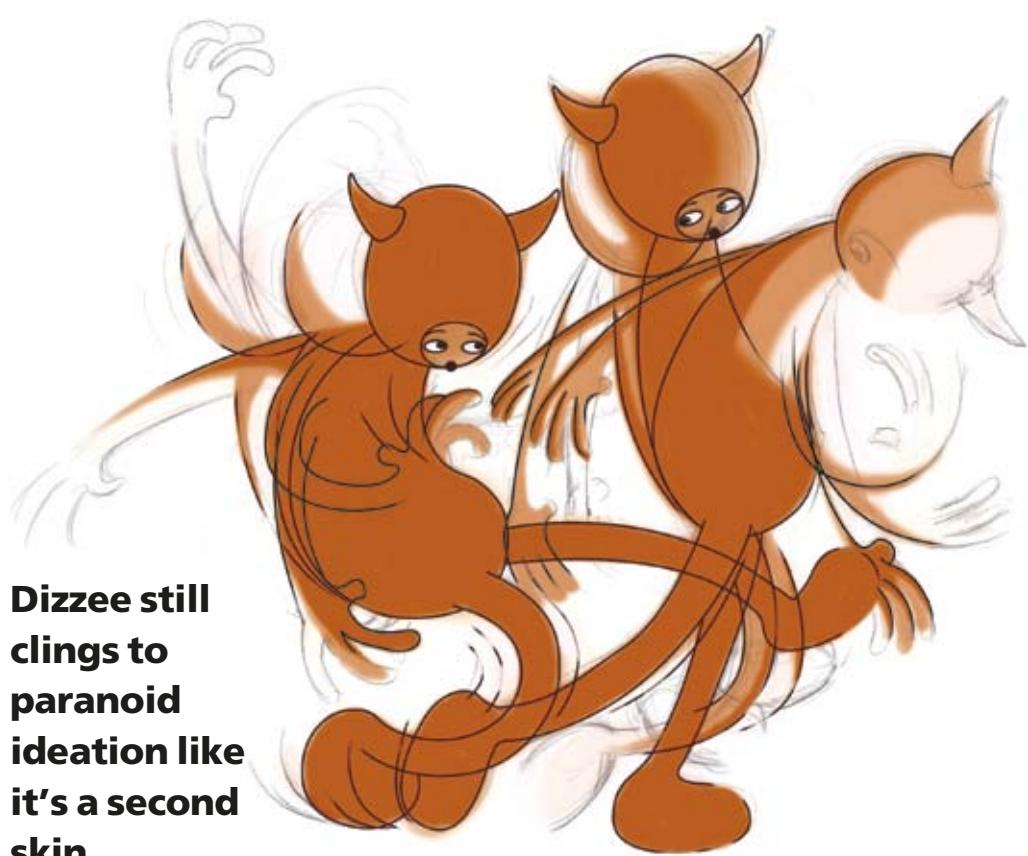
Winchester Cathedral (Domino)

I'm hearing cowboys, since you ask.

From the deranged prairie ramblings of 'Country Mile' – all *OK Corral* fanfares and crop-driven beats – to the *Rawhide* harmonium and galloping rhythms of 'Thank You', the third album from bandana-enshrouded sonic outlaws Clinic is a tobacco-spilt gloomy delight, saddle-sore with reverb and nasal high-noon outcries.

Granted, there are exceptions. There's nary a sheriff in sight on the punk-shat 'WDYYB' – nor on the funereal delirium of churning closer 'Fingers' – but otherwise this is a dusky, cantering wonder. And for that alone, I doff my stetson.

Nicola Meighan



Dizzee still clings to paranoid ideation like it's a second skin

paranoid perspectives

Words: **Chris Ballard**

Illustration: **Robert Ramsden**

If 2004 has been about anything it's about drawing a line between those who make you fear the future and those who embrace it. Between the terrifying retro-rock rumble so easily embraced by the students you avoided at uni, and those idiosyncratic geniuses that realise pop's still a game to be played.

So grab *Milanese*'s delirious *1 Up* (Warp), a slinky dubstep six-tracker that starts from the premise that pop should distort your peripheral vision, and then turns its focus on the rest of your body. Melt with *Kompakt 100* (*Kompakt*), the sound of a hyper-prolific label so confident in celebrating its centenary of releases that they remix their back catalogue to bugger and still emerge triumphant: from ambient euphoria to jagged, lush rave anthems, it's all dancefloor mayhem that will make you swoon and shake. Feel *Skinnyman*'s super-skill *Council Estate Of Mind* (*Lowlife*) for peach-sweet beats and militant broadsides, for the way hopelessness is suffused with hopefulness, and for the moment of realisation that you can be a genuinely awful human being acting as a catalyst for ultimate redemption. Maybe. One day.

Take on the *Life's A Dice Game* (*Dice Recordings*) comp as it sniggers and thrashes through 16 tracks of the subliminal and ridiculous, ugly and unpredictable ('Armhouse' surreally welds a harsh East London pop aesthetic onto Madness' 'Our House'): best is *Skepta*'s mighty 'Serious Thugs', *Bone Thugs'* 'Thuggish Ruggish Bone', cut and slashed into a piercing siren straight out of the 'Rebel Without A Pause' school of noise abuse. Dig deep into *Dread*

Meets B-Boys Downtown (Heavenly), Don Letts' ace rendering of early Eighties NYC hip hop, for a time when possibilities seemed so much more endless, when eclecticism meant more than setting iTunes on party shuffle and hoping for the best.

But mostly, embrace *Dizzee Rascal's Showtime* (XL). Back barely a year after *Boy In Da Corner* shot a warning across the entire pop landscape, it's a record that makes demands of you, and so demands your attention. It typifies the second album syndrome in that it's about a kid lost and scared, trying to negotiate his lack of centre with a terrifying level of tunnel vision.

It's a perspective trick. Propelled from the streets that made him into relative fame, Dizzee still clings to paranoid ideation like it's a second skin. The tropes are familiar from *Boy In Da Corner*, except Dizzee's now got the problem of achieving his dreams to contend with. Everyone is a target. Everyone's out to steal something, be it money, fame, or a piece of your soul. Everything's for sale. Everything's going to hell, and getting out quick is the only option. Legitimacy is something that happens to other people.

So just what is it that makes Dizzee the most irrepressible character in pop right now? The trick's in his cadence, the manner in which he bends phrases into spaces that shouldn't fit, accelerates into a tongue-tying pace in the middle of a bar and then spits out the money shot. Name me a noise more enjoyable, and I'll prove you a liar.

That *Showtime* never deviates enough from ME-ME-ME to form a coherent narrative isn't a problem; indeed, one of Dizzee's many gifts is his almost painful self-awareness and inability to stand still: his defensiveness is an enamel shell that sometimes he hides in but usually just windmill-punches his way through. He's

still a teenager, what do you expect? You don't expect a bizarre remake of Captain Sensible's 'Happy Talk', complete with Dizzee's hilariously off-key singing, which he's pitching as his 'Hard Knock Life', but is more the sound of someone grinding near-genius from the depths of insanity.

The sound is no longer so shocking (and with Wiley, Shystie, Doogz and Kano all signed, it'll continue to be less so), but this isn't Dizzee's pop album. Sure, 'Stand Up Tall' wheelspins on Youngstar's atom-splittingly energetic Super NES noise, 'Girls' is a pure club banger, and 'Fickle' is pretty and intricate with a gorgeous helium-pitched diva sample – but mostly the pace is slack, the tone sombre, the atmosphere bleak. Wormholes of technoid-bass envelop these songs. 'Everywhere' features a beat of desi-minimalism that's practically hippies banging bongos. 'Graftin'' is crafted from the same sub-low bass-biznizz as Dead Prez's 'Hip Hop'. You're never more than 10 seconds away from a threat of aggression ("I'm not mad/I'm a lovely lad/I'll give you the loveliest beating that you've ever had") or delicious wordplay that will make you giggle.

'Respect Me' features Dizzee wrestling impressively with the tidal wave surge of the beat and his conscience. "You people are going to respect me if it kills you." Jesus. It's the suicide-pact singalong of the year and it's certainly protesting too much. From Tim Westwood to the photo pullouts in *Sneak*, some jealous UK hip hop types apart, who doesn't respect Dizzee? But you get the impression that if he cheered up for just a minute, or even just accepted a hug, he'd lose the perspective that's fashioned the two most consistently stunning, boldly brilliant albums of the past two years. So, Dizzee: feed that paranoia, suckle down on it with earnest, and same time next year, eh?



class of '86

Words: Alistair Fitchett

Various

Rough Trade Shops: Indiepop 1 (Mute)

Hey, C, so they're collating and repackaging our youth. Way to make us feel old, right?

I mean, so much of this CD set takes me back too many years, makes me think of walking down Sauchiehall Street in the rain, DM shoes splashing on the pavement, Oxfam anorak catching the reflections of the sodium light. Up to Splash One or the Kes club, and falling in love a million times a night. You remember how it went, don't you?

And, listening to this collection, it's a bit like replaying some of those old mix tapes I used to make for you back in the day: you know, the ones with the spray-painted dolphins and photocopies of Andy and Edie on the cover; the ones I spent all my time and effort on when I should have been doing my art. Or maybe that really was my art? Who knows.

It's funny, too, because here I am writing this in my old bedroom in my parent's house. I don't know if you remember, but it had clouds painted on the sky-blue walls, and on the bright yellow desk there was my mum's old Swiss-built typewriter and a stack of notebooks. In the

It's like seeing your past in a museum: touching, but depressing as hell

corner, there was the stereo we made in the art school studio – all dolls' arms stuck to the controls, fake fur and a stencilled 'sha-la-la' in pink on the speaker grille, and beside it, the stack of seven-inch singles and flexis. June Brides, Primal Scream, Shop Assistants, Felt, Jesse Garon, McCarthy, Television Personalities, The Pastels, This Poison!; also fanzines *Hungry Beat*, *Are You Scared To Get Happy?*, *Communication Blur*, *The Legend!* – the list goes on. Oh, and let's not forget the ashtray filled with badges. Remember that homemade Talulah Gosh one? That was so cool. In fact, the packaging for this CD set looks kind of like that. It's like seeing your past displayed in a museum: quite touching in a way, but depressing as all hell, in another.

But let's be positive here, right? Let's not get caught up in old-codger moaning about how we never liked the word 'indiepop', or how we would never in a million years suggest there was any kind of connection between the likes of Felt, AR Kane and, say, The Darling Buds or Dressy Bessy, other than the fact their records were released on independent record labels. Instead, let's remember the moments and the memories, because after all, that's what counts the most, isn't it?

Even if it does make us feel old as hell.

The Faint

Wet From Birth (Saddle Creek)

For their fifth record, The Faint will get back to basics, rediscovering minimal synth music and pop aganist sexual politics with a neo-Marxist flavour. They will realise that the string arrangements and female backing vocals were misguided, and resort to death metal riffs as their only extravagance. Or so one can hope. Meanwhile, they've left us with an incoherent fourth album that works so hard to avoid categorisation that it ends up simply bizarre. Their Duran Duran-isms have been replaced with light classical music and Russian tech-house. Hopefully, they will ditch this pompous mode and revert to the murky disco grindcore depths of their brilliant cover of Sonic Youth's 'Mote'.

Pil And Galia Kollectiv

Viewing Pleasure: The Faint

"While we were in the studio, we found a copy of a DVD with all of The Residents' videos to date. We were working on the videos to be projected when we performed the songs live. The Residents' videos became a source of inspiration, and we began to feel a certain kinship. Here was a band that had a limited budget, but made stylish, artistic, brilliant videos, directly tapping into a subconscious dimension of bold colour and bizarre imagery. We'd watch the videos in the studio's lounge, which doubled as our bedroom. Our dreams were fuelled by the transmissions from the surreal world where The Residents reside."



Copenhagen

Sweet Dreams... (Flower Shop)

Copenhagen's singer Neil Henderson sounds like a lugubrious Jarvis Cocker. Beauty and tragedy go hand in glove on these songs, the sort of crepuscular melodies that could grace Tim Burton movies. Taking inspiration from the well-thumbed references of Nick Cave, Tindersticks and early Lambchop, along with Brel and Gainsbourg, Henderson creates portraits of imaginary characters and gives them names to make the whole thing more personal – it's hard not to imagine these disaffected loners as real people. His wonderfully lachrymose voice steers the whole thing into gently climactic, emotional, oblivion.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

The Delgados

Universal Audio (Chemikal Underground)

"No one ever said to me that I should write a symphony," goes 'Get Action!' – but that hasn't prevented The Delgados from penning symphonies throughout their previous two sets. Here, they slip into unvisited territories of understatement, without losing the grandeur. Seraphic voices swell into hearts and souls, utilising bare essentials perfectly. They cannot help but make epic, affecting pop. That this is breezy rather than bleak just goes to show their instinctive range. Masterpiece theatre shorn of theatrics, this is a classic study of emotive undercurrents.

Stewart Gardiner

Delta

Singularity (Elephant Stone)

From the ashes of The Sea Urchins' early Nineties burn-up there arose the phoenix of Delta, a band who pieced together all kinds of early Seventies influences that were deeply unfashionable at the time, but that in hindsight sound really rather fine. This collection of early singles and EPs shows that Delta must have been scouring the secondhand stores and digging the likes of Bronco Bullfrog, Twin Engine, Rockin' Horse and Badfinger years before *Mojo* or *Uncut* were fuelling the salvage operations of the reissue industry. And maybe it's just my age, but these tunes delight me now in a way they never could before.

Alistair Fitchett

Destroyer

Your Blues (Talitres)

This goes out to all the seekers sailing too late from East Coast ports to inter-war European romance, stranded forever in a modern world of gold lamé cruises. This is for cryptic telegrams reread obsessively till "Someone's got to fall before someone goes free" becomes your lover's desperate plea to run away with him and his contemptuous backwards glance as he leaves you forever. Capturing oceanic siren songs in rolling electronic organs, this is for boys, with voices as huge and compelling as the vanished Interzone, who understand how love songs make the best diss songs and how words destroy communication. And, finally, this is for anyone who ever wondered how Doseone would sound if he came from Canada and played acoustic guitar.

Gracelette

Efterklang

Tripper (The Leaf Label)

The Scandinavian countries have really been on the button over the past couple of years – Iceland's Múm, Sigur Rós and Amina (the latter guest here), Norwegian label Rune Grammofon and now Copenhagen's Efterklang.

This is just the loveliest feeling. I close my eyes and suddenly I'm not here. I'm soaring on the breeze – a choir wail in unison, perched on a cloud. At least that's what it feels like. I'm lulled by opaque melodies so delicate they barely exist. I stare at the cover art's sublime white-on-black etchings and wish I'd thought of it. 'Tripper' is coolly detached in much the same way that Múm or Rachel's are, but Efterklang are probably too tripped out and embroiled in their own softly-earnest sensations to give a shit about idle comparisons.

Velimir Pavle Ilic

Eighties Matchbox

B-Line Disaster

The Royal Society (MCA)

There's a band round my way that make a living by copying the flavour of the month. They used to imitate Marilyn Manson; now, with the make-up firmly back in the bathroom cabinet, they're aping Eighties Matchbox. Their frontman shrieks in the audiences' faces, singing about motherfuckers over filthy, guttural bass.

But they're going to need a new band to follow, as Eighties Matchbox have lost their way. The debut album *Horse Of The Dog* threatened to make me skinny from the arse-wiggling it induced. Guy McKnight's gorgeous vocals were laid over dark psychobilly cool, but have now been smothered in layers of sickly-sweet production. My arse is staying firmly still throughout this album.

Natalie Boxall

The Essex Green

Everything Is Green (Track And Field)

Supple and seductive, naïve and knowing like teenage fingers lingering on the nape of your neck, The Essex Green are the sound of sweet suburban psych pop. They are the sound of open-top bus rides to the beach with thoughts of bejewelled angels playing fuzzbox guitars and Vox organs deep inside the darkest recesses of your mind. They are the sound of a summer romp in the park with the likes of Sandy Salisbury, Dennis Wilson, Marc Eric and Triste Janero, complete with Bergen White conducting the Incredible String Band in the Rococo-styled bandstand that sits beneath the weeping willows.

Alistair Fitchett

The Fiery Furnaces

Blueberry Boat (Rough Trade)

Orchestrated by 19th Century showman PT Barnum, *Blueberry Boat* leaves reality on the peripheries of magic realism, alluding to its own secrets through a stunning narrative arc. The album's unexpected twists, turns and jolts offer up *deus ex machina* after *deus ex machina*, without throwing the listener into wild bouts of disbelief. Suspension is retained throughout, albeit in as giddy a fashion as those fairground rides to which the organs allude.

Like viewing the inner vistas of bandmates/siblings Eleanor and Matt Friedberger through a lurid Technicolor viewfinder, this allows rare access to the life of others, a gift both charming and somewhat insidious.

Stewart Gardiner

Flotation Toy Warning Bluffers Guide To The Flight Deck (Pointy)

This is an archaeology of invented histories and half-imagined narratives, pasted together into peculiar collage visions with a glue of electronics, charity store instruments and a wealth of warped imagination. Flotation Toy Warning make 10 soundtracks for movies you've never seen anywhere outside of your mind's eye. Or, at the very least, from the corner of the reality afforded by lazing on the sofa on a late summer Monday afternoon, with daydreams of hidden pasts and forbidden futures battling for attention over the sounds of woodworking and junior operatics. The most naturally strange accompaniment imaginable to the end of the season.

Alistair Fitchett

Giant Haystacks

We Are Being Observed (Smartguy)

The prevailing windbags would label this art rock, raffishly referencing Gang Of Four, Wire, Minutemen, Mission Of Burma and yadda yadda. Well, if what art rock means is the fusing of angular choppy jangle-toppy guitars with ragged chopped vox over the top of tribal-taut Parkinson-nerved drum patterns, then so be it. And, so, step forth Allan McNaughton, lately of Scotpunk Glue, newly relocated to Oakland, devilish and effervescent, experienced and incandescent. And, so, Giant Haystacks' debut album flips, flaps and fleas itself round that post-punk-funk-spaaz itchiness; terse dynamic of dark pop delivered with fervour and no small quality.

(Oh, sorry, I forgot: er, two The Falls and one Sub-Mission. Or something.)

Joe Shooman

Gong

Angel's Egg/You (Virgin/EMI)

It's amazing how tight much of the content of these two reissued albums is, despite such space-cadet excesses as the tortuous (and badly drawn) mythos of pothead pixies and flying teapots. OK, as the latter parts of a stoner-absurdist trilogy detailing Zero The Hero's interplanetary quest for enlightenment (man), these are chock-full of 'quirky' asides and hoary synth mantras, but when it all bugs out in a way befitting lynchpin Daivid Allen's impeccable free jazz/Soft Machine lineage, it's exhilaratingly disciplined – incongruously so, compared with the bombastic shambles of parallel travellers such as Hawkwind. Unlike many of the space-faring rock alumni of the past several decades, most of the virtuosity, here applied to electronics and then-exotic toys such as gamelan, is genuinely innovative, in a UV-tie-dye-patchouli kind of way.

James Papademetri



puppet theatre

Words: **kicking_k**
Illustration: **Phillip Kingsbury**

The Dresden Dolls

The Dresden Dolls (8Ft)

I have this fantasy. The president is attending a fund raising dinner in hell. Well, not hell, strictly speaking, but Texas (which I'm told has a comparable climate). It's an informal affair, jeans and stetsons, hamburgers and beer, tables 25 grand a time. The lights dim and the crowd settle. He's hoping for some good ol' C&W, the music the country was founded on. Y'know, hillbilly bullshit.

And out come these – well, what would you call them? A boy and girl, but they're both wearing make-up, white faces that catch the lights like angled mirrors. They're the only people in the place in formal wear. She takes the piano, he the drums. The president's brow furrows.

She kicks a pregnant pause in the stomach, and digs into the keyboard like it's a side of ribs, clawing out a sudden flurry of weighted notes – a hoop of black lipstick spitting: behold the world's worst accident! "*I AM THE GIRL ANACHRONISM!*" He puts on the expression he uses when he's patronising the arts, or in that tricky moment before the translator translates.

The Dresden Dolls are un-American in form as well as content. Their wilful appropriation of an alien tradition (cabaret) is the acid-etched sepia scene that makes your digital mobile phone pic look modish. To find their peers you have to go back half a century. And this album is a tightly laced corset, a fabulous contraption brimful of hot flesh. Songs about pills and stitches, and

hints of innocence abused, epic arrangements, and everything exaggerated for effect.

Also: there are nimble, clever, self-aware songs that tease and toy. Swooning bridges knuckle into major key fusillades, or chords that step carefully, echo and recede like ripples. And there's something uniquely affecting about the way the mannered, commanding vocals fuse with the raw autobiographical (but always artfully phrased) lyrics – it's part confessional, part posture, all performance. Sometimes a number will start off jauntily, saunter through a witty chorus while the verse provides a darker subtext; the ostensibly frivolous form becoming gradually freighted with emotion, importance, urgency – until the whole thing rattles off like a train wreck, a blur of screams, beats and orphaned keys. "*Why on earth would anyone practice self-destruction?*" she mumbles in one half-bar of lucidity, "*Makes me want to give myself a beating*".

There's something about the piano, too – the way a frenzy of feelings so big that words alone won't do have to be fed through this old-fashioned, simple machine – the piano as a kind of typewriter. Drama is conflict: the black and white of the keys, the sound and the silence, piano and drum, boy and girl (half-Jill, half-Jack), the tongue in the cheek and the twist of the knife.

As for the president? He smiles politely, offers some token applause, maybe even a prairie whoop – and fires his events manager.

kicking_k talks to Brian Vigilione of The Dresden Dolls:
What's your live set-up like? Do you reference cabaret visually?

"We visually reference vaudeville and burlesque by painting our faces white, but the shit is usually melted and terribly undone by the time we're finished and sweating like pigs. Our live set is incredibly intense. We are quiet, bombastic and very silly and very serious. We've both injured ourselves playing. People laugh."

"They cry. It's better than Cats. Cabaret is more a state of mind and atmosphere than a musical style, as far as I'm concerned. The spirit and the remnants sort of lurk in people's imaginations and can be readily called to action."

'Girl Anachronism' has the potential to become an anthem for a generation of neurotic females – was that the plan?

"I had nothing going through my head but my own self-centred neurotic voices when I penned that one. There's a very liberating feeling of revealing your sad, flawed self to an imaginary audience. It does surprise me that so many girls claim they relate to it word for word."

How's your reception been from the American press?

"Those who miss the point tend to label us a goth band with a mime schtick. They wouldn't know what *Brechtian* meant if Bertolt himself walked up and clobbered them with an alienating two-by-four."

Is it difficult to be taken seriously when you're so witty?

"Sometimes people are afraid to laugh. But sometimes that uncomfortable moment is the point in itself. The most humorous jokes are the tragic ones. Switching emotions quickly often jerks people into feeling, period."

This space blank for yr message:

"We're all doomed. Let's dance."

monkey in a zoo

Words: Pil And Galia Kollectiv
Illustration: Daniel Johnston

Various

The Late, Great Daniel Johnston:
Discovered Covered (Gammon)
Imitation isn't always a form of flattery, especially when you're trying to sound like a heartbroken mental case. Which was something Daniel Johnston never attempted.

It was never going to be easy to separate the man's lifelong struggle from his music, and in a sense it was never necessary, because the songs not only speak for themselves, they smile, cry, scream and beg to be loved, too. Which they are.

And so this tribute succeeds mostly where the artists involved have made the songs their own, keeping in mind that Johnston has always aspired to be more like The Beatles than like some outsider folk hero. The euphoric 'Blue Clouds' couldn't have fallen into better hands or stomping feet than Mercury Rev's, who give it their full-on Disney sunshine treatment, and yet retain the bitter sadness of an unexpectedly devastating cartoon such as *Watership Down*. JT Leroy's band, Thistle, make 'Love Not Dead' as joyous as it deserves to be, and even Beck, sounding strangely like Lou Barlow when he's not being ironic, attains serenity without succumbing to the hazards of hagiography. And Gordon Gano just sounds like Gordon Gano, which is fine by us.

But when Vic Chesnutt claims to be like a monkey in a zoo, well – he's



The songs not only speak for themselves, they smile, cry, scream and beg to be loved, too

not, and he just sounds vaguely annoying, pretending to be a victim of success. Simon from Rough Trade rightly says that TV On The Radio sound exactly like early Genesis, which is not so fine when you treat songs as delicate as 'Walking The Cow'. And Jad Fair, collaborating with Teenage Fanclub, sounds so much like Johnston that it's spooky, like wearing a dead man's shoes, only he's not even dead yet. Not a good look.

Listening to Johnston's original tapes, you can't help wanting to save that wonderful, poor soul, be his friend, visit him in his parents' house, take him out for a drink and drown all this sadness. You can't help fantasising about being one of those people who received a mono Sanyo tape back in 1982 and danced in Daniel's cellar to the gorgeous tinny smallness of 'Speeding Motorcycle', curiously absent from this selection, along with 'Casper The Friendly Ghost' and 'It's Over'.

These covers sound like a bunch of people doing just that, and you can't help feeling jealous of them for doing it instead of you. The effect of intimacy once removed is a strange one, and perhaps the only one who does this strangeness half-adequately is Tom Waits, who just freaks out all over 'King Kong'.

And, 10,000 miles high over our home, in a hand-drawn, lonely universe, still alive if not quite well, the Late, Great Daniel Johnston and his dead dog are laughing in the cloud.

The Go! Team

Thunder Lightning Strike
(Memphis Industries)

From the Private Files of kicking_k:
24/08/04. Outstanding reviews: The Go! Team (due 23 Aug EEEK). Press refs: Avalanches (with rougher edges) Yeah Yeah Yeahs (*Q* magazine, *Stop Being High*) Double Dutch (playground chants – c'est cool + true, make more of this). Hott: 'The Power Is On' – awesome, clap-happy, Langley Schools disco daytrip. Ladyflash, Junior Kickstart (all singles – one genius EP with bonus tracks?) Nott: track 5 = Simon & Garfunkel Latin carnival nightmare. Song that starts like *Film 2004* music, mini-bar kitsch. Vintage athletics soundtrack. The BASICS: Cut and paste ethos – sugar-addled, hyperactive, hook on hook, frantic drum tracks, retro samples treated disrespectfully. At best: epic, emotive, addictive. Worst: wacky, car advert mini-movie. Angle (content): band's self-proclaimed anti-production stance. "It's all about red-limiting the levels, distorting to tape..."

(Mention when I played #4 at my club ICFTHS, hearing aid hiss killed dancefloor dead.) But: does put clear water between them and (currently unfashionable) big beat era (forever?) Touches base with no-fi spontaneity of bootleg culture (better?) Angle (form): maybe if I took every review I could find, and constructed entire thing from samples – yeah! Hmm, but the

deadline... I know – I'll just fabricate some vehicle to send my notes in. Heh. No one will ever know.

kicking_k

Growing

The Soul Of The Rainbow And The Harmony Of Light (Kranky)

Like its predecessor, 2003's *The Sky's Run Into the Sea*, the second album from Olympia, WA's Growing fills me with an unearned and wholly inappropriate patriotism for the USA. It sells me myths and legends of pioneer spirits, of tarnished dignity and compromised idealism. It beguiles me with abstract ideas of the frontier. It gestures towards America's future as a vast, unpopulated wasteland. It's a tattered flag, blowing in the breeze against a fading autumnal sky. It makes a fool of me for loving it, but I just can't help myself.

Joe Stannard

Guitar Wolf

Loverock (Narnack)

Folk round these parts say this Japanese trio – so far-gone in the pastiche that it's more serious than Jet – played the best damn show of the year: devil signs, feedback-drenched amps, hoary rock poses and distorted anger faces, and all. Hey! All you need to do is set those drums a-pounding and those guitars a-racing, and make those words a blur of

indecipherable lust, and folks round here will fucking wanna have your child. You want your rock LOUD and slickly raw and with no finesse whatsoever? You better step right in. I'm throwing this one straight in the bin.

Everett True

Half-Japanese

Loud And Horrible (Drag City)

There's no other way to be a teenager. You're bored, sexually frustrated, hopelessly romantic. Nothing makes sense. You never want to learn to play properly. You just want to make noise. You think the avant-garde is bullshit, without realising you're revitalising used formulas, just like any avant-garde musician. But your heart beats fast and love lasts, sometimes, for a splitting second. So you beat the shit out of the drums in your separated parents' garage, your brother makes his guitar sound like a sick hamster, and somehow only this chaotic noise makes you feel safe. But, when you close your eyes, you can still see your high school burning, and all the teachers lying on the football field, executed. So you write a song about it.

Pil And Galia Kollectiv

Head Of Femur

Ringodom Or Proctor (Truck)

Elvis has a lot to answer for, but if you conjured him up and asked him about

Head Of Femur, he'd probably shrug his shoulders in confusion. Taking their name from the fact the cameramen on *The Ed Sullivan Show* weren't allowed to film The King below his pelvis (medical description: head of femur), this Chicago collective promise to bring out all the hidden sexuality of rock'n'roll. However, there are far too many strings, accordions and pop harmonies to associate their efforts with raw, primal power. '80 Steps To Jonah' begins with a frantic glockenspiel and is structured like a rock symphony. Only 'Acme: The Summit Of A Mountain' comes closest to all-out indie rock. An intelligent, intriguing listen, *Ringodom...* shakes your brain more than your pelvis.

Lianne Steinberg

Hollywood Ending

Praying To Fiction (Mighty Atom)

This lot have got their work cut out if they're going to compete with bands such as Hundred Reasons and Funeral For A Friend but *Praying To Fiction* is a terrific way to kick off their first full-length bid for post-hardcore immortality. With producer Joe Gibb (Funeral For A Friend, Million Dead) twiddling the knobs, this is all about sweeping riff-o-ramas, surging melodies and three sets of emotive vocals – everyone bar the drummer gets to shriek, though he does rejoice under the brilliant name Tom Higginbottom. Poised eloquently between emotional fragility

and skull-caving bludgeon, this album walks a taut and fearsome line.

Essi Berelian

The Hunches

Hobo Sunrise (In The Red)

In The Red don't release bad records. It's probably in their mission statement. For approximately one minute, *Hobo Sunrise* sounds disturbingly average. 1:01 – faith is restored.

The Hunches don't waste time getting going. Neither do their songs. Guitars don't waste time letting basslines make their point. There's more lo-fi drama in here than an average episode of *The World's Wildest Police Chases*. This is laziness come good. Half-arsed Western twangs morph into '68 Comeback noise-disaster. This didn't take an age or a fortune to record. We know this because it sounds human and real and instinctive and honest. This, we like.

Hayley Avron

Intricate

In Pectra (Spezial Material)

A mighty amalgamation of Autechre, Boards Of Canada and Anti-Pop Consortium, Intricate is the aptly entitled work of Austrian duo Thomas Federspiel and Fabian Stubi. Together, they've taken the loose-limbed ideals of hip hop and implanted them with heavy, general aesthetics from their twinned cyborg minds, dreaming up something eerie, enigmatic and rather exceptional. *In Pectra* is a dizzying sprawl of static-encrusted thuds, scientifically tinged clangs, and voices that whisper...well, we're not sure exactly what.

This is the sound of humans locked inside the machine, with the machine winning. Hands down.

Ian Fletcher

Jaga Jazzist

Magazine (Smalltown Supersound)

Cold, clammy and 10 in number, the rangy cooperative Jaga Jazzist reissue their 1998 debut for the first time outside their native Norway. Where rock, dance and jazz battle for supremacy, Jaga crawl like Tortoise and John Barry scoring seedy spy soundtracks amid massive smog clouds emerging from cigarettes your mother would never allow through her door. Theirs is a frenzied rush of saxophone hedonism and seriously swinging bass-lines, and yet they're most affecting on the mellow gush of 'Seems To Me', with its – surprise! – actual singing. Nearly a perfect 10, then.

Ian Fletcher

Japancakes

Belmondo (Darla)

That's an inspirational name, so what if it sounds like a dainty Oriental pastry? This ambient, alt country-tinted chamber music is so languid, you can imagine Athens' Japancakes recording it lying down. Six songs in 44 minutes means they can really stretch things out – it even sounds like they've taken a nap at one point and left the intemperate music to fend for itself. Achingly slow and tenderly beautiful, *Belmondo* is like a long Sunday drive through the dusty heat of the Southern territories.

Velimir Pavle Ilic



the true report

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Tom Genower

Here's a treat from that most precious of late Eighties East Coast bands, **Galaxie 500**. Their *Uncollected* CD (Rykodisc) has actually been collected already, as part of a four-CD box set, but that shouldn't stop enjoyment of such atmospheric, heady splendours as the stoned Rutles tribute, 'Cheese And Onions', a suitably sombre Young Marble Giants cover and the appalling sax-led version of 'Blue Thunder'. Dean Wareham's voice provides a fourth instrument in the symphonic VU-influenced sound, and his lyrics release rare humour.

Those who cherish Low's somnambulant splendour should check out Galaxie 500 – music alternating between stormy claustrophobia and chilled silence, Naomi Yang's bass never less than sensitive, Damon Kukowski's drumming a stately delight.

Helen McCookerybook

occupied a special place for me during the early Eighties, first as part of Brighton's pop-fed Chefs, then as a homely Doris Day type in Helen And The Horns, covering songs from *Oklahoma!* and coming over all cowgirl (don't cringe: it was *fun*). Her open, slightly upper-class accent did it for me: drenched with yearning and desire, slightly Monochrome Set, and always chipper. The swinging horn section – half-inched from a go-nowhere college band, if memory serves – increased my enjoyment. *Helen And The Horns, Etc* (Near Shore) contains 13 such gems. Nice.

Dutch band **John Wayne Shot**

Me are weird: covers of J Richman, Destiny's Child, ELO, Napalm Death and Daniel J, tackled in the most

unexpected way – like Herman Düne covering a Tom Waits song with singing saw. All the above back up an original, 'Let Sleeping Monsters Sleep' (62tv). More FSK than They Might Be Giants, more children's drumkit than Sony Playstation... and the more charming for it.

Gagging for more Har Mar? Then buy his new single, dunderhead! Alternatively, hear **Plantlife**'s debut, *The Return Of Jack Splash* (Gut) – like Har Mar, only 4 REAL ladeeeZ,

circa 2004: abrasive, rough, melodic, psychotic and romantic, stained with dirty rain marks and scorched with the heat of a hundred cloudless days. Mostly, this is pure poetry. Compiled and sleeve-noted by *Plan B* contributors David Nichols and Shane Moritz, their words on such UK-unfamiliar faces as **Panel Of Judges**, the dreamy **Royalchord** and swaggering **Dave Graney** do them far more justice than I can here. So recommended, I wanna

Alternating between stormy claustrophobia and chilled silence

cosmic hip hop, jus' like that ol' OutKast magic, that makes you wanna fuck and funk.

Human Television remember The Wedding Present, recalling how those guitars could chime with such élan, how those lyrics could tear you to shreds. *All Songs Written By...* (Gigantic) has such a big old fuzzy Florida heart it almost makes me wish indie hadn't become a dirty word. Someone whispers 'Waterboys', and I'm like, 'later!'

Gagging for Hawnay Troof? Then buy some, dolt! Then steal DC synth-punk duo **Hott Beat**'s *A Hott Mess* (Paroxysm) cos it squeals and bounces and glowers and wears a funny mask in all the right places, even if it is too Le Tigre and not enough Gravy Train!!! for comfort.

Three great comps: the lo-fi rockin' transatlantic sampler *I'm With Cupid* (Waxfruit) throws up a few gems, including London's all-girl summer fun garage band **The A-Lines**, the delinquent cutie pervcore of **Bearsuit**, and **The Mumps'** fuzz-laden harmonics. *Melbourne Water* (W.Minc) is a great collection of that fair city's counter-cultural splendour

take a subpoena out on yr asses to make you investigate.

Then there's Sheffield Phonographic Company's excellent *A Box Of Odd*: such brawling, unfettered Northern delights as zombie freaks **The Motherfuckers**, **Chuck** out Detroit-ing half of Detroit and **GG Action** getting drenched in fuzz and female pulchritude like a less refined Thee Headcoatees.

To end, a brace of new releases on Mike Alway's new label, The Sound Of Chartreuse (Mike is the man behind the strange Englishness of the él label and languid continental drift of Siesta – Death By Chocolate, David Candy, etc). First, **Continuous Electric Now**, who straddle the divide between mariachi and surf with an instrumental zip, like Dick Dale given the keys to Joe Meek's toy cabinet.

The Sixth Form are classic Alway – opulent lounge music with a rainy keyboard occasionally interrupted by a snooty Emma Peel-type reciting nursery rhyme admonishments over Peter Sellers film music, looped with full orchestral fluency. Ian Svenonius, form an unruly queue now!

hot wax

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Mike Langlie



Khonnor

Handwriting (Type)

A sublime syrup made on shifting sands, *Handwriting* is made up of the semi-comatose wet-dreams of 17-year-old American Connor Kirby. Through a blur of electronic chitter-chatter, acoustic fumbles and mumbled whispers, Khonnor buries these shy pop songs beneath more static scratches than those of a vinyl collection entombed with the pharaohs. It vaguely tilts towards singer-songwriter turf, before edging back into that inescapable sprawling mist, like My Bloody Valentine and Talk Talk sneaking love letters from the afterlife under the paws of Four Tet. Teenage fumbles and regrettable follies have rarely sounded so sweet, or so surreal.

Ian Fletcher

Knifehandchop

How I Left You (Very Friendly)

Scavenging the very soul from those shoddy C90 rave compilation tapes that blurt from battered Ford Escorts in wasted towns, *How I Left You* is marketed as the first 'true' Knifehandchop studio LP. Here, Billy Pollard runs a full gauntlet of jumbled ragga, sleazy electro and filthy gabba, as some high energy slant on Ed Dmx's *Breakin'* imprint, with razor-sharp winks to VVm and Kid606 for added dosage. Yet, surprisingly, instead of having more bad jokes than a pissed Jimmy Tarbuck

impersonator on Christmas day, tracks such as 'Policecore' pimp it up like a stampede of kangaroos on highly toxic acid implants. Few slice-and-dice bad raves this well.

Ian Fletcher

The Mae Shi

Terrorbird (SRC)

Forget Seconds, Die Monitr Batsss, Yeah Yeah Yeahs and the dislocated, discombobulated funk of all these sex-ridden young boys growing up on a diet of werewolves, Lightning Bolt, indigestion and Dischord records. Alright, don't forget them...but man. This is such a fucking blast – two brothers from LA hitting staccato bass notes like they're in a hardcore karate dojo, hitting the absinthe and soliciting mix-tapes while on tour, and coming up with the most magnificent, unfettered collection of spazzcore madness since...Fuck, I've already forgotten. There are 33 tracks – although the last five are all, gloriously, called 'Repetition' – recorded for \$120, influenced by mainstream hip hop and Dutch insurgents The Ex.

You like Radio 4? You like all that ace Noxagt/Load records shit? Fucking forget them already. This is the shit, the bomb, a pounding, pulsating, ever frantic, twisting blast.

On our next cover now.

Everett True

The Red Krayola

Singles (Drag City)

Anyone with a passing interest in Caucasian counterculture as both art and a political tool should've encountered Mayo Thompson's work over the past four decades.

He's been a producer, most notably in the heyday of Rough Trade records, working – often with Geoff Travis – on early records by The Raincoats, Stiff Little Fingers, Cabaret Voltaire, The Fall, Felt...He's been a musical collaborator, in Pere Ubu, with Chicago's present post-rock hegemony (Grubbs, Prina, O'Rourke, etc), and as the mainman in the ever-changing line-up of The Red Krayola. He's been an activist: sleeve notes and lyrics have often touched on Marxist doctrine, sometimes wittily.

Singles is far from coherent, as might be expected from someone whose own musical taste has been so receptive to passing fashion, yet determinedly avant-garde (after his own fashion: Mayo has always preferred rhythmically dense structures, abrasive vocals and jarring guitars that don't seek recourse in feedback). It begins in the Sixties, with a prog instrumental ('Woof') and a couple of the countrified psychedelic blues that were all the rage early Seventies ('Old Tom Clark', 'Pig Ankle Strut'), before heading straight for the musical stratosphere with the superlative dislocated funk of 'Yik Yak' and 'Wives In Orbit', Mayo's voice bleating and raging with all the abrupt fury of prime David Thomas or Talking Heads.

The album then hits a purple patch, beginning with 'Micro-Chips & Fish' (1979), Mayo switching into taut dub-reggae and jazz-flecked pastoral fancies, aided by a few Rough Trade sorts such as Lora Logic (*Essential Logic*), Epic Soundtracks (*Swell Maps*) and Gina Birch (*Raincoats*). The former adds her piercing, warming vocal to a brace of killer tracks, including the righteous 'Born In Flames' and disorientating 'The Milkmaid'. Also worth noting is the Mayo's pained diatribe against The Crusades, 'The Sword Of God': lyrics that could well serve as a warning against current US foreign policy.

Three songs, all sung in German, follow – more *Essential Logic* than The Red Krayola, so distinctive is Logic's saxophone, but charming nonetheless, especially the deadpan 'Gewichtswächter'. And that's where the good stuff stops, pretty much. There's one woozy, sub-Beefheart, German single from '93, 'The Red Crayola On Forty-Five', where Mayo echoes former glories (the B-side is even stranger) – and then poor Mr Thompson stumbles into a party full of crashing Chicago musical bores, and quickly succumbs to the dubious attraction of their snide in-jokes.

'4teen' is kinda funny, the way it keeps threatening to burst into 'House Of The Rising Sun', and the brittle drumming, but that's it. For the past decade or so, Mayo's oblique sense of humour and musical style appears to have deserted him; he's gone all navel-gazing on our ass! Still, 15 or so genuinely rewarding musical moments out of 22 – not a bad ratio at all.

Mark One

(featuring Virus Syndicate)

One Way (Planet Mu)

Following Rephlex's pulverising compilation, the manner in which the Brit electro underground is propelling the dubstep/grime crossover is proving utterly fascinating. Mark One's first-full length delivers industrial, terror-rhythms: the key sound is freewheeling, spacious phase-shifts and tingling, loose-limbed freakbeats. 'Bang Bang Boy' and 'The Industry' are demented gothic techno that reek of death, darkness and disgust, but the music surges into hyperdrive when roughed up by Virus Syndicate MCs. The rarity of the Manc timbre in a rap context is initially beguiling, but when Nika D manages to tame these jagged ragged productions on 'Contagious Rhyming', *One Way* shares rare pleasures. Love it.

Chris Ballard

Angela McCluskey

The Things We Do (Manhattan)

No one liked Finley Quaye because he was a git and never showered. Everyone likes Natasha Bedingfield; she's lovely and showers lots. Angela McCluskey's voice hits a sumptuous middle ground between the two unlikely comparators. She's got one of the best voices in pop today. But aside from dreamy, Bond theme-esque winner 'It's Been Done' and perfect pop-rocker 'Know It All', her debut album is

cracking under the weight of shapeless, wishy-washy Portishead twinged efforts, generally involving Dido-ish "Boo hoo, he left me" lyrics.

Not that it's her fault: most tunes were penned by uninspiring producer Nathan Larson. She'd have got better songs out of entering *Pop Idol*.

Jamie Fullerton

Megadeth

Reissues (EMI)

So with a new Megadeth album imminent, the golden and not so golden oldies get a 24-bit digital spring-clean along with a few cool bonus tracks for good measure, though nothing from the rarities collection *Hidden Treasures*. But the most interesting aspect of these seven albums (plus 1996's MD45 side project), stretching from 1986's *Peace Sells...*

But Who's Buying? to 1999's Dave Mustaine remixing job *Risk*. This sonic revisionism largely corrects the aural atrocities inflicted on albums such as *So Far, So Good... So What?* and the previously over-produced *Cryptic Writings*. It's almost enough to save the toothless MOR tosh of *Risk*. Almost.

Essi Berelian

Mocky

Are + Be (Fine)

Accurate musical description of modern dance-boy: deranged bleeps, crap disco,

sleazy romance, harmonic disorientation, chronic dissatisfaction, confusion, lust, lies, self-deprecation, restlessness, drum machines, booze and weed, throwaway signifiers, current affairs horrors, paranoid delusions, vocal distortions, lots of girl talk, bitterness, unstoppable disco, one sexy duet, stupidly bad rhymes, silly melodies, the urge to get lost in a crowd of sweaty smoke and lights and swaying bodies and not wake up tomorrow, warped twee, dirty undertones, immediate entertainment, desperation, puke, skydiving, rhythmic rupture, acceleration without really going anywhere. Mocky. He doesn't just play to animals.

Melissa Bradshaw

Juana Molina

Tres Cosas (Domino)

Once a celebrated comic in her home country of Argentina, Juana Molina left behind TV celebrity to return to her first passion – music. It's hard to imagine the equivalent happening in the UK: Caroline Aherne turned into folktronica songstress? Johnny Vegas doing his best authentic troubadour? But Molina quietly impresses once again with this mesmerising and heady album. Celestial vocals and accentual guitar are placed in the foreground, to produce a sound brighter and more crystalline than the electronic wanderings of Molina's last album, *Segundo*, though no less illusory. Sometimes I wish I knew what she sings as she wraps her tongue around sonorous Spanish vowels and rolling consonants. But then, sometimes it's better to imagine than to know.

Hannah Gregory

Monster Movie

To The Moon (Claire)

Yet another of Claire Records' shoegazing resurrections, Monster Movie is the work of ex-Slowdive member Christian Savill and his new musical spouse Sean Hewson. On *To The Moon*, they emit lethargic space-pop that lives with its head way up in the stars but has its feet firmly fixed to the floor. Here, chiming melodies rattle their way around a mist that wafts through the whole album, like some vagrant offspring of Ride, gingerly tugging at the goatees of Grandaddy.

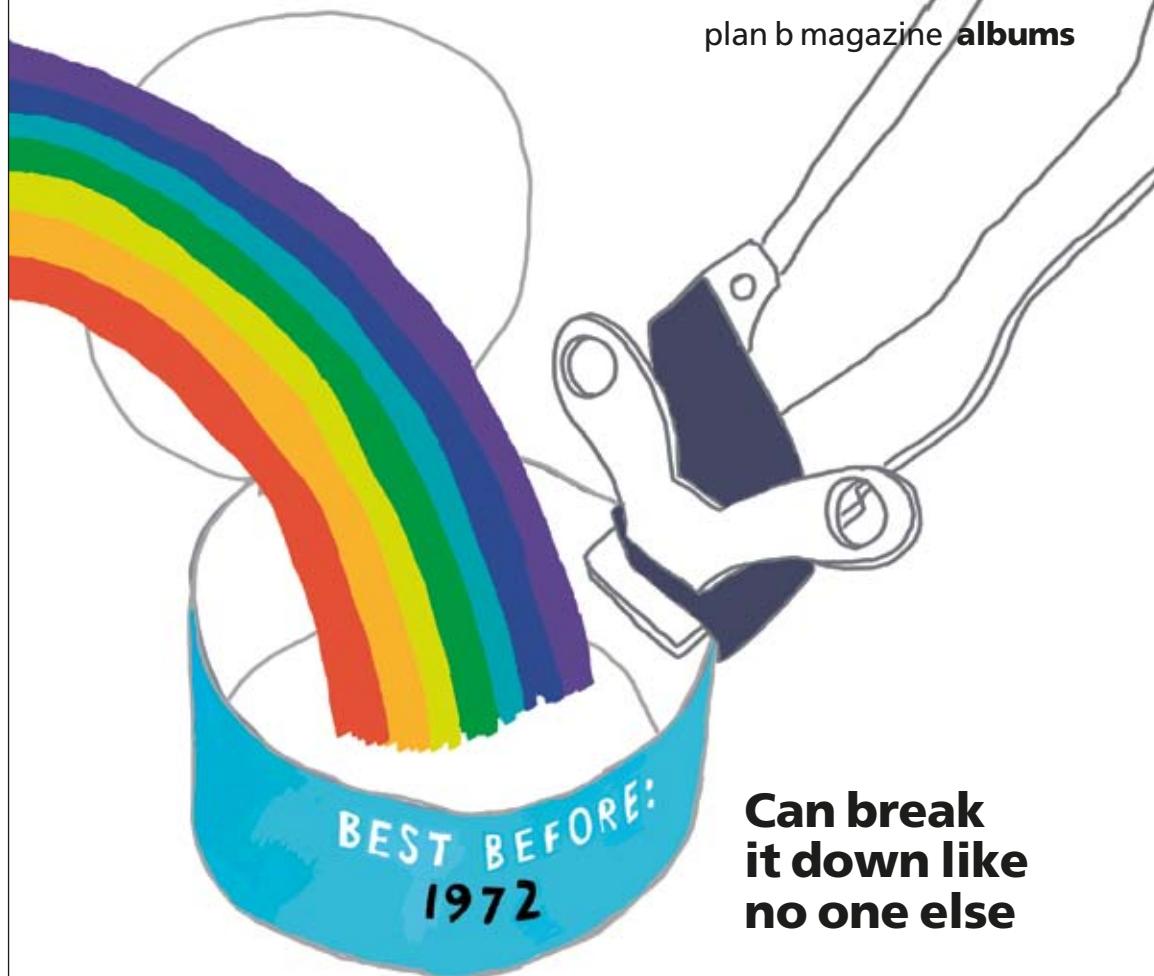
Ian Fletcher

The Mooney Suzuki

Alive & Amplified (Sony)

To some, the idea that these garage grease monkeys from New York might want to swing away from raw and minimal production values and embrace a fuller, brighter sound is heresy, especially seeing as they went to the Matrix – the production team that helped Avril Lavigne and Liz Phair – to do it. But when the results are this deliriously fun, who gives a skinny rat's ass? When the Mooneys rip into their r'n'b-lovin', riffalicious groove it's party time: lots of songs about shagging and rock'n'roll and more shagging. It's a gloriously simple equation. And there really aren't enough cheesy handclaps and tambourines on records these days.

Essi Berelian



Can break it down like no one else

no such word as can't

Words: Frances May Morgan

Illustration: Andrew Clare

Can

Monster Movie/Tago Mago/Ege Bamyasi/Soundtracks (Mute)

My memories aren't sepia tinted; they're midnight-blue and smile-white, fleet-footed but with ash on my toes and holes in my tights where I kicked off my junkshop red suede boots in the corner; long hair, long arms, long legs flickering.

The girl in my memory is in a warm, closed-eyed spiral of rhythm wherein her body is obeying her like it's a band in itself – a process hauntingly described by Can fan *par excellence* Alan Warner in his tribute to girls and rhythm, *Morvern Callar*. Feet are pivoting and legs are winding, hips are up and down bass, arms are guitar, and head is bent downwards, swinging back to obey the ululating, ragged "leleleleleluwah" coming out of the cheap PA. She's part of an orgy of ego-less, organic sound, a warmly impersonal force field that holds her tight, making none of the awkward physical demands of electronic music and none of the emotional and psychic demands of rock music. All it asks of her is to be a musician, to be music: no connotations, no implications, no hesitations. For the first time, not only is she in her element, but she knows what her element is – and it's a glorious non-element.

But hold it right there, Miss Saturn Returns and your mental filing cabinet of Krautrock-revival memories. The music of Can and the concept of nostalgia do not sit well together. Because every time I hear the songs from *Tago Mago*, *Monster Movie*, *Ege Bamyasi* – every time the urgent mantra of 'Mother Sky' from *Soundtracks*

kicks in – I hear them slightly anew. I hear them in their own place, untouched by the events they soundtracked. Re-mastered, they touch new nerves and I'm thrilled all over, and all over again.

So here is 'You Doo Right' (*Monster Movie*, 1968). Here's the Gnostic gospel of Malcolm Mooney, holding on by his fingertips to a groove that, six minutes in (six minutes out of 20), threatens to become a tightly reined freefall. A groove that's smearing and seesawing, rough enough to send warm waves coursing up my spine, but sublimely sexless too; music for a woman to walk tall to. "You made a believer outta me." Jaki Liebezeit's – on this occasion – restrained and impressionistic effected guitar scatters magic dust in front of your eyes.

Damo Suzuki's inception into Can lightened their sound – whispering, entreating and cooing in Japanese, English and his own made-up languages, he helped turn them from VU-inspired primitivist genii into something stateless, airborne and weird as hell. So here is 'Mushroom' (*Tago Mago*, 1971). Can at their tauest, it now catapults itself at you and boomerangs right back, smooth as titanium. Its disconcerting approach to tuning is a precursor of electronica (timbre, in this case, is all), as much as it's a nod to their classical backgrounds. You're reminded of the ring modulation of Stockhausen's 'Mantra', as well as the fearful symmetry of early techno, as the phasing on Liebezeit's drums is no longer an 'effect', but absolutely integral. You're whipped gently this way and that by Holger Czukay's elastic bass intervals, and you're spun slowly from all sides by Karoli and Irmin Schmidt's shifting guitar and keyboard interplay, and you're jerked from

your feet by whatever the hell it is Suzuki is yelling, before you curl down and chant along, "*I was born... and I was dead...*"

And here is 'Halleluuhah' (*Tago Mago*), and I challenge you to show me a better 18 minutes. There are so many highs in this song, each one bursting like a flower opening in your chest, and a rhythm as deep as the earth's core, and a triumphant, wordless celebration of celebration itself; a lazy funk epic as solid as a megalith and just as mysterious.

And here is the strangest pop album you ever heard, *Ege Bamyasi* (1972), further honed by its glossy new sound into razor-wire sharpness. Kicking straight off into the reptilian rhythms of 'Pinch' and audacious, breathy vocals and scrapes and pings and whoops and Hammond punches, another timbre-led grabbag of place and time that finally sounds as if it's coming from all directions. And here's a favourite keyboard line, the edgy, meditative, steady, open chords of 'One More Night', that makes me want to move my open hands softly and deliberately over the surface of every lover I've had or imagined I had. And here is 'Vitamin C'. Vitamin fucking C.

Oh, and here, also, are all the other Can songs you might have ignored, sparkling and new, the awesome, jaw-dropping drums and the burrowing in the psychedelics cupboard brought to the forefront, the guitar warm and singing, the experimentation loud and clear. And here's me again, dancing to some, beating you into submission until you listen to the rest, laughing at the dodgy prog bits, playing you snippets of *Future Days* (surely next in line for a reissue) and lecturing you on precisely why and how it was that an unlikely collection of German hippies helped make me the person I am now.



Like experiencing dew melt on sun-flecked hydrangea leaves, the faintest of sky-trails from a seagull

Mortiis

The Grudge (Earache)

It's hard to imagine a logical progression more obvious than this. The bat-eared one was wondering around in a Depeche Mode daze with his previous album, *The Smell Of Rain*. To make the songs work live he needed a band, and so the sound of *The Grudge* was born from the driving density of the live shows. Here, everyone's favourite troll uses his bandmates to deliver an eclectic album of rockers from the crypt that bobs along in the bleak industrial wake of Nine Inch Nails and Ministry without wallowing in the same degree of mental and emotional degradation. One for darkened dance floors everywhere.

Essi Berelian

Mr Scruff

Keep It Solid Steel Volume One (Ninja Tune)

For someone so determinedly eclectic as Mr Scruff, you'd have thought this mix album would operate as something akin to a manifesto. There are choice picks from a fairly broad selection of things: dub reggae to start, moving through retro hip hop to Brit hop, lounge-funk from The Peddlers, and superb electro from Little Miss Trinitron. As a mix, it works neatly, making it hard not to nod your head and grin, despite a nagging little voice decrying inside. As so often with the likes

of Mr Scruff and other Ninja Tune artists, the beats bypass the rational, journalistic part of your brain and hotwire something more receptively childlike inside.

Jim Cassius

Q And Not U Power (Dischord)

As comfortable staring up at the glitter balls above as towards those soiled stains below, Washington DC trio Q And Not U are masters of – if there is such a thing – happy post-hardcore. Undeniably the funkiest entity to emerge on Dischord, their third LP boasts a barrage of handclaps, synths and call-and-response yelps that only the dumbest of ears, or clumsiest of feet, could ignore. They're a cunning combination of Fugazi, The Rapture and XTC, fronted by a moody Har Mar Superstar with a falsetto to cry for.

Ian Fletcher

Munk

Aperitivo (Gomma)

Gomma play the cosmopolitan card by drawing in associates for what could have been a badly misjudged vanity project. But this mishmash works without giving protracted birth to a disparate mess.

'In The Creamfields' has Bobby Conn doing his best Balearic Lou Reed turn, leading us into a series of crisp slow burns for a post-colonial clubbing globe.

euphoric folk

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Phil Elliott

Tenniscoats

We Are Everyone (Rover/Magick)

Nagisa Ni Te

The Same As A Flower (Jagjaguwar)

Hush. Quiet, now. There's no need to raise your voice. Turn it down a few notches, please. There's a danger that, in all your brash laughter, you might overlook this most delicate, fragile of Japanese 'human is music'.

Tenniscoats utterly bewitch and confound me: 14 tracks that feel so sparse it's like experiencing dew melt on sun-flecked hydrangea leaves, the faintest of sky-trails from a seagull, a heart murmur from your part-Persian cat. Lead vocalist/songwriter Saya and her partner Takashi Ueno (sax, guitar) use the barest of traces to colour in their beautiful, minimal music – a dab of crystalline guitar here, a gentle female vocal there, so brief you fear songs like the mysterious and choral 'My Car Is Burning' might falter and die. But they never quite do.

Saya and Takashi are mainstays in Geographic's pastoral art terrorists Maher Shalal Hash Baz – and it's in Maher's warmly disorientating, mischievous, naïve and haphazard music that songs like the 'exiled nowhere-ness' of 'Wanderer' (a homage to TV Personalities) and exotic 'Malaysia' draw their closest parallels. But Tenniscoats always feel far more serious – sepulchral, even – that joyous, stern feeling you get from illuminated 14th Century stained glass windows. The beauty overwhelms you. Only on 'Telen-Pa-woo', a gleeful romp to rival even Heavenly's more engorged girl group fantasies, does the mask slip. It's ace.

Likewise, Nagisa Ni Te's music feels so pure it makes me ache. Each new album that trickles down over here is so sparse and sprawling, gentle and confident and serious it almost hurts to listen. As one US critic rightly termed it, this is 'euphoric folk' – an ever-burning quest for the moment, that shifting peak that only occurs once you forget song structure. Shinji Shibayama and Masako Takeda's wistful music draws on many influences – early Rough Trade, 13th Floor Elevators' psychedelic otherness, Mark Eric, Maher themselves – but always strongly retains its own identity.

The title track is a full-blown epic that chugs beautifully: 'A Light' dabbles rather than splashes out, slow and entrancing: 'Beyond The Grass' is what The Flaming Lips could be capable of, if they ever stopped shouting. I hesitate to use the word 'cute' but – fuck it.

If the Marine Girls hadn't heard the dark, sparse minimalism of Young Marble Giants' sole album *Colossal Youth* and grown up rockin' to Roy Harper, then maybe...Hush. Quiet now. Listen. The snow is falling.

Elsewhere, the hipster-baiting James Murphy implores us to get up and dance instead of sitting down. "Kick out the chairs, motherfuckers!" Change does not equal death, so it's not time to wave goodbye to dance music just yet.

Stewart Gardiner

Reverbaphon

Our Hearts Beat With Joy (The Curved World Outside) (Benbecula)

Insular and intriguing, Reverbaphon filters voice, accordion, guitar and assorted flotsam and jetsam through a web of accidental, geometrical glitch and rustling digital mulch. The meshing of acoustic instruments into the framework of electronica is now well established enough for the process no longer to be a commendable novelty; musicians now have to find a distinctive voice, and move beyond the merely pleasant.

With *Our Hearts Beat With Joy*, Reverbaphon proves himself to be a gratifyingly off-kilter, unsettling presence with, say, Leafcutter John's sense of place and wry humour woven into his own musical landscape. It's a tense, melancholic street to live on, with lonely processed drones backing a deadpan Scots monologue, and crowded caffeine heartbeats worrying amid minimalist melodic patterns, and the echo of plucked strings bouncing off old electricity substations, long since disused. The ghosts of gentle free jazz quartets are improvising

soporifically beneath the pavement, and it's always autumn.

Late in the night, when the fires are out, this music will flicker like a city snowfall under streetlights.

Frances May Morgan

Riton

Homies And Homos (Grand Central)

There's something so right about this Northern Electronic retroclash scene, supposedly faceless machine music given a regional accent. Getting a bit bored waiting for one of the fuckers to make a good album, though. See, irony and pastiche are liable to go off in your pocket if you're not careful. And here, every track is a series of FX, each verse has its own gimmick. It's a gradual accretion of little ideas, details, an outfit made entirely of ironic accessories. It's a series of drunken jokes made flesh; ultimately, a squandered opportunity.

This is a shame, 'cause in those moments when the punchline is forgotten and the misshaped grooves pulp through loops of bleeps and clanking piston beats, it's clear that Riton could really take his mongrel machine funk interesting places. 'Candy', a warped R&B rip is all drill-bit beats and disengaged boy/girl vocals that sound like txt msgs bounced back and forth from disinterested satellites.

Elsewhere, his cover of 'Killing An Arab' is a mixed blessing, a Teflon sprint replete

with obsessive bass pulses – Stylophone disco business. This isn't alienation in the existential sense, but the deep freeze of the actor who can't get back out of character, lost in these reality TV streets, these embedded hyperlinks, these quote marks that surround us.

kicking_k

RTX

Transmaniacon (Drag City)

Reports that RTX represented a get-together of ol' Adam and Eve proved to be somewhat misguided, as this new look outfit is merely Jennifer Herrema and a bunch of blokes roped in to grind out the Grand Funk riffs disintegrating into a horrible mess that was her old outfit's trademark.

That said, *Transmaniacon*, against all odds, is a riot. Bizarrely, it's an extremely agreeable continuation of the Royal Trux tradition, namely of switching stations on some otherworldly car radio channel between the outer reaches of the solar system and the Texas Jamm '75 on an endless ride through the desert. What's more, Jen still sounds enjoyably like she's about to cough up her entire oesophagus. This fucked-up jalopy keeps on truckin'.

Jimmy Martin

Rob Sonic

Telicatessen (Def Jux)

Telicatessen is NYC scenester Rob Sonic's solo debut, a breathless avant hip hop sprawl that's equally at home pinging its way through a sun-roof as provoking thought in the passenger seat. Jabbering

like Chuck D paying Tricky sweaty lip service, Sonic is a ceaseless presence across beats ingrained with grit and grime from the streets of his hometown, culminating in the dazzling DJ Shadow-esque shades of 'Macomb's Dam Bridge'. **Ian Fletcher**

Schwervon

Poseur (Shoeshine)

Schwervon's previous album featured 'Let's Make Dinner', one of the best songs ever written about the joy of cooking in four hands. If this sort of twee domesticity makes you gag, read no further.

At its best, anti-folk took small anecdotes from city life and turned them into perfect little pop tunes you could whistle while chopping vegetables for salad, throwing some clever pop culture references in with the tomatoes. Sadly, this short-lived movement gave us too few of these. But Schwervon's songs still go very well with a good leafy bowl, and although *Poseur* lacks the two immediately recognisable hits of its predecessor, it can still bring a smile to your lips.

At their best, Schwervon do the Black Francis/Kim Deal conversation in harmonies and also employ a little bit of Yo La Tengo's gentle dreaminess, with a hint of the Velvets' third album. When they try to spice things up with a weird sample or an atmospheric instrumental they're less successful. But most of all, now that the anti-folk fad is past, Schwervon just sound like the kind of good solid alternative bands that America used to produce before alternative came to mean lazy industrial gothic rap metal for

Various

All Good Clean Fun: A Journey Through The Underground Of Liberty/United Artists Records (EMI)

A twofold response.

1) Fuck me, when old music is good it's terrifically good. Before rock got saddled with being depressing, back when natural joy and wonder at life could express itself through rock'n'roll, bands had a freewheeling throb and wail to them that even a vintage production job couldn't recreate now. Listen to the two Can tracks here and Hawkwind's frankly awesome 'Be Yourself' and 'You Shouldn't Do That' (without a doubt the best band Lemmy's ever been in) and get your soul blown out the back of your head. Oh, and dig Idle Race's lumbering fuzz-pop and Bonzo's wonderful 'Intro/Outro' and realise that if The Groundhogs were around today, all those little Jets and White Stripes and Detroit Cobras would be shitting themselves silly and running for the bunkers.

2) Fuck me, when old music is bad it's fucking awful. The hippy shit and gruesome pub rock that over-clogs this retrospective of the late Sixties/early Seventies 'golden age' for Liberty Records, is all so unlistenable twee it wants slapping. Much of AGCF is useful proof that there have always been shit bands: hobbyists, wannabes and over-praised poltroons hyped to fuck by the press. Think of the real lineage the likes of The Libertines and Razorlight are gonna belong to. In 30 years, they'll be as fondly remembered as, say, Deke Leonard, the fucking appalling Man, or the frankly inexcusable Brinsley Schwartz. Ahh, the circle of life.

Neil Kulkarni

kids too white and too suburban for proper hip hop.

Pil And Galia Kollectiv

65daysofstatic

The Fall Of Math (Monotreme)

I hereby claim this record in the name of post-hardcore. And all you Warp-loving fucks can kiss my pale behind. 'Cause Mahumodo fell apart and Miocene have yet to deliver an album. So being able to appreciate the wife-beater-wearing

influences in *The Fall Of Math* is the only thing that makes me glad I once spent a year getting the shit kicked out of me by Red Bull-addicted UKC straight-edgers.

So what if this Sheffield quartet also sound like a distorted Trans Am with better vests and bigger balls? So what if this debut album points the way to a more human sex on *Drukqs*? My ears, my review, my influences. And I need this one way more than you.

Gracelette

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Words: **Velimir Pavle Ilic**
Illustration: **Andrew Clare**

Virgin Prunes

A New Form Of Beauty/...If I Die, I Die/Hérésie/The Moon Looked Down And Laughed/Over The Rainbow (The Grey Area Of Mute)

Formed in Dublin in 1977, Virgin Prunes embraced the so-called avant-garde and were more intimidating than Marilyn Manson could ever dream. Taking their name from the local slang for 'innocent outsider', they matched the aesthetics and microcosms of punk with their own conceptual theatrics (fish entrails, plastic tunnels and excrement). They wore make-up and torn dresses, but we're talking more than Christian Death here.

A New Form Of Beauty deals with identity, sexuality and the fatality of death; this could be after-dark ritual music for would-be cadavers. Gavin Friday's deliciously unhinged lyrics are brilliantly off-the-wall intense.

"Run rabbit run, before it gets too late/You hurt your fucking mother but you won't fucking hurt me..."

Strangely beautiful melodies nullify you into a trance, particularly on the volatile fragility of 'Sandpaper Lullaby' and the mind-fucking 'Din Glorious'. You can feel Einstürzende Neubauten, but the album retains a depth that tears you from within, as the incest confessional of 'Come To Daddy' testifies.

"In the bedroom, white sheets on the bed/In the kitchen, on the cold floor..."

There's no doubting that *Hérésie* is equally powerful, but its misguided self-indulgence and enforced hysteria spawn dirges that lead nowhere. 'Down The Memory Lane' – a parody of an Irish folk song – provides a few minutes of light relief, but the saving grace is the handful of live tracks. Minimal production, idle experimentation, raffish ambiguities – this conceptual suicide is like being beaten to within an inch of your skinny white gothic ass.

Produced by Wire's Colin Newman, 1982's ... *If I Die, I Die* is easily the Prunes' most accomplished recording but is less experimental than the earlier stuff. The energy of Lydon's PiL billows throughout, while 'Ulakanakulot' and 'Decline And Fall' are revenant pleasures that catch the Prunes luxuriating in their own ambiguous twilight world.

Originally released in 1985, *Over The Rainbow* is a compilation of Prunes rarities recorded between 1980 and 1984. Its diverse range of tracks is a testament to their belligerence. 'Red Nettle' – a hypnotically repetitive homage to Krautrock – was a deliberate foil against anyone who dared to pigeonhole them, while the simple piano and plaintive drones of 'The Happy Dead' still soothe like a lover's whisper on a rainy winter's night.

Final album *The Moon Looked Down And Laughed* marked a brusque change, and was fuelled by Gavin Friday's obsession with chanson melodies and twisted European ballads, but by that stage it didn't matter. The funereal mass is over but the legacy remains.

Velimir Pavle Ilic talks to Gavin Friday:

What was it like hearing all the Virgin Prunes stuff again?

"Some of the stuff gave me a bit of a shock. It's an era that is really ignored in music. One minute we're playing fuck-off-and-die bass, drums, guitar stuff, the next minute we were pretending to be in Berlin."

Do you think you captured the underground zeitgeist of the Eighties? Your music is reminiscent of the early 4AD stuff...

"I never really got the goth thing – we were wearing dresses and make-up, but you didn't know if I was going to kiss you or fucking kill you."

You certainly courted controversy...

"The Brits banned us for a year. There was a double headliner in 1982 and it was being filmed for Channel Four. We did 'Come To Daddy', where we simulate sex. The scene had to be cut out and we weren't allowed to play London – I remember Rough Trade had to submit lyrics of what we were planning to perform. Shit like that doesn't happen anymore, but I can assure you of one thing – the band will never reform."

Why?

"You know, I'm very proud of 'Sweethome Under White Clouds' as a song, but I don't think we'd be able to play it – not musically, but mentally, emotionally. We'll look much cooler in dresses when we're 70. Let's leave it for another 30 years."

Tommy Stinson

Village Gorilla Head (Sanctuary)

This is a solo album in the true sense of the word – well, almost, Stinson did call on mates from his other bands Guns N' Roses, Perfect and Bash & Pop to help out. It seems that while he was playing with G N'R the ex-Replacements bassist wisely decided to exercise his own considerable writing prowess, which didn't get much of a look in all those years ago with Paul Westerberg as the main songsmith. The result is pitched somewhere between *Don't Tell A Soul* era Replacements and Bash & Pop; it's poetically dark and brash, but shot through with delicacy and lush romance.

Essi Berelian

Tears In X-Ray Eyes

The Way We Live Now (Test Tube)

Please read these words right: lingering, dreamy, tender, vibrating, gentle, impassioned, helpless. Guitars chime and resonate through layers of sorrow. A voice strains and yearns for a better life, for a life untouched by monotony. A voice cajoles and soars and reaches heights not scaled since (and please read these words right) Martin Rossiter took his bitterly misunderstood blurred city lights romance out with Gene – or, in a parallel universe, The Cardigans' Nina Persson realised her early promise.

It's a fairytale, it's all scalding cold beauty within Tim Closs' world in *Tears In X-Ray Eyes*: songtitles and lyrics reflect the delicious depression within (as does the tinkling piano, and strung-out chords) – "Too young to die/And try hard to grow old" ('Heavenly Host'). Songs are given space to blossom. Trumpet blares, mournfully.

Please don't overlook this. Imagine if Robbie Williams was able to sing. Or a Mercury Rev reared on the dregs of Britpop and creating beauty in the unlikeliest of places: The Field Mice in their complete multi-toned glory. This is so, so beautiful.

Everett True

The Thanes

Evolver (Rev-Ola)

Before The Dirtbombs, before The Kaiser Chiefs... there were The Thanes. An Edinburgh four-piece rising from the ashes of the legendary Green Telescope and centred around the Steve Marriott-like figure of Lenny Helsing, The Thanes always understood the thing about 'authentic' Sixties garage was not to dwell on the former, but pay attention to the latter: fuzzed-down, gritty guitars, infectious tunes like 'That's The Story Of Your Life' and 'Please Don't Cry', and lashings of sweet, sweet organ. Hiding in dark corners, released on obscure labels, *Evolver* is a collection spanning The Thanes' (still ongoing) 18-year career: one to match even Billy Childish.

Everett True

Therapy?

Never Apologise, Never Explain (Spitfire)

Rise Up! Rise Up! Live Like A Fucker! Die Like A Mother Fucker! Could Be Worse, I Could Be You! But Perish The Thought! It's Therapy?'s Ninth Album! And all this in the first three tracks! With guitars that

have pins in their feet! And riffs that are tattooed all over in skulls and fire! And lots! And lots! Of! Muscymusik! Played! In! Exclamation! Marks! Back to a three-piece at last, the N Irish bash-bags are in fiery fettle here. 'Panic' is the best single Motörhead never released. Adrenaline Makes It Taste Better! Last One To Heaven's A Loser! Rarrgh!

Joe Shooman

These Arms Are Snakes Oxeneers Or The Lion Sleeps When Its Antelope Go Home (Jade Tree)

What, like big snakes? Like big angry cobras with hooded eyes and searing venom? Like stealthy boa constrictors strangling guitars, making them spasm in scrupulous rancour? Like menacing rattlesnakes drilling and drumming ruthlessly, angular, spattering rhythms? Like vipers, long and skinny and lithe, skittering over a ricochet bass? Like big giant mambas, dwarfing a microphone, spitting barbed hardcore through fork-tongued bile? Even like teeny garter snakes, slyly belying the soft underbelly of this serpentine trio? Really? Our Seattle specimens are just like that? Oh, in that case, you're bang on, they're glorious. These Arms Are Snakes indeed.

Nicola Meighan

Tijuana Mon Amour Broadcasting Inc Day After Night Before (DOXA)

For those of you that like your electro ambient, trippy and Germanic, this will work a treat. It's a collection of remixes of

earlier Tijuana Mon Amour material and settles easily into that part of your brain that deals with fairground rides and accordions. Maybe it's a little shy, a little unassuming, a little boring, but if this is meant to bypass ears and engage dusty parts of your psyche, then that's fine.

Jim Cassius

Todd

Purity Pledge (Southern)

"I'm gonna be nice/I'm gonna stop drinking..."

Listening to *Purity Pledge* feels like living with a violent alcoholic who also happens to be the best fuck of your life. As much as the sheer ugly, abject physicality of Todd's grimy riff assault should be a terrifying thing, there's a deep primal satisfaction at the heart of this gloriously wretched and transgressive stew. AmRep scuzz, good ol' pigfuck Buttholes'n'Melvins skronk and Kraut-y trance-outs all retain a palpable sense of danger which keeps you on edge, aware that something deeply unpleasant is about to happen. The finest dirty-ass gutter salvation you're likely to find this side of a rehab clinic.

Jimmy Martin

The Twilight Singers

She Loves You (One Little Indian)

Ever since The Twilight Singers toured at the start of this year, the most stunning aspect of their shows has been Greg Dulli's ability to mould cover versions into his distinctive debonair style. Bjork's 'Hyperballad' takes on new life as a rousing lament to flagging sobriety. Mary J Blige's 'Real Love' is treated to wailing

Selfish Cunt

No Wicked Heart Shall Prosper (Horseglue)

Selfish Cunt sing about biting the hand that feeds, and boy do they. They hate us all and they deserve to be hated. Ironically, if there is anyone out there who can appreciate their arch, sarcastic art punk, it's precisely the Hoxton-ite new media trash they attack with such glee. Sadly, the Robert Kilroy-Silk supporters who should be forced to listen to their debut album on repeat are unlikely to get a chance to check it out. Surprisingly, Patrick Constable's minimal guitar sound, Martin Tomlinson's E. Smith droning and newly added drummer Bambi's sparse skin bashing is quite elegant, bile switching to Bauhaus baroque with the flick of an eyelash. Intoned to the sound of drum machine guns, "Put your kettle on/While the war is on" ('Britain Is Shit') rivals the Vorticists' declaration back in the Twenties that England was the perfect place for revolution because it had the most golf courses. And the frankly bizarre attempt at punk-funking up Bobby-the-kind-of-wife-beater-you-don't-wear-in-summer-Brown's 'My Prerogative' is almost as much of a kick in the nuts as The Flying Lizards' 'Sex Machine'.

A friend recently told us that the Germans take their Olympic performance very seriously, and they have TV panels of experts analysing to death the failure in Sydney. Britain, meanwhile, has a beautiful tradition of self-mockery summed up as 'the fall of a great empire' or just The Fall, for that matter. Selfish Cunt do that tradition proud, and their scathing criticism of this island's population – corporate sluts to selfish cunts – is a reminder that DIY can and should apply to politics, not just home improvement.

Pil And Galia Kollectiv

guitars before Dulli dims the lights for the nagging, sensual 'Love Supreme'. Uniting his choice of songs around the idea of wasted love, this collection fits together like a sublime jigsaw of spurned desire.

Lianne Steinberg

Various

Blue Balearic (Sanctuary)

Eclectic's fine, but there are some malodorous beasts lurking here – mainly on disc one, compiled by Rob Da Bank. On

the upside: Mylo's 'Valley Of The Dolls', and a bossa nova 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' by Nouvelle Vague.

Still, Chris Coco's weirder set does the job, featuring Schneider TM's glitch-infested Smiths cover 'The Light 3000' and the gossamer melancholy of The Earlies' 'Song For 3'. But it ends on a sour note with the David Gray-alike 'Sun Arise' by Lucky Jim, the kind of fluff dropped by Balearic DJ progenitors such as Jose Padilla and Cesare.

James Papademetrie

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a new kind of kick

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Vincent Vanoli

Marianne Faithfull

Before The Poison (Naïve)

Tom Waits

Real Gone (Anti)

What keeps folk like Waits and Faithfull from phoning it in? Why do they feel a need to reinvent themselves, seek out new styles like 'kazoo funk guitar' and 'cubist funk' (Waits) or fresh songwriters (Faithfull), to invest their art with vigour and new angles? Why aren't they content to rest on their laurels – do a McCartney or a Lou Reed or a Brian Wilson, say – and pull in the arena-size crowds?

With Waits, it's because this is what he's always done, seek out alien sounds and rhythms – consolidating success is foreign to his oeuvre. It's in the unfamiliar he seeks solace. His last pair of albums, 2002's piano-drenched *Alice* and *Blood Money*, may have recalled the beautiful, personality-led blues of his Seventies work, but this new one's a rhythm riot. It is not an easy listen: dark and densely packed, the jittery guitar and splatters of percussion hint at unseen menace. There are no sweet ballads to take home to Matilda, aside from the drawn-out 'Day After Tomorrow'. Half of this new album deals in heartbreak, the other half in tragedy.

It's in the unfamiliar that [Waits] seeks solace

Taking as its root Waits' own chant-song and lengthy redemptive grooves, *Real Gone* is far more storm-saturated *The Black Rider* (1993) than whiskey-soaked *Heartattack And Vine* (1980). It flits between a miasma of styles – skewed James Brown funk strut ('Metropolitan Glide'), afro-Cuban guitar welter ('Hoist That Rag') and old-fashioned boogie ('Baby Gonna Leave Me'). With a fair amount of carnival shouting and rattling show tunes thrown in. And, for the first time ever – no piano.

Yet, such is the strength of Waits' fevered presence, and the songwriting of both himself and his wife (Kathleen Brennan) – aided by the return of guitarist Marc Ribot and ex-Canned Heat bassist Larry Taylor – it's immediately, recognisably *Waitsian*. Indeed, it's so *Waitsian*, that anything that follows will feel tarnished in comparison.

Faithfull, meanwhile, has discovered a new kind of kick either through pragmatism or, more likely, pure chance. *Before The Poison* will sound strangely familiar to anyone conversant with the jagged thrill, the pummelling disquiet of PJ Harvey's earlier work, and those keen on Nick Cave's maudlin, piano-led songs. This

is because Polly has contributed five tracks, Nick three. (There's also a Damon Albarn song, but it's relatively negligible.)

The result is thrilling – especially on Harvey collaborations like 'The Mystery Of Love' and 'No Child Of Mine' which sound precisely like stripped-down PJ Harvey (ie: superior PJ Harvey) only with that great, gravelly, nicotine-stained drawl of Marianne grieving over the top of Harvey's nervy guitar. The Cave songs are fine, but...well, you kinda wish that Cave had sung them himself. Especially with Warren Ellis drenching up a storm on violin.

Faithfull's continued ascent into critical rehabilitation is interesting, considering the lady's obvious preference for the comfort zone (cf: those horrible Virgin Atlantic ads), and the fact her whole (artistic) reputation is based around two songs – 1963's 'As Tears Go By', where she sounded like she looked, a spoilt yet naïve upper-class choirgirl (pre-Rolling Stones), and the devastating, late Seventies, world-weary lament, 'Broken English' (post-Stones).

The PJ Harvey songs here could, in time, match that brace. And that is saying something.

Various

Dread Meets The B-Boys Downtown (Heavenly)

The follow-up to Don Letts' classic reggae roundup ... *Meets The Punk Rockers Uptown* sees the former Big Audio Dynamite man and Clash cohort tracing hip hop's roots. There are familiar, indispensable b-boy standards, such as the Mohawks' 'Champ' and the Incredible Bongo Band's 'Apache'. It's also rich in scarcer gems, such as the Fearless Four's 'Rockin' It', The Clash's 'Outside Broadcast' and Hashim's 'Al Naarfish (The Soul)'.

This is a loving document of the brief collision of breakers and post-punk club kids, by someone who was there. This music is still striking in its grimy eclecticism and voracious assimilation (Kraftwerk, Babe Ruth). One can only wonder at the sterility of the R&B-diluted chart-fodder currently vomited out in hip hop's name.

James Papademetrie

Various

Sixty Minutes (One Hour) (Wiaiwya)

Sixty International Pop Underground bands get together, and prove that brevity doesn't necessarily stifle invention. A few less electronic doodles from Exmaark and Dalia, and a few more fiery pop gems from Sportique, The Swedish Chef and MJ Hibbett...and maybe we'd have a one-minute parade to equal The Residents' *Commercial Album*. Until then, a fascinating, if short, insight into 2004's countercultural mindset.

Everett True

Various

The Electronic Bible (WLM)

Listening to Joe Meek's majestically eerie *Hear A New World*, the continental shades of *musique concrète* fade away and the incredible debt that Add N To (X) owe the great producer from Holloway becomes apparent.

This album, compiled by Ann Shenton, is largely a homage to the rich English history of electronic experimentation. The B-movie humour and exoticism of the earlier years is evident in Mount Vernon Arts Lab's creepy 'Hobgoblins', the later post-industrial northern dystopia is soundtracked by the man himself, Richard H Kirk, in his new Pat Riot guise, and the sleazoid post-Pulp Sheffield scene is duly represented by Kings Have Long Arms, Relaxed Muscle and Hiem.

These are spiced up with a selection of international floor-stompers and quirky lo-fi efforts, most notably Räuberhöhle's Biscandy sweet 'My Heart Beeps Noisy Beeps'. All combine to create something that is not unlike recent British TV comedy where the joy of experimentation in form is balanced with an almost misanthropic view of modern life.

Pil And Galia Kollectiv

Various

Tracks And Fields (Kill Rock Stars)

These kids is too hip for me. Across two and a half hours, and a sleeve that looks cool left around your hovel but, like a metaphor, doesn't warrant close examination, they prove that I'm just a little too slow to be here. I come out confused but I guess that's the point and



craggy rock

Words: **John Robb**
Photography: **Peter Telfer**

Datblygu

Wyauf/Pyst/Libertino (Ankst)
Last week, I was watching a documentary about middle ages Welsh freedom fighter Glendwyr and how he nearly threw the English out of Wales, and almost managed to invade England itself.

I don't know why, but it made me feel good. Maybe it's because

hung around for three albums (beautifully packaged together here) and imploded in the mid-Nineties. There was always something comforting about the fact there was this weird irritant out there in the middle of Wales, bending rock out of shape and being ignored by the music biz squares.

They sing in Welsh, and it sounds perfect in these tedious days of the Anglo-American axis, where all pop culture has to be sung in Britney American English – it's great to

Welsh sounds perfect in these days where all pop culture has to be sung in Britney American English

I'm a tiny bit Welsh on my grandmother's side. I dunno. But I've always loved the old place. It's a beautiful country – especially in the north – all wild, craggy mountains, and some of the most amazing scenery in Europe. The industrial hinterland of the south is also about as wild as it gets: Newport TJs is one of the best venues in the country, and the big-hearted drunken revelry there is something to be celebrated.

Nowadays, there is a massive Welsh music scene – the Manics, Super Furries, Stereophonics... none of whom would exist without the sweat and toil of Datblygu and their label, Ankst. In the Eighties and Nineties, there was an amazing Welsh underground of gloomy, twisted, leftfield rock. Most of it was on Ankst, and if you're looking for an archetypal band in a scene that eschews archetypes, it has to be Datblygu. Built around the central figure of travel-phobic David R Edwards, Datblygu hardly gigged but recorded brilliantly skewed songs with scathing lyrics. They

hear someone sing in their own language. Of course, you don't have to understand a word. Datblygu make you feel their dislocation. Also, they've kindly translated all the words into English in the lyric book to make sure you know damn well what living in Wales was like back then. Datblygu made modern angular music, kinda like Welsh cousins of The Fall, but with their own agenda. There is a spook to their music: a lilting, goofy off-the-wallness, a sadness, an isolation. There is humour, anger, sarcasm and sadness, all in equal doses. They hook into myriad of forms, from Metal Box disco to rockabilly to indie underground rumbling, and make it their own.

But Datblygu should be remembered for more than being Welsh, or being underground. Datblygu were a stunning group who made distinctive music a million miles away from the self-important metropolitan music scenes.

By 1995, they had disappeared, a tragic loss.

I know that these I dig. The Legend! brave as Robert Wyatt. Antietam reminding me of That Dog. HNIA live coming on like some divine cross 'tween the Feminine Complex and A Tribe Called Quest. Dos' forgetting everything but bass and getting so damn accurate. John Wilkes Booze's mental 'We've Got Room In Outer Space'. Cynthia Dall out-Smog-ing her ex-band, the wondrous Lovers and Xiu Xiu stroking every spare inch of you, the monstrous Lucifer and Wiretaps Chinese-burning the rest. Radio Berlin making the best bass-heavy goth electro since bad Bauhaus, Measles Mumps Rubellas, and the fabulous Slumber Party doing the same to Six Finger Satellite and Mel'n'Kim respectively. Male Slut letting Thurston Moore, Jim O'Rourke, Steve Shelley and Lee Ranaldo fend off the menopause a little longer. Wonderful tracks from the Paper Chase and Devendra Banhart (did you pick your feet in 'Poughkeepsie'?). I didn't know Laura Veirs sounded so like Lois and Helium. Someone send me an album yeah?

Tracks And Fields bows out on an increasingly psychedelic fade that takes in Sweet Heat's femme raunch, C Average's nutzoid 'Stalwart' and Dead Meadow's hippy-killing 'Golden Cloud'. And if, like all comps, *Tracks And Fields* can be proof that the great and godawful sometimes have to share the same stage, at least mediocrity doesn't even get a look in.

Diggit like Tweaky.

Neil Kulkarni

We Start Fires

Caught Redhanded (Head Girl)

"We're sick of boring indie boys like Keane and monosyllabic retro-heads like Jet," comes the cry from this feisty post-punk North East England girl (and one bloke) guitar gang. "We want rock'n'roll bands that have read some books!" Fuck yeah. *Caught Redhanded* has 11 brash, spiteful, tuneful, cheeky, chaotic, cheesy keyboard-textured songs recorded in-between selling double-glazing in call centres and serving old men in bars – and, man, it's a refreshing blast of air. 'Hey Now' is early Go-Go's caught swigging their mum's supply of cheap vodka. 'Dolls House' is brash primetime Kenickie if only Johnny X had been female. Everything is stop-start abrasion and heady exclamation marks. Nice.

Everett True

READ AND BURN: Dead Disco

Read the reviews then compile these MP3s from this issue's review to make a disco-dancing disc that causes damage

1) The Go Team! – 'The Power Is On' (from *Thunder, Lightning, Strike*)

2) Munk featuring James Murphy – 'Kick Out The Chairs' (from *Apertivo*)

Because dancing's just not dancing if you're not destroying furniture in the process

3) The Faint – 'Paranoattack' (from *Wet From Birth*)

Dosed up on CNNaganda, anthrax becomes the new fashionista nose candy of choice

4) Riton – 'Killing An Arab' (from *Homies And Homos*)

5) The Dresden Dolls – 'Girl Anachronism' (from *The Dresden Dolls*)

6) Har Mar Superstar – 'Back That Camel Up' (from *The Handler*)

Har Mar humps a camel toe, Holly Valance and Nick Zinner do the dromedary

7) Steve Clayton – 'Bad Penny' (from *The Electronic Bible*)

If only Add N To X had sounded like The Make-Up cast in chrome...

8) Q And Not U – 'Wonderful People' (from *Power*)

9) Hiem – 'Tweak' (from *The Electronic Bible*)

10) Mortiis – 'Gibber' (from *The Grudge*)

Devil-pixie gabba-metal competing in a Wacky Death Race 2000 with Ministry's seminal 'Jesus Built My Hotrod'

Paul Westerberg

Folker (Vagrant)

Paul Westerberg is the only human being ever to have sung 'amphetamine' in a self-penned song and not sound like a twat. Umm... fact. He might have chalked up a few years in The Replacements and, boy, do people age when they write flawless albums like *Suicide Gratification*. But Westerberg still sounds like a pubescent drunk fumbling his way through life and strumming his discoveries. You can almost smell the stale fag smoke and beer stains on the carpet that went into the creation of *Folker*. You hear noises that you're not meant to hear on CDs because they get chronically cleaned up. Welcome to the gutter, come look up at the stars.

Hayley Avron

Yellow Swans

Bring The Neon War Home (Narnack)

More freaky shit from the Bay Area. Yellow Swans' spirals of sublime irritation reach some kind of pinpoint-pupil plateau on this, their debut full-length release. At once sinister, miniature and insectoid ('Police Eternity'), and vast and bubbling like some giant discord porridge ('High On The Mountain Love', coming on like an eternal astral building site, all spiralling drills and heavy scaffolding) the Yellow Swans' epic noisescapes are no gonzoid shitstorms, nor are they dull-ass 'cosmic' doom-wanderings. They're more akin to a trip to a dubious tattoo parlour, where Swanson and Saloman etch some bad Mandelbrot patterns onto your forehead and then shoot you up with DMT while you're still reeling from the pain. Once you can speak again you'll thank them for it. Righteous.

Frances May Morgan

James Yorkston And The Athletes

Just Beyond The River (Domino)

The follow-up to a wondrous debut, *Just Beyond The River* is more luscious acoustic balladry made in Fife, and here produced by Four Tet. The latter fact is hardly noticeable; the rest is guaranteed to hug your soul and hardly let go. Yorkston sings songs of love and a little loss that flicker with the irresistible melancholic glow of warm fires in winter. An effortless glide from what's gone before, Yorkston floats free beyond this river of his own design.

Ian Fletcher



chick shit

Words: **Melissa Bradshaw**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Est'elle brings a gospel sensibility to chart hip hop

I like it when Est'elle sings to me.

I like it especially when I'm so pissed off that all I want is to go be a nomad in the Sahara. 'Cause when she sings, she exudes a freshness, a trueness of voice that creates song from her usual talking-speak, using the timbres and inflections of her natural tone as a base for vowels that rise and soar like gospel balloons. This is a *real* soul voice. It doesn't derive its power from training that denies the singer's quirks. And it doesn't sound like all the other sexy girls who warble strong and flexible without ever touching that essential something.

"I've always known I was meant to sing. I've always been singing and been in various groups, but I never took it seriously; I was

just kinda honing myself. But I knew how to sing in church. So, basically, I got on the open mic one night at the record shop and people were like, 'Whoa, you can sing, alright, OK, you're alright'. So every time there was a stage I jumped up on it, like, 'I'm gonna sing, I'm gonna rap'."

Part of what makes Est'elle one helluva girl is that keenness and gospel sensibility. Hearing her is hearing frustrations understood, shared and overcome. She's got that healing power. Community is her primal drive and 50 years ago she would have been a soul singer. But in these times it's, "Hip hop that's a way of speaking to people. It's brought people together; I feel that it's music and music,

period, that moves people. It's the most popular art form right now, and I feel like this is what's needed. It's like...OK, if all these hip hop artists are down for it and they're so popular with the kids, maybe we should use it. That's how politicians think. So I'm happy."

Est'elle's sense of moment is crucial too. Her songs snatch diverse familiarities from the world she knows, and rotate them in an aesthetic kaleidoscope, creating new shapes and colours. The album fuses gospel themes, hip hop styles and Eighties girl group beats that smack of assertive femininity, while *that voice* and the detail of her empirical narratives save her from any hint of recycled, now meaningless,



righteousness. Lyrical positivity with sense of self is the magnetic centrifuge. And, of course, that means a sense of being female.

We're backstage at the Empire in a grubby room filled with sven guys. I want Est'elle to tell me why *she* gets pissed off. 'Domestic Science', a Skitz-produced track from three years back, was a female rapfest that featured the yummy Tempa, the scary Wildflower, and Est'elle bitching about guys trying to get her into the studio for a shag.

"That was at the beginning of my career. I got lots of guys who would be like, yeah, you sing... come to my house at eight o'clock, cos I got one beat I want you to listen to you. And they would not be in their house, and you would be calling them, calling them, really eager to listen to this track, and they would not be in their house until nine o'clock. They're playing lots of games with you, and then whatever happens happens, and then they can call you a ho because it makes them feel better. Dudes did some stupid shit back in the day! [The guys are laughing.] Unbelievable. But some of them think they could get away

with it, that's the funny thing. But they see me now, and they feel like idiots to come and say 'hi' to me.

"So for young girls now, I'd say, watch your back. Have your own shit in position. If you can't find any producers, learn how to produce. And if you're talking to guys in the Real, don't get flirty with them! Don't get silly with it. Don't think like, 'Oh yeah, he's gonna do this for me, he's gonna do that, without asking anything back'. If it's not sex, it's gonna be money. And make sure you have money to pay them. Don't rely on anyone for anything.

"It's easier to be a chick. People don't understand this world. A man's main incentive in this world is women, and chicks are after the dough, let's be real! [The guys crack up.] This is my philosophy on it. It's true. Guys get money, buy clothes, do whatever they're doing, in order to get money, to get a chick, to get a wifey. That's me generalising... but I feel like, to me it's easier, but they'll look at me, come up to me and talk to me. Because I'm a girl, they think they can whatever. And when I put it down

'If you can't find your own producers, learn how to produce'

to them they can either respect me or leave me alone, they don't need to fuck with me. There's no two ways about it. So for me it's easier to be a chick. Bush and Blair have both got wives. I'm not into all this man's world shit."

Later I'm watching Est'elle on stage. She moves sexy, and she knows it; she doesn't need skimpy clothes to prove it. And I'm thinking of Bush and Blair and all the world leaders, and I'm laughing to myself how it's lucky for them she's a chick not a gull; 'cause "If I was a bird, and I could shit on someone, I'd shit on all the world leaders, not just Bush and Blair. 'Cause they're all doing wrong." I'm thinking this is a hella woman, who knows her shit.



written in the skies

Words: Doug Mosurock

Illustration: Superdead

Don't run from the meteorite storm. **Comets On Fire** are your friends

Monday, 26 July 2004

The Delancey, Lower East Side, NYC

This Corona in my hand cost me \$6 and I'll be goddamned if I'm gonna buy another. One of the few patrons at the bar picks up his cellular to the vibrating ringer of Coldplay. Some old glam-rock burnouts are playing Motley Crüe at low volume. The urinals are filled with glass marbles and there's an ATM in the bathroom.

The sole reason I'm here is because Comets On Fire are back in town and are going to play here, at this new-smelling, new-looking bar.

I shrink to the back corner while the room slowly begins to fill for Vietnam, a local act signed to Vice. Vietnam's approximation of psychedelic music is making me feel uneasy. They're doing something reasonably interesting, but it fails. I don't have long hair anymore and I shave regularly and wear jeans and a T-shirt and comfortable shoes, and get up for my office job every morning and I love that. And these guys are wearing satin NASCAR jackets and have scraggly hair and a week's worth of My First Tash all over their faces and Aviators and ripped jeans and five years ago they were 'all about' June Of 44 or some other placid death-of-rock bullshit music, and had girlfriends they took to Rainer Maria shows down in Texas.

There is a certain level of understanding that must take place when you brand yourselves 'psychedelic rock', and an affinity for looking sloppy and maybe doing drugs isn't going to get you there. It's what you know, not what you show.

And since nobody likes to be told what they know versus what they don't, Comets On Fire manage to clear the bulk of the crowd. If you're a safe distance away, please tell me – who gets out of the way of the tornado?

Let's talk about experiences with nature. I was driving around Kansas last summer and listening to Comets' second album *Field Recordings From The Sun* and the sky turned black. About 12 miles away, tornadoes were destroying the Missouri border. I was pretty scared, but the music seemed appropriate. So talk to me about nature. Do you commune with it often?

Noel Harmonson (Echoplex): "Nature is indeed a big inspiration for the band. I'm from a small town in southern California called Ojai, which is, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful towns in the whole US. I remember feeling completely terrified and totally exhilarated during heavy thunderstorms as a kid. The other dudes in the band all grew up in Eureka, which is in northern California and is surrounded by dense forests. So I'm sure they all have a certain connection with nature developing in their childhoods as well. I'd like to think some of our songs would make a nice soundtrack for a massive thunderstorm or tornado storm."

Ethan Miller (vocals, guitar): "Nature is a big part of my lyric writing. I live in the city by necessity, but all of the free time I can muster I head for the hills. My family has a place in the backwoods of southern Humboldt County on the Eel River that is an incredibly powerful place to go and write and clear my head

"We tend to mythologise 'mother nature' as this nurturing, maternal, all encompassing pillow – which in certain circumstances can be true. But very often, as you mentioned with the tornadoes, nature is just skull-fucking us, herself, civilisation: just mindlessly laying shit to waste in a biblical way. I find that duality of transcendental beauty and absolute destruction working with and against each

other within the same myth to be akin to the overall artistic aim of Comets."

I had a roommate who went to school in Santa Cruz (where you guys met) and told me it's like Earth Drug Capital USA. Is that the kind of environment that fosters rock like yours?

NH: "I can't argue with that. Santa Cruz is a bizarre and multi-dimensional and misunderstood town. On the one hand, the town has a long legacy of being a hippie town. However, it's also filled with rich California conservatives, college kids, surfers, naturalists, scumbags, and junkies. It really has all of the elements of a big city condensed into one small town."

"There were a lot of drugs in Santa Cruz... I had a couple of friends down there that died from drug overdoses a few years apart from each other. There were a lot of different ways to get drugs too. I know some people who would barter random things like computer parts, antique rugs, and even scrap metal for drugs. Perhaps in that sense, Santa Cruz is still a hippie town..."

EM: "There are strange energies meeting in that town. It's protected by a treacherous mountain range so that the suburbs of San Jose, a massive city, can't creep into Santa Cruz and consume it, and there is very little common crime – no one really wears shoes or locks their doors at night – but there is an extraordinary number of weird serial killings and unexplained bodies found in the river and that sort of creepy shit. Everyone who has lived there for long enough has seen a UFO, had to exorcise ghosts from their house, been nearly fatally bitten by a rare spider, almost joined a mountain meth cult, started a Brazilian giant cockroach farm, that kind of shit. It's a gloriously weird place



if you can stand the vibes going from mellow, to bad, to frightening, to good again on a daily basis.

"There wasn't ever much of a sustained music scene there while we lived there, but the environment described above is enough on a daily basis to get the creative juices flowing. But there are a lot of snags and traps that creative people often fall into there and burn out their lives and their hearts and minds."

How did this band get started?

EM: "Ben Flashman and I started the band with the vision of creating a no-bullshit rock band that would transcend the commercial heartless slime that is being pumped across the airwaves and record store counters and being called 'rock'n'roll' and 'rock revival'. We wanted to honour the spirit of rock'n'roll by the structure of our vision and the audacity of our artistic ambition rather than simply snorting blow, wearing leather pants and namedropping the fucking MC5."

NH: "Ethan and Ben were playing in a sort of cruiser-styled classic rock band in town. We hung out and listened to records really late, drunk and kind of raging, trying to blow each others' mind all the time. Ethan and Ben began to become a little uninterested with the straight-forwardness of their project and planned a 'weekend project' with our friend Chris Gonzales. The idea was to bring some loose 'rock' riffs (or make some up), get holed up in a tiny practice space with beer and whatever uppers were on hand, and record some really fast, short and simple songs with microphones plugged into distortion pedals and a four-track cassette machine; pure rock meltdown. After the dudes had amazingly recorded about an album's worth of material in a few weekends they decided they wanted to record vocals. They

knew I had an Echoplex and wanted me to help them record vocals through it, so Ethan and I recorded the vocals in my basement bedroom. It was at this time that I introduced the 'shitstorm sound' that would become a signature element of the Comets On Fire sound. It seemed ridiculous at first, to have a person who just plays noise and effects the vocals in a live setting, but we worked it out. The way I found that I could avoid feeling awkward on stage was to go completely ape shit.

"Our first drummer left the band after the first record and we luckily tracked down Utrillo (Belcher), who lived in the Bay Area and was an old friend. The passage of time and Utrillo's influence seemed to lend themselves toward longer and more dynamic songs."

Fire, air, water, or earth?

EM: "Comets are earth and fire."

Tell me about the first psychedelic rock record you got into, and why.

EM: "Jefferson Airplane, *Surrealistic Pillow*. My pops had a cassette recording of it that we listened to all the time heading out to our place on the Eel River. Also *Sgt. Pepper's...* was on the B-side of the cassette – once again it was Pop's choice."

NH: "Hendrix records, for sure. My dad had a friend who had a load of albums laying around that he didn't listen to anymore and brought them over for me to check out. I was probably 14 years old. Included was like every Hendrix record, even *Rainbow Bridge*. There's this one song on there about an alien coming down to earth and deciding to leave, and Hendrix is talking about how he wants to be taken along – I thought that was pretty heavy."

What sort of headspace do you guys need to be in to play this kind of rock?

NH: "I'm sure we're all in different headspaces when we play. I like to have

a few drinks to loosen up to the idea that I'm basically just slinging a bunch of noise and sweat on top of these rock songs. There is no 'Comets concoction' if that's what you mean. There's certainly a common headspace of some kind of deliberateness: a sense of intention. It's hard to explain."

EM: "We feel like if we play to the top of our form the audience should be exhausted and abused by the intensity of our attack, and if they don't like us, they should be punished even worse. So part of our getting into a headspace is that we mentally see big red targets appear on the audience's faces, and then we attack!"

NH: "Yeah, I guess 'attack!' is a pretty good way to put it."

'We see big red targets appear on the audience's faces, and then we attack!'

Comets On Fire don't stop, don't wear down, don't flag. It's all in the monstrous, red trucks of riffage coming down on our brainpans, and it doesn't rinse out the next day. The band return later in the week to play at the Knitting Factory with Sunn O))), masters of the brown note, and to headline over cosmic-joke's-on-you band Sunburned Hand Of The Man and esteemed Doug Sahm tribute Oakley Hall at the fabled Brooklyn loft space, Mighty Robot.

But here at The Delancey, I see The One. Comets On Fire might be the best hard rock band in America, if not the Western Hemisphere.

Let them prove it to you.

shut up you fucking baby

Words: Everett True
Photography: Sarah Bowles

David Cross is half truth-teller, half irritating smug creep,
and the funniest US comedian since Bill Hicks, perhaps

He's not funny.

He's sharp, sure. But he's also unbearably smug. He can dissect life's absurdities with a brutal, nattily cynical ease: George W Bush and the rampant progress of stupidity in the American media, the 'humbleness' of Jesus Christ and hypocrisy of Catholic 'boy-fucking' priests. But he also enjoys throwing in swear words and gratuitous similes to shock. ("You think raising a child is hard? Try convincing your girlfriend to have her third abortion – now that's hard.") He can make an audience choke with laughter at an acerbic, over the top, metaphor – "I would rather hear the death rattle of my only child than have to listen to that fucking shit," he deadpans, talking about Evanescence on his second, Grammy-nominated Sub Pop album *It's Not Funny*.



But he's also an American (the *victors*). He can make a crowd nearly gag with his series of impressions and images...a crack baby, a thalidomide drummer turning up for an audition, the vision of Mr Cross himself attempting to masturbate to English pornography (full of "60-year-olds and over, what's up with that?").

OK, maybe he is funny.

He's particularly incisive when attacking easy targets – consensual age limits ("Let's make it 15; why should spotty 14-year-old boys have all the fun?"), Fox News' depiction of the reasons behind 9/11, liberal horror at the use of the 'gay' word in humour. Yet he plays to an easy audience, a post-Internet pornography, post-South Park crowd who take delight in showing up at his sometimes surreal live comedy routines to prove to each other how unshockable and open-minded they are. You know if David took his smart-ass, snickering, superior classroom clown routine out to where it needs to be heard – a Republican convention, Leeds City Centre on a Saturday night, the streets of Najaf – he'd get the shit kicked out of him. But he doesn't. Who can blame him?

As the TV star (HBO's cult series *Mr Show*) and actor (*Ghost World*, *Men In Black II*) is fond of pointing out, after a particularly outraged exclamation from his audience, "It's what's described as a *joke*, people. I'm not being serious."

But of course he is, 53.7 per cent of the time – and that's why his humour can bite so hard.

Why be a comedian?

"I never had a crucial moment. I formulated the idea I liked being funny. Then it became something I enjoyed doing, a way to get some respect or ingratiate myself because I was an odd-looking kid. It's a way of being confrontational without being physical. After that, it became a way to express myself and, later, a way to make a living."

The idea of stand-up itself is strange – that you have to get up on stage and be funny.

"There's an implicit performance aspect to it. Even the driest stand-ups must have some need or talent to perform in front of people. A guy like Steven Wright, who's pretty quiet, may be considered shy or anti-social, still there's something in his makeup that makes him go out and perform. As strange and foreign as it is to most people, for that tiny population that does it, it's not strange at all – it's organic. The idea of being a stand-up isn't sexy, but the idea of being successful at making people laugh is certainly an example of confidence and ability, and that is sexy."

On the whole, comedy seems born of some form of insecurity...

"I would say in my case that's correct."

...And yet you put yourself in a position where you are by yourself a lot – unlike rock music, say, where you have the support of a gang of mates.

"That's where it's easy to be jealous of musicians. If something's not going right, it's a shared experience, and you can just crank up your amps and drown it out. You can't do that with stand-up at all. You've got to sit there and take it for an hour and then have nobody to commiserate with."

Do you enjoy yourself on stage?

"Most of the time, definitely! There's a lot of button pushing which is enjoyable, to get that rise

Media

72 COMEDY:
David Cross

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out of people. Obviously, I enjoy talking and pontificating and opining. And I enjoy performing."

You've played a lot of shows with rock'n'roll bands. Was that out of necessity?

"No, more what I would call experiment, an interesting way to mix it up. I've done, and will always be able to do, clubs and theatre. When I was starting out I did a bunch of music clubs, specifically because that felt right, and it was a cool 'badge of honour'. I don't think I'll do it much any more, though. It doesn't work as well as I'd hope."

What do you do in between tours?

"I am one of the busiest people I know. I'm on a television show that takes up six months plus prepping and everything. I take small roles in movies and I'm always writing, with partners or by myself. I do stand-up; I do a comedy show with two other friends in New York. I just directed a video for The Black Keys and produced a pilot with Vice magazine for Showtime, a cable network in America."

When you choose your material for your live show, are you conscious that some topics are going to go over better than others?

"No. You can guess, but I'm always surprised. I've been doing this for a long, long time but I will still occasionally misjudge an audience. I'll look and think, 'This is going to fucking suck' and it's great, or the reverse. An audience is a strange mythological beast of yore, with golden horns, and diamonds for teeth."

Do you specifically tailor your act to suit the region you're in?

"Never in the States, there's no reason. But I have some really strong lead-ins for topics that I can't use in other places. So that sucks, and there's my big closing bit I've been using in the last year, which I really enjoy, and I can't do it because London won't get the references. Other than that, you take a guess and the audience will tell you whether it's good or not."

How do you choose your topics?

"They choose themselves. I don't sit down and write. I tend to sit down and think about something and it will occur to me that will be funny. I'll jot it down, go on stage, talk about it, riff around and improvise that bit. Usually, I'll tape my sets and try to remember the funny things I said and edit out the other crap and then have my three jokes about it."

When you perform on stage what are you thinking about?

"Leaving. It totally depends. Sometimes, I'm really in the moment, really loving it. Sometimes, I'm completely outside of the bit, and I'm thinking



'An audience is a strange mythological beast of yore, with golden horns, and diamonds for teeth'

of the last bit or the next bit, or 'Who's that girl in the third row? She's really cute', or 'Where am I supposed to meet Gary after this?'

How do you judge if a night is a success?

"If I'm good, first of all. Less importantly is whether it went over well. Sometimes, I will have a really good set and I will be on top of it, sharp, and it's only a so-so night, response-wise. Other times, I'll be all over the place, not that funny, rambling, lazy, and the audience will be going nuts. That's not a success, either."

If you're lazy and rambling and you do that a few nights, and the audience goes nuts for it, does it get tempting to be like that the whole time?

"No, not for me. What stops me from phoning it in? I guess this deep-down idea that I've got a job to do. I'll be reminded of it because I'll go to a gig, it's the Wednesday night show and I'm not that psyched. But then I'll meet a group of kids who have driven 400 miles overnight from Canada to see me and it reminds me this is why I've got to do this."

Tell me a story from your childhood to explain why you're here.

"Alright, doctor! It goes back to the first question you asked about a pivotal moment and there never was one."

"There was an accumulation of a series of moments and those are all about always being the new guy, wanting to impress. Having no real athletic ability, being a bit of a pussy. Couldn't draw, couldn't play an instrument but I could make people laugh. I have, as I've gotten older, an increasing cynicism and disrespect for most other forms of employment. I obviously like money but it's not as important to me as it is to a lot of people. I also don't have that spiritual side of me that wants to give up and build shelters in Peru. I clearly have a craving for performing and instigation. Put all of those things together and that's why I'm here."

art

women in burlesque

Words: Katrina Howat

Illustrations: Lady Lucy

Think burlesque, and you think scantily clad ladies doing the bump and grind in nipple tassels and thongs to 'The Stripper', performing in dimly lit bars with tatty red curtains. Or maybe the new burlesque, a kind of feminist-punk reappropriation of what Honey Harlow (the notorious stripper/singer/clothes designer wife of Lenny Bruce) called 'tease to please', inspired by Harlow or Betty Page or Gypsy Rose Lee, and popularised by troupes such as San Francisco's Velvet Hammer, and the Suicide Girls; or the glossy photo book *The New Burlesque*; or closer to home in London Sparkle Moore's More Than Vegas club a decade ago, and more recently The Lady Luck club; or Stella Starr's Va Va Voom club in Brighton. Or maybe you're noticing the word 'burlesque' popping up as the latest novelty spin for a club, theatre show, or cabaret. As Sixties garage



leering men stuffing money in garters. Whatever you think burlesque means, it's entertainment, for women as well as men. And it's not just a nostalgia trip either. Sure there's a neat circle to its history – women run the burlesque troupes now, just as they did when burlesque first exploded on to the British and American stages in the 1840s – but this time round, women are more in control than ever.

Burlesque – the word is a rhythmic tease, a cat-purr with a saucy kick; suggestive, sensual, subversive, which is how it started out. Is it such a surprise to learn that it began just as Queen Victoria was getting comfy in the throne, the era of being prim and proper in public and getting up to all kinds of naughtiness behind closed doors? Yet burlesque wasn't automatically associated with stripping until the Twenties. Lydia Thompson and her 'British



punk goes mainstream, so the underground goes backwards, more attracted to the Las Vegas Grind/Frat Shack style rock'n'roll and rhythm'n'blues of the Fifties – thrills of a more cult kind, and a little more glamorous too.

It's no accident that burlesque's most recent revival has been its most successful since its last heyday in the Fifties. In a time when every extreme has been plundered 'til even the tabloids struggle to sensationalise scandals for our all too knowing interest, there's got to be a certain pining for something a little more mysterious, a little more intriguing and playful. Which has more appeal: what you can see or what you can't? Straight strip, or a full-on choreographed performance? Well, each to their own, but let's get this right from the start: burlesque isn't about porn. It's not about

and pasties disappeared with the free-livin' Sixties and the explicit Seventies, the performance was still the main thing.

In her autobiography, *The Life And Loves Of Lenny's Shady Lady*, Honey Harlow describes watching her role model move in a circus burlesque routine. She studied just how that woman drew the audience in until they were hanging on every tiny, subtle move she made. In the film *Gypsy* (1962) about the life of Gypsy Rose Lee, the most famous of the era's burlesque performers, Natalie Wood's beauty is perfect for the role, because her beauty has nothing to do with being a successful burlesque performer. Whatever flaws that film has, it's a flattering portrait of burlesque tease as an art that has to be practised and perfected. In the Fifties, the names and figures of leading performers Tempest Storm and Blaze Starr weren't their only assets – though Tempest is said to have insured hers for \$25,000 each. They captivated their audiences with routines that ranged from animal passions to sly suggestion, almost creating a storyline with beginning, middle and end, together with snap-fingered timing and dancing agility. It's provocative theatre, playing a part, a complete erotic fantasy, a 100 per cent 'look, but don't touch' performance.

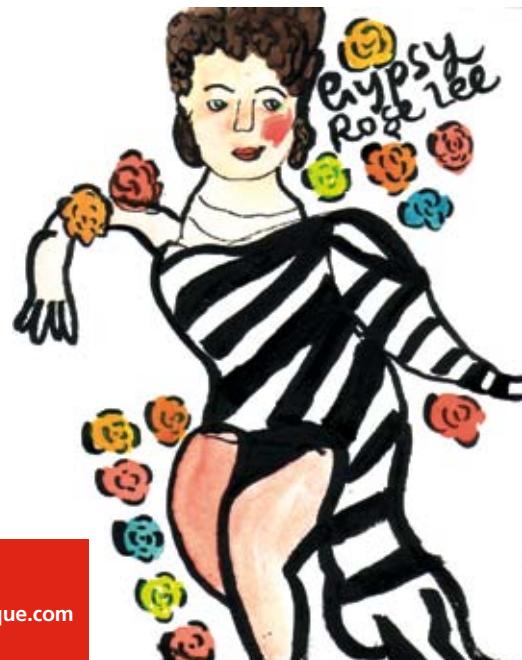
And it's the performance that's returned today, along, sometimes, with the variety. But it's women leading the way, not just performing but creating shows, costumes, a whole new scene – the Tease-O-Rama convention in San Francisco offering workshops in how to make pasties; The New York Burlesque Festival taking the East Coast underground overground (*Wombling free?* – Ed); the fantastically named Immodesty Blaize demonstrating the art of twirling her tassels both ways in a Goldfrapp video; Miss Katie making corsets, nipple tassels and burlesque-style wear at House of Harlot; Miss Hussy making clothes somewhere between burlesque showgirl and Victorian freak show; Miss High Leg Kick doing – what else – her famous high leg kick. There's more, so much more; but then burlesque is tease to please, so find out for yourself.

blondes' burlesque troupe were the act that made burlesque popular, but Thompson was not only the show's star – she ran the troupe, and devised the material and routines, which were more about showing off wit than flesh. PT Barnum spotted the potential and brought the troupe over to New York for what turned into a massively successful run, and burlesque troupes began springing up, many run by women. It couldn't last, and men had muscled their way back into managing burlesque entertainment by the 1880s, turning it into part peek-a-boo, ooh-la-la titillation and part variety, with a year-round vaudeville circuit.

And that's when burlesque started to really get a name for itself as a naughty, raunchy transgressor, as the entertainment became more risqué. Come the Twenties, when radio and then

film started nailing the coffin of vaudeville variety, burlesque was left with only the strip and tease; a racy attraction across the Western world from America to London, Paris and Berlin that teetered on the verge of sleaze as the routines revealed more and more. Sally Rand didn't become famous for her fan dancing for nothing, to say little of Josephine Baker's balloon dances. Burlesque's heyday is thought of as the Thirties to the Fifties, the era of Hollywood glamour and glitz, of cabaret escapism and sophisticated innocence. It's also the era when pasties (to cover the nipples) and G-strings came in, for maximum tease to please. And before G-strings

www.vavavavoom.co.uk
www.ladyluckclub.co.uk
www.velvethammerburlesque.com
www.exoticworldusa.org



art

for your viewing pleasure

Words: Pil And Galia Kollectiv

Black President

To Oct 24, Barbican Centre,
Silk Street, London EC2

A legendary central figure of the Afrobeat movement, Fela Kuti's free jazz-infused funk was as revolutionary in the early Seventies as his political agitation, which resulted in a life of persecution in his native Nigeria. This international group exhibition explores the impact of Kuti's life and work. It will be interesting to see how Turner prize nominee Yinka Shonibare deals with this potent cocktail of radical politics, and experiments in new forms of musical expression.



form, in a matter of months he was arrested for murder. Mick Jagger, due to replace Beausoleil in a film made from the surviving footage, also got the heebie-jeebies from Anger. After dropping out of the film, he witnessed his violently summoned satanic mojo unravel at Altamont. Now film stills from *Invocation Of My Demon Brother*, newly edited by Anger, offer the chance to glimpse his single frame 'subliminal' shots and to admire the super-saturated, Californian sunset shades of the summer of love's dark side.

Kenneth Anger

To Oct 10
Modern Art, Vyner Street, London E2

With a new book coming out and several film projects in the works, it seems Kenneth Anger has finally decided to stop sulking about countless MTV-generation film and video-makers ripping him off. Good thing too. Getting on the cult filmmaker's bad side is known to have nasty side effects. When his demon star Bobby Beausoleil stole the *Lucifer Rising* footage, Anger cursed him to turn into a toad. While Beausoleil kept his corporeal

Kleterkammer: John Bock

Sep 24 – Nov 3
ICA, The Mall, London SW1

Known for his highly theatrical lectures, German artist John Bock's performances

and installations are equal parts Beuys avant-gardism and Alice Cooper schlockism. He promises to transform the ICA's gallery spaces into a cabinet of curiosities, which will represent a condensation of his diverse and highly absurd artistic universe.

Revolution On Request



Archigram

To Oct 31
BALTIC Centre For Contemporary Art,
South Shore Rd, Gateshead NE8

The best thing about the Design Museum's Archigram exhibition is a short interview with Peter Cook, shown in a back room together with a colourful (and slightly superficial) collage of archive material. With more impact than any gift shop T-shirt of their bubble-shaped, swinging Sixties re-imaginings of urban space, Cook's words encapsulate the group's radical philosophy. He claims that unless we treat cities as pop objects, quick to mass produce, cheap to buy, easily disposed, and easily adapted to changing needs and fashions, then all we will have are dead monuments. If Archigram had their way, trains to Newcastle would look like Yellow Submarines. Instead you step out from their poptastic universe, which never materialised, into a rainy, dead, Victorian monument.

international artists. The exhibition is accompanied by live performances and a special publication with a limited edition CD of music by the Chicks, Les Georges Leningrad, Patrick Wolf and other proponents of independent DIY tactics.

Paul Noble

To Nov 14, The Whitechapel Gallery,
Whitechapel High St, London E1

Paul Noble explores totalitarian dystopia with the fantasy geek's obsessive eye for detail, forging a retro-futuristic architectural language that is uniquely nostalgic. Monumental drawings of Nobsob Newtown, his meticulously illustrated fictional city, are accompanied by new sculptures, and a black-and-white film.

Matt Franks

Oct 22 – Nov 28, One In The Other,
4 Dingley Place, London EC1V

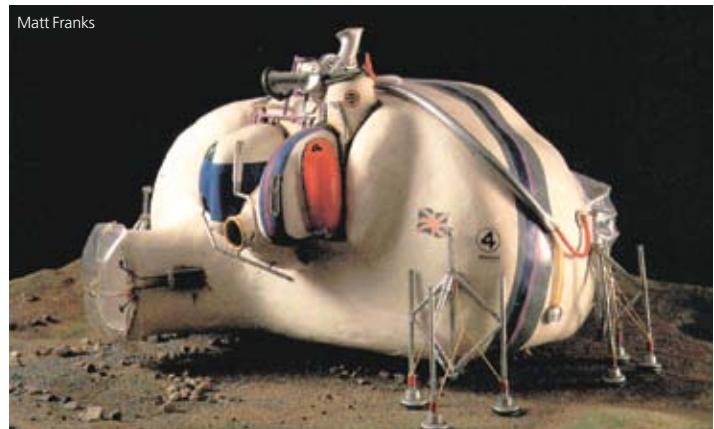
From hairy genitalia to mad science contraptions straight out of *Dexter's Lab*, Franks' work comes on like a lost lyric from X-Ray Spex's 'The Day the World Turned Dayglo'. Styrofoam, Polystyrene and Perspex are hand-carved into *Ren And Stimpy*-style cartoon explosions. These materials are normally used to insulate buildings, unseen between walls, or to cushion and protect works of art. Here, they themselves are celebrated in all their neon glory.

DaDaDa: Strategies Against Marketecture

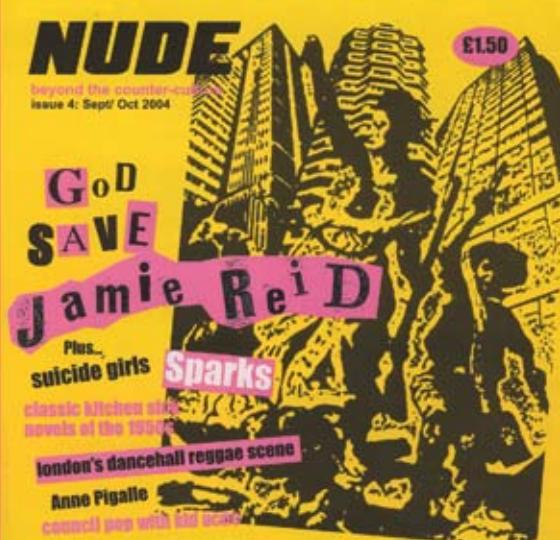
Oct 21 – Nov 21
temporarycontemporary, Atlantic
House, The Old Seager Distillery,
Deptford Bridge, London SE8

Reckless appropriation and rampant collagism dominate this group exhibition featuring art by Chicks On Speed, DAT Politics, Finnish art collective Revolutions On Request and German pixel artist Mister Ministeck, plus 10 other

Matt Franks



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film

four to see this autumn

Words: Katrina Howat

Anchorman: The Legend Of Ken Burgundy

(94 mins, Sep, dir Adam McKay)

Will Ferrell (*Zoolander*, *Elf* and, next year, *Bewitched*) and Christina Applegate (*Married...With Children*, *Grand Theft Parsons*) wage a battle of the sexes in this unashamedly silly satire of Seventies chauvinism and TV news network



anchormen. But check it out. Ferrell is Ron Burgundy, king of an all-male San Diego news team, a polyester-clad man's man of the time with a chunky moustache, an apartment that smells of mahogany and a dog he describes as, "Like a miniature Buddha – with hair". Applegate is Veronica Corningstone, out to become the first female anchorwoman, who no one, least of all Burgundy, takes seriously until she steps in during a road rage accident involving Jack Black, a burrito and Burgundy's dog.

A bit *Network*, a bit *Zoolander* and a touch *Starsky And Hutch*, but Ferrell and McKay's script adds surreal magic. Ace.

www.anchorman-themovie.com

Saved!

(92 mins, Sep, dir Brian Dannelly)

More satire, but this time Christianity gets it in Dannelly's teen comedy set in an evangelical high school. Mary (Jena Malone) just wants to save her gay boyfriend's soul, so she loses her virginity



to him, but instead finds herself pregnant and demonised by her fundamentalist friends in the school's über-popular clique, the Christian Jewels. Queen bee Hilary Faye (Mandy Moore) gets most of the best lines by being the biggest superbitch Jesus freak ever, while Macaulay Culkin returns from nowhere as Mary's cynical, wheelchair-bound ally.

Teen movie with added Jesus? Freaky, but fresh, tackling the teen quandaries of questioning ideals and looking for acceptance while spoofing the ludicrous hypocrisies of the "Let's get our Jesus on" fraternity. You won't have seen the high school conventions of mean girls, the gym scene and the prom this way before.

www.savedmovie.com

Super Size Me

(99 mins, Sep, dir Morgan Spurlock)

Morgan Spurlock (33) was no Charles Atlas before he decided to prove just how bad for you fast food can be, but he was at least healthy.

Twenty days into his 30-day experiment to show just how fat McDonald's, the fastest baddie of all, is making America and, by



implication, the rest of the McDonald's-eating world, the three medical specialists, the nutritionist and even the health club cheerleader accompanying him were pleading with Spurlock to drop out before his major organs packed in.

Spurlock's one-man document of this *Jackass*-style self-inflicted dare, wherein he eats nothing but McDonald's three times a day, tries everything on the menu, and says 'yes' every time the staff ask if he'd like to 'super size' his portion, is a gruesomely compulsive affair, packed with calorie-defying titbits of info, revelatory interviews and full-on vomiting. Guaranteed to make sure you're not 'lovin' it' next time you feel the urge.

www.supersizeme.com

The Life & Death Of Peter Sellers

(126 mins, Oct, dir Stephen Hopkins)

It's hard to say how convincing *Shine's* Geoffrey Rush will be, stepping into the all-too-legendary shoes of *Goon/Pink Panther* comedy actor Peter Sellers.

However, with a back-up cast including Emily Watson, John Lithgow, Miriam Margolyes, Peter Vaughan, Stephen Fry, Alison Steadman and, as Spike Milligan, Ed Tudor-Pole (frontman for Eighties band Tenpole Tudor and TV quiz show *Crystal Maze* alike), not to mention Charlize Theron as Sellers' wife Britt Ekland, it should be worth a view.

Unravelling the man from the myth, Hopkins goes for the dark side rather than a whitewashed portrait, and recreates scenes and characters from the peak of Sellers' career, from *The Goon Show* in the Fifties through films such as *Dr Strangelove* in the Sixties, up to the last film he made before his death in 1980, *Being There*.

<http://liconmovies.com.au/petersellers/>



radio

choking on cufflinks

Words: Pil And Galia Kollectiv

WFMU is an inexplicably fantastic ex-college radio station based in New Jersey



It might be the fault of the Israeli army radio – the nation's favourite – which played MOR Seventies rock and had a marked preference for melancholic blandness, but radio has never been our favourite method of encountering new music. With the exception of some John Peel caught on crackly long wave on the World Service, radio largely offered a continuation of the authoritarian state control that shaped the general cultural hegemony, dictating not only musical taste, but also its organisation. This meant if you ever got an earful of something vaguely alternative, you could rely on it being followed by some local equivalent of Coldplay or a morale-crushing rendition of 'Coco Jambo'.

We wouldn't be telling you about all this if not for Michael Goodstein's claim that too many music critics just want to prove their lit-crit credentials, and don't share their personal experiences with music. But it's his show, *Choking On Cufflinks*, that we really want to tell you about. The show is aired on WFMU, the inexplicably fantastic ex-college radio station from New Jersey that plays everything from Resonance FM type drone odysseys to the bastard pop madness of People Like Us' 'Do Or DIY', to the super cool teen-beat garage of Teenage Wasteland to possibly the best show ever targeted at under-10s,

'Everyone in Toronto is a semiotics major and they all like Beuys and Beat Happening'

the totally awesome *Greasy Kids Stuff*. But it's Goodstein's show that you really want to check out for a journey that will take you from the 21st Century, as envisioned by the 20th, and back again to tomorrow's lost nouveau indie pop punk classics today.

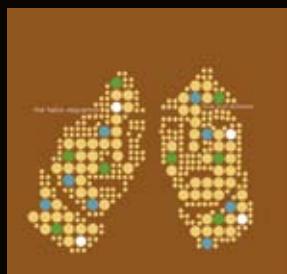
We were going to suggest that it's not often that the loss of *Dungeons And Dragons* was rock'n'roll's gain, but actually it quite often is. In Goodstein's case it was Sara Jaffe, former guitarist for Erase Errata, who put him in touch with WFMU following a stint together on college radio, saving him from a youth battling elves and warlocks. "My original radio show was named 'Velcro Radio', and I was obsessed with wearing Velcro. This masked (rather poorly) my inability to tie my shoes. In the ensuing years Velcro became less interesting to me as a fastener, and I became more obsessed with cufflinks as fasteners."

Goodstein's predilection for non-English language songs and penchant for lyrics pertaining to evil dictators borders on the gratuitous. Recently developed into a drinking game by ardent fans – you have to drink every time he stumbles on foreign language tongue-twisters – the sheer comic value of his struggle to pronounce the song titles almost seems to mock the xenophobic regulations of French radio with its native language quotas: "The French and the Canadians! Don't forget the Canadian content requirements. Would the music really be as 'foreign' if I could pronounce the band/artist/song names? Some of the German new wave in particular chose unpronounceable names to further ridicule the popular bands and attack the digestible/English language mainstream. It adds to their obscurity. Too much today can be easily discovered via a quick web search or a cursory glance at *The Wire*. There's no thrill of discovery."

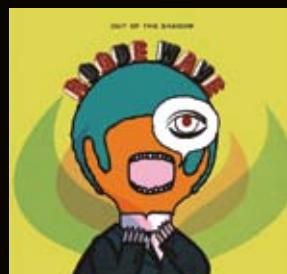
We're not actually sure where the Canadians figure in this scheme of evil/foreigners, but they do seem to feature strongly on the show. From The Barcelona Pavilion and the Blocks Blocks Blocks contingent to the glamtastically bizarre neo-Dada experiment that is Les George Leningrad, hardly a show goes by that doesn't include a track or two from America's cousin.

"The exciting bands will always come from the locales filled with bored art students with good daily skincare regimens. And preferably they will not wear Diesel jeans. Especially not the women. None of the Toronto kids I've met wear Diesel jeans and they are all semiotics majors. I swear, everyone in Toronto is a semiotics major and they all like Beuys and Beat Happening. Reiterating, good skincare can never be underestimated."

WFMU is an independent freeform radio station broadcasting at 91.1 FM in the New York City area and live on the web, Mondays at 11:00pm – 2:00am. You can hear the show archived on www.wfmu.org



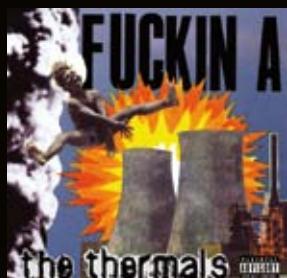
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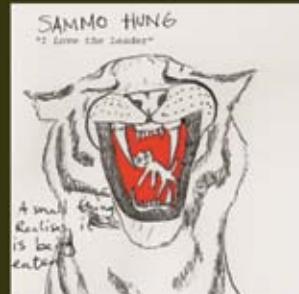
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I Love The Leader (new mix : tweaked by Charlie Francis)

In A Fit of Something (BBC Radio Wales Adam Walton Session)

Bat Squeaks (BBC Radio Wales Adam Walton Session)



The original version of I Love The Leader is on the album 'Stand Up and Swear' which has another 12 songs to keep it company. It got lots of good reviews from journalists and it made some celebrity 'djs' drool. It's already out in good record shops and bigger shops, but not supermarkets. They should stick to selling food.

Sammo Hung play live a lot.....

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Oct 22 : Liverpool. Inner City Sumo at Heaven & Hell

Oct 23 : Manchester. High Voltage at Korumba

Oct 28 : London. Sonic Mook Experiment at OnThe Rocks

Oct 29 : Oxford. Oxford Bands night, The Wheatsheaf

Oct 30 : Bristol. The Anson Rooms, Bristol Uni (with Ivory Springer, Chikinki, Mighty Stars, Geisha and more)

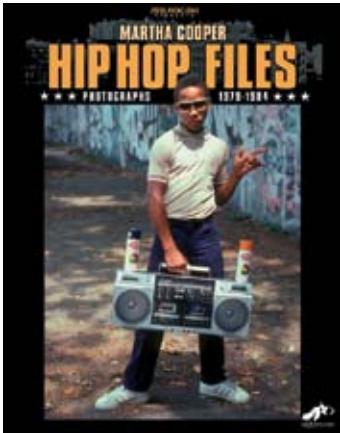
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books

street couture

Words: Pil And Galia Kollectiv



Hip Hop Files

Martha Cooper (From Here To Fame)

In one of his short stories, Will Self describes an anthropologist observing a tribe of natives. Noticing some inconsistencies in their customs, he suggests that the tribe is playing up to the passerby, and that their behaviour is modelled on what they believe the anthropologist's expectations to be.

Looking at Martha Cooper's photographs and reading her descriptions of how she coaxed kids from around New York City to show her their breakdance moves – a trend that was dying out and one that Cooper had some difficulty tracking down – one suspects that something similar occurred during the formative years of hip hop culture. That what we have come to believe is the ultimate street style evolved out of a complex symbiosis of youth, media, music, art and theory.

In a sense, without the records, films, gallery support or journalistic documentation like Cooper's *Subway Art*, it is doubtful this New York fad would have lasted so long. Instead, it became a worldwide phenomenon that gave rise to MCs in Bombay, graffiti-covered trains in Milan, and Russian immigrants winning breakdancing championships in Israel.

It's been 30 years since the birth of hip hop, and 25 years since many of the *Hip Hop Files*' photographs were taken. Cooper's attention to detail and ability to identify significance where others saw only vandalism, noise and crime allows the

modern reader to appreciate how cleverly compact and innovative the culture was.

In a city with no money – NYC declared bankruptcy in the mid-Seventies, and half of Cooper's photographs contain images of derelict blocks – opportunities to change the street's physical nature arose through dancing, MCing at block parties (often stealing the power from lampposts) or bombing whatever surface came your way.

This necessity to overcome material limitations bore a style revolution where nothing was wasted. A torn shoelace became

a fashion statement, an abandoned cardboard box became a dance stage, and a break in an old funk tune became the basis for a whole new musical genre.

It is this same poverty that gave us the minimal noise of Suicide, the torn jeans of the Ramones, the homemade haircut of Richard Hell; and it is an existence that would be unimaginable in Carrie and Giuliani's New York of today.

So what do we get from this reassessment of hip hop in big chrome prints, sponsored by a multi-million dollar clothing label and initiated by a German ex-B-Boy?

A torn shoelace became a fashion statement, an abandoned cardboard box became a dance stage

A reminder that hip hop needs a new focal point, one that moves away from the American dream and its inevitably frustrating search for authenticity.

Or, as B-Boy William Upski once put it: "We are trying to preserve real hip hop... we paint trains even if they don't run. We throw our effort into maintaining a culture we learned from the New York City of the Seventies and early Eighties... hip hop was not created to be preserved like a museum exhibit."

And now that it has been?

Take it all in, and then fuck that shit. Go make something new.



Ball Of Fire: The Tumultuous Life And Comic Art Of Lucille Ball

Stefan Kanfer (Faber)

Ball by name, ballsy by nature. And this biography? It's balls too.

Kanfer starts off with great intentions, pitching a story that goes beyond a saccharine nostalgia for the carrot-haired *I Love Lucy* icon who was America's comedy queen in the pastel-coated Fifties and whose surprised 'O' expression

continues to grace kitsch ornaments bought by millions of adoring fans. Lucille Ball was, after all, the "first woman with economic power in post-war Hollywood", an unlikely and unwilling feminist icon. She deferred to husband Desi Arnaz while married, but after their divorce became a producer and the power centre of one of TV's biggest studios.

From a broken family in suburban nowhere, Ball clawed her way to the top with incredible tenacity, from shop model to B-movie 'drop-gag' girl to TV star.

Neither stunning nor gifted with acting, dancing or singing talents, she took her knack for comedy and learned to make it work. Then she met Desi, a dictatorial, womanising, mercurial and self-destructive Cuban singing star who introduced America to the Conga. Up to that point, this is pretty standard gossipy fluff and flimflam with potential. Potential, however, that isn't realised. The woman who more people watched than Eisenhower's inauguration, and who was described as matching the "facial mobility of Red Skelton" with "the innate pixie quality of Harpo Marx" deserves better. But then, as even Kafner admits, unlike other dead stars, her reputation rises with every year.

Katrina Howat

TechGnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism In The Age Of Information

Erik Davis (Serpent's Tail)

Marshall McLuhan, the media theory guru who coined the idea of the global village in the Sixties, said that, "Technology forces us to live mythically." Four decades on, Davis has again articulated this idea of technology as the alluring trickster in a gargantuan, lyrical, connect the dots between technology and the eternal Gnostic grail of freedom.

It's a sprawling, dense, magical read, crowning Hermes as the god of the information age and exploring electricity as the spirit of modernity. Ben Franklin tames the gods' wrath with his lightning rod, and Beethoven exclaims that, "Music is the electric soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents". Nietzsche meets Hitler meets William Gibson meets Hollywood, as the

Brave New World and the Aquarian Age intertwine.

Gi Gurdjieff's automatons awaken their consciousness through the ecstasy of information. Political powers control us through



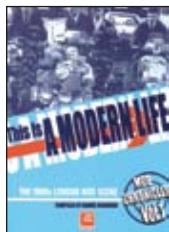
propaganda's 'rhetoric of enchantment'. The Tao of the Dow sees the business world sealing a Faustian pact that trades individuality for money and power. It's a trip alright, a wild Google ride into the past and the future, but one that'll send you off in a million directions.

Katrina Howat

This Is A Modern Life – The 1980s London Mod Scene

Enamel Verguren (Helter Skelter)

This slice of pop culture history comes from a time when you could be beaten up for just looking like a mod, before retro took over. It's the first in a proposed series that should, by rights, cover other parts of



the world. Not that London's own tiny but hugely influential scene isn't enough to start with.

The epicentre of the original mod scene regained its place as the most sharply dressed, fleet-footed town as punk faded into post-punk and The Jam spearheaded the mod revival. Even if you hate the bands, the look and the whole idea of mod, the energy and passion of those involved hook the reader in, with photos and personal histories of those unsung local heroes and underground times making an undeniable impression.

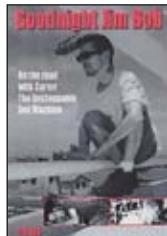
It might not have been punk in look, but it was punk in attitude – a defiant blast of 'I'm not like everybody else' do-it-yourself writ large in fanzines like *Pow!*, *The Way Ahead* and *Whatcha Gonna Do About It*, event-makers like the Camden Stylists, tiny clubs in down-at-heel pubs, intense discussions about original black music versus white beat revival, button-down shirts and scooter accessories.

Katrina Howat

Goodnight Jim Bob

Jim Bob (Cherry Red)

Carter USM were infuriating. The hairstyles didn't help. Neither did the overactive guts. Fourteen Top 40 singles



in the UK is plain absurd, as absurd as all those lip-curdling puns, self-righteous snippets of social commentary and FUCKING T-SHIRT SLOGANS. It was

embarrassing to be caught tapping a toe to a Carter song in public, especially that bloody 'Sheriff Fatman' – and yet, their live shows could be a riot of exhilaration and exhaustion, bruised shins and alcohol. Or, alternatively, crap.

Jim Bob's sprawling biography/travelogue is just as irritating and petulant and inspirational as the band it portrays. Sometimes, it's an absurdist's delight of televised Phillip Schofield punch-ups and asshole immigration officials with weird humour. Other times, it's a dreary litany of missed shows and Adrian's Magic Pants.

But what the fuck. Carter USM were better than all that Suede and Verve and Wonder Stuff crap, and this book is a sometimes bittersweet, sometimes smug, always evocative look at a time that I, for one, would rather forget.

Everett True

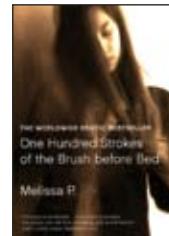
One Hundred Strokes Of The Brush Before Bed

Melissa P (Serpent's Tail)

Much hoopla and ooh-la-la surrounds this 'worldwide erotic bestseller', but it's neither as scandalous nor as dangerous as it'd like to be. Less de Sade or Anaïs Nin than the soft porn dabblings of an Italian teen, at least it's something different from the chicklit of the past few years.

Maybe I'm jaded, but the publicity blurb gushing, "these are the diaries of Melissa's sexual experimentation aged 14 to 18," seems a little too fantastical. There's disappointment to come, and not just at the climax.

Melissa starts with promise. Cluelessly going down on her first conquest, she pines for the heartless cad for months before deciding to go for full-on badness and use men for her own whims as they use her for



theirs. Bondage, outdoor frolics, group sex, swinging, adulterous affairs, older men, lesbian/dominatrix/schoolgirl fantasies – whatever takes the budding Lolita's fancy.

But, of course, what she really wants is someone to love and know the real her. Also, lots of lingerie. Latter: good. Former: not so hot. When you want a sexy read, you want action, not moralising, and the whole good girl playing bad cliché is a real turn-off.

Where's my *Erotic Review*?

Katrina Howat

Billie Morgan

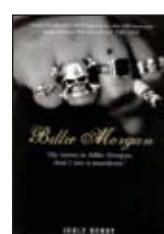
Joolz Denby (Serpent's Tail)

Outsiders; bikers; murderers; Bradford. Who could ask for anything more? Joolz applies her background (punk poetess, founding member of New Model Army, once married a member of the Satan's Slaves biker gang) to the urban tale of a life lived on the fringes of society and the mistakes made therein.

The mistakes aren't the drink, speed, acid and being in a biker's gang called The Devil's Own. No, the mistakes are the big ones: lying, cheating and murder. Heroine Billie Morgan is a 46-year-old spinster who lives with cats, dresses in black, runs a gift shop and doesn't care what anyone thinks about that. What she cares about is looking after her junkie whore 'sister' Jas, trying to make a better life for her 'nephew' Natty and trying to be honest about

what she's done and what she has to do next. The diary-style narrative flicks between a messed-up but idealistic youth in the early Seventies and a regretful but tough adulthood.

This is an acute, funny, tough-talking look at our dreams of who we'd like to be, our fears about who we really are, the way



others see us and the way we see ourselves. It's brilliant, nothing less.

Katrina Howat

The White Stripes And The Sound Of The Mutant Blues

Everett True (Omnibus)

For once, forget the words. Let's examine the design by *Plan B*'s Andrew Clare.

First, the cover. It looks shoddy, indistinguishable from a thousand other cheap cash-ins. (Apparently, it was Clare's 15th choice.) The title is both obscure and meaningless. Not a good start.

Open up the pages, though, and a virtual cornucopia of sidebars, panels, passport photos and flyers confronts you. The design is clear, concise: in other hands, this hubub of information would overwhelm the reader, lost in a profusion of WOB-bed-out text and 'sexy' angled headlines. Clare, however, admirably decides to treat rock biography as a Fifties Sear's catalogue: information and pictures placed squarely on the page, space used to maximum effect. The overall result serves greatly to enhance the reader's reading pleasure.

David Swanen

The Remembered Film

Victor Burgin (Reaktion)

Victor Burgin is known as the godfather of conceptual art. Apart from making art, he writes and lectures at Goldsmiths College in London. My image of Burgin is as a thin

intellectual, self-effacing but prolific, with a halo of curly hair. Apparently, he now wears designer trousers with buckles on.

His latest book is an unconventional look at film theory through the remembered fragments of film and the 'leakage' of cinema into everyday life. True to form, it's a complex and pretty hardcore read, but worth it. His dense and sometimes obscure writing produces a richness of meaning that wouldn't be possible in simpler text.

Isabelle O'Carroll

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comics

the utopian headspace

Words: David O MacGowan

DC have been seriously testing my status as a card-carrying Marvel kid these recent weeks. *Scratch* is a mini-series about a teenage werewolf, with a brief cameo from Batman to anchor it to the DC Universe. The fact that every single DC story has to take place in the same continuity means they have to keep inventing massively epic pan-dimensional crossovers to explain the tiniest of errors: "The wings on The Flash's helmet used to point the other way, you say? Ah, that's because he was actually from Earth Two."

And so on.

However, *Scratch* offers more proof that Sam Keith, the writing and drawing master-brain behind this five-part series, just can't draw uninteresting pictures. His cast of mutated freaks,

crazed man-beasts and backwards yokels sucks the reader in. The plot is a sweet little messed-up bedtime story that almost reads like a pitch for one of those 'Scary Goth' doll ranges, albeit cooler and more unpredictable.

New Frontier is due to be collected into a trade paperback, and thank Christ for that, because my single issues are falling to bits with constant drooling and cramming into pockets to read at every available opportunity.

Darwyn Cooke (he of the gangster-style reimagining of *Catwoman: Dark End Of The Street*) distils all the gosh-wow beauty of Fifties and Sixties superheroes and squirts them onto glossy paper with the compositional eye of a particularly refined cinematographer – dig Hal Jordan getting to grips with his powers by literally moving a mountain! Or Superman being beaten up by a giant robot in Tokyo!

The story, a retrogressive look at Atomic Age USA and the role of their costumed archetypes, is less important than the sense of grandeur. It pumps patriotic fists about "this country of ours", which would have me writing to the editor as 'Disgusted, UK' if it weren't for the suspicion that Cooke's really talking about some United States of Comics – a utopian headspace where we can throw our ridiculous and unrealistic ideals into paper boxing rings.

The *Batman* family of books always offer guilt-free Bam! Pow!



pleasures, but recent developments have been especially kick-ass. A hero-killer called Scarab tries to do in the eponymous hero of *Robin*, with spasmodic kung-fu kiddie art from Damion Scott; *Detective Comics* puts the Girl Wonder through the grill again as she fends off the advances of

icky serial murderer Mr Zsaz.

And Batman himself begins an epic new adventure, 'War Games', which, as often with these expansive, year-long stories, will experience dips and highs, but has got off to a good start with an issue that will cost you all of 10 pence.

The recent passing of one of DC's biggest names, Sixties editor Julie Schwartz, led to the usual muckraking exposés and tearful odes, but the most unpredictable response has been the release – one per week over a course of eight

All of these releases are half-decent eye candy, all include a text piece by Harlan Ellison that makes you want to shoot him, and all are destined never to be read more than once. With one exception.

Grant Morrison is a four-colour god. He can do no wrong. With *DC Comics Presents: Mystery In Space* his task was straightforward, even banal: write a tale based on an Adam Strange cover, depicting the space-age gunslinger trying to decide the fates of two about-to-be-no-longer planets. ("There's only time for me to save one! WHICH SHALL IT BE?") Morrison could so easily have phoned this one in: kitsch pop art here, improbable B-movie sci-fi there, a sprinkling of post-war commentary, *et voilà*. Other contributors on the project haven't bothered, so why should he?

Yet this is a bona fide classic: an incredible creation that will be studied and read about for years if there's any justice. Eleven pages of storytelling that demand your full attention. A slo-mo freeze-frame bubble on paper that forces you to puncture it with the dripping of your own tears; gutsy and brave in places you'd never expect.

Morrison weaves his own voice intermittently into the action like a slightly numbed lover. The main

'Many panels stop you dead with the realisation of what they're actually doing, and that they're getting away with it'



weeks – of one-off homage books under the banner *DC Comics Presents*. Produced by present-day teams, these celebrate Schwartz's favourite gimmick, the cover-led story.

It's a useful tool to encourage dried-up writers and artists, and the way the legend is told makes Julie sound like a galley master, whipping the slaves into action: "Green Lantern on a street corner selling off his power rings" CRACK! "Batman refusing to answer the bat-phone so he can stay in and watch TV" CRACK!



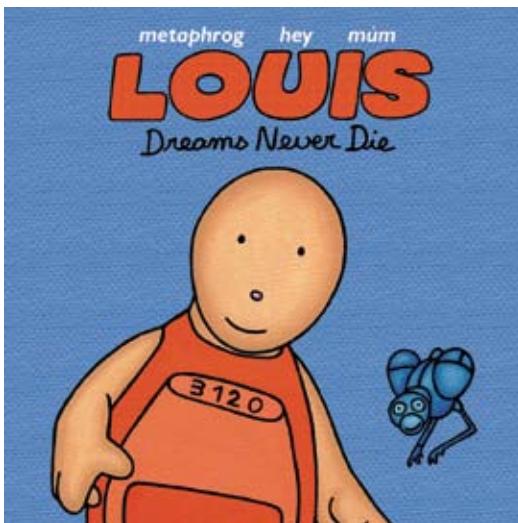
plot, with Adam cutting across his time on Raan, and later on Earth as a military prisoner, is seasoned by authorial bows to Schwartz's vision, to dreams of "white collar supermen [who] blueprint a lost self-image of America's 21st century – suggesting a holy pulp fiction future trampled in the unholy rush to get here." Jerry Ordway pencils, his 'classic' style echoing the quasi-nostalgic tone of Morrison's script.

Many panels stop you dead with the realisation of what they're actually doing, and that they're getting away with it. One panel features the Earth soldier turning to Adam with a camouflage version of his own spacesuit, waxing cynical on the US government's plans for the planet Raan, "An enemy the whole world can hate. Everybody's happy." Today it's my favourite panel. Yesterday it was Adam's girlfriend Alanna in freefall, her thought bubble a love letter to her Earthman paramour. Tomorrow it might be the one with the Sandstorm creatures running amok.

This is a book that I was afraid to close upon reaching the finale. Something just felt different. Apt, really.

I wasn't aware of Julie Schwartz's importance before, but the sense of loss felt by his intimates and acolytes is perfectly communicated to me by this uncanny sensation of saying goodbye to something at the story's end.

Morrison's done it again.



Louis: Dreams Never Die (Metaphrog/Fatcat)

This slick, unusual comic stimulates the eyes and the ears, for it comes with a CD or seven-inch. Quick reading is needed to fully utilise the nine-minute score, but it's a perfect match.

Enter the colour-sodden world of Hamlet and follow the adventures of Louis, a literary blob, as he hunts for his aunt who suffers from 'juggler's twat'. Running around his uniform world and evading all types of predators: dancing carrots, robo-dogs and Hitler lumps, the memory of his aunt begins to haunt him; is she real or is it too hot to think straight? Accompanying Louis on his travels, Hey and Müm provide suitably disturbing background tunes. These blend perfectly with the narrative, adding shards of electro drums when the plot thickens and bursting into brightness as dilemmas are resolved. Full of bold characters and off-the-wall humour, *Louis* attempts to do what *Sophie's World* did for philosophy – only this time it's existentialism for infants. www.metaphrog.com

Jonathan Falcone

Scheherazade: Stories Of Love, Treachery, Mothers And Monsters (Soft Skull)



Megan Kelso's 200-page plus anthology of female cartoonists stands proud as a reflection of women's different and differing approaches to the comic art form. Twenty-three voices offer their own unique perspective on life, love, childhood and fairytales. Queen Scheherazade casts her spell over them all. The iconic storyteller from *A Thousand And One Nights* is paid tribute to in Andrice Arp's blast of an opener, 'The Fisherman And The Genie', a Jim Woodring fantasy version of not one but three of those stories, with panels that lack colour but stand alone as potential T-shirt emblems.

From there, it gets stranger, as the French co-founder of the Le Simo anthology, J Manix, explores a mother and daughter's shopping trip for birthday gifts in rough Jules Pfeiffer style. Eleanor Davis' 'Bird Eater' casts a gothic spell without words, and Canadian animator Amy Lockhart relates the nightmare of childhood girl-bonding in a story that looks like it was drawn by an 11-year-old – albeit a talented one. Rare Creatures creator, Kelley Seda, steals Jimmy Corrigan's head for her story of Olivia, a child whose wicked stepmother tries to break her spirit, but whose doll turns the baddie into tea. Brooklynite Leela Corman documents the confusion experienced by a child seeing a woman die from what she learns is an attempt at home abortion.



girlfriend's thoughts of release when she hears news of her boyfriend dying in a plane crash.

And then there are the strange and playful tales; Sara Varon's dog buying a tiny robot kit and taking it to the beach; or Fantagraphics/Drawn & Quarterly name Ariel Bordeaux's 'Bitches', where dog-women party to Bowie's 'Diamond Dogs'. As all great comic art should, these stories revel in the dark recesses of our brains like a series of crazy dreams.

Katrina Howat

It Disappears: Nate Powell (Soft Skull)

If you're looking for easy entertainment, go get yourself an *Archie* comic, because Nate Powell's second graphic novel is a black-and-white slice of

intellectual surrealism that pulls the reader into the darker recesses of the brain. A young man lights a fire while camping, and finds himself alternating between viewing his future, the lost promises of the past and a dreamy nowhere-land guided by a mutating, riddle-talking animal. This is a fantastical and figurative odyssey about the flimsy grasp we have over time, and the embrace of change, loss and faith in both the whims of fate and the potential of free will. By zooming in and out through different perspectives, Powell has honed the off-kilter angles and line work that made his debut, *Tiny Giants*, such a pleasure. Very cinematic, very dreamlike and very subtle, *It Disappears* is a thoughtful treasure.

Katrina Howat

it disappears... by Nate Powell



The Classic Pin-Up Art Of Jack Cole (Fantagraphics Books)

The reason *Playboy* still holds such an exalted place among men's magazines today, when really it was just the *Maxim* or *FHM* of the Sixties, is because of the work of cartoonists like Jack Cole and Harvey Kurtzman (*Little Orphan Fanny*). Certainly, the pornography itself was nothing to get excited over. (As Bart Simpson once almost said to Hugh Hefner, soliciting guests for Krusty's comeback special, "Where's my smoking jacket and my bubble pipe?")

Cole delighted in depicting voluptuous women in quirky lines and lush watercolour, seemingly oblivious to the stares of distracted men around them as they lounged in office chairs or outsexed their admirers. (As *Maus* creator Art Spiegelman wrote, "Cole's goddesses were estrogen soufflés who mesmerised the ineffectual saps who lusted after them.") Much of this collection of 100 images for *Humorama*, drawn by the much-loved *Plastic Man* artist, hadn't seen print for 50 years. No longer.

Everett True

Pictoplasma Conference October 28-30, Berlin, Germany

Pictoplasma? Think Super Mario, Hello Kitty and those cute little Japanese characters turned into gift and stationery merchandising. Think of the bizarre monsters on Super Furry Animals T-shirts or those sites where you can render yourself online as a comic character – Mr Potato Head-style. Think of skateboard mascots, graffiti icons and promotional logos for video games, clothing and TV programmes. Think, essentially, of cartoon figures (picto) with expressive features (plasma) and the project that began in Berlin in 1999 to archive this unsung art form.

Having produced two bestselling catalogues edited by Peter Thaler and featuring thousands of tiny, animated characters by graphic designers, illustrators, computer whizzes and agencies from around the world, the pictoplasma project has evolved into a launch pad for ideas about the power of graphic language and the playful possibilities of design.

The programme for this three-day event features a comprehensive list of talks and panel discussions from industry contemporaries such as Furi Furi, Gary Baseman, Dalke and Miss Van; along with pixel performances, VJ battles, animation screenings and the opportunity to see your own pictoplasma plush toy.

And if none of that appeals, the accompanying *Characters At War!* exhibition (October 1 – November 5) lets visitors get up close and personal with the most eye-catching creations. Hundreds of 2D figures by the likes of Phunk Studio, Showcat, ACNE, ShagArt and Jim Avignon have been blown up into life-sized cardboard cutouts and placed in a walkthrough 'battlefield installation'. What next? A pictoplasma Disneyland? That could be fun.

Katrina Howat

dvd

visions from the world's edge

Words: Jon Dale



NZ's Flying Nun label was once without parallel – releasing a whole spate of guitar-led masterpieces. Here comes the visual evidence

The Clean emancipated New Zealand pop music. Chris Knox may have been beating at the old ball-and-chain longer (in *The Enemy* and *Toy Love*), but it was the brilliant pop songs wrought by The Clean that established New Zealand's legend in the hearts of forward-thinking music fanatics. It's appropriate, then, that the Flying Nun label's first DVD, *Very Short Films*, should start with The Clean's 'Anything Could Happen', David Kilgour looking bored and cool in Sixties Dylan hair, acting out oblique movements as though the band had developed their own internal logic for engaging with the outside world. The song, and the video, summarised the defiant true fidelity of the best music from NZ, the sense of endless possibilities that manifested itself through the best of the Flying Nun catalogue, and a cavalier attitude to their home country – proud and slightly abstracted, aloof and fiery all at once.

The first half of *Very Short Films* is full of videos that are half-remembered totems of a previous life. Watching Graeme Downes feign absolute disinterest through The Verlaines' 'Death And The Maiden', I felt as though this was a privileged moment of pop history that I'd somehow experienced, yet subsequently forgotten. The first 20 or so videos documented on *Very Short Films* read as a who's-who of great music from New Zealand: the aforementioned Clean and Verlaines, of course, but The Chills (with a spooked, elemental take on their all-time classic 'Pink Frost'), The Bats, Bird Nest Roys, Look Blue Go Purple, The Great Unwashed, a strobe-lit and strained Gordons, and the Tall Dwarfs.

There's also a handful of clips featuring Shayne Carter – from a cameo in 'Death And The Maiden', to his punk days in Bored Games, the much under-rated Doublehappys, to the Straitjacket Fits' 'She Speeds'. This string of videos documents the dilemmas facing follicle fashion in NZ in the Eighties – Carter's hair shifting from a strange mop to a masterfully unpleasant dyed-blond mullet *thing*. Eighties NZ music = good, Eighties NZ hair = bad. But what strikes me the most about these videos is that they absolutely reflected the music. This is video making that isn't limited by low budgets. Rather, it uses restriction to its advantage. Later clips from the likes of JPS Experience have higher production values, but lack the defiance of spirit that's central to great NZ music.

If there's one problem with Flying Nun's approach to archival material and documentation, it's that they sometimes err toward rewriting history to suit their own ends. You could sense this as far back as their legendary *Tuatara* compilation of 1985, where some of the label's most aesthetically and historically important acts like The Rip,

Proud, slightly abstracted, aloof and fiery all at once

This Kind of Punishment, Bill Direen's Bilders, and Scorched Earth Policy were written into the sidelines, acknowledged only in the liner notes. *Very Short Films* meets this erasure a little less than halfway, with one sole appearance from The Cakekitchen, Graeme Jefferies peeling sheets of acid out of his guitar and spilling them all over 'Dave The Pimp'.

Most of the important disturbances wrought by New Zealand's music occurred both underground and in the South Island. When Flying Nun started to drop the ball in the late Eighties, Bruce Russell's Xpressway label stepped in and released a string of visionary titles from The Dead C, Alastair Galbraith, and the Jefferies brothers, among others, while documenting said erased history (an early *Terminals* cassette was subtitled *Living Off The Fat Of Flying Nun*).

A worthy parallel to *Very Short Films*' revision/versioning of New Zealand's underground would be the release of the *X/Way Vision* video on DVD – an entirely other project of recollection. Certainly, it would act as a necessary corrective to the diminished rewards spooled out from the second half, where, for every great piece of mad pop from 3Ds, or drone-rock hedonism from HDU, or Bailterspace's salutary 'Splat', there's some third-rate filler – Garageland? Betchadupa? The D4? Indeed.

But for the first hour or so, *Very Short Films* serves as a salutary reminder of a time when it seemed almost every record from the Flying Nun stable descended from some amazing place, where guitars spilled off-beam visions from six strings, where pop music was never just a piece of fluff: where most every song – and, so, most every video – was invested with a fire and ire. When Flying Nun ruled the country, they acted as a beacon, calling their own brand of outsider spirit into their orb. *Very Short Films* documents the decline, but it also captures the early brilliance. That's trade-off enough.

Black Books – Series 3

(Channel 4)

You don't need to know what this is about: just watch it. It's the only comedy sitcom in the past 25 years, apart from *Father Ted*, worthy of being obsessed over. Like *Fawlty Towers* or *Rising Damp*, Graham Linehan and Dylan Moran's vaudeville-based celebration of dysfunction is a brilliantly taut creation packed with as much surreal nonsense (dancing competitions to Motörhead, hidden bars underneath restaurant tables, whisky through a four-way straw) and one-liners as a half-hour can handle.

Dylan Moran is Bernard Black, the archetypal misanthropic, grumpy, alcoholic, chain-smoking owner of one of those ramshackle second-hand bookshops in Bloomsbury. A half-lovable, half-horrible, anti-everyman, Bill Bailey is Manny, his hippie serf-cum-best friend. Tamsin Grieg is Fran Katzenjammer; single and just as alcoholic and messed up as Bernard.

In this all-too-short final season of three, Bernard won't say sorry for introducing Manny's hand to a sandwich toaster: Manny goes to work for the scary chain bookshop owner next door played by Simon Pegg of *Spaced*; Manny and Bernard write a children's book and Fran ruins a hen night. Manny's moo-ma and moo-pa turn up and Fran makes the mistake of telling Bernard, "It'll be fun". Bernard becomes a gambler and tries to kill his landlord, Benson (a cat). Fran and Manny fall for the charms of a travel writer and all three go to a party and bring back strange liqueurs. There's lots and lots of wine throughout. Raise your glass, and savour every drop.

Katrina Howat

The Residents

The Commercial DVD (Mute)

A domed, shining peak in the eyeball-headed ones' 30-year career, *The Commercial Album* takes an eminently sensible premise and milks it to distraction. The idea is simple: to whittle the three-minute pop song down to its raw elements – the verse and chorus – thus reducing it to around a minute, the length of your average TV commercial.



The resulting 45-minute, 40-track album is a thing of manic economy, deranged ditties that will make you laugh, cry and look nervously round the room as a looming sense of unease takes hold. Titles like 'Love Leaks Out', 'Die In Terror' and 'Moisture' should give you a sense of where their cyclopean heads were at.

The DVD contains the four original one-minute videos made by The Residents to accompany the album – this was in 1980, before MTV – which are now part of the Museum Of Modern Arts collection in New York. On top of that are 10 new films by The Residents, and 30 by artists working in a variety of media. These can be watched in sequence – recommended only if you're

already insane – or by exploring a digital labyrinth of eyeball-esque surprises.

A feast of sights unsound, *The Commercial DVD* is sure to make any party a twitching anxiety fest and turn coach journeys into screaming terror rides.

Mark Pilkington

Galaxie 500

1987-1991 Don't Let Our Youth Go To Waste (Plexifilm)

The title is taken from the Jonathan Richman cover, the stunning centrepiece of this Boston trio's hypnotic, inclement debut album: appropriate for several reasons. First, Galaxie 500's sombre bass and densely-packed guitar lines were just as influenced by the austere minimalism



of Jonathan and the Velvets, as they were by the serious young men of Joy Division and Manchester circa '78. Second, much of this fine two-DVD set is taken from snatched footage of concerts played by Dean, Damon and Naomi while they were in their twenties: hence, a moody sidelong glance here, some backlit footage of

a plane crashing there, carried out with the studied indifference of the young.

This is wonderful stuff: seven live concerts (including the legendarily dour ULU November 1990 show in its entirety), a UK television appearance featuring an acoustic reading of 'Here She Comes Now', a few early songs like 'Tugboat' and 'Oblivious'



given wary outings, four music videos including 'Fourth Of July' (a poignant tribute to Manhattan) and a booklet that is laugh out loud droll.

But no Kramer? For shame.

Everett True

Various

Plastic Donkey II (www.plasticdonkey.com)

A second layer for ET's favourite DVD-zine: this one sees live and video footage of Young People, Les Savy Fav and a rather over-exitable Hawnay Troof jostling for space with a return for the already legendary World Indie School – bands put through a mathematical equation blender, and danced to by small

plastic figures and Postman Pat in his van. Well worth the fiver for Young People and the free Gemini sticker alone. Mine even came with a free Steerage CD!

Everett True

Ramones

Raw (Image) The Who

The Kids Are Alright (Sanctuary)

Calm down. Take a deep breath.

This Ramones DVD features OVER 5 HOURS OF MATERIAL! Do you know how little Ramones footage is actually out there – compared to that from their immediate peers, The Sex Pistols and Blondie? There are a handful of cheesy videos, a great live CD recorded in 1978, but... No. Very little.

OK, so this is mostly the Ramones horsing around, playing genial jokes on one another (executive producer Marky Ramone is caught with his pants around his ankles in the loo: Johnny and Joey appear on the Howard Stern show in some incomprehensible segment featuring US presidents and a mock golf course) but fuck it. It's nice to see Dee Dee spread out all casual in the back of a van, Joey perplexed by kangaroos during an Aussie zoo photo call, Johnny speaking. Plus, all of this is

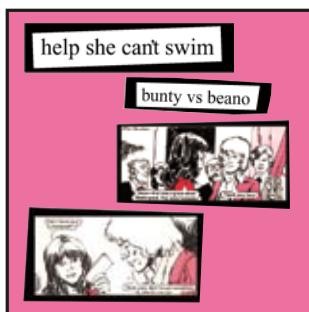


interspersed with archive video footage of a 1980 live show – would've been nice if it'd been '76, but whatever – and some other clips, performance and TV appearances (plus a feature-length commentary which seems a fraction unnecessary). Indeed, with Ramones' fondness for moving from one song to the next as fast as Johnny's hands can move, there are at least 25 live songs featured... fucking nirvana to me, pal. Gabba gabba fucking yeah!

I'm throwing The Who DVD in here, because Joey always loved The Who. I dig Joey the most, and if he tells you from beyond the grave to check their shit out – 100 minutes of unseen footage, plus the usual feisty rehearsals, smashed guitars and freewheeling rampages – then go and do it. OK?

Everett True

help she can't swim



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games

pure sensation

Words: Kieron Gillen

Robotron 2084 will leave you a twitching mess

For the last day and a half, I've been possessed by videogames. Not as a healthy lifestyle accessory, but as life. All other activities existed solely to support the urge to devour yet more games. This is why:

It starts, as these things should, in a bar and with a girl. The girl is one of my sharper-thinking peers, and – her innards coated in booze – she rants on the ever-popular topic of people missing the fucking point. She singles out a games commentator who thinks the form dumbly regressive due to the lack of careful shading in the emotions it can present. For example, videogames can't reproduce, "That feeling you get when you think you see an ex, except it's not really an ex and you get disappointed and scared simultaneously", and so are rubbish, since literature excels at such complexity.

But if it comes to – say – trying to reproduce how it feels to hurtle down a mountain, in a blizzard, on a metal tray, games every time, fuckhead. The problem with videogames is that they, like every new cultural form, find themselves tricked into fighting the establishment on its own territory. So



It's the gaming equivalent of locking yourself in a hotel for a weekend and freebasing

what if videogames can only do primary colour emotion? They do such sensations with a purity, directness and power that nothing can match. Pop music comes the closest, but videogames have a consistency in hitting their emotional targets than music can't equal. As much as I love the Johnny Boy single, it doesn't leave me breathless every time the needle hits the groove, unlike – say – the twitching mess I am after half an hour on *Robotron 2084*.

Waking up the next day, with the argument ringing in my ears, I decide it's time to put my physical health where my critical doctrine has led me. I lob my PC into a car and drive to a LAN party in a friend's flat. You probably don't know what these are. Put it like this: such a gathering is the gaming equivalent of locking yourself in a hotel for a weekend and freebasing. It is, by the strictest definition of the word, abuse.

We emerge from the sunless hole at some point after dawn the next day, hands aching, my guts a tight coil of caffeine, junk-food and spent adrenaline. Old sweat coats my skin. I feel debased and dirty.

It's glorious.



An advertisement for CCA Glasgow. The background features a person from behind, wearing jeans and a cap, holding a video camera and filming a landscape under a cloudy sky. The text 'set film free' is prominently displayed in large red letters, followed by 'For free entry for a friend to the movies and more visit: www.cca-glasgow.com'. At the bottom, there is additional text: 'Free exhibitions, Film, Kids Club, Bookshop, Music, Spoken Word, CCA Bar, Performance, Restaurant, Club Nights' and the address '350 Sauchiehall St, Glasgow G2'. The CCA logo is in the bottom right corner.

games profile

Katharine Neil

Words: Kieron Gillen

Videogames as vehicles for political activism? It's time the medium grew up

"Games may train you to shoot better," the voice crackles down the phone.

"You probably are a better soldier after playing lots of these games – but that's not a reason to ban them. There's already a state monopoly on violence, so at least you can go down the shop and train yourself."

The words echo Ian Svenonius' claims of the AK-47 as equaliser of the underclass, but the source is Australian games creator, Katharine Neil. She's one of the minds behind *Escape From Woomera*, a political videogame that highlights the state of refugee detention camps in Australia.

She's an atypical developer. While training to be a concert pianist, she found herself alienated by the discipline's conservative structure and left its confines, being told that she had "no control of her eccentricities". Afterwards, she realised that realm simply wasn't relevant. What interested her was work as a self-confessed leftie hack activist, her new studies of electronic music and the mid-Nineties love of virtual reality as an emergent art form. She rediscovered her childhood passion of games. As if by magic, she found herself in the depth of the games industry as an audio engineer for a mainstream Australian developer. "Over the past six years," she claims, "I've become more into the idea of games and less about the idea of sound."

It's not just her that's changing, either. "I've seen new people come into games development, while there's an old guard that's leaving. They're less nerdy than they were before. They're more educated and take games more seriously. It has the potential to be a sophisticated media form."

"We're trying to turn around the whole heroism thing. Instead of playing some big American soldier going in and beating up people in the Middle East, I wanted to be the kind of hero I want to be," she notes. "Seeing the world through the eyes of a refugee coming to Australia, and exposing the inside of a world that you're literally not allowed to see."

Does *Escape From Woomera* trivialise the subject matter? Katharine references *Special Force*, the game made by Hezbollah. "That, to me, vindicates games using serious material," she notes, "Hezbollah made a game about campaigns where their comrades died. If they take games seriously enough to make a game about their campaigns, that's serious enough for me to show that questions like death and violence in games are worthwhile. It's kind of a marker in history."

www.escapefromwoomera.org



Thief: Deadly Shadows

(Xbox/PC)

Ion Storm/Eidos

1998: *Thief* is released. The gaming world, not being used to games which force you to be weak and scared, ignores it. A sequel, made possible by the game's sleeper audience, is released later. It's not enough to save the developers, long-



suffering subversives Looking Glass Studios, from folding shortly afterwards.

2004: Ion Storm release *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, a loving update that evokes its less glossy predecessors and finds its own voice. The concept survives: crouch in corners waiting for the guard to turn his back so you can slip past. The aural experience is still peerless, all creaky floorboards, humming servants and pure white noise. The gripping story of an approaching but unstoppable Dark Age is told through hushed, overheard exchanges and scribbled notes. This instalment retains all the impact of the first.

Aanand Prasad

The Chronicles Of Riddick

(Xbox)

Starbreeze Studios/Vivendi

The gaming prequel to *Pitch Black*, *The Chronicles Of Riddick* succeeds in surpassing the source material. And who'd have thought there were enough polygons in the world to model Vin Diesel's manly arms?

A visceral gaming experience, you snap necks, eviscerate guards and punch your way out of showers. It's smartly dumb, taking cinematic aspects from the highest points of popcorn movies, and adding a tight script.

Once again, a lowly computer game has demonstrated a keen understanding of what the audience wants: action and violence.

Dazmeister

Doom III (PC)

iD Software/Activision

A decade ago, the digital bloodlines of today's staple genres were seeded by a handful of videogame titans. They proved that a collection of blocky sprites and distorted, trash-MIDI sounds could bring us emotional rushes of laughter, sadness, elation and fear. iD Software's



Doom earned its place in that pantheon as a bringer of fear, preying on our childhood ghosts of wardrobe monsters and sudden noises in the dark.

Today iD release *Doom III* and, again, a marine's usually pedestrian guard duty becomes a linear survival war against hellish forces. Since the first instalment, 10 years of technological progression have brought towering graphic and sonic sophistication to the claustrophobic tunnels, in which your fear is salved only by the weight of the ludicrous arsenal you accumulate.

But, though shocks are many and frequent, *Doom III* eventually falls to the threefold curse of repetition, cliché and tedium. The one-trick nature of *Doom III* and its fundamental similarity to the original swiftly tarnishes its glamour. But maybe for those who never had the opportunity to fear the imp in the cupboard, or those who revel in nouveau-nostalgia, the nightmares could come again.

Always Black



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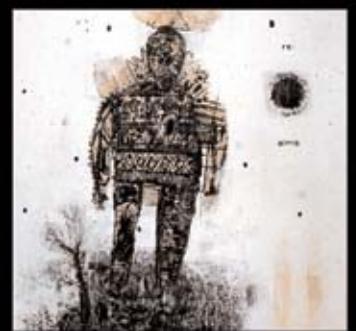


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Words: Ian Svenonius
Illustration: Søren Mosdal

a warning to swedish girls

(an open letter)

London is teeming with lovely Swedish girls, each one manning the post at some bogus internship while riding on their own nation's largesse. By day, they capitalise on their phlegmatic Nordic drawl. By night, they prowl the putrid clubs of the city and mechanically gyrate with their anaemic English counterparts.

Swedish girls are the most sought after of all girls, not because of their supposed beauty and blondeness, but because of the maternal nature of their nation's welfare state. This has an enormous psychic impact on infantilised modern man's desire for security which, due to barren self-awareness, is displaced as imagined carnal longing. Their country's neutrality, and its wealth, also makes them very hot.

Each Swedish girl is there in hope of snaring an English boy – a Damon Albarn or Jarvis Cocker of her own. The Swedish girl's self-perceived northern isolation has given her an inferiority complex that makes her feel positively provincial. Therefore, they are obsessed with being chic. And the English boyfriend, like any other chic accoutrement, is a must-have.

The Beatles are ultimately responsible, for without them England would be revealed as a chilly version of Portugal; a conservative backwater left only with distant memories of imperial glory. Before the Fab Four, England was drab and bowler-hatted; the parliament wore wigs, the food was bad and the morality stultifying. In the

days preceding Beatlemania, Anita Ekberg and Ingrid Bergman were in Italy, almost certainly making love to their respective directors. The English were only an aberrant, half-Teutonic curiosity without any major contribution to painting, cinema, ballet, opera or symphony. And they were conservative; the art movements which transformed aesthetics through modernism, surrealism, Bauhaus, cubism, et al, didn't include any notable Englishmen.

With The Beatles, the Englishman was, for the first time ever, desirable. He displaced the Latin lover who had been the mainstay of western feminine romantic fantasy since the high Middle Ages, when the French and Italians compiled the *Romance De La Rose* and *The Art Of Courtly Love*. The Beatles also sparked interest in English fashion and film, and soon Richard Lester was a bigger name than Rossellini, Bunuel or Truffaut. The British music trade papers capitalised on this windfall with a cunningly crafted critical regime, transforming a teeny bop world of pop into a moptop court of Versailles. Ever since, they've held the continent transfixed with the latest wind change, folly or foible.

The soap opera they created (The Beatles vs The Stones/The Clash vs The Jam/Judas Priest vs Queen) endures to this day. The Englishman's newfound attractiveness was simultaneously buoyed by a film industry that fomented their snobbish ideal internationally. All this propaganda resulted

in a sexual dominance that has held sway for 40 years now, giving the ultimate reward by the standards of western sexual commerce today: Swedish girls. The Englishman reaps the dual prize of erotic liberalism and maternal Euro-communism. But, remember this, Swedish girls: your prized, pouty Englishman may seem to swing but, in reality, he is the gouty father of the ugly American.

Indeed, the modern US culture, with its awful food, industrial blight and softcore imperialism that you Europeans love to decry traces its ancestry directly to Old Blighty. The Americans merely took the baton from their lime-gnawing spiritual masters. It could be argued, even, that the oft-mentioned American hegemony is an English one. US dominance on the world stage began at Great Britain's behest with their imperial contraction at the end of World War I.

England, because of the enduring myth of charm and chivalry borne of its artistic export, is excused from a history of genocide, despite offences that rival LBJ, Himmler and Tamerlane. Its troops marched every indigenous inhabitant of Tasmania into the ocean, for example. The reason for Europe's pathetic general complaisance with Hitler during WWII was a nearly unanimous aversion to England.

Belgium was an English invention, created to castrate French naval power after Napoleon. Belgium became (like Poland

The English pub on a Monday afternoon is scarier than a Detroit drug war, and its tribal rituals more bizarre

(later) an English protectorate, giving Britain the right to enter into continental politics at will. Israel is the modern analogy, a state initially sponsored by England in order to give them access to the highly strategic holy land.

How did the English pull off these fiendish stunts? With the race of violent chauvinists who roam there still. The English pub on a Monday afternoon is scarier than a Detroit drug war or a Mississippi cross burning, and its tribal rituals more bizarre. The Britons throw darts and bricks at their athletes during football matches, sometimes hitting them in the eyes. Meanwhile, gangs of feral youth conduct their 'war on the terraces' with office knives and other awful, ordinary implements. The English sports enthusiast is feared and reviled the world over for his unreconstructed behaviour.

Their nightclubs are little better. When the 'lad' spies the 'bird' he desires to 'shag' he need only bark five words; "Get your coat; you've pulled." She complies. Is this the world you're prepared for, Swedish girls?

In all fairness though, we must accredit the English with their considerable cultural contributions: Triangular teabags. Wonderful toast. Powell and Pressburger. Mike Leigh and Alan Clark. Ken Loach, Nicholas Roeg, Peter Cooke, *Billy Liar*, et cetera.

And then there's The Kinks, The Beatles, The Who, The Adverts, The Clash, Gang Of Four, The Pop Group, Swell Maps, The Smiths...it's true; the aesthetic presented by the great English groups was neither chauvinist nor hooligan. But the secret with them was gay management. All the aforementioned groups were simple yobs who had theatre-connected modish homosexuals pulling the strings. They whispered conceptual titbits into the ears of their dashing young pupils, who otherwise would've been exposed as crazed brutalists.

A gay rock manager may not make an ideal boyfriend, however. But perhaps he could be convinced to manage the relationship? Well, yes, that might work. The guy will look good with the hair and anaemia while the manager, on his way to constructing the perfect art-school rock combo, will suppress your man's ultra-violence by teaching him about Bunuel. Your love affair could have the aplomb and pretence of The Who and the 'mania' and 'love' ideology of The Beatles.

Unfortunately, a manager is expensive. You'll have to give up 20 per cent of your boyfriend...

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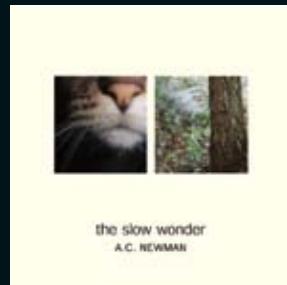
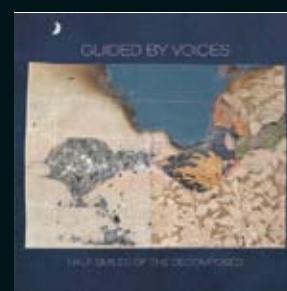
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