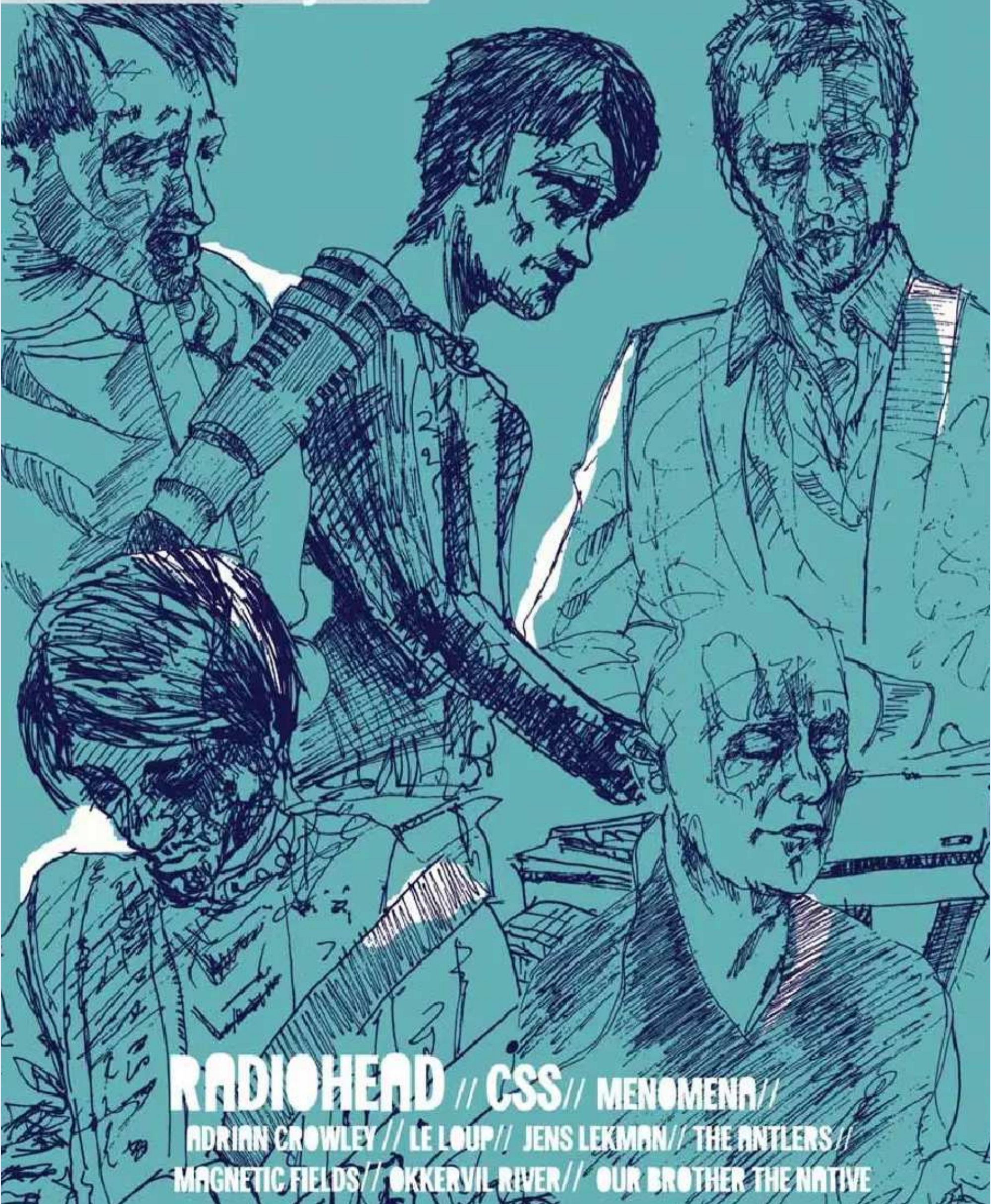


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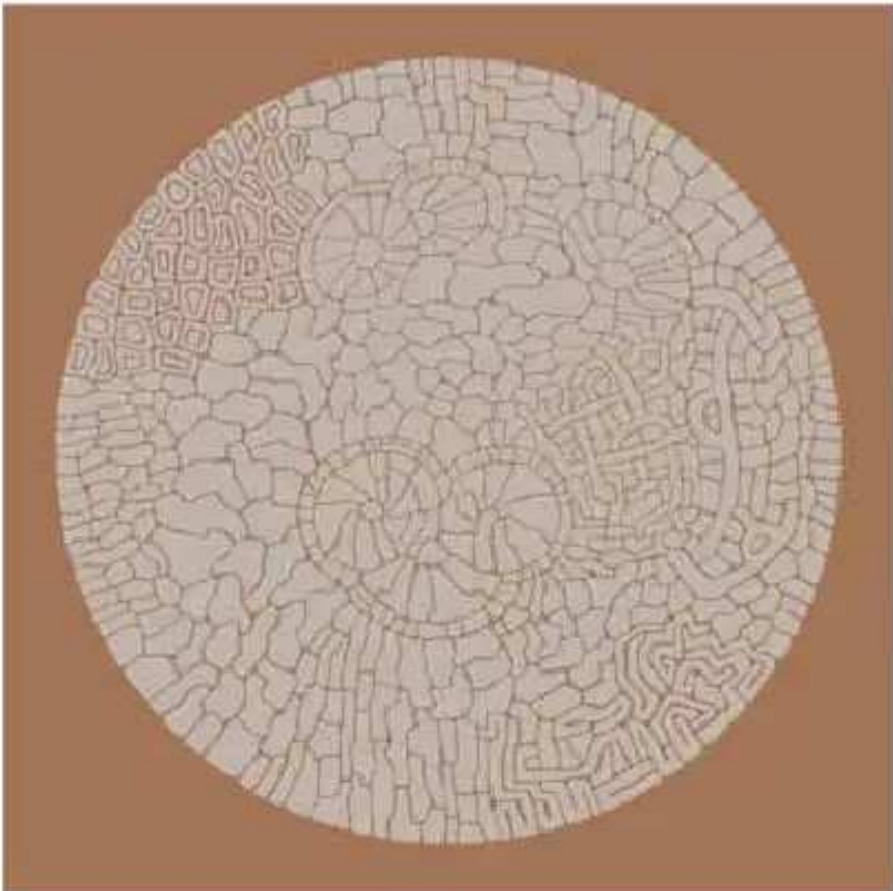
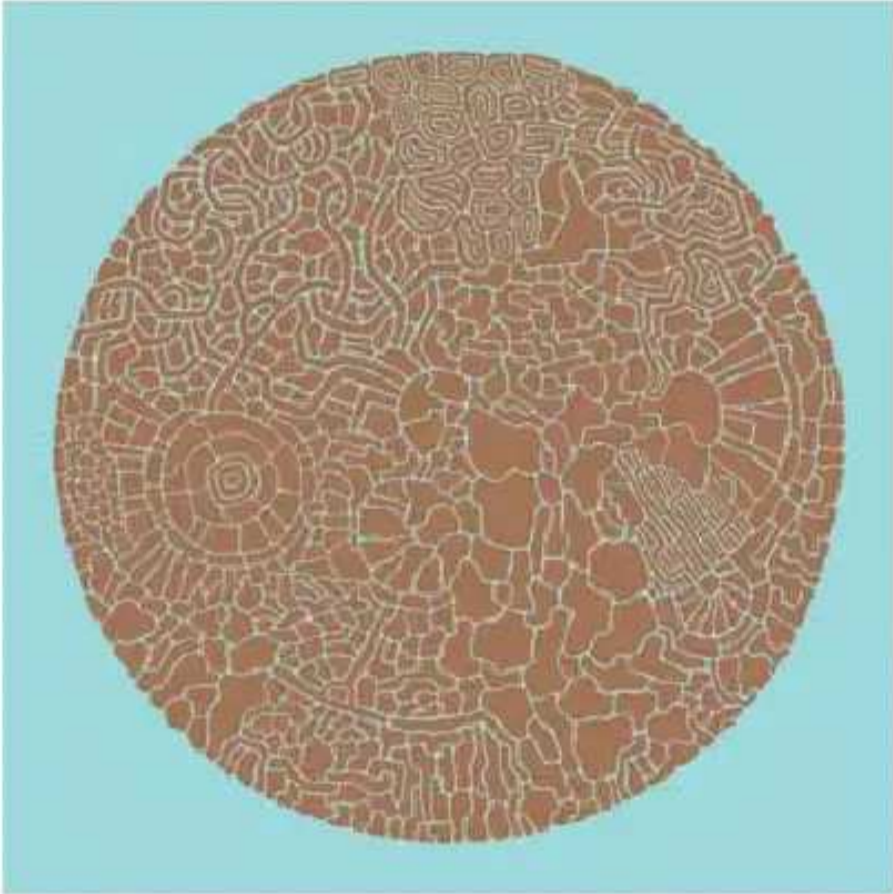
Issue 3. February 2008



RADIOHEAD // CSS // MENOMENA //

ADRIAN CROWLEY // LE LOUP // JENS LEKMAN // THE ANTLERS //

MAGNETIC FIELDS // OKKERVIL RIVER // OUR BROTHER THE NATIVE



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EDITORIAL

I never really know what to say in these things, I guess it's a relief to make it to Issue 3 and prove that we're in this for the long haul. Now more than ever is a magazine such as Analogue is needed to keep music fanatics up to speed with all the great new music being produced by bands such as Menomena, Le Loup and Our Brother the Native. Like I've always said we aim to ask the questions that you want to hear the answers to, I think in this issue more than any other we've really strived to do this. We're still working on a few glitches in the design end of things but I definitely think we're improving with each issue. We'll hopefully be back with a fourth issue in the coming months, which will be as always free. I'm going to finish up with a plug, Darragh's twin brother, Ciarán makes some really impressive ambient electronic music under the name Storkboy Choons, he's supporting Casiotone for the Painfully Alone along with the brilliant Ugly Megan in whelans on the 9th of March. You should head along if you're free. Most Irish electronic music is shit but this is class. www.myspace.com/storkboychoons

Brendan McGuirk, Analogue Editor

STAFF

EDITOR: Brendan McGuirk

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Ailbhe Malone, Conor O'Neill

WEB EDITOR: Gareth Stack

DESIGN: Brendan McGuirk, Zoe Manville, Chris Flynn

ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE: Nicola O'Dwyer

ILLUSTRATIONS: Sarah Jane Comerford, Zoe Manville, Nick Johnson

WRITERS:

Paul Bond, Andrew Booth, Karl McDonald, Olwyn Fagan, E. M. Gallagher, Daniel Gray, Aidan Hanratty, Nick Johnson, Conor O'Neill, Ailbhe Malone, Darragh McCausland, Brendan McGuirk, Gareth Stack.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Loreana Rushe, Kate Southall.

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CONTACT: www.analoguemagazine.com // analoguemagazine@gmail.com

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All serious complaints to:
Editor,
Analogue Music Magazine,
D.U. Publications,
House 6,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2.



TECHNOLOGIQUE

There are certain things you tend to associate with the French. Cutting edge music is not one of them. Or at least it wasn't up until quite recently. Things look set to change, however, as France continues to dish up the newest and most exciting acts in the field of electronic music today. Looking at the lists of breakthrough dance acts of 2007, it's difficult to ignore the predominantly gallic theme that's overtaken clubland in the past 12 months. Tunes such as DJ Mehdi's *I am Somebody* and SebastiAn's *Walkman* have gained considerable play in clubs across the world while Justice's *D.A.N.C.E.* not only enjoyed huge commercial success but was also remixed by dance maestros MSTRKRFT. If that doesn't spell success, then I don't know what does.

This is not an entirely new thing. France is, after all, home to Daft Punk, arguably of the biggest and most influential dance acts in the world and a group who are responsible at least in part for the huge rock/electronic crossover phenomenon of today. We must not forget Cassius or Alan Braxe either who have been producing funky house since the mid 1990s. Asides from them however, most people would have been hard pressed to come up with many other groundbreaking French artists had you asked them a year or two ago. Oh how things have changed!

Walk into any club tonight and you will more than likely hear the sounds of one of the Ed Banger crew pumping from the sound system. Frenzied yet melodic, funky but with a healthy dose of grit, today's french electro is noisy, brazen and in your face. Characterised by ear splitting treble, tight edits and 80s glitz, the dance music of today is unmistakably gallic and undeniably cool.

Sick of big name DJs spinning shit tunes to crowds of people too mashed off their faces to even notice, the French have taken matters into their own hands and the result has changed the sound of dancefloors worldwide. A far cry from the four-on-the-floor house and techno of yore, today's electro is considerably more innovative, drawing influences from rock, metal, hip hop and funk. The result? A sound that is uniquely french and extremely cool. The difference between the Ed Banger crew and superstar dance acts of the nineties is that this lot really don't give a fuck. The label is their own and thus the artists have little by way of creative restrictions. In fact, they have none. Pedro Winters, AKA Busy P, founded the label in 2003 with the aim of creating the type of music that he himself wanted to hear when he went out. Long time manager of Daft Punk, Winters felt that electronic music had lost the plot a bit somewhere along the way and wanted to reinstate the fun, the noise and the colour in dance culture. He has been successful in doing so. Boasting acts such as Justice, Mr.Oizo, SebastiAn, Uffie and Feadz, Ed Banger is

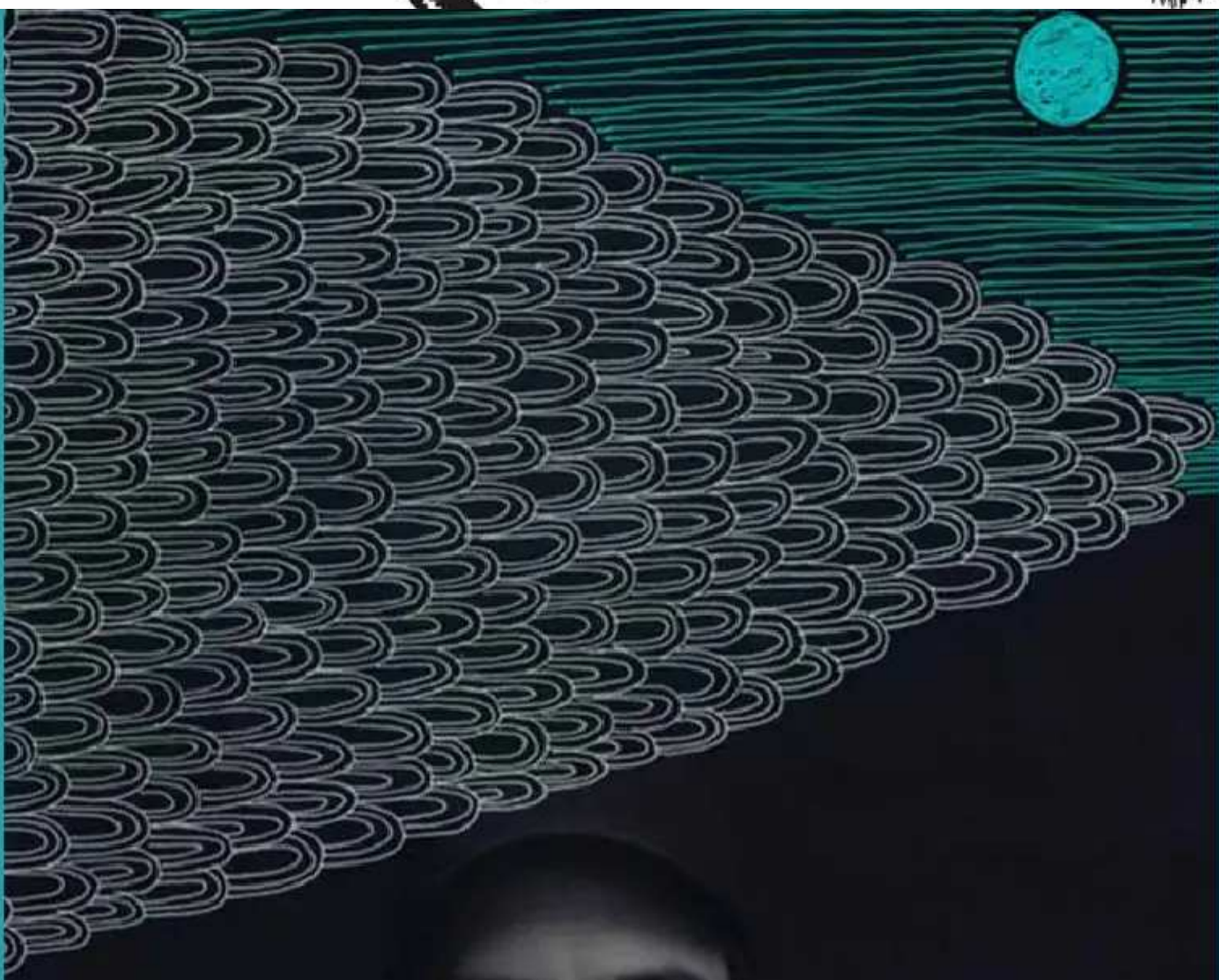
home to some of the biggest rising stars of today. And it's not just the ravers who are taking notice. Indie kids, perhaps bored by the increasingly homogenised rock scene have started turning to electronic music, kicking off their converse in favour of high top fluoro trainers and finally learning to dance. This movement, dubbed "Rock 'n' Rave" by *mixmag*, is lead by DJs such as Erol Alkan, a fan of the Ed Banger lot since the very beginning. Alkan himself readily admits that his roots lie in the world of indie, and notes that today's generation can't relate to the rave culture of the nineties, as they simply weren't there. This is where Busy P *et al* come in. Having grown up around trash metal themselves, they are now producing a bizarrely danceable type of cacophony, never heard before in clubs or indeed anywhere else.

The Ed Banger crew are innovative in that they are fusing genres which have traditionally been considered at opposite ends of the musical spectrum, and therefore creating a sound that is utterly unique. Fancy a bit of disco metal? Try *Rainbow Man* by Busy P. Feel like a little electro-hop? Check out Uffie and her mates TTC. Their music is recklessly fun, sticking two fingers up at the corporatisation of dance music and as such giving a voice to youth culture. Clubbers are tired of hearing the same thing over and over again. So are DJs. The music coming from France is now remedying this fatigue as dance music is returning to what it was originally supposed to be; music you can shake your thang to.

The strange thing about this gallic movement is that the French themselves are taking very little notice of it. Despite the fact that the Ed Banger and Kitsuné collectives are getting people dancing again on this side of Europe and indeed across the pond in the US, the French themselves are remaining unusually blasé about the whole thing. The reaction

of both the French press and public towards their new wave of superstar DJs has been surprisingly lukewarm and the majority of Ed Banger's parties are held outside of their homeland. Not that they've much to worry about though, having received extremely positive feedback from fans and critics alike in the press and in internet forums in recent times. These guys seem are on to a good thing and show no signs of packing up soon. With most of their artists due to release something in 2008 and their live shows gaining quite a reputation amongst today's generation of clubbers, it seems these these guys have cracked the code and brought dance music back to its roots. They are making noise funky again, making sweat drip from the ceilings of clubs all over the world and amazingly, not taking themselves to seriously while doing so. Having already made their mark on the club scene in 2007, the French show no signs of retreating and luckily so. Clubs would be a hell of a lot duller without them.

Words: Olwyn Fagan



ADRIAN
CROWLEY

It was a normal dull Friday afternoon when I met Adrian Crowley in the Central Hotel to talk about the release of his latest album 'Long Distance Swimmer' and his impending success. He had been doing interviews all morning and even a photo shoot with the Business Post but still had time to do a last minute interview with Analogue. As we begin our conversation, Adrian is soft spoken and thoughtful, choosing his words slowly and considerately. He seems genuinely surprised

~~by how quickly his latest release has garnered praise and accolade from critics at home and abroad.~~ 'Long Distance Swimmer' has been nominated for the Choice Music Prize for Irish album of the year, an acknowledgement that both humbles and vindicates Adrian.

How does it feel to make the shortlist?

I'm really delighted because I kind of got used to not being included in that kind of thing. Well I suppose since I've been releasing records I got used to my own dynamic of everything, I never really felt what I do lent itself to what might be popular especially in Ireland, which it has been to be honest quite a hard thing to take.

So making the list really felt like a justification or vindication.

Definitely yeah, it's an endorsement that's really important to me so yeah if nothing else, to be on the list, that's brilliant.

Well you've topped many critics album of the year list so you must have a quiet confidence when it comes to the award.

I wouldn't start driving myself mad about it but it's given me, well I wasn't lacking in a certain confidence before, self belief I certainly had. I'm just ~~really bowled over by in just a short period of time~~ in the UK and here in Ireland, in a few weeks there's been like an avalanche of feedback that I can't get through. Rich from the label called me yesterday and joked saying he needed to hire someone else to read all the stuff that's been coming through. Well he's exaggerating but it's given me confidence and put an extra shot of excitement into my arm because this record has been ready for quite some time. I've even started another one in the meantime and I've toured this already before it was released, I've quite a few shows in the UK, which is essentially touring the new material but no one could obviously buy the record. And I would happily go touring it for another twelve months which I probably will do so I'm not sick of it or anything. I got so used to it being in my life that there was this tension, I wasn't consciously playing down the release. I just

wasn't aware that it was going to be a sudden, could be a sudden spark. And you're never guaranteed any reaction anyway.

I suppose it's kind of strange situation to in where you've been touring with the album of a couple of months and then releasing it because I'm sure when you finished it, you were like this is it.

When I finished it I really realised that there were all these signs and signals but the time when we were making the album with Stephen Shannon, the engineer. Just that week, we chose a week in my house, my sisters place, to record and it was just the kind of thing you know can only happen once. We were really conscious that it was going to be a recording to turn some corner and it was a very exciting feeling and when it was finished, I've always been really really excited with a new recording, it's just a brilliant feeling but with this one, I felt from early on that it had its own will, it had its own legs.

Did it feel like it was really special when you were recording it?

Definitely, there this overall atmosphere where it was really amicable. I had asked a few people to come and play, James Yorkston came over. There was a buzz before we started recording it. I had done some rough stuff that I had sent to James, I had already decided to record and I said by the way James, would you like to play a bit on this, he was the first to kind of get excited about it. The recordings were typical hissy bad sound quality but something was there, there were hints of arrangements, there was atmosphere to it that is in the final recording too I think. And then when Stephen and I were making it, it was like really hard work, harder than the hardest job if you can imagine, in terms of being tiring but at the same time, you'd be tired out but exhilarated.

Yeah you recorded in 5 days.

Yeah about a week.

I know that you said that you recorded it in your sisters house and the PR release says that it was recorded "behind a fortress of mattresses" which I think is really great. Do you think that this approach to recording really adds that distinctive sound? You were talking about hissy sounds, obviously there's not like a 4-track type hiss over.

Well in the final version you do hear, Stephen and I were talking about this after listening back to some of the songs, at the beginning of one of the songs there's this guitar figure and you see the

stairwell when you hear it, well we do. It invokes the room the songs were recorded in and it's funny, maybe it's just our point of view, it's got this homely sound but it's got this very lush swanky sound at the same time I think. It's sort of like it's a really hi fi record but it's got this home feel.

Like a lo fi undercurrent.

Yeah it does and nothing is badly recorded but there was an approach we had, minimal. If you want to take the example of how some people record, they take it apart and put other parts together. Even one vocal line could have twenty pieces from different takes you know, a lot of people record like that and you'd never know when you hear it I suppose but we just went with single takes for all the vocals. There is a roughness to the vocals I suppose but they're all untampered.

A lot of albums now seem too polished and over produced, it's not recorded badly there is a distinctive sound to it. Did you record all the parts of the album live together?

Well, there was no way that we could get clarinet, cello, violins and concertina all down at the same time, but anytime we were recording, say, the drums and guitar, that was live. The shapes of the songs were going down really quickly, and you could sit back and listen to the previous day's take. In the meantime, after that, Stephen booked the studio and we recorded two more songs. Then we spent months and months and months doing mixes. So the recording process was pretty fast, but we remixed a few times. We didn't want to be nerdy about it, but it's such an important thing to be happy with the mixes.

The instrumentation on the album is amazing. When you were writing the songs, did you have certain instruments in mind?

I knew I'd have cello, violin and viola. I had rough ideas of where things should sit. I knew I wanted electric guitar for most of the album, and for two different drummers to play. Basically I play a lot of instruments rudimentarily and that, so I was able to get some sounds going at home, on violin and harmonium and piano. I wanted to leave it open to some of the players to be able to express themselves, but I had quite a clear view of what instruments should be there. Some of it came about by experimenting as well.

I love the way most of the songs have a really slow subtle build and the way the instruments come in, like 'walk on part' and 'leaving the party', everything doesn't kick in until a minute and half or two minutes in. Was it really hard to get the balance and the dynamics right?

It probably would have been if I hadn't developed a lot from playing live, there's a swell that's in my music that has come up gradually through playing and from playing with others, there's a band I was playing with in London, any time I was touring in England they would play with me, mainly a string section and drummer but even when I was by myself I realised there was a natural crescendo or a swell that was becoming a part of what I do, a gradual dynamic with this kind of rolling building tension and that wasn't something we thought

would be a nice angle to take, when we were recording, it was there already. It's part of what I do, so with those songs you mentioned it was already there.

How do you feel about comparisons with Nick Drake, was he an influence on you at all? A lot of the Cello instrumentation is very complimentary in a way that he would have used.

Yeah but... I love him, I don't have all his records actually. I discovered quite a long time ago and I instantly loved his music with the exception of one record but I can't even remember which one it is. It's the one that has dodgy backing vocals, do you know that one? With 'Poor Boy' or something...

Oh, Bryter Later. That's the jazzier one.

Yeah but all his other ones are incredible. Anyway to answer your question, it's very easy to make the comparison. I don't mind it as such. It's a dangerous territory, I've just finished reading 'White bicycles' by Joe Boyd and in the section where he was talking about Nick Drake, he was describing the first time he heard a demo tape that Nick had made at home and describing what happened within his life and everything. And then in Joe Boyds career as an A & R person for Hannibal, he had a section in the room for demos labeled white male singing acoustic guitar with sad voice and they were all obviously trying to emulate Nick Drake. I'm not trying to emulate anybody, what I mean to say is it's very easy to make the comparison. It's not far off either because I love his music and I love his words and way of singing. And if it makes it easier for someone to get a feel for what I'm trying to do, that's fine. I imagine every single music magazine that you pick up at any time will have some reference to him which is amazing, I mean he's so influential. I'm not sure if the comparison holds any... the impact of the comparison might have been less than it used to be. It loses impact after a few decades I think!

Just to come back to the album, the theme of the sea runs throughout the album. Why did you choose to link each song in this way?



Well, the thing is, I didn't really choose that at all and I didn't notice. It's a funny thing because I remember I did this interview with Pearl on Phantom a couple a years ago. I wasn't playing in the studio, she asked me to bring some records and choose some songs to play from my record collection. And we'd talk about it because I was plugging a gig. She'd say "alright and what's the next one?" and she'd play them. I think there was about six in a row like that and She said "alright I'm seeing a theme here and I didn't know what she meant but all the songs had this link to water. I didn't know it though, I didn't notice. So the same thing happened with this album when I was looking back at the songs that I had written for it, someone pointed it out to me again. It wasn't something I set out to do but now I'm conscious of it so the next record I will probably sidestep it if it happens but I've already written about 20 songs that could be another album.

Some music now doesn't really contain much emotion; some indie bands just completely sidestep it. How important is it for you to write emotive songs?

The thing is, I don't think I'd be able to play or sit down and play something that I feel like it didn't shake me in some way. It's the only way I can do it, otherwise I'd feel like a sham. I mean, you could argue that I take it all too seriously but I just wouldn't do it. I wouldn't be able to sing something that I didn't have an emotional connection with. I mean different emotions, all emotions. If I'm singing something or playing something that is striving for that emotion, if I don't actually feel it then I'm not going to do it. So it's very important to me, most important I suppose.

Adrian plays alongside fellow nominees at the Choice music prize award ceremony in Vicar Street on the 27th of February.

Words: Brendan McGuirk
Illustration: Zoe Manville



Young Galaxy only work as a couple. Made up of partners Stephen Ramsay and Catherine McCandless (along with 4 other members), the band's main energy- and content-emerges from Ramsay and McCandless's relationship. Ramsay is excitable and unguarded, while McCandless is wary and reserved. Many times during the interview, she motions to Ramsay that, perhaps, he should think before he speaks. A touring member of Stars, Ramsay 'walked into a scenario in Stars where two of the members were breaking up and one of them was getting together with another member.' McCandless quickly interjects with-'Is that out right now in the press? I don't know!'- and Ramsay apologetically draws back, saying 'Oh fuck yeah, only certain people know.'

The interplay between their two personalities becomes even more apparent when Ramsay muses that 'I think we've staked our well, everything, in a way, on our relationship, and that's the sort of approach we took with this project. I think everything, at the heart of it, comes from that place. If in a year from now we find ourselves broken up, I don't think the band will continue. We've staked our relationship on the band.' McCandless assures that 'we won't break up though. We won't.' This affirmation spurs Ramsay on further, and bringing the WAV recorder closer, he enthusiastically adds 'We know that. You wanna know why we know? I'll tell you why we know, here's an exclusive. Katherine was married to, essentially, our best friend. I was the best friend of her and her husband. We had an affair. At the same time as this, Katherine was diagnosed with M.S. We were in our twenties, and we were living like rock stars already, we weren't in a band or anything. We had the world at our feet, we felt like everything was possible. We had this really idealistic way of looking at the world and it felt like all our best efforts were being challenged by the universe essentially. Our lives were fucked.' At this point, McCandless flashes her eyes towards Ramsay, looking worried, saying -'My look is that you're going to tell the whole story.' Ramsay promises that he won't, McCandless looks unconvinced and attempts to logically sum up Ramsay's point- 'We

were so destroyed by the devastating after-effects of what we'd done, and yet, so in love that we feel we've built something that's super-strong. As strong as our destruction was.'

Though the circumstances for Young Galaxy's conception were unfavourable, they have been fortunate in coming from a large musical community (members of Stars and the Besnard Lakes played on their debut record) and in being signed to Arts and Crafts. McCandless agrees that 'absolutely it's helpful to be part of a scene I think, you see other example of people leading the life that you want to lead. It's not a simple thing to just drop your day job and decide to make music, at a huge personal cost. It feels like a risk. When you have other people in your community doing the same thing, and going to each other's shows, and playing on each other's albums, there's so much support and it makes it that much

easier. I don't think it limits us in any way: it doesn't make us feel like we can't do our own thing.' Ramsay concurs that 'the only thing we may feel pressure to do is to define ourselves on where we sit on our own label, because the label has a tendency to be viewed, um, that every band on Arts and Crafts is part of a collective. We have had, by and large, very little input from bands on Arts and Crafts. But then you know, I played in Stars, and we're on Arts and Crafts, and we're called Young Galaxy and people like to mash all the associations together and make a nice tidy package and that's fine. We feel like we're working in a very liberated scene, if you want to use that word'. They cite the Arcade Fire as an inspiration, though for differing reasons. Ramsay admires them because 'they've decided, very pointedly, to not play the game of playing into their fame or any of that, for anything other than the best reasons. That sets a really nice tone, because everyone admires their fame and aspires to that. But beyond that, they also have a very reputable approach. It has integrity, and that's hard to do when you're that huge.' McCandless however, applauds their business savvy -'it's not the size, it's the way they've built a business. It's sustainable. They can do what they do forever now.'



The forthcoming self-title album is standard Arts and Crafts fare, and while Young Galaxy shrink from comparisons with

Stars, the similarities are self-evident: Boy/Girl vocals, keyboards, melancholic lyrics and soaring melodies abound. Though the record was recorded as, essentially, a duo, when it came to performing it live difficulties presented themselves. Ramsay and McCandless added in four other members, and Ramsay, tired of having to play someone else's music whilst touring with Stars, was adamant that the new members would be allowed creative input also: 'My experience is- having been a touring member of Stars- it's hard to be told to play parts and not just make it your own. To faithfully play someone else's idea, it's hard to do. I sort of figured we had to give some leeway to people, and sure enough, that meant that our set-up would change. There's so many layers on the record that we could never pull off live. We had to strip it back, deconstruct it and put it back together and equally share it with the six people involved.' While this egalitarian attitude is admirable, it in turn factored in more problems. McCandless adjoins- 'that kind of screwed us for a while, for me. That was the first thing we realised, we had to learn to sing loudly. I was so used to trying to sing under my breath so that people wouldn't hear me. Suddenly I have to sing over two guitars, bass, keyboards and drums.' The incline of their learning curve is not to be underestimated. Previous to making the record, Young Galaxy had no record deal and had played no live shows- 'We had no live experience; we'd never been in a band. I'd been in Stars, but only as a touring member. We'd sung this record in a studio but had no experience playing these songs live. Despite the fact that it worked in the studio, you can't, for instance have this big racket going on and be whispering your vocals the whole time. It sounds brutal; it sounds like ducks being strangled.'

On the album's opening and stand-out track- what Ramsay later calls 'our creed'- 'Swing Your Heartache', the lyrics are achingly bare. They don't speak in terms of Stars's 'Endless Beauty' but of more grown-up concepts- 'It's time for you and I to face the signs/ and realize that living's a battle'. Ramsay's world-weary vocals combine with McCandless's searing harmonies to create a battle cry for the bruised, the underdog and the dreamers- 'For all the times we cried/ absorbed the lies/ and realized/ life's not a rehearsal'. The gung-ho attitude of the lyrics is re-enforced by the personal investment that Young Galaxy have made in the band. Ramsay and McCandless are unflinchingly honest about the financial risk involved with the project - 'We could make about 50,000 dollars if we sold our music to an ad right now, and we are probably equally as much in debt, in terms of getting the band launched.' McCandless's practical side manifests itself once more when she ads bluntly that 'we're by nature selling ourselves, cause we're performers, that's what we do.' However, with a sidelong glance and a sigh towards Ramsay she inserts an ellipses and continues, 'but we're willing to have long-term sustainability be the goal, instead of short-term, so we can make choices that feel like they have integrity to us.'

Words: Ailbhe Malone

Illustration: Zoe Manville



“Hi, sorry, you’ll have to speak up a bit, I’m a little deaf”. Phil Selway, drummer with multi-platinum selling, genre-hopping, conscientious stadium behemoths Radiohead, doesn’t quite hear when I say hello. Human after all. Radiohead’s profile was perhaps higher than ever in 2007, due largely to their announcement in October of the release of their seventh studio album, *In Rainbows*. It’s not so much the music that got people talking though. The little blank boxes on the *In Rainbows* download page sparked more discussion, debate and parody than anything else in the musical sphere. Even Pitchfork, notorious for specific ratings, left their review score up to us.

There were whispers of a great social experiment, that Radiohead were testing their fanbase and the world to see how much value was placed on their music. If file-sharing democratised music for the masses, then Radiohead were the great established band trying to legitimise that once and for all.

Pay as much or as little as you like. It’s up to you. Nothing is as simple as it seems, however, and reports started to trickle out that Radiohead had made more money with their download than they would have from an ordinary CD release. The only way to own a physical copy of *In Rainbows* initially was to pay fifty-five euro for the admittedly well-presented discbox release containing the album, a bonus disc, the album again on double vinyl and a book of artwork. Then they signed regular record deals to release the album conventionally too. They were setting a precedent that common or garden indie bands couldn’t follow. They announced a European tour and sparked a backlash due to high ticket prices. The *New York Times* called it revolution in the music industry, but *Forbes* called it one of the 101 Dumbest Business Moments of 2007. Was it revolution? Was it just more capitalism in a different shape? Does it matter? More on the politics later. First and foremost, the music:

In *Rainbows* took nearly four years to come out, why was that?

Well, we took... [thinking sounds] 2003 to 2007... 2003 was the year *Hail To The Thief* came out I think, wasn’t it?

Yeah

Yeah, so we toured for a year, then took about half a year off after that, away from the band. The actual process of making this record has been about... watch my maths now, but I think it’s been about two years. Two and a half years, actually. A year and a half of what was, with hindsight, preparation really, trying out different approaches to how we would record, just trying to find something that excited us in how we were going to present the material, how we were going to play the material. And then we went in with Nigel Godrich last September [2006]. It’s been quite a painstaking process making the record. Especially when, you know, you start the process and you hope it’ll be fast, but it just isn’t. And when it doesn’t happen spontaneously initially, you kind of know that you’re in for the long run, really, till you get to the point where those moments of spontaneity are there. Not that you construct spontaneity, but you put the right

situation together for it to happen. I hope that comes through in the performances. It was a very painstaking process. But we completed it, which is fantastic.

The album sounds very carefully constructed, very complete as a whole. It sounds different to *Hail To The Thief*, was the process of writing the songs different in any way?

Well, there are similarities. Apart from *Kid A*, we’ve always started with a collection of songs, and us in a rehearsal studio. And at some point we will have played those songs live as well. So a very similar process from that point of view. We spent a lot more time in the studio this time, so hopefully we got to the point where we felt more comfortable with being there. The biggest difference really was the length of time it has taken. *Hail To The Thief* was a relatively quick record to make, and this one has taken a lot longer. I think with any of our records, a part of what drives it along is a bit of a reaction to the record that’s gone before. With hindsight, I mean, there’s a lot of good things about *Hail To The Thief*, from our point of view, but there are also elements that we’ve come away thinking “wish we’d done that differently”, or spent a bit more time on *that*. So you act on those

impulses on the next record you make.

You've put out an extra disc in the discbox version of In Rainbows. Was it difficult to decide which songs to put on the actual album proper, which to put on the bonus disc, and which to leave off altogether?

I think the difficulty came in realising that we're not going to get everything onto the record. We kind of felt like we put everything on Hail To The Thief, and we didn't want to do that again. So I think once we got to the point where we'd decided that we want to make a ten-track record, then you actually select the ten tracks that sit well together. So it kind of then decides itself. It was probably a good three or four days of trying out different tracklistings and different combinations of songs on there until we got to the point where it became sort of self-evident which songs sat well together. And oddly enough actually, the second CD sits well together as a collection of songs.

So you'd consider the second CD to be a complete...

Oh! You'll have to wait a moment! My youngest son is just about to burst into the room... hold on... [sound of a small child] "Hi Dad!" [Phil, aside, amidst shuffling] Hi Patty! Hold on, I'll just go somewhere else... Sorry about that.

I think we were pretty much done with that one. Everyone's been talking about you giving away the album for free, or letting people choose what they want to pay, which in practice means giving it away in a lot of cases. What was the thinking behind doing that?

Well, one of the initial things was actually getting the music out there as quickly as possible. Generally, you get into this... you finish your album, you deliver it to your record company and three months later, after all the marketing processes, the record comes out, having run the risk of being leaked in the meantime. I think for us it was kind of almost leaking our own material, if you like, just at that point being in control of that process. Also, it was having that immediacy of getting the music out there very quickly. It was under a week between the final mastered version of the record getting to us and it going up as a download. That was something we've always wanted to, work a bit faster, especially when you've been working on a record for two and a half years. You're just absolutely desperate to get it out there, really. So then you think, okay it's going out as a download, how do we put it out there? Do we put a price on it? I think the important thing was to get the music around to as many people as were interested, but then at the same time there was scope in there for almost like an experiment, saying, well, what value

do people place on the music? We could give people an opportunity to think about that. It seemed a very fair way, and a transparent way of putting the music out.

Certainly novel, as well. Do you feel that releasing the album as a download was equal to a CD release? Do you not think there would be some disappointment for people who weren't able to go out on the morning and buy a physical copy of the new Radiohead album?

Um... sorry, I think I heard that, you'll have to excuse me, the line was not quite there. But the whole thing behind it, with the release, it was like viewing as different formats. If you take it from the basis that we want the music to reach as many people as are interested, and if you put out something as a download only, you're cutting out a lot of people who wouldn't have access to that. But we've never wanted it to be exclusive, we've always wanted it to be a CD release at some point. So it is just different

formats really. Hopefully there is something there for everyone who wants to listen to the music.

You've signed to XL to release the physical album...

Yes.

Thom put out The Eraser on XL, was it because of his experience with the label that you chose to do that, or was there any other reason?

They seem to have a very good understanding of where we are as a band at the moment. And yes, Thom had a very good experience putting out The Eraser with them. When you're in a position where you're out of contract, you can view as who is the most appropriate place to release the record, who is the most appropriate label to be with. And XL definitely "ticked all the boxes" on that one.

And how is your relationship with EMI now?

Um... well... we still have a huge amount of respect for all the people we worked with at EMI and Parlophone. There were a lot of people there from when we released the earlier albums, from around The Bends era, and we had a very good working relationship with them. We just felt that ultimately, it wasn't the right place for us to release In Rainbows.

They've put together their own boxset, I believe...

Yes, they have, all of the previous...

How does the band feel about that?

Um... well, it's our music, you know... I think we'd prefer to concentrate on the release which we feel most connection to, which is In Rainbows. Um, you know, they're all our records and of course we stand by them, but we've kind of moved on from that point...

Are you afraid that they might try to put out an unauthorised "greatest hits" or something like that in the future? Or is that a possibility?

It's well within their rights to do it. [sigh]. So we'll have to see. But as I say, for us the main thing is that we're excited about the process of releasing In Rainbows and what we're doing, around the touring, around the way we're able to release it, and most importantly around the music itself.

About the touring, tickets for your gig in Dublin went on sale this morning... it's very expensive, it costs €70.70, and there's been some discussion about how you can justify releasing your album in such a fair way, as you say, and then charge that much for a tour gig?

Right... and what's been the general response on that, that you see?

There's been arguments that you might be pricing out some fans, people who may have bought the diskbox, or students who may not be able to pay that much money to be able to go to a gig.

Right.

Do you have any reaction to that?

Well, whenever we've looked at ticket prices and set them, we've wanted to make them as fair as possible. So I would hope that we've pitched it right on this one, made it as fair as possible on the price. We've never really set out to max, as they say, our tour revenue. So I think we've always put out reasonably priced tickets. That's as much as I can say really.

It's just something that's come up in the last few days in Dublin.

Yeah.

The use of Dead Air Space [the band's blog on radiohead.com] during the making of the album, what was the reasoning behind that? Did they the band enjoy doing it? Do they think it was a good idea?



It was just to have that kind of immediacy in what we were doing, really. It was somewhere that if any of the band members wanted to air their feelings about the recording, or put pictures up, if anyone was interested in seeing it then yeah, there was a place there for that to happen. It's been a good space for us to have. We were able to put our announcement about the download out through there, and that kind of thing. It's like with the release of the download, it's a much more direct way of reaching people who are interested in the music. That's very much the feeling with Dead Air Space. It's a very honest representation of us, really,

Was there the same sort of thinking behind the Radiohead.tv broadcasts? That seemed like a lot of fun to do.

It was! It was very random, but it was also fantastic for that as well. It was great. Especially after having taken such a long time in the whole recording process, to do something that didn't have that *weight* of scrutiny on it, to be in the studio and have loads of different things going on, happening quite quickly, yeah, it was great! It was fantastic fun, it was a good response to how we'd been working for two and a half years.

You did a couple of covers, The Headmaster Ritual [by The Smiths] and Ceremony [by New Order] I think, how did you decide which to do?

Yeah, our Manchester section really, wasn't it? It's funny because when we were at school, we never really played covers. It's something that we've not done an awful lot of either, at any point. We've always kind of worked on original material. So to come back at this point and just go in and work on these songs which we've all really loved at some point and seeing if we can pull them off... we enjoyed doing those versions of them.

So if those were the songs you were listening to in your youth, are you keeping up with music now?

I hope so! [laughs]

Is there anything in particular that you've been listening to recently?

Personally I've been listening to Juana Molina, Will Oldham, Adem, Fourtet, those kind of Domino artists... Turning, that kind of thing. Between the five of us, we've got a very broad musical spectrum.

So you'd all consider that you're staying sort of hip?
Sorry?!

You all consider that you're keeping up with what's going on?

You'd get five different responses to that one, depending on who you speak to in the band. Where we are at the moment is just a great love of music, from wherever and whenever really.

With all the political causes Thom has been involved in, in the past couple of years, is there ever a feeling within the band that he's becoming a bit of a Bono?

[laughs] Two very different characters though, aren't they?

They are different, but do you never consider what he is doing naff?

No, because he does it from the heart. I don't think it is naff at all. I think he speaks very effectively on the issues that are very close to his heart. You're kind of damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't with that one really. I think he uses the platform that he has effectively. He doesn't, well in *my* opinion he doesn't abuse it, he just uses it effectively.

But even in the general sense, it's sometimes considered that a musician shouldn't talk about politics. You don't think that applies at all?

I think if you stop somebody talking about... well it's the basics of principles here, you don't want to impinge on anybody's free speech, do you? Different people are probably more effective at it, or less effective, but I think in Thom's case he has a very strong interest, so he has a great grasp of what's he's talking about..

Words: Karl McDonald

Jason Molina

Words: Karl McDonald



"After all these years of doing it, it would be nice to have a house or an apartment. It'd be nice to not be paying rent, or to be sure where my next meal is coming from, because these days, every show is my next meal. For all these years I've spent every cent on keeping back on the road, to keep that independent relationship with music making. It's meant that I've definitely passed up some fantastic opportunities to make a lot of money for commercials or for certain movie soundtracks, or even signing to a major label".

Jason Molina is reflective ahead of his gig in Crawdaddy. It's been more than a decade since he put out his first record as Songs: Ohia and he is in Dublin after gigs in Galway and Cork in an effort to "make this my backyard". A long career with Songs: Ohia, Magnolia Electric Co. and solo has brought him around the world many times, so he is no stranger to life on the road. But this time, he's completely alone. Having used our frankly poor public transport to carry himself and his gear around Ireland like a true wandering minstrel, it's easy to forgive him a little solemn contemplation.

"I just think it's a good artistic time right now," he says. And he's right. While he has always been prolific under his various project titles, the most recent Magnolia Electric Co. release Sojourner was a non-retrospective box set containing four discs of new material. A very ambitious move for a cult alt-country artist, no matter how well-respected. What did his label think of this?

"Secretly Canadian and I have a wonderful relationship that goes way back, and they were suggesting doing a retrospective. I wasn't willing to take six months out of my life, compiling fan input and compiling all of the ideas and notes that I have when I could actually be writing something new. So I approached Secretly Canadian with this offer: if I give something you cannot say no to, can we not do the retrospective? And that's when I went and started working on this box set, which I broke my back on."

"I went radically in the direction of the [2001's Songs:Ohia album] Ghost Tropic days of putting together a band I'd never played with in a studio I'd never been in on one disc. And then I put the Magnolia guys together and we did all brand new material. There's solo material, and then Magnolia and myself went to Sun [Studio, recording place of Elvis, Johnny Cash and more] which was a really important place for us to record. I went all out on the artwork, and in the end I asked the label to make sure it was affordable for just anybody. We don't make money off those box sets. It's a true gift to the fans."

But how does he write so many songs? Sojourner makes it sixteen full-length (or longer) releases in ten years. Some bands would be lucky to make three or four records in that length of time. "I feel a need to do it. If I'm not writing a song, I find myself feeling like I need to work on that. I've spent my entire life between songs and art-making. I never shut it off. It's a real child-like instinct, but as I've gotten older, I'm so happy I never sacrificed that for the status quo. Really I am."

But there is the suggestion that releasing such a volume of material is a symptom of not being able to self-edit. "If I write eight or ten songs that seem like a family, if there's one song in the middle that seems a little bit weak, I leave it because

I feel it's a necessary part of that grouping of songs. When it comes down to writing songs day by day, I know right away whether it's a keeper or whether it's just not going to ever work. The real strength is deciding where the family of songs is."

It could be difficult for a new fan to follow that sort of prodigious output, but in the era of file-sharing, access is easier. Is he comfortable with that? Would he prefer that people heard his music on a physical format like CD or vinyl than from downloading? "These days, whether you buy it on CD or vinyl is a personal taste. It's very difficult sometimes to find a shop that even stocks vinyl, but until vinyl is dead and buried, I'm going to keep doing that. Because that's the way I discovered music, that's the way I even write music. I don't write just a song at a time, I try to write a record at a time. I write a Side A and a Side B, and I consider the artwork, and vinyl as a medium is wonderful, it's the way I listen to music at home. I guess I'm a purist to a degree."

But as far as illegal downloading goes? "If people are downloading a Madonna song, it's probably not affecting her in any kind of way, but when it's a purely independent band like myself, and you start doing that, it literally means 200 less miles we can afford to go to the next show. So for a small band, and I don't think we're small because we've got tonnes of fans and we've sold a lot of records but... I don't mind playing out of the way places, but when it comes down to it, we don't live off this music. It's really a struggle."

"I think there's going to be a tapering off, where the computer generation of music lovers will somehow meet up with the old-school guys who go in record bins and find new music. Because it's gonna take a hundred years to put all that stuff that's in those bins and out of the way places online. It's gonna take that long."

Jason Molina's music has always been American in essence. His reference points are classic purveyors of Americana like the blues of Screamin' Jay Hawkins and the alt-country of Neil Young. He was even wearing a cowboy hat during his set at Crawdaddy. He does have a cult following in Europe, but it is still a surprise to find an artist of his size playing outside the capital in a country the size of Ireland. Not that Cork and Galway aren't worthwhile places to play. It's just unusual. It turns out, though, that he has relocated from Chicago to London with his wife.

"It's hard to get a feel for a place, especially when you do it years apart. But now that I'm getting close, I've got some priorities, and that's to make Ireland and Scotland aces high, and then to go back to these college towns in England where normally it would just have been a rock show where people weren't really paying attention, and to make those into beautiful musical nights. I have a lot a lot of musical connections here. I'm a good friend of Glen Hansard's, that's not name-dropping, that's well-established. So I'm not a rookie."

"I was thinking on the flight over, that if I ever had to summarise Ireland to someone who had never been here, I would say: banshee. That's it. When I get here, there's something so heavy and spiritual about it. I have been here a lot, I'm not new to it, but there is something really heavy and wonderful about it. I could never put it into words."



Pete Silberman's story is a familiar one: A prodigious American singer-songwriter releasing under a plural noun pseudonym captivating the hearts of bloggers the world over with a set of wistful songs and lush instrumentation. Yet, like the best stories, it's one with replay value and a promising plot-line. Currently on his 5th album "In The Attic Of The Universe", the 21-year-old New Yorker is steadily building up a reputation and a brilliant back catalogue.

Why "The Antlers"?

I've gone by a few names throughout my time writing and recording solo. By the time I moved to New York (about two years ago), I was using a variation of my real name, but feeling less and less like being a singer-songwriter. I decided a little over a year ago to make what I was doing less of a solo affair. The name The

Antlers was taken from a Microphones song called "Antlers". I think I also probably got the plural noun idea from The Microphones, as "the band" was mostly Phil Elverum, but with a rotating cast of people involved in the recording and performing. You can't re-

ally tell who you're listening to, where sounds are coming from, and it all becomes one thing. So far it's just been me on the recordings, but that'll change with the next record.

What's your mission statement for the band? What do you want to achieve?

That's hard to say. At this point, I'm loving recording and hearing those sounds come to life through the band. I'd love to do some serious touring soon. I guess I'd say my goal is to be able to do this for a living. I haven't loved doing anything in my life nearly as much as this. I've also wanted a Basset Hound for awhile, so if I someday find myself with one as a result of making music, that'd be great.

"Uprooted" was a very folksy affair, what prompted the more widescreen feeling of "In The Attic Of The Universe"?

Uprooted was recorded right before and right after I moved to Manhattan, and I think my goal was to record something I could replicate by playing solo shows, as I didn't have a band at the time. 'Universe' came practically out of nowhere last September, but I think in recording it I tried to make an album that I would like. I've recorded music that I've been attached to but don't enjoy listening to. For 'Universe', I tried to imagine an album that I would enjoy if it came from someone else. I ignored the practicalities of an album I couldn't perform by myself, and that eventually forced me to get a band together. Aside from that, Universe was made to sound huge inside something small, or small inside something huge, depending on how you look at it.

You're already writing your next album, "Hospice". Are you concerned with maintaining a steady output of music, rather than promoting the stuff you've already made?

Well it's easy to release something and then move on to the next thing you want to write, or the next point you want to make. I've always had this problem, and it's something I can't really turn off. Even as I work on Hospice now I'm putting together ideas for the album that follows it. I have a terrible short term memory, so if I don't record things as they come into my head they go the way of laserdiscs. It seems funny to me that I'm still promoting Universe, but the fact that that album doesn't let me leave it alone is encouraging.

How did you hook up with the other members of the band? Some of them are artists in their own right, does this lead to a conflict in interest?

I actually found three of them through Craigslist around the time I first put out 'Universe'. I met the newest member Darby (trumpet, banjo) through Justin (bass, vocals). I've actually found that it helps that everybody has their own musical projects or is involved with other groups. There's no competition to be writing songs in the group, and everybody has an available cast of players for recording. I'm a bit of a control freak when it comes to song writing, but it works because everyone can be a control freak for their own projects without getting in each other's way.

What's the reception been like in New York to the Antlers so far? Is it a positive environment for new bands?

Reception's been slow. I probably played twenty shows to empty rooms in the first year I moved here, but they're getting much better now. The blogs here have been really helpful by booking me/us for a bunch of shows around town. But I think New York is an insanely hard place for new bands. There's so many of them, and some of those blow up the second they start playing shows, but most don't. Pay attention, work hard, be patient.

How much time do you devote to the Antlers?

I'm finishing up my undergrad here in New York, though studying something largely unrelated to music, which I hope to never use. I spend as much time as possible on the Antlers, and tend to put it as a priority before anything else, which is good for Antlers and not so good for school.

What informs your lyrics, what influences your song writing?

It depends on the album. 'Uprooted' came out of leaving a life I'd started in upstate New York to chase music here. It began as a sort of hackneyed idea that evolved into something else

once I arrived because I stopped feeling that magic for an unreachable place. 'Universe' feels as though it happened independent of me. I remember at the time feeling completely fascinated by space and dwarfed by its size, reading and thinking about it all the time, but I can't say where that music or those lyrics came from. I guess that's the thing about song writing for me - Once it's done it's sort of out of my system. That helps if I'm trying to get over something. But with 'Universe', it makes it harder to understand in retrospect. 'Hospice' is my "relationship/break-up album", and I know exactly where it came from, but I might not after it's done.

You've covered My Bloody Valentine, are you excited by their reunion? Are MBV a strong influence on your music?

All these reunions make me nervous. I'm not sure any of them have been good yet...but maybe MBV will break the curse. I honestly became a big MBV fan pretty recently, at about the time I recorded that cover. It's the kind of music that can easily become all you listen to if you're not careful...which happened to me this past summer. Since then, it's definitely been influential on the album I'm working on now. 'Hospice' has a lot of guitar that doesn't sound like guitar, but like 'Universe', it's narrative, whereas MBV's lyrics and vocals are usually pushed to the back.

The band is signed now by Fall Records, what made you choose this label?

Around the time I first released Universe, my friend turned me on to Page France's 'Hello, Dear Wind', which I obsessively listened to for a while. After some research, I found out that it was originally released by Fall, and decided to send them the album for the hell of it, maybe because they seemed so approachable.

Would touring outside of America interest you?

I'd love to play Ireland, actually. I visited when I was about 12 and thought it was beautiful and have been wanting to come back ever since. Lately Iceland's been appealing, France too...At this point I'm really open to playing anywhere and everywhere. If the opportunity appeared to tour Europe, I think I'd kick myself if I didn't take it.

Words: Daniel Gray

Illustration: Zoe Manville





John Maus

Words: Ailbhe Malone
Photo: Kate Southall

Few modern composers limit themselves to the confines of a twelve-tone composition, even fewer still modern alternative musicians. John Maus, who was previously the keyboardist for cult lo-fi icon Ariel Pink, and touring keyboardist for Panda Bear, is not one of the above. Having studied Composition in University, and currently working towards a PhD in Aesthetics, Maus's influences are incongruous with his lo-fi medium-

'I'm interested in how a more polyphonic language might take part in the procedure of trying to bring forth the essence of pop. In terms of dodecaphony, on the first album [Songs] there is a

song- 'Less Talk More Action'- which is a 12 tone piece. The way that I avoided implicating the vocals and fucking up the row is that I just talk. All the music in the background, with the exception of the drums, which aren't officially pitched, is a strict 12 tone composition. I think that music is radical. I think Arnold Schoenberg is perhaps the closest paradigm for what I strive towards.' While, in theory a dodecaphonic pop song should sound overly pretentious, and beyond dire, in Maus's hands, it works. This clash between modern composition and Rock and Roll is one that Maus has considered. Although he included a miniature Fugue on his current album 'Love is Real', he cannot reconcile mixing the two genres- 'Maybe it's too complicated for pop music, maybe some people would wager that the essence of pop has to do with a primitivism. I played with No Age, for instance, and that's their idea. They draw pop to its bare bones, you know, stripping it down to its simplest elements. In which case, a fugue would be pretentious and silly, and very much

obscure what a subject to the truth of Rock and Roll should be after. Either make Rock and Roll or make experimental music. If you synthesize them, it obscures the critical potentiality of both.' In terms of creating new music, Maus is loathe to repeat what has been done before and is constantly striving to be innovative: 'There's a philosopher that I'm really into, he has a lot of ideas that I think are really important and relevant right now. He has 15 Theses on what contemporary art ought to be and they approximate the most what seems to make the most sense for me right now. Alain Badiou is the philosopher. For instance, one of the theses is that 'it's better to do nothing than to contribute to ways in which Empire has already recognises as existent'. I think that there's a degree of truth to that. It's better to do nothing than that.'

This innovativeness extends to the recording equipment he uses. On stage he has a beaten up 8-Track, some looping pedals and a microphone. In the recording studio, essentially the same materials are used. 'I just think that contemporary composers need to utilise all the materials at their disposal, and that includes materials that maybe, in terms of the status quo, are considered outdated, do you know, and obsolete.' His interest in outdated recording materials draws in-

evitable comparisons to collaborator Ariel Pink (who played on two track on Maus's 'Songs'), but this doesn't faze Maus. 'I know I get connected with Ariel (Pink) but I imagine that's primarily just because I played with him.' As far as similarities can be drawn, contrasts can also be found. Pink's voice is a light tenor, in a Brian Wilson vein. Maus sings in a deep Baritone that's endlessly been linked with that of Ian Curtis. While Pink's back catalogue is prolific, he has a tendency towards the hyperbolic, as can be seen in his endorsement of Maus on the Upset the Rhythm website: "John Maus is a maniac on a bloody

crusade; a tortured evangelist on a mercenary quest to rid our world of villainous defilers of The Gospel of True Love. By turns shockingly infectious and disarmingly unpredictable, his music conflates a perplexing marriage of Moroder's 'Never Ending Story' and classical 12-tone renegades of 20th century past, harking THE NEW path which resurrects romance from its post-modern shackles, and reignites the promise of a better world." Conversely, Maus is nothing if not considered and sincere: 'I think there were really four places in 20th century music where something like a truth of music was happening. Here I'm following the experimental composer Michael Pisaro who gave a paper a few years ago on philosophy actually, on Badiou. He said the four places in music where he felt something like a truth happened in the 20th century is Schoenberg, the whole serialist movement, Jazz, from Armstrong to Coltrane, Cage and his circle in New York and then Rock and Roll with Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley. They're all in a truth procedure, you know a

group of subjects exercising fidelity to what we could call the truth of Rock and Roll. I'm always struggling through the work to arrest that truth, to re-interpret an entire situation from the standpoint of that truth. That's what I'm striving to do.'

Onstage Maus is like no other. While, in conversation he stops and starts and gets embarrassed about what he's saying – 'I wish we could just start over. I loathe the thought that anything I just said is being recorded right now.'- he literally becomes another person when he performs. At the Me and My Korg gig, he eschews the stage and commands the floor. He stomps back and forth, entwining himself in the microphone cable and jumping up to the ceiling. Nobody in the crowd wants to make eye contact with Maus's onstage Hyde, yet neither can anyone tear their eyes away from him. One is immediately reminded of a line that Maus quoted from Badiou earlier on the interview- 'art should be as rigorous as a mathematical demonstration, as elevated as a star, and as surprising as an ambush in the night.'

John Maus is a rare thing, a musician that not only sets himself aesthetic goals, but one that supersedes them.

www.myspace.com/meandmykorg

Who would've thought it, Norwegians are funny. Well at least these ones are and just to add to that amazing fact they're in a great band too. Analogue caught up with Frode, Kristian and Øyvind of Ungdomskulen on the night of their first Irish show at Whelan's. Standing on the cusp of their transatlantic tour, dubbed '80 towns in 80 days', these three lads from Bergen were

completely un-phased by the hailstorm of publicity they're about to encounter. For there's no denying it, their debut LP *Cry Baby* will draw attention.

Ungdomskulen



For a band that have been seen under several guises since the millennium, Ungdomskulen have never grown up. I'm told their name means 'high school' in Norwegian, "but if we were in a film it would be like *The Doors* movie where Jim Morrison is walking in the desert or something, and you know like a fox comes to him and says 'your band should be called Ungdomskulen'." The name came to them in a dream then, how quaint. None the less there is a sense that these three were meant to be in a band together. Just chatting to them you sense that their immediate familiarity and friendliness will disarm any naysayers.

But why should there be any critics? They've produced an excellent album of powerful rock music. It's been genre cast as dance-punk, post-rock, post-punk, noise rock with sludgy garage riffs, and all manner of other silly names, but this inability to define it or label it certainly speaks volumes for its versatility and genre transcending abilities. It's just loud and fun, complex yet simple at the same time. When put to them that it sounds like instrumental music with vocals mistakenly put on later they agreed. "It's hard as hell to put lyrics and melodies on top of this miss-mash of stuff" joked guitarist and vocalist Kristian.

Now on the first leg of their tour they seem very comfortable about the whole affair. "Nervous? Yeah, but excited too cause we're going to all these different places that we haven't been before. Also we're going back to places where we have been, so it's kind of new land that we're going to discover and we're going back to old friends". Øyvind the drummer continued on obviously speaking for the three of them, "when we see old friends we get sentimental, and when we go to new lands we get excited. It's like sleeping with eighty women in eighty days. In the beginning it's really exciting and in the middle it can be a bit scary, but you still wanna do it and when you're finished you're really glad that you're done you know?" Of course we do.

However if you've only caught them live and never heard *Cry Baby* you're in for a surprise. Despite the vehement claims that they're primarily a live band and use no overdubs or production tricks the album is just as frantic, energetic and pounding as their shows. As Frode the bassist said "We were talking earlier on about Radiohead and all the studio bands who, you know, you can't kind of touch the music cause it's all sequencers...", "and you don't really know what's going on" finished Øyvind.

But Kristian interjected and joked "we still enjoy listening to music that is studio produced, but for us the intensity of playing together gets really lost if we say 'let's take away the drums here and put some fiddle in'."

They went on to explain their influences. "I think starting out it's not necessarily influenced by the sound so much than an approach to stuff. I remember when *At the Drive-In* came out with their *Relationship of Command* record, there was something fresh. There was something there, it wasn't like your Thin Lizzy where there was a riff and you put a drum beat behind it. They're good songs and all, but with *At the Drive-In* I thought wow here's a band that makes stuff in a totally different way. Cause I'm not really interested in rock per-se but when I hear stuff like that it tends to inspire you to think, if not the same way, but a least differently. Cause here you have a band that is really experimental and just doing their own thing and doing it so well."

Don't be afraid though that you're in the presence of some evangelical musical purists. These guys are just as their press release describes them, fun. For their Japanese seven inch single *Oh Life*, they catnapped a poor tabby to professionally photograph in the woods with a frozen fish. When asked to explain themselves all Kristian could come up with was this "well basically it's inspired by the painting, is it Michelangelo? You know where the hand comes down, the hand of God. So basically I thought, what's in his hand? What can it be? It's not a gun and it's not a microphone or anything, it must be a fish. And who's the biggest fish fans in the world? It's cats." Don't worry no cats were harmed "it was very professional, cause we had like two guys holding your gold reflection things, cause it's really a beautiful picture. The cat's fur is looking so fluffy. So Øyvind was holding the fish, and there was a camera guy and a camera assistant, and Frode and I were holding the reflectors. And we all went to find locations and I think that's really in the spirit of the band."

This idea of having fun and "going for that goal until it's perfect" is what they're all about. Kristian claims "it's basically like a group of friends you know, it's not only music that we're interested in; like talking, philosophy and stuff like that. I was thinking earlier while I went to the toilet why we work so well together and it's because of that. It's something that drives us so much. Since we've hung out for so long and played for so long we're really a gang, a tight, tight gang that can't be messed with cause we have so much strength within the holy trinity." Øyvind adds "It's like travelling around with your best mates for three months. That must be every boy's dream. At least it was when I was young. Now we're living our dreams lads!" he says to

smiles all round. As I leave the band room I'm told "you're a part of it now", the first stop on the dream. "One lady down!" they all laugh. Well I can't complain, at least I was first, you're next. Prepare yourself for Ungdomskulen.

Words: Paul Bond

menomena



Words: Darragh McCausland

Menomena were not well known outside of their native Oregon when they came into 2007 on the back of their record 'Friend and Foe'. But as that record gathered countless rave reviews and plaudits, things quickly changed. 'Friend and Foe' was a remarkably intricate piece of work, stuffed full of playful looping arrangements and melodic charm. It also came neatly wrapped in what is bound to go down in history as one of the coolest album covers ever, a dizzying, scrawled psychedelic menagerie with rotational settings. Because they used their own specifically designed software to record individual loops of instrumentation, the record felt different when compared to your bog standard indie release. It was fluid, elastic, like it was made out coloured rubber balls and twisting neon. Well, to me it was anyway. Ahead of an extensive European tour that will include a date in Dublin on February 29th, I spoke to one third of Menomena, guitarist Brent Knopf. He's a really nice guy who says 'totally' a lot.

It's been nearly a year since 'Friend and Foe' came out. So what kind of a year has it been for Menomena?

It's been incredible, so much fun. Friend and Foe came out in the US a year ago but it just got released in Europe last September. And it's been amazing because we started off, like playing a show a year ago in Denver to, like ten people. And from there we've been able to play some sold out shows and even go to Europe for the first time. And it's been so busy, I got fired from my waiting tables job 'cos I was away from work so much...

So Menomena better work out for you huh?

[laughter] Eh, yeah. It better.

Okay so I've noticed on your Myspace page, there are some nice mock up posters of classic 80s family movies

starring Menomena and I was wondering if you could arrange for one to be made starring me? I'd like to be Elliott cycling his bike in front of the moon in the poster for ET.

Totally, no problem. We'll just delete all our posters and replace them with ones of you. How does that sound?

Ha ha sounds cool thanks. So on the topic of band art, the amazing cover of your album 'Friend and Foe' record has given lots of people hours of fun, and I was wondering what the next stage in interactive album art is? Like will you be able to bring it up a level for the next record?

Emm, maybe. But can you tell me what the higher level is because I'm dying to know.

I dunno, how about a three dimensional hologram or something?

Yeah totally. Or how about every new CD will be its own nuclear reactor. We've been able to buy a lot of enriched uranium from Sudan and each CD will play Menomena and power your home.

So Menomena aim to tackle the global energy crisis as well?

Totally. That's what we're all about. Solving global crises.

Ha ha, well following on from that, how important is the design element of your music? Like the actual physical design of your records and stuff?

Well we look at the artwork like we look at the music. We try to challenge ourselves to make an experience that's worth revisiting. Our first album was packaged in a flip book and that took

a long time to make. With 'Friend and Foe' we had a chance to collaborate with Craig Thompson who is a genius and our goal with him was to make an experience that people are intrigued by and hopefully come back too. Hopefully that's the thing with our music too. Hopefully people will listen to our songs more than once and on subsequent listens will hear something different each time.

So what album covers by other bands do you rate?

Well I think Tool have done a good job. Their most recent one had 3D goggles on it. The one before that had a sort of multi-

layered anatomy textbook and the one before that was some sort of animated thing. Respect their work a lot. How about you, what are your favourites?

Emm, I like that Spiritualized cover. You know the one that's like a medicine packet with its own prescription and you burst the foil to take out the CD? That's cool.

Yeah it is. That's awesome.

So your album artwork got nominated for a Grammy award right? Are you bummed that it was your album cover and not the music that got nominated for the award?

[Laughs] No, naturally because the music sucks at the Grammy's.

Okay to change track. Nearly every piece that's written about Menomena mentions the software programme called Deeler that you made and used to record loops for both albums. They pretty much go on about it as if you reinvented the wheel with this thing. So I was wondering, did you ever think of putting a patent on it, making some money?

You know I was always so poor and exhausted. I was working a couple of jobs and trying to do the band on the side. I didn't have any resources to explore what I could do with it in that regard. I always used to show it to people, and I'd get blank stares. It just ended up being really useful for us. Although I ended up rewriting it and it became incredibly complicated and digital. I basically went insane and wasn't able to finish it. It got too unwieldy, there were bugs I couldn't trace. And since then I think there is new software that came on the market that can basically do the same thing.

Sure. So it won't become an all-consuming scientific obsession that could destroy Menomena?

No I think there will be a different obsession that will do that to me. I tend to go in stages. Since then I got obsessed with doing a music video, and built a kind of home made motion controlled camera device. I built all these sets, and characters, a storyboard and then I had to put it in a box and it lived in boxes for two or three years and then it got resurrected and made into the video for evil bee.

To continue with Deeler- Did the stuff you recorded with it need to be dragged kicking and screaming to the point where you could play it live or was it easier than that?

Our music tends to be very layered and we are only three people so it can be a challenge to choose which layers to perform. So if you come see us live you will see that sometimes Justin

is playing the tracks and at the same time playing the foot synthesiser, and that Daniel is pretty much playing drums and singing at the same time. So yeah it can be a challenge. But once we get going and hit our groove it feels really good. Some people say they prefer the live show to the album.

Okay because I was going to ask that. Just how different does 'Friend and Foe' sound live? Because it seems to me to be more a kind of headphones-suited studio album.

Well, it's louder. It's sparser too, but more dynamic, and usually we play the songs a little faster. It works well, but it's different.

In between your two well known albums, you recorded a lesser known record, which contained instrumental music for an experimental dance company. Was this a pretentious folly or a sign of things to come?

Ehh, both. It was a miscalculation on our part because we thought when 'I am Fun lame Monster' came out there were all these sort of punky bands like the Rapture and the Strokes and we thought, clearly, the next big thing is gonna be instrumental dance music [laughs]. We tried to beat everyone to the punch, but it turns out we were wrong. But it was really a good experience. It's an album that not many people know about but when we play shows people will often come up to us and tell us it's their favourite. It's not for everyone, but we are happy we did it because it gave us the opportunity to collaborate with an amazing dance group.

Okay, another quick change of topic. My friend took one look at your album artwork for 'Friend and Foe' and he also heard that your recording software is called 'Deeler' and now he's convinced that you are all on hard drugs. Is this true or will I have to disappoint him?

Well I don't really think crack cocaine is a hard drug. Do you?

Well I suppose in moderation its fine. A nice way to relax on a Sunday afternoon right?

Yeah, and as long as Amy Winehouse is with us, we feel comfortable.

So Amy is a spiritual inspiration for Menomena?

Totally.

Okay last question about music. Are you working on a follow-up to 'Friend and Foe' yet?

Yes [pause]

No more information other than that?

Emm. Okay yes. We're writing lots of baby songs, I call them fragments or baby songs because they are just ideas for songs. You might call them embryos and we are extracting stem cells from them.

Stem cell songs huh? So you won't be voting Republican because they won't let you record your own music?

Ha ha that's right. No, we're working out ways to record these baby songs, we have over a dozen of them so far and maybe more than half of them will never become viable and reach maturity. But we're starting that process and taking old Deeler sessions and mixing them. It's going okay so far.

Finally, a question for our under-12 readers. What's your favourite colour?

My favourite colour is... polka dot.

Menomena play the Sugarclub on the 29th of February.

Lightspeed Champion

Saddle Creek Records are a major deal on the East Coast (USA) Indie scene. Based in Omaha, they originally catered only to artists from the area, but in 2002 open their doors to others. They have a *sound*. It's distinctive and obvious. You can hear it on nearly every record cut there: the huge open skies, the cold, the horizon. It's all there in the slide guitars, the liberal use of brass and all the other bits and bobs that turn a record from a bunch of Indie ballads to something epic sounding, gentle and bombastic. It's a little bit country. There's a little bit of traditional rock'n'roll. It is not Nashville, but hell, its not a million miles away.

Started by some of the minds and talents behind Bright Eyes- Mike Mogis and Conor Oberst, as well as Tim Kasher- and a couple of others, Saddle Creek grew out of the impressive Omaha music scene, based around the Sokol and Cog Factory clubs. It has an impressive stable of artist; Two Gallants, Tokyo Police Club, Broken Spindles and Sorry About Dresden, amongst many others. They also take in the odd vagrant, so when Dev Hynes, formally of the Test Icicles, allowed himself to be bullied into recording an album of solo material by Domino Records, they sent him to Saddle Creek, to get that Omaha *sound*. The record seems to have soaked up every mile between London and Nebraska, until it has become an album uniquely of both places.

The Omaha Sound translates for Lightspeed Champion's- as Dev's solo project is known- first album *Falling off the Lavender Bridge* as like a paired back Weezer album if had been done in collaboration with Calxico. "My early bands I played in were fairly like Weezer- they're probably my biggest musical influence", he says, face totally straight. "I really enjoyed making the record, but it was really fucking cold though. I don't know if that comes across on the record. It was like four feet of snow and you'd walk outside and your face would hurt". Of course, Dev sees the influences on the album differently, "A big influence on this album was the band Heart from the mid seventies and the Hair musical", but to be honesty it doesn't really come across. There are moments when it sounds a bit like Love's 'Forever Changes', in that much of the instrumentation is acoustic with slashes of electric to punctuate and accentuate.

As part of the process, several of the names connected to Saddle Creek helped with the recording, playing trumpets and all. Song writing credits are shared by Hynes and Mogis, and Mogis played a bit on the album. There were others, too, but it doesn't seem to have fazed Dev at all. He admits momentary awe, but otherwise plays it cool about the guys who helped put it all

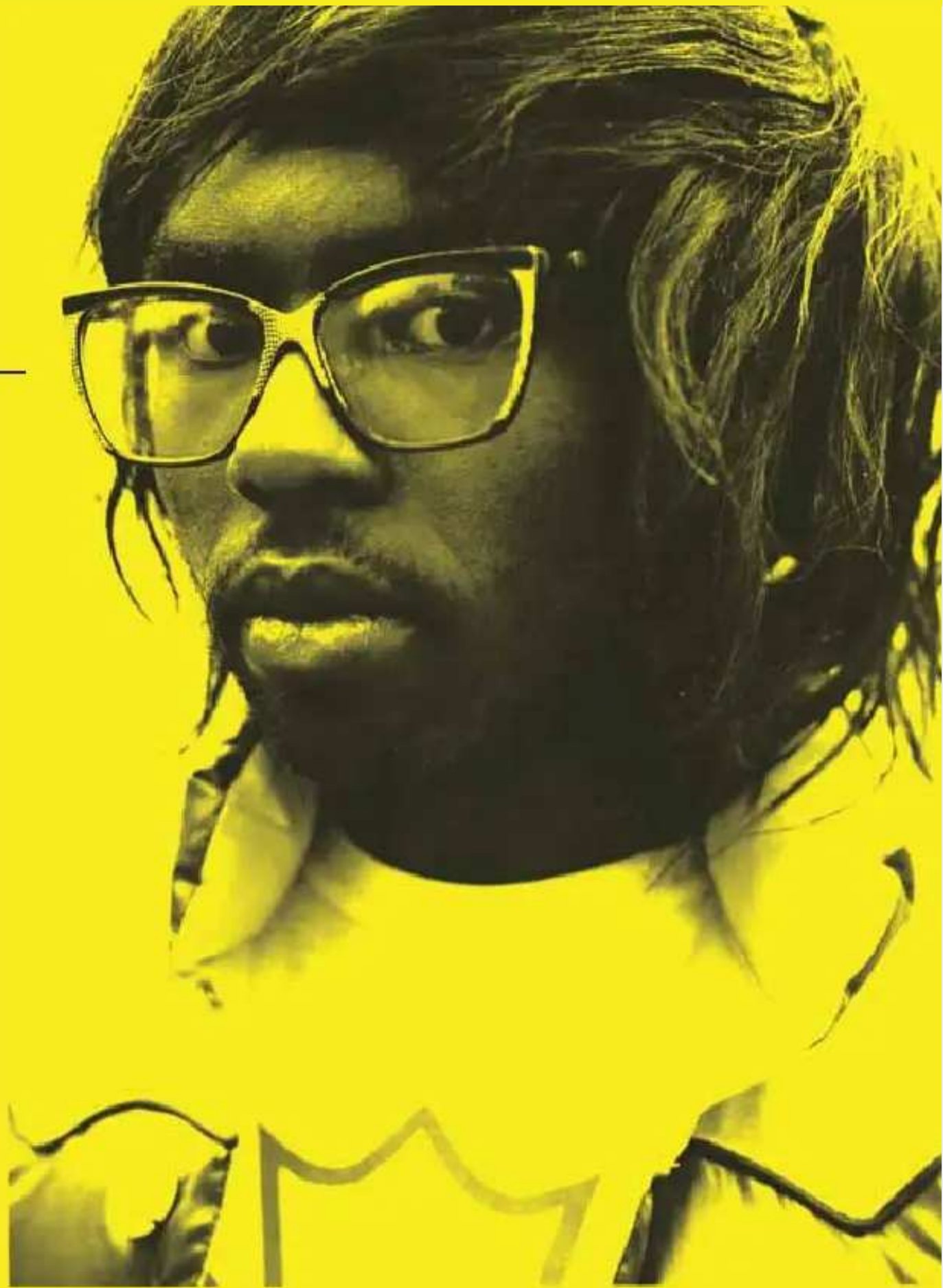
together. "About half way through recording the album I suddenly realized who I was recording with. I was like wow, there's Charlie from The Faints just laying down the drums and ... it was weird because we'd all been hanging around for months and I was totally blown away for, like, a day".

Dev Hynes is curled up in the corner of the bar we meet in, drinking water, knees nearly under his chin. He is dressed in a windbreaker and a checked shirt. He is wearing out-sized NHS reading glasses, held together with sticky tape and metal. His hair resembles a brilliantly collapsed Bearskin, it's magnificent. He's a turbo geek: he draws his own comic strips for fun and spends his time correcting Wikipedia entries about hip hop rivalries. His manager is whittering on about him being brilliant. He's not, but he does a fair impression. He's getting a lot of exposure and kudos from other, more mainstream, bands. Alex Turner from the Sheffield based band the Arctic Monkeys played on stage with him recently.

Dev grew up listening to music most of us would sneer at, like Weezer. He enjoys bands like the Thrills. Indeed he gets very excited when he's told that they'll be attending his gig that night. "I washed one of theirs' hair once..." And he used to play guitar (he was often called an axeman, a lovely image when compared to the startled, articulate and shy young man I met) in a band which was, arguably, responsible for the current wave of music featuring loud guitars over dance and bad synths of guitar riffs, or nu rave.

Dev has been gigging under the name for a while: "In between all my previous bands, when I played on my own it was always under the name of Lightspeed Champion. I've just decided to tell people about it now". And he's been in plenty of bands. "I played in punk bands, I've rapped, I played base in some bands, vocals in others, drums in some..." This education in music informs much of his song writing as well, there are sensibilities and marks from nearly every genre, although, it's hard to escape the shadow of Saddle Creek on *Falling off the Lavender Bridge*. "I like songs, no matter what. I don't really hear the genre. I just hear like this skeleton of a song and get attracted to it."

Thematically *Falling off the Lavender Bridge* lyrics follow a close pattern of friendship and love and the loss of one without losing the other. Longing and loss punctuate the record. You get the sense he was adrift when he wrote it. "I wrote most of the lyrics one six hour flight, and I was breaking up with my girl-



friend at the time, and she was like my best friend, so it was difficult, and I kept falling asleep and waking up”.

*“And even better still
Warm nights and the chill
Creeping down my bones
Reminds me I’m alone
My sweet midnight surprise
Staple down my eyes
Stars I cannot see
Take me galaxy”
(Midnight Surprise)*

It’s all pretty obvious stuff, but when sung in Dev’s near pleading voice over the nearly as articulate instrumentation it is an effective little piece of song writing. There doesn’t appear to be an end in sight for Lightspeed Champion. He’s already written most of the songs for the next record, “They don’t sound much like the last one. I mean it’s obviously me, but the music’s moved on”. With such a varied musical background it could contain anything, but most likely to be

“a sort of post-Strokes indie guitar stuff”.

Domino have him touring like mad at the moment, and have recently added some American dates after the album started to get some critical notice over there. But he doesn’t really seem to care. “I’m normally a nester. This is like the first time I’ve been happy to be out of London. I don’t do anything on tour. I just sleep. I don’t go and do touristy stuff. I don’t care...” He insists on travelling by van and staying in hotels, rather than by bus. “It’d be fun for like a few hours but I couldn’t sleep on a bus, I’d get cabin fever”. The touring band changes all the time, and consists of his mates from other bands, such as Florence of Florence and the Machine, Martin, aka The Train Chronicles and singer-songwriter Emmy the Great. It changes depending on who’s around at the time. Every show is unique, and although his Dublin show in December received mixed reviews his live experience is entrancing.

Words: Andrew Booth

SONS AND

DAUGHTERS



Adele Bethel and Scott Patterson- the lead vocalists in Sons and Daughters- act like brother and sister. When together, their sentences drift in and out of each other. Musical influences are shared. Bethel cites 'Debbie Harry, Pattie Smith. Leonard Cohen, Morrissey. Velvet Underground', at which Patterson echoes 'Velvet Underground, the Smiths.' When Bethel is absent, Patterson speaks for her with certainty, before voicing his own opinion: 'I know that Adele would KILL to sing with Leonard Cohen, that's her absolute hero. You know, we've been lucky, a lot of things like that we've done. I mean, we really wanted to play with Morrissey, and we did. We've played with the Stooges and Nick Cave, a lot of our heroes we've kind of met and played

with. One of my ambitions is to work with David Lynch: I'd love love love to work with him. I've told my publishers that, as well, so that they can tell him. I'd do that for free, that would be just like a dream for me.' Sons and Daughters are reluctant to brand themselves as a 'Scottish' band, though they are label-mates of Franz Ferdinand and have thought of collaborating with them. 'We were going to do a thing with Franz initially, when Franz and us first got signed. We were going to do a split E.P., where they would write us a song, and we would write them a song, and then we'd record them, but it never happened.' Though their Glasgow accents have caused a little bit of hassle in Europe, they reassure that 'we never wanted to sing in anything but our own accents. Nowadays it's kind of fashionable to sing in a regional accent, but at the time it really wasn't. I suppose coming from the Arab Strap thing, with Adel and Dave both working in Arab Strap; it would have just been a bit silly putting on anything else. We just wanted to be who we were and where we were from.'

Bethel in the daylight is much quieter than her raucous onstage persona. All long eyelashes, sparkly clothes, with her name on a necklace around her neck, she is almost shy, especially when asked about her lyrics. 'It's mainly outside influences, things that touch me in a personal way, I suppose. Cinema, poetry, those sort of things that you observe, and take in, and make your own personal adaptation out of it, I guess.' When pushed further, and asked about the themes of the new record- 'This Gift', she opens up: 'Specifically because the last two records have been dysfunctional relationships, I wanted to get out of writing about the same thing. It was more that I was searching for specific themes, in things like cinema and books. You always want things to tie in, and I guess you always want a theme for the record. But there's always one thing that you're thinking about, and in the case of 'This Gift', I think the main thing was escape from modern culture.' Patterson adjoins- 'A lot of the record deals with things like disdain for modern celebrity culture, and worshipping of fucking idiots like Big Brother people. The obsession with celebrity, and people who want to be famous for fame's sake, and make lots of money, and they're not talented. They're idiots. It's a really vacant, empty thing. For young women, especially, there's a lack of people to look up to. You've got Jordan, or Posh Spice. It's not like people are saying you can be an independent person. The quick way to do it to just fuck some footballer. 'This Gift' is kind of an ironic title for people who have no talent.' Bethel bemoans the lack of attention given in the U.K to those who *do* have talent, and don't buy into celebrity culture- 'Bright Eyes. Voice of a generation. Hugely under-rated, especially in the U.K. Somebody who's completely ignored. It's insane, because we toured with him in America, and he plays to 5 or 6 thousand people, and then comes here and plays to 500. At the most. That's not right. I

don't think many bands these days have much to say, and I think he does. I think he's ignored by the British press because he's American.' While Patterson- and Bethel- are adamant that they don't want to be role models for anybody, Patterson is incensed at the lack of worthy icons for the youth of today. 'I just

wish there were more inspirational people to look up to. Growing up you [Adele] had loads of female musicians, and same with me. My little brother has a girlfriend who's a teacher, and she asked her class to write an essay about who they most admired in the whole world. Ten years ago, at my school, you'd have people writing about politicians, or great writers or artists. All the people in the class, every single girl, wrote about Jordan.'

While Bethel and Patterson are disdainful of modern pop culture, they embrace pop music-, which is clear on the current

record. Certain tracks, such as the Bonettes-esque call and answers on 'Chains', and the persistent doo-wop backing vocals throughout the album, attest to their love of 60's era Motown- 'The girl-group stuff is stuff that we've always loved, and we've always thought that there's so many different types of music that we love that's never really been that obvious on the records we've made. So on this record, we wanted to make a pop record to reflect some of things, like soul, or Motown, or girl-groups, that we'd never shown before'. Their live shows are the driving force of the band, and without a doubt are what propelled them to playing at the SXSW festival before even having signed a record deal. Patterson struggles to communicate their astonishment at the reaction they received- 'We were bowled over when we actually played, because we were pretty much an unknown band at that time, going out to Texas, of all places. We thought 'we're lucky if anyone comes', and it was absolutely jam-packed. There were hundreds and hundreds of people.' Bethel tries to emphasize the reception the American crowds gave them- 'we literally thought no one was going to come. We never even thought at the time. Our friend Blair- who directed most of our videos actually- came out to that show and recorded it. We saw footage of it about a year ago, and there's actually hundreds of people there.' There were problems, however, in adapting 'This Gift' for the live shows- 'The previous two records, it actually wasn't a problem at all, because we pretty much recorded them the way we play them live. We didn't have a lot of time in the studio to make them bigger, and do lots of overdubs and things like that, so what you hear on the record is pretty much what we'd have done live at that time. For this record, the live songs, particularly with the guitar, there's a lot of guitar stuff going on. It's just not physically possible for me to play all the stuff on the one guitar. We've had to jigger things about. That's just the way it is, a record's a record and live's live.'

When asked if either of them would continue with a solo project after Sons and Daughters had run its course, their answers are famially cosy. Though Patterson would be willing to continue making music, he adds that 'there's something about the camaraderie of being in a little gang that I really enjoy. From doing solo stuff myself, although it's cool because you're the only one that has a say, there's also that thing of if you play a bad show, it's just about you- you can't blame it on the drummer.' Bethel admits that 'if I was going to do something solo, I'd want at least one person from Sons and Daughters, probably Scott, to be in it'- leaving Patterson to sum up what they've both been trying to say: 'We've been together so long now that you kind of form this E.S.P. where when you're playing, without even looking, you know what the other person's going to do. We play together so easily. To get that with any other band, it would take years. I don't think I could be bothered to cultivate that over years and years again.'

Sons & Daughters play Whelans on the 17th of February.

Words: Ailbhe Malone



Band member and the man behind the greatest thing to come out of Brazil since Giselle! Adriano from CSS talks to Analogue.

So 18 months on the road and over 5 concerts in Ireland alone, you must be the hardest working band today!

Yeah our agency, since we have been through a lot of bad things made this little frame or picture saying "Most Hard Working Band Of the Year". We played like a 180 shows last year!

When you were leaving Brazil 18 months ago you were just getting big. You went back recently for the first time since and now you're huge. How was that?

It's weird as a lot of people didn't like us and then they wanted to interview us but we didn't do anything we didn't want to. Like we didn't speak to Globo Television (Brazil's largest tv company). They wanted us to go on the like the David Letterman of Brazil and we said "no way we're not doing this". We don't sell that much records there, we don't have a record label there. So there's no point in doing those things. We were wasting our time rehearsing and recording and we didn't want to waste our time doing those things for people who didn't like us. Just because we were famous in Europe and America. It's really boring.

But you did a few shows in Brazil when you got back. How was that?

Yeah we did. We were at a festival and 6000 people were there watching us, which was cool. We were on at the same time as Lilly Allen and people left her to see us! That was emotional. For a moment I thought people were there to criticize us but they were all there singing and dancing. It was really beautiful.

The first time I met you guys was when I was living in South America and you were on a bus, a normal bus from Sao Paulo to Rio in November 2005. Then I see you less than two years supporting Gwen Stefani on her European tour. That must have been weird, that quick rise, that trajectory from local band to world tours.

Yeah we played the Wembley Arena 4 times! Like 12,000 people each night! Ok they're not there for us but to see Gwen Stefani.

But you must get people who go to those gigs to see Gwen but come back to you and say "Wow, I didn't know you guys before and you're really good!"

Yeah! I never thought of the marketing aspect of touring but when we do tours like that our sales increase tremendously after. Of course there's a lot of people who have never heard of us. You know if we play in front of those 12,000 people and only 10% of those like us and buy our record that's 1200 people buying our record. So they are in HMV or Virgin and they see our record and go "That's the band that opened for Gwen Stefani!" and they buy our record. That's really cool.

How do you come about nabbing these big names to support? Is it a question of the record company coming to you?

Nah, it's the agent. It's the people who schedule our show. Like Gwen Stefani is from Primary, our agent. Primary, they have been really good to us. Our agent, he's brilliant.

You've supported over the past year or so Ladytron, Basement Jaxx and Gwen Stefani. Which one was the best?

Ladytron. We became really good friends with those guys. They are the sweetest people ever. Like Daniel from Ladytron, he lives in Milan so everytime we go there we meet up. His wife is Brazillian. She's really nice and we really became close friends. Like Helen from Ladytron always goes to our gigs in London. And Gwen, she's really, really cool. She always went to our dressing room and she brought her kid Kingston and she is so down to earth. But she's also kind of unapproachable as she's a big star, you know. So we didn't get that close so I don't have her email or her phone number so I can't ring her up and go "Hey Gwen, how are you!?". Basement Jaxx, we met them 3 or 4 times in the catering area at the gigs and they are really nice.

We had the most fun supporting Gwen. Basically we had a show and a day off, a show and a day off. Her show is also amazing. Watching that show every night it was amazing.

So you're working on the second album. How is it different in sound from the first album?

I think it's gonna sound more like a live show. It's going to be less electronic but still sound very pop. When we recorded the first album we weren't a band. We didn't play that much and I didn't know what we would end up doing. I have been working on this album since we started touring. I work on it on my computer touring and I am a workaholic so I am writing all the time. We already have 13, 14 songs so the album is all done. Man, at the beginning we didn't even have songs. We would have maybe 4 songs and we would do one song twice and move on. And everyone was so shocked we had the guts to do that. But now the girls have gotten way better. I really trust them as musicians. I know I can make a bassline and Ira would pick it up. At the beginning they couldn't. But now we play every day and we're practicing. I still write all the arrangements for the instruments but now when we're playing they'd change something as maybe it's easier for them or they discover it's better. Although I'm not really happy as we won't be able to rehearse all the songs before we record and that's something I really wanted to do. I wanted to go somewhere like a farm away from things and play the songs for almost forever but it's not gonna happen. It was funny we were thinking about songs in ways like how it would sound on the main stage of Glastonbury or we would go "let's make a break here so Lovefoxx can jump into the crowd" and stuff.

What goes on in Lovefoxx's head when she thinks of things like "Music is my hot hot sex"?

She's really unique. I think she's a little genius. Her first thing is not music. It's drawing. She's an amazing illustrator. She's more graphical than musical. I think her lyric writing is very visual as she is so graphical. She's one of the best artists I have ever met.

So how did you two meet up?

It's all Ira's fault. I used to have another band called I Love Miami, which was the worst band. It wasn't a proper band. It was me with like 10 other girls and we would just go on stage and make loads of noise. Then Ira saw us play one time and said "I would love to be in a band like that" and she called me and said "lets make a band" and I said ok. She invited the girls. I never met Lovefoxx before the first rehearsal. She said we met once when I was in my other band but I don't remember.

Did you get on well from the beginning?

Yeah! Ira was thinking when starting the band about who would be the best people to party with so she thought it would be cool.

With touring and the stress, do you still get on well?

Yeah we do. I think it's because were a lot of people. I get along very well with Ira. Yesterday we went for dinner and I live very

close to her in Sao Paulo. Lovefoxx hangs out with Luiza. Its not that we are jealous of each other and we have two gangs, it just seems natural.

So what is it like as the only guy in the band?

I never really thought about it. Most of my other bands had girls. I was in one band with all guys. The difference when you have a band with girls is that people tend to treat you better. In Brazil they would put you in a better hotel as they would think they wouldn't put a girl in certain hotels.

Have the girls rubbed off on you? Have you developed an appreciation for good shoes and make up?

Ha, and astrology too! We speak a lot about astrology too. I don't know how they do it but they guess the star signs of everyone. They go "Oh you are a Virgo" and I go "Yeah!" They are always right. And it's good. They always have creams like when my hands are so dry....

So what do you think of today's fast moving world where people come and go and more specifically bands form, go global and break up in such a short space of time?

Since we get along so well and we had a lot of shit together and we didn't break up or fight I think that if we want we could be a band that could last 10-15 years. This idea of brief famousness is so new now. I think our fans are not those trendy people looking for trendy bands. They like our music so if we get smaller or become less famous we would do well.

Are you the beginning of something new, a wave of Brazilian bands to come over here and make it big?

Nah. There are a lot of bands that suck. There are a lot of bands that sing in Portuguese. Bonde do Role kinda work cause they have this different funky kind of sound. But they're not big in Brazil because their lyrics are so filthy. Like if you understood what they were saying you would freak.

What is it with Brazilians? You guys and Bonde do Role. You seem to be overtly sexual? And your lyrics are too?

Well it's when we sing in English and its not our first language. Like when Lovefoxx sings Art Bitch she would be ashamed to sing it in Portuguese.

But why sing in English and not Portuguese?

Well because I was listening to bands singing in English. I've been that way since I was in bands at 14 years or age. I'm a terrible Portuguese writer. In English the words are very small.

And so you've been on the road almost 2 years non stop. Are you going to take a break?

No! All New Year we are recording the album and then we are back in March. Actually in January we are going to Australia from Brazil for three days, which from Brazil is awful. We have to go to Chile, then New Zealand and then Australia. Its gonna be awful. Then we will be back. In February we have 2 or 3 shows.

And this year you're making the big move to London. Are you apprehensive about going to London?

I don't think about it much. We stay so much there so don't think about it. Once I have my own house Ill be fine. I hate hotels. I'm paranoid to the point I travel with my own pillow! I keep thinking about who has drooled into that pillow. I was even thinking about bringing my own sheets but I thought that was too much!

Words: Conor O'Neill



Neil Campesinos!, the guitarist in this year's most hyped indie-pop band, chats about their debut album, their all-ages shows and the impending egomania.

A line in *We Exhale And Roll Our Eyes In Unison* runs "four sweaty boys with guitars say nothing about my life". Do you think Los Campesinos! provide a healthy alternative to that traditional British indie outfit?

I really hope so. When we first started we were completely sure that we didn't want to be that standard lad-rock post-Libertines, boring, stale...

The View!

Yeah! There are bands like that coming out every single week.

We didn't know what we wanted to sound like, we only had ideas of what we didn't want to sound like.

You associate a lot more with North American acts. Are you complete anglophobes? Are there any British bands or scenes that do interest you?

Oh yeah, there's still lots of awesome British bands. On the tour we're doing we're playing with Johnny Foreigner from Birmingham, and 4 Or 5 Magicians, which are bands that we all know. So we're not anglophobes at all. British bands that get press attention aren't particularly good. And all our favourite bands are American anyway.

Have you found your reception in North America has been more welcoming?

The North American reception has been quite surreal. They read the British press in a different way. I can't fathom the fact that we can go to gigs in America and play to people who are singing all the words along. I guess the internet has done so much for us. It's really amazing.

You're signed to Arts and Crafts over there which is fairly prestigious. You have a similar sound and ethos to other bands on that label. Did that play a big part in you choosing to sign with them?

I think the A+C thing was down to a lot of bands on that label. We got to work with David Newfield who's connected with Broken Social Scene. It all just came about without us looking for it. We never really considered getting on a record label in America. When the Wichita thing happened they were like "We'll get someone to put it out in North America too. How about Arts and Crafts?", those two labels have a connection. So we were like "Why the hell not!" It was very flattering. A year ago we were huge fans of that label, and now they're asking us to be part of their roster.

Have you met any of the bands you like off the label yet?

Yeah! Several times. I bumped into Kevin Drew in Toronto at a gig. Well, he bumped into me, I didn't even notice him at first! We've met them all now, they're all really nice. David Newfield especially so.

Do you think he's made a contribution to your sound?

Yeah without a doubt! He's such more musically advanced than us in so many ways. He's older than us, he's got more experience. He has ideas that we've never even thought of, and this vast array of instruments, mics, compressors, everything. He's exactly... a mad scientist, but he'd be like "Let's try this through a 1940s vintage amp." And it would work.

A lot of your influences, like Pavement, are distinctly lo-fi, but the Los Campesinos! sound is quite clean. Was that conscious?

We didn't necessarily want to go for a clean record, but somewhere in between... I don't think we could have gotten away

with releasing a lo-fi record, although it would have been amazing. I don't think it's a super-clean mix, but I guess it is essentially a pop record. I think our first record almost has to be a pop record. It's meant to be fun. Not mainstream pop, that American type of indie pop.

Is Los Campesinos! the dayjob now?

Yeah. We just graduated in June. To be able to walk out of university straight into this is a bit ridiculous.

I know it's a bit into the future, but do you think you'll be a quick fire releaser of albums, or will you take your time over them? You haven't been together that long, and your first album is already finished.

Well, *Hold On Now, Youngster* comes out in February, and we'll pretty much tour this year out. The longer you drag it out, the longer you get to be in a band for, so I think we'll take our time!

Milk it for all it's worth! Release *You! Me! Dancing!* four times!

No! No! That is a no-no. It's so frustrating when bands re-release their songs... If you've not made it by now, stop trying! If that first single you released three years ago isn't popular now, it's not going to get popular. Just go away and quit! If you're not in a band where you want to release material because it excites you, why are you in one? Just to get famous.

Most of your gigs on the upcoming tour are all ages gigs, is it a fight with venues to allow this?

It has been, some venues make a big deal of it. I don't know why, I've been to plenty of gigs where it's not over 18s. Some people just don't like it. Gareth (singer and lyricist) is quite active in getting our gigs all ages. I like it, it makes the crowd more exciting. When I was 14 or 15 at a gig I'd go mental, whereas if I go to a gig now I'll probably just stand there, move my head and say "Yeah, this is good".

Have you noticed at your gigs whether people are like that? Static, with some head-nodding thrown in, or have you been getting a more excitable reaction?

Actually, really amazingly, we've been getting really excited reactions. During our UK tour we had stage invasions. Generally we do get an exciting crowd. We find it weird, because when we go to gigs we're not like that. We'll just enjoy the music and not go mental. Maybe they actually HATE the music, that's why they're going mental.

That's a fucked up way to look at it! Last time you played some of the band seemed quite nervous. I suppose it was the first time you'd been on tour. Do you think next time you'll be more comfortable on stage?

Yeah I hope so anyway. That was pretty much one of the first gigs of a big tour. We'll be much more comfortable now. We've much more songs to play. We've not even started learning them yet. They're songs we played for the album but haven't actually played live on the album yet, as a band proper. When we recorded the album we didn't really play the songs together, as a band. We'll see what happens in a few weeks, how that goes. When we realize we probably should have started practicing about two weeks ago. I think we'll still be nervous, if a little bit more confident. But still nervous, and still excited.

Is Los Campesinos! a democracy?

Yeah, I guess it is. Everyone has differences at times, but most of the time it's all positive. We do try and always agree on, say support acts, and tracklisting and album names. Gareth writes

all the lyrics, Tom writes a lot of the lead lines and hooks, and we'll all structure and arrange it and add our own parts into it. **Speaking of tracklistings, you left *International Tweexcore Underground, It Started With A Mixx*, and *We Throw Parties! You Throw Knives!* off the album. Did you want an album of mainly new material or were you just bored of the older songs?**

We just really wanted to get a mix of newer material and material that had been released, and then songs people new anyway. So we left *International Tweexcore Underground* off the album because it didn't fit in terms of the mix of the album and

sonically, also we just liked the idea of a standalone concept single. We left *It Started With A Mixx* off because it's an old song, and we've played it for a long time. Perhaps it wouldn't fit on the album. And the same goes for *We Throw Parties!*. We still really like it, we'll still play it live, but it was time to move on. I think we made the right choice.

How easily did the songs come together for the album, it doesn't seem like you had a lot of time to make it?

I guess a lot of them, even the new ones had already been totally written, practised and demoed. We had more songs that we didn't pick to go on the album. It didn't feel particularly stressful at the time, even though we didn't have a lot of time. We approached it quite sensibly. We knew how much we had to get done, so we focused and did it. Also, we were staying in a town where there was nothing at all to do, it was very dull, which meant we didn't get distracted at all.

It is a "big" album, are you ready for the inevitable backlash against it? The band gets so much positive press, do you think it'll be difficult when negative comments start appearing?

Probably. But so what? However it balances out, it doesn't really matter anyway. We'll do what we want to do. It all depends on how seriously you take yourself, and how seriously you take other people's comments, and one thing we really don't want to do is take ourselves too seriously. We're well aware this bubble could break, in a year's time people might not give a shit about us, and if that's the case it'll be sad. But we've had this opportunity, and none of us ever expected to do this, none of us aimed to do this. Every day on tour, I know it sounds really cheesy, but every day is exciting.

You've been getting an awful lot of press for a young band, how've you been dealing with it?

Just not thinking about it too much, not taking it too seriously... When you see yourself in magazines you like, say Pitchfork or Plan B that's cool. If people ask to do an interview with us it's really flattering that somebody cares that much, whether it's national press, university press, or fanzines. It's so surreal that people care at all what we have to say.

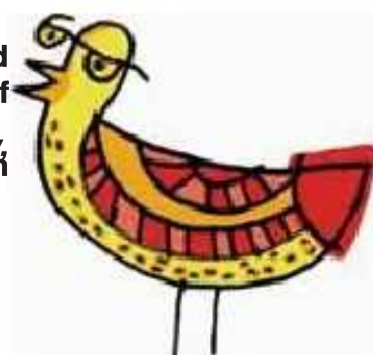
Do you think the ego will come eventually?

Oh yeah, hopefully. We're practising it now... Not really, though, we never meant for this to happen, and it wouldn't be fair to get too carried away with it.

The Next Big Thing play their second Dublin gig in the Village on the 11th of

February. Debut album *Hold On Now, Youngster* is released a week later on Wichita.

Words: Daniel Gray



A photograph of a young man with dark hair, wearing a dark tank top, playing a violin on a stage. He is leaning forward, focused on his instrument. A bright spotlight shines down on him from above, creating a dramatic effect. The background is dark with some faint, colorful light patterns. The text 'The Fantasy' is overlaid in a white, cursive font in the upper right quadrant.

The Fantasy

Analogue got a chance to speak to Owen Pallett better before he took to the stage to support Girl Talk at the Foggy Notions Christmas Party in Whelans. Sitting around in Whelans mini boardroom come makeshift green room, Owen chats openly about "doing new things with technology", why comparisons to other musicians don't bother him and how he unexpectedly came to score the strings for Alex Turner's new album.

A: Your show at Vicar Street on Tuesday went pretty well, you tried out a quadraphonic sound set up. When did you start experimenting with that and how do you think it's

going so far?

FF: Well literally about two weeks ago, I was originally just going to do that and have that something in the distant future but just because this was a hilarious one off gig, I was just like whatever I'll do it! I'll try and make it, like I mean it's not even technically quadraphonic but rather it's just like doing a looping show that's more than stereo is, or even more than mono is. It's really really difficult and requires some extra programming and concentration and stuff like that. It's also my way of trying to stay ahead the curve, you know.

You haven't used laptops in the past, have you?

No I never have and I always think there is a stigma to having one on stage.

I think at this point I think people are pretty familiar with the set up and understand that it's a live show and that there's no pre-recorded stuff going on. I think it's safe that I can have a laptop on stage and plus the amount of stuff I can do now is crazy, I get so excited that I've actually started to dream about it. It's opened up this whole new world, I'm a little bit embarrassed about the nerdiness of it, reading about Stephen O'Malley from Sunn and reading interviews where he's talking about amps and I've been getting really excited. I'm like 'ohh I'm going to play with amps'. I don't have a huge savings account so I can't really afford to go out and get a huge rack of amps but wouldn't that be exciting to just surround the audience with big amps, just a wall of sound. That would be so cool but we'll see...

So it's still in the experimental stage at the moment.

Yeah I really needed to change something from my mono set up because all the new songs I've been writing have been getting a little more complicated sonically and when you're doing mono looping, the amount of sounds I have at my disposal are very limited but now it's really cool, I'm using Mac Msp to do all sorts of crazy things where I can have the violins go in circles and carosels around the audience and stuff so I'm really excited around when I can get it perfected.

Was that the first gig where you played like that?

I did one before that was a total disaster but because my computer didn't crash I decided I'd do this one. Even this one I kind of thought was a bit of a failure, I played every song badly. My singing was so happening and I was really concerned about playing it all correctly but it was the same thing when I just started off and I was doing mono looping.

I wouldn't say it was a bad show at all but it seemed like it was a little bit different to what you played at Electric Picnic and a lot of people who were there on Tuesday night would have been at your Electric Picnic show and for them it was a totally different experience because you didn't play all the same songs.

Well the Electric Picnic set was really...I tried to make it very like "let's have fun at the festival" and this one was actually kind of like "I am doing new things with technology!"

Because really I looked into it and there's nobody else doing this, isn't that exciting? Because when I first started off people were like "Oh Yeah, Andrew Bird blah blah blah" and now you know...

Loreana: No don't say that!

I didn't say it.

Loreana: I mean in your favour.

No I think it's really disrespectful to both me and him. He does this amazing thing.

Gareth: You're both great in your own unique ways...

Ahh that's nice. Well we've decided that we're going to fight to the death and I will emerge triumphant and then nobody will ever listen to Andrew Bird again.

Loreana: Or join forces, Final Bird.

Final Bird! Ha. Actually we were talking at a Latitude Festival in Ipswich because he heard this cover I did of his song, I did a cover of, actually it was three of his songs, that I smashed together into one song and I was looping parts from different Andrew Bird songs all on top of each other while Cadence Weapon did his Shark Song which has "that means stop biting my shit" over and over again in the song. I was like this is hilarious! And he when he heard it was like really confused so we had a conversation about it but was ok, he like "I thought it was nice". I was like you know when you're compared to somebody all the time it's best to just look them like right in the eyes and be like, fuck you.

Bren: It doesn't happen to a lot of people, if they're compared it's always like the journalist doing it and it's probably fairly rare that they actually come head to head.

No dude, I don't feel bad about it because I see what happens to any female musicians, because it's impossible for female musicians to be considered original. Either female musicians sound like Cat Power or Jonnie Mitchell or they're considered crazy, like these crazy bitches. I'm serious, like you read about any sort of female musician who is doing anything even remotely weird and it's always just like "Oh She's *crazy*". Even Joanna Newsom until She was like "fuck you I'm going to get all these men to help me make this record and there's nothing you can say about it" and granted everyone loves Joanna Newsom now but up until She made that record people were just like "She sings crazy, your music is about weird things" you know what I mean? Scout Niblett is still at that point where people are just like "She sounds like Cat Power, it's Cat Power". It sounds nothing fucking at all like Cat Power, it sounds like Black Sabbath, her music sounds like Black Sabbath. If you put on Black Sabbath and put on Kidnap by Neptune, you're listening to the same record. I don't feel so bad about getting compared because I feel that women have it so much harder than any man does.

You're past the whole, well not stigma but like that guy who recorded with Arcade Fire and now I don't know how often you get that any more.

Em I don't know, yeah it'll just be replaced by something else.

Somebody will get wind of my massive child pornography and then I'll be that guy who was arrested for all that stuff he has on his computer.

I don't have any child pornography.



No I doubt you do.

I'm sure there'll be something.

So next week you're scheduled to record with Alex Turner of the Arctic Monkeys on a side project of his, how did you get involved in that?

It's pretty confusing actually, I'm not sure how it happened. I think they contacted Nico Muhly who is the guy who arranges for Bjork and he did the best Bonnie Prince Billy record ever,

Letting Go. He did all the strings on that and he's doing the new Anthony record and stuff and Sam Amadan and every other record, it's going to be amazing. Anyway I think they contacted Nico, I don't know how and he has started passing stuff off in my direction because we became friends earlier this year. We both have ears for different things like I could never do a Bonnie Prince Billie record because I'd just be so precious about it, every second I'd be like "no no no no!" you know what I mean, whereas Nico is just like "whatever, here it goes". With Alex Turner I feel more relaxed, I'm like "Yeah!" so you know. Not that I don't connect with Alex's music, it's just I feel a little more relaxed about it.

It just seems like you would move in different kinds of circle, it's strange that you would come together on something like this.

I don't know, you think so?

Well your fans would be different to Arctic Monkey fans.

It's kind of funny because I'll be talking to...you know I'm friends

with like a few really famous British musicians like Keli from Bloc Party and Patrick Wolf and when I started working with Alex, they were so surprised and even a little starstruck by the whole thing because I feel like Alex Turner moves in different circles to the entire British music scene. Because he's not comfortable with being a star, he is actually some dude who he just like "I play in a band with my mates". You know what I mean?

You come across a lot like that, except that you don't have a band behind you. You're very much like this is what I do.

Like unromantic?

No, I mean that you're not like searching for fame, you just seem like you do something that you're passionate about and not in a way that's aiming to be a star.

I think everybody does stuff the exact same way. I feel as if different people have, everyone who's making music have like a different level of ability and a different background and everyone has like different levels of substances that they abuse and different diets and stuff like that. But other than that, everyone just wants to make records that everyone is going to love, everyone just wants like everyone in the critical and public community to love them for the rest of their lives and proclaim that they're geniuses. So I don't think it's that different.

Are you going to be writing any of the songs on this album or just scoring strings to accompany it?

For Alex's record, no I didn't write anything. In fact they came to me with pretty specific things of what they wanted me to do so I just tried to flesh them all out. I have no idea how this is going to sound. I'm so excited about it, I was tapped to score a song on this last Spoon record, the Ga Ga Ga one and so I worked on it. It actually took me a long time to work on it because Brit was like really precious about what he wanted on the song and I did a lot of research and I just spent like a week listening to all these songs off records that he liked and I was listening to all the Spoon material. I did so much research for it and then I sat down and wrote it and it took me an entire month to do an arrangement for one song which is like insane, I've ever put so much time into anything in my life and I sent it to him and he like "Nah I don't like it" and so that was that.

Loreana: Are you for real?

Yeah so he didn't use it.

Loreana: Which song?

It's the very last song called 'Black like me' and he ended up writing his own arrangement which was very very simple. I thought my arrangement was pretty good but what he ended up using, his arrangement was far more suitable in the context of the entire record which I hadn't heard so obviously Brit Daniel knows how a Spoon record is supposed to sound and I don't so I mean it's totally good.

Bren: When I spoke to you at Electric Picnic, you told me a bit about your next album Heartland. How's that coming along? Have you gotten a chance to work on much of it? Have you been sitting in the back of a van writing that?

Yeah I mean I've got about four songs now written for it, of which I'm going to write eventually twenty. I tend to write songs quickly when I'm actually at home. I'm like today write songs and I can write a song but I just haven't had much of that time so I'm kind of behind. These spectrum Eps have been taking up



a lot of my time as well.

They're coming out pretty soon as well.

Yeah they're going to be maybe coming out in April I believe. I've still got to mix them, I'm still working at the mercy of other peoples schedules and stuff like that, there's been a lot of other weird things that I've had to take care of. Margarine commercials...

So will you take time off from touring in 2008 to get that finished?

Yeah I'm not going to tour until the record is done, until Heartland is done and I'm not going to play any shows.

Apart from the Maximum Black festival.

Yeah apart from the festival.

So 2008 is going to be an exciting year between the album and Maximum Black, what's the idea behind creating the festival? Have you any ethos that you want to bring forth?

To be honest the whole festival is fine but I'm happy to let it slide, do you know what I mean. I think that was something that I feeling really negative about but now I feeling much better about.

Pitchfork posted a story about it and it came from various different sources.

No it came from a single email that I wrote to them because they were like "what is this?" and I wrote them, well this is what happened. I mean honestly I didn't want to spend any time thinking about it and I kind of still don't, I'm like sure I'll play this festival and I'm really happy to be playing with my friends

bands. It's as much Susanne's [Owen's manager] project as it is mine because She's the one who settled up with the finances and is booking the shows because She's the professional booker. I'm just like "Oh, get these bands".

In terms of the whole Werner Stadwerker thing, from what was essentially a terrible situation you've come out on top.

I didn't even think of it as a terrible situation, it's just like the ad company who made the ad is like a group of eight people, the dude who recorded new violin over the track and added the 'Can you feel it?' is just like this fifty year old dude that makes music for commercials, he's just some dude. Like some of my friends do the exact same work that he does in Toronto so it just didn't bug me all that much. I definitely didn't want to pursue any sort of litigation. But they [Werner Stadwerk] were very nice, they came forward after the show in Vienna, I actually played their version of the song at the show. To the people I was like you might of heard this song before you went to see the Bourne Ultimatum or something and then I played it with the 'Can you feel it?' and the new violin solo.

Did you do the "Der ist ein Stadt" part over it?

Yeah I did!

Where did you get the name for the festival from?

Oh yeah it's from a song by Bohren and the Club of Gore, which is a really awesome German metal band so Susanne was like "where should we get our name from?" and so She came up with all these song titles from her favourite band which is Born and then came up with a whole bunch of song titles from my favourite bands and all of my favourite bands have lousy song titles so we picked Bohren.

What were the other options?

There was a Destroyer song called 'Don't become the thing that you hated' and I was like that's a terrible name for a festival And then there was a teabjbob song Hair hair hair hair hair hair hair, that was a contender for awhile. I'm just kidding, that would be a pretty funny name. The Boy Soprano music festival, that would be ok.

Words: Brendan McGuirk

Photos: Loreana Rushe

Mg netic F elds



Axe wielding beach boy parodies, nymphomaniac nuns and zombie sex slaves, it must be the new Magnetic Fields - 39 minutes of harmony and 'Distortion'.

Stephin Merritt, the 'dangerously white' Magnetic Fields front man, perhaps the grumpiest man in rock and roll, is sick. He has what Americans like to call stomach flu. He takes epic pauses between each. New. Sentence. New words are elicited slowly, begrudgingly - the low growls of an aging bear. Merritt is not angry, but bored and irritated. Erving Goffman, the great social psychologist, described how human beings negotiate their interactions like actors on a stage. Each of us holds numerous scripts, we follow notes on how to behave without needing to be told. Stephin Merritt is ignorant, or contemptuous, of such mortal concerns. His pauses are ferocious, his interruptions unrelenting. Were it anyone else, I might simply hang up. Instead I search and cajole, tickle and suggest, because Stephin Merritt isn't like anybody else. He is, perhaps, the greatest songwriter alive.

The Magnetic Fields, merely one of Merritt's numinous projects, are best known for an album released almost a decade ago, the endless and bountiful '69 Love Songs'. "69 Love Songs would have sold just

as many records if it had been terrible. It's just a great title. I probably shouldn't have spent so much time writing the songs, I probably should have put down just any old 69 songs I could think of."

Despite Merritt's protestations, 69 Love Songs was an almost unreviewably epic, instant classic, lauded by everyone from Pitchfork to 33 1/3. 69 Love Songs is so good, so utterly and unambiguously original, bawdy and irreverent, that it basks the rest of Merritt's work in the golden glow of mere association.

And those side projects aint bad neither. When not writing the soundtrack to Lemony Snicket's 'Series of Unfortunate Events' as bubblegum goth outfit 'The Gothic Archies', Merritt is hard at work writing cabaret for Neil Hannon, Marc Almond, and Gary Numan in the 6ths, composing electropop about vampires and aliens with Chris Ewen as the Future Bible Heroes, or collaborating on experimental updates of 13th century Chinese opera.

In his 18 years in the music business, Merritt seems to have collaborated with everyone he considers worthy, producing in the process an output trivialised by the term prolific. Despite this, 'Distortion' is something new; a fusion of his mastery of melody and counter-melody, with the deliberate distortion of an

early Jesus and Mary Chain album. Or so the press release tells me. In truth 'Distortion' is its own thing, baroque pop candy, hazy in the mist of noise, "So you can't always tell which notes are being played, and which notes are happening by themselves." The melodies may lack the instant earworm stickiness of earlier Fields releases, but they're the kind of noisy slow boil classics you'll feed to friends once cracked.

Merritt recently appeared on Bob Boilen's turbo hip NPR show 'All Songs Considered', in a segment where artists write and record a song in 48 hours. The product was the simple but beautiful 'Man of a Million Faces', at its heart a plain but beautiful piano loop. "I certainly only did it as a publicity stunt, but in fact it's not all that unusual for me to have to come up with a song and record it really quickly...The sprint part of it was to do that on camera. I think the song would have been better if it had been worked on longer. But that's kinda the point, it's not supposed to be something that's pretending that I worked on it for a year."

The Magnetic Fields, and Merritt's work in general, has been described as a series of concept albums, from 1994's 'Charm of the Highway Strip' (an electro country snook at the American myth of the road), to 2004's 'i' (a pack of self deprecating love songs, narrated by protagonist who may or may not be Merritt). So why the obsession with themes?

"Because I'm making fun of the whole idea. I was told by a Swedish journalist that distortion is actually a concept album I didn't realise I was making about solitude. Almost all the songs are about solitude, which when I look back at it is true. Solitude or impending solitude I guess. But I don't think solitude is an unusual enough topic for that to qualify as a theme. I think probably the first Soft Cell albums would also be considered to be about solitude really, and more than half of Roxy music."

To Merritt, everything has a theme, even Britney. "All of her songs are like 'Hey I'm 15 now, I'm 16 now, and here's my belly button, aren't you titillated.' That's an extremely narrow theme, and so far it's her entire career. If I wrote songs with that theme, I'd be accused of repeating myself." Distortion does seem to buck the trend, substituting conceptual production, "it sounds like the Nuggets albums, it sounds like

Garage rock from 1965", for lyrical consistency.

The album drips with references to the history of rock and roll. "I'm happy with the word derivative," Merritt says, asked about the Beach Boy inspired 'California girls', a track whose acerbic lyrics run, 'See them on their big bright screen, tan and blonde and seventeen. Eating non-food keeps them mean...I hate California girls.'

"Certainly California Girls existing in relation to the Beach Boys depends for its effect on you ever having heard the Beach Boys. I suppose if you've never heard of the Beach Boys you can still understand the song, but you can't really understand the point of the song, and you risk thinking that I in fact am telling you to go to California with a battle axe and kill people." Merritt side-steps accusations of satire, "I don't think I would ever admit to mocking it, that's the point of deadpan, if you tell everyone what you're doing..."

That's the other signature of a Magnetic Fields song. Humour. 'Painfully intellectual' humour, sandpaper in the rump of a desert goat dry. "Dr. Seuss was actually a major influence on me, because Dr. Seuss shows you what's wrong

with Bob Dylan, allowing the plot to be lead by whatever happens to rhyme with whatever word was just used. Dr. Seuss foregrounds that and makes it funny. Whereas Bob Dylan sometimes thought about that, and makes it funny, and then keeps it going and we're expected to not find it funny any more. But in Dr. Seuss land its always funny / weird. He finds surrealism in the idea that you would make something up, and he's always making something up right in front of you, in really self parodying ways. Quite brilliant."

After our interview, I thank Stephin Merritt, and set the phone down. I pause a moment, then vent at the nearest body, a publications editor working late, who's foolishly wandered into the line of fire. I'm fuming, tired and disappointed. I've never felt more foolish. I go home and listen to 'In the Aeroplane over the Sea'. There are other geniuses after all. It doesn't last. Merritt's melodies have a timeless draw, and his lyrics, droll as his dysthymic Deputy Dawg baritone, keep me coming back.

Distortion is out now on Nonesuch. You can hear a great deal of Merritt and the Magnetic Fields on MySpace.

www.myspace.com/themagneticfields
www.myspace.com/stephinmerritt
www.myspace.com/gothicarchies
www.myspace.com/th6ths

Words: Gareth Stack



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Mia cle Fø tress



If you thought Caribou was the only 60s obsessed Canadian one-man-band recording psych-pop, think again. Graham Van Pelt (aka Miracle Fortress) has been at it too. His full-length LP 'Five Roses' was one of the most quietly beguiling records of last year. It was a record with an astonishing amount of attention to detail- the songs seemed to come sealed inside their own hazy and summery micro climate. Graham recently toured the record with a full band. I caught up with him before his band supported Final Fantasy in Vicar Street. He chatted about touring with a full band, the merits of 1960s recording techniques and the Montreal music scene.

Okay, about miracle fortress. Graham, you started this project as a one man thing, now that the guys are with you, it's sort of a band dynamic. How is that going for you?

Yeah its alright you know. Its really different and something that we are still working on all the time. Its been so quick. Like we have only played together for 8 or 9 months. I've gone through 3 different types of line-up.

Hah, a bit like Guided by Voices.

(Laughs) Well, yeah. But mostly the people have been the same. We've been messing around with different ways to pull off the album

and sort of departing from the album a lot more and feeling a lot better about it. Every time we go on a trip its gotten better, like I know there are going to be growing pains and all that but its certainly working.

Listening to the album, it's sort of a summery sound, an optimistic sound. Would you find that an appropriate description?

Yeah, I dunno. I actually made it during blizzards in the dead of winter. So I don't really know how much I had that in mind but I guess a lot of the imagery a lot of the stuff I was thinking of was

indirectly summery. A lot of what I'm into, a lot of sort of 60s psychedelia, well you don't exactly think of blizzards and snowdrifts. You sort of picture a whole thing of meadows and sunshine.

Another album your record reminds me of is another Canadian record, Andorra by Caribou, listening to the two of these albums, I thought there was an air of 60s revivalism about them, and there is the whole 'one man band' thing, but both records have that 60s sound...

Ok, well I don't really think I was trying to revive anything. But what I do see, is the production and that is just something that I prefer and I don't see why things have to sound the way they often do now. Like now, things are produced really heavy and really big. And I just recorded the album that way, is because regardless of when they were done I just prefer songs that were recorded that way. Songs that are maybe a little more delicate, a little less drum and bass heavy in the mix. I guess things like that made it sound a little 60s, but otherwise I guess it would sound more like contemporary pop.

Yeah it does. It has a real sort of classic sound. But you did all that yourself right? So just how did you go about that?

Its funny but a lot of it comes down just to the thinking that you put into engineering a band or engineering a rock song. The way things were done in the 50s or 60s was specifically about the limitations that they had and they had to work with y'know things that were naturally occurring in the rooms that they were recording in and that's just a principle that I brought to it. I have a kind of distaste for a lot of pro-tooly and clean digital production. Now I know that can work well sometimes and record a lot of cool stuff. But as far as recording a sound well, I mean I suppose my subjective take on that would be to get a sort of natural thing happening. And what that meant was recording things in the room really naturally using room sounds and putting mics away really far from your instruments.

So yeah I suppose instead of using some kind of effect to get an echo, you would actually...

Yeah, y'know there's a difference between taking a drum and putting a mike an inch away from it, playing it and sitting there with equalizers and compressors and treating it like a big sound, putting it in a digital reverb space y'know. Or you could just play the drum and hang a mike six feet in the air in a really reverberant room and that's just basically the difference.

Hah, it reminds me of My Morning Jacket. When I was into them a few years ago I used to always tell my mates that they recorded their album inside a grain silo, you know to get the reverb sound they got into an empty grain silo!

To me its actually a lot easier. People ask how did you manage to get that sound, you know that more 60s sound. But basically

it's a lot easier to record things that way. You could just imagine hanging a mike and playing a drum the way things were done versus hours of trying to craft it. That's actually just quicker and easier. Its actually almost sort of a lo-fi thing.

I want to ask you about coming from Montreal. To a lot of Irish music fans there is this notion of Montreal as being some sort of indie-wonderland where everyone knows each other and are all in the same bands. How's that for you guys, is the scene really that tight over there or what?

Its definitely a great city to play music in and everyone from this band basically came together because of all our other projects. Like we knew of each other that way before we decided to start this. So yeah, in that way there is a lot of camaraderie and people messing with each other's stuff. Also, if you look at Toronto its even more the case there. Toronto is definitely another city where you see a lot of huge collectives. It kind of makes sense. If the city has a lot of musicians that you really like you sort of end up wanting to play with them.

Right. To get back to the 'Five Roses' record. It's a pretty cohesive record. It's one to listen to from start to finish. So I'm just wondering about MP3s, how easy it is to rip songs out of their natural context and put them up on blogs. Now you find that songs have to sort of stand on their own. How would you feel about that in terms of your own record?

I mean it probably does hinder these songs a little bit to be taken out of the context of the album. That's because the whole time I was thinking about making an album. I had in mind how things would blend into each other. I wasn't thinking about writing a single or having things pulled out of it. That's something beyond my control, but it is meant to be heard all together.

Do you think that this will ever effect the way you record music?

I dunno. Maybe it already has. Now that we are all playing together as a band the focus is on songs. I don't think we're going to all sit down and focus on like a suite of 12 songs all blended in together.

Who or what are you listening to right now?

Everyone is listening to such different stuff. Im kind of obsessed with poppy lo-fi punk bands. I've been listening to 'The Clean' and these lo-fi bands from New Zealand. I've also been listening to the band 'Japanther' from New York and 'Cause Commotion' from New York. Just really dirty garage music.

New Zealand lo-fi, yeah that was a bit of a scene wasn't it?

Yeah a lot of that stuff was from the early 80s. There were a bunch of bands that came out of it. David Kilgour who has a lot of stuff I really like.

Finally, whats next for Miracle Fortress now that it has become a band?

We've just been talking about getting home. Staying at home and writing a bunch of new stuff because we have more or less been playing the same 7 song set for almost a year. Basically quality time at home.

**Words: Darragh McCausland
Photo: Loreana Rushe**



Words: Darragh McCausland
Photo: Loreana Rushe

Jens Lekman



What I first notice about Jens Lekman are his shoes. They are a marvel in shiny white leather engineering, tapering off to ridiculous pointyness like a pair of miniature concorde jets. Backstage in Whelans, as Jens speaks about touring in that melodiously well-spoken manner shared by male Scandinavians, they keep distracting me and I wonder if the tips of them are splitting atoms. You might, by now, be asking yourself why this piece is starting off with a digressive observation of the interviewee's footwear as opposed to the standard snappy relevant quote to get things going. I could lie and tell you that I am a bisexual shoe fetishist and the sight of a dapper Swedish man in patent leather rendered anything he had to say about music completely irrelevant. Or I could admit the sad truth, and tell you that the battery in my recorder ran out after 2 minutes, meaning that the few shreds of actual quoted material I got from Jens are to be guarded jealously and sprinkled sparingly across this piece like dinky bits of white truffle on a posh omelette. But we won't worry too much about the details of the interview that (mostly) got away, as there is much to relate about Jens himself and the festive gig he played later that night accompanied in part by Owen Pallett and a woman who looked freakishly like a young Britt Eckland. Jens Lekman is a Swedish singer-songwriter who writes wry, lyrical and heartfelt pop that is polished and meticulously constructed like, yep, those shoes. A few things set him apart from the dreary masses of guitar-toting workmen that haunt

this dreaded genre. One is the way in which so many of his original melodies are woven through samples cribbed from the vinyl he obsessively collects in second hand stores and flea markets. It's something that could potentially be a clever parlour trick, but in Lekman's hands the samples imbue the songs with timelessness, like he's selectively dipping his lyrics into the huge collective vat of love and loss that informs so much great pop music. For me, this is best demonstrated in an earlier song of his called 'Black Cab.' Here, a heart-rending lyric of alienation from friends is married to the jaunty sounds of a 60s baroque pop song by The Left Banke, creating a finished product that leaves you grasping for suitable adjectives and wishing the term 'bittersweet' hadn't become such a cliché.

There are two other things that mark Jens out from many contemporaries. They are his light and playful way with words and his rich singing voice, which sounds whiskey mellow and often belies his young age. I ask him about the way he plays around with words on his most recent album 'Night falls over Kortedala,' whether it comes naturally to him or whether he has had to work hard at it and sweat everything out? He tells me it comes easily to him, that he's been fascinated by words

and language since a very young age, and likes how the one word or phrase can mean many different things, "for example, the words 'cigarette lighter.' I've been fascinated by those two words for a long time and I think I used it as an image in maybe about five of my songs." In Jens-speak, meanings of things do not only change across different songs, they often get turned inside out suprisingly in the space of a lyric, like when he describes how a crab crawls out of a shell he holds up to demonstrate his homelessness in the song 'The

Opposite of Halleluiah.' Now, I'd say that some readers who have never heard Jens Lekman have gotten this far and are thinking 'Cripes, pass a sickbag, cos this sounds like some sickeningly twee fluff.' And there is no denying that, taken alone, or even on record, some of the lyrics might seem a tad affected and suited to only the sweetest palates. But when he takes to the stage in Whelans, twee and grating are transformed to dry and funny as he delivers his lines with the easy and expert timing of an old comedian. It's something that really strikes me during his gig, this mixture of calm charisma and fluent banter that has the audience hanging off his stories and song lyrics. It is exactly like Johnny Cash playing San Quentin prison, but only if you replace the grizzled and murderous cons with fey kids in cardigans and wonky spectacles.

Talking backstage, Jens' demeanour is as impenetrably calm as it is live. He chats in such gentle and quiet tones that I'd

later wonder if my battery died from the sheer strain of trying to pick up his voice. I ask him about how songs which seem to have such complicated arrangements on record translate live? "Some songs I have to change the arrangements a lot on," he says, "and some I can't even play live." I tell him I heard one of the songs he rarely plays is 'Maple Leaves, (a swooning ballad from an early EP built around a violin sample) which is a shame because it is such a beautiful song. He smiles, and says it will probably get a rare airing later on. Sure enough, about halfway through the gig, Jens announces a guest musician will be joining him, and a beaming Owen Pallett (Final Fantasy) walks into the fray. Together, he and Jens play a wonderfully stirring version of maple leaves. It's a showstopping turn but more is to come. In a spontaneous and electric moment, the man who earlier proclaimed "I wish I could have brought [a full band] with me," leaves me secretly glad that this particular wish did not come true. During 'Black Cab' he turns the mic to the crowd and they softly sing the song's melancholy chorus back to him. He loops it and plays it back to us over the venue's speakers. The effect is hair-raising and touching. He really didn't need that band at all.

Okkervil River

Okkervil River have come a long way in the last 8 years. From self-releasing 500 copies of their debut album they have become staples within the North American indie-rock aristocracy. Singer and songwriter Will Sheff explains the ups and downs of his band's situation.

Is there less freedom being on a label as compared to self-releasing material? Is there more pressure on you now?

Our label has never put us under pressure. You have to appreciate the fact that we're on the same label as we were seven years ago, the label that put out our first nationally-released record *Don't Fall In Love With Everyone You See*, Jagjaguwar, and that's the label that has put out the Stage Names. Those are our buddies, we've grown up with them. We've watched them go through major life stuff, we know them really well. They're not suits who are going to tell us what to. They don't hear the records until we're done with them. They don't tell us our songs need to sound like THIS, tell us what to do. That happened to me one time and I kind of laughed in the guy's face. I don't feel pressure artistically. Maybe I'll get to thinking how there's more pressure on us now to deliver what people think we are, that we have to make good on images people have in their head of us. But really I don't understand people's tastes and what they want. You make your music that you think is cool, interesting and exciting and hopefully if you're hard on yourself, if you're very exacting about your work and set high standards, then other people will respond to that.

Your songs seem really thought out, like an awful lot of exactitude is exercised. Is that true or is it just a vibe Okkervil River gives off?

I guess... It depends on the actual song. *Say Our Life Is Not A Movie Or Maybe*, that was written really fast. *Title Track* was written in about twenty minutes. But certain songs take a long time. I can write songs a lot faster than people seem to think... I do tend to edit a lot afterwards. I am a bit of a perfectionist. Not in terms of the sound, I do like a rough edge to songs.

How much time off do you get with the band?

We get a day off once every week or two weeks. Sometimes it doesn't feel like a day off because it's like a 12 hour drive day.

Do you have little goals for wherever you go to?

I love food, I think when you're on tour it's one of the few things you get to control, one of the few ways to have pleasure. You're cooped up in the van all day and sometimes the one choice you get is what you're going to eat. A good meal can turn your day around and make it really good. A bad meal can totally ruin it. Especially if you've a really bad breakfast

So if you ever see a bad Okkervil River show you can



blame the food!

That's what it was! I'm probably being particular with this. I'm personally really into culture, different cultures, what certain values are. I guess when I'm in a place I like to get as much of a view through the van window as I can, because you don't really get the immersion in a place you want. Sometimes being in a band can feel like being trapped... Sometimes it feels like enforced fun. It's like "the only way I can have fun now is by getting drunk or listening to my iPod". We read a lot in the van, and pass the books back and forth

So do you write songs on the road, or wait until you get back home to more stability?

I have written songs on the road, but I usually don't. One of the reasons for that is that I barely have any privacy, and I barely have any time to touch my guitar. Usually it's in a gigantic flight case that is really, really heavy, and I can't bring it into the hotel or whatever. And even if I do, I'm going to have roommates in there, who are going to be annoyed I'm playing it. Sometimes I write songs in my head on tour, come up with melodies to go with them. I find it better when you have an instrument in your hands. You're less likely to write something predictable. So I don't get as much time to write as I like. If we can we're going to try switch to a bus, and I hope that'll make things easier.

Is that how the song-writing process works then? You come in with the core of the song, the lyrics and guitar... Or does it evolve more collaboratively now the band's more settled line-up than it used to be?

I come in with lyrics, melody and the guitar chords, and maybe ideas of how I'd like a certain riff to go, or how I'd like some

arrangement aspect of it to be. But usually the band take it apart, and work on it a lot, we all pitch in. The drummer might tell me to do something differently, the guitarist might tell the bassist to do something differently. Our whole goal is to make the complete song feel like a whole. I may decide I want the way we worked up the song to be different and I might rewrite the lyrics entirely. One of the songs we did, it's an iTunes only song we finished after the album had been finished, called *Starry Stares*, it's one of my favourite songs we did. I wrote it as a slow, groovy song, but it ended up being worked up in a soul kind of way, and when we did that I changed the lyrics entirely.

Does playing live give you a chance to take songs in different directions?

I change them a lot live. I don't feel an allegiance to the record. When you're making the record you want it to be as good as possible. But the present is the most important thing, whatever seems to be the right thing to do in the present is what counts. Plus it's impossible to truly duplicate the record. All the record is is an attempt to give a simulated feel of what it's like to be at a live show. So I think the songs have their own lives. For me it's like dress-up, taking the songs and putting them in different little outfits. With *You Can't Hold The Hand Of A Rock And Roll Man* for Daytrotter, we played that song as I first envisioned it when I wrote it, as this kind of shuffle. So we did it more that way. *Our Life Is Not A Movie* was originally planned as a slower song too.

Do you think it's important for holding audience's attention too?

I think so. Some audiences would like it best if you just always play the song exactly as it is on the record. What I look for in a show is something real, something that's happening right in front of me that only I'm seeing, and everyone else in the audience is seeing, we're all sharing this experience that's not going to be repeated. It's about casting a spell in that moment. The live show is better than the record. It's something you're making out of time and the vibrations in the air, that's what it is, and it's really there. I've known bands who tour with samples of stuff they've made on the record and their playing to a metronome so they can line their samples up. To me that seems besides the point.

You used to be a rock critic, do you apply that critical eye when you're writing your own music?

Not really. I think rock criticism is a very noble venture, but I don't feel that it has too much that can teach you about how to write a rock song. What you're doing as a critic is taking something apart and explaining why it's good. If you're a musician, you're making something out of nothing. The ability to take something apart doesn't necessarily help there.

Do you find, since your songs seem quite personal, that fans or reviewers think they know who you are based on what your songs say?

Yeah, I find that. On the one hand it irritates me, because it's frustrating to see an image of yourself that someone else has thrown back at you distorted. But on the other hand it's empowering, in this weird way, it almost puts the cards in your hands when people think they know you, because it gives you the power to fuck with them that you wouldn't have otherwise. You know that they're bringing a certain image of you that came out of their brain rather than something that's real. So as a result you can use the weight of that behind you to more forcefully

affect them

I'd say in about 90% of interviews it's always the depressed, intellectual diarist that's put forth...

Mmmhmm

Is that irritating?

It is. Whenever I read a review of what we're doing, it strikes me as something I would absolutely hate. I know and I see musicians who are very happy to play the role of either that depressed person, or that intellectual. These are two stock indie rock identities people have. I'm the mopey sad-sack dude with his heart on his sleeve.

You always get compared to Bright Eyes, when in reality there's very little lyrically or musically akin between you.

I'm always confused when we get compared to Bright Eyes. I can tell you straight up I'm not influenced by Bright Eyes. It doesn't really bother me as much as it used to though. The thing that annoys me is the intellectual thing. That, you know, I'm a poet, I'm this teller of tales. That personality in the indie rock world is actually slightly more obnoxious than the depressed guy.

And you combine the two of them and you get..

ME! Haha, exactly! My opinion about myself, which obviously you can take with a whole shaker of salt, is that I'm not a de-

pressed person. I think I'm a pretty happy, fun-loving guy. The songs are about people who are not me, but there about these characters I care about and find interesting. I think you learn most about a character when they're in an extreme situation, when they're pushed to a point where you see their character come through. And so you will find in Okkervil River songs characters who are pushed to a certain extremity. But you'll find just as much joy in our music as you will unhappiness. I also think you'll find as much idiotic playfulness in our music as you will an attempt to be more intellectually ambitious.

The new album is slightly less "angry". Less noticeably so, anyway. Did you try and move away from this particular emotion?

I was seeing people's reactions to Black Sheep Boy, and I was happy that people liked that record, but I felt that if I went any further in that direction I was going to become sort of a clown. I was going to become the "sad intellectual". To me that image... I don't feel like we need that image in our culture at the moment, I don't want to play that part. It's funny, you can try to run from something and people will still see you as it, probably forever. I can't help the fact that I have a certain way of talking or thinking that makes me come across that way.

You usually incorporate rare cover versions into your sets, what are you playing on this tour?

We're doing a version of April Anne a John Phillips song. We've also been doing "Does Your Mother Know" by Abba. I've always loved that song, and wanted to cover it, then once we were in Sweden and we thought "Aw, fuck it. We're here, we might as well". There's an Irish song I've always wanted to cover, but the chorus is in Irish and I'm afraid I'd mangle it terribly: "Siuil A Run". It's one of my favourite melodies ever, ever. I'm not "Irish-American". You get irritated at people who play that up right? I'm Ukrainian-American, so you don't have to worry about pretences from me.

Words: Daniel Gray

Photo: Loreana Rushe



Our Brother the Native

“Holly, Michigan is a small town full of small-minded people”. Our Brother The Native are a band that seem to come straight out of suburban middle America. There is nothing small-minded about their music, however. It is experimental and ambient, and above all it is imbued with an over-riding sense of space. Heima showed us that Sigur Rós are making the music their landscape commands, but it is a testament to the artistic powers of this trio that they can conjure music of such scope from a world of white picket fences.

The obvious thing to mention about Our Brother The Native is their age. Of the trio, only John-Michael Foss could legally attend gigs in clubs in America. Chaz Knapp is close too, but has his own DIY label to keep him occupied instead. Josh Bertram, who I talked to, is eighteen and not long out of high school. They met over MySpace in 2005 and signed to the same label as Animal Collective and Sigur Rós in 2006. And

their latest album, ‘Make Amends For We Are Merely Vessels’ is not even their debut. It can’t have been easy starting out in the weird world of freak-folk and post-rock that their dense, pastoral music inhabits.

“The reviews of [debut] Tooth and Claw made me think

we weren’t taken very seriously. But I feel anyone who has met us or seen us hopefully could understand that we are very serious about our music”, Josh says. That’s that then. “I know for me, college is just for the time being. The band and music is my definite priority and passion in life”.

The band’s formation is a matter of some discussion too. Josh and John Michael met in high school in Michigan and had started playing together, but Chaz lives in California. How did they even find each other? “I contacted Chaz through the MySpace for his DIY label Delude Records. He had been putting out some really interesting obscure folk recordings and I told him that if he ever needed a new release to contact us. So he did. He was really adamant about putting out something of ours. We put out the six-track EP “Cheer Up My Dear, The Sun Will Shine Again”.

“Over the course of working on the recording, we became great friends. I talked to Chaz on the phone almost every other day. We started to do collaborations via e-mail on two songs, and they turned out beautifully. So I thought we should just add him to the band. He accepted the invitation, and that was that.

Tooth and Claw was received as a record from the New Weird America camp, but Make Amends... is much more panoramic and spaced out. Combining that sort of cinematic quality with falsetto vocals was always going to draw comparisons to Sigur Rós. This is not a problem for Josh.

“That is an endearing compliment to have. To be compared to Sigur Rós is an honour, and I will always strive to make our music as dramatic as some of Sigur Rós’ work.



However I think we are much different in terms of what we are trying to convey. We will always be much darker in mood. I also think there is a little more experimentation happening on our part. I try not to have many rules for us when we go about writing a song."

And the vocals? "The falsetto comparison I can understand, but I have been singing that way long before I heard Sigur Rós. I have a weird fascination with women's voices and hushed, cute vocals. Also I guess I have always wanted to have a range that fits the mood of any style I want to sing."

Fat Cat signed the band after Chaz sent them a link to their MySpace in the hopes of getting some constructive criticism. The label liked what they heard and asked for a demo. They liked the demo even more, and instructed the band to record a full-length album with a view to releasing it. For an experimental but still mostly teenage band, to share a label with the likes of múm and Sigur Rós must have been exciting.

"I would say we feel a closeness to the bands on the label. They are all so amazing, and I feel we share a lot of their ideals. There is a lot of bands on the label trying new ideas all the time and that's something inherent in our goal as a band

as well. But if you're asking if I think we're on the same level as múm or Animal Collective or Sigur Rós, I would have to say no way. We still have much more room to expand and grow."

Most bands that lean towards the sort of organic, experimental music Our Brother The Native make come to it through improvisation, or jamming at the very least. It's

interesting to find out how that works in a long distance set-up.

"John-Michael and I wrote Tooth and Claw long distance, sending parts of songs back and forth to Chaz until they were complete. On Make Amends... John-Michael and I wrote songs over the course of two years since [the band's first gig, at a Fat Cat festival in] Belgium, playing them live with

Chaz occasionally. Parts got added here and there as they aged. When the time came to record, Chaz wrote a load of new parts for it, including the piano base for one song and the entire two parts for *The Multitudes Are Dispersing*."

"There is a balance of improvisation and structure. The music part of it has been planned out for the last two years and hasn't been improvised on the album. But a lot of experimentation I did with the atmospherics in each song came from testing new ideas out to make the songs fresh to me, considering I had been playing them for quite awhile. I do a lot of searching for the right samples to fit each song."

In an attempt to have a little fun with Josh, I asked him to describe his idea of Ireland. "Lots of pubs, green pastures, Nessie and leprechauns". Despite this slight gap in knowledge of the specifics of European affairs, he says there's a good chance they'll see Ireland this summer. "We actually are looking at a little summer European tour. We have a

couple of promoters inquiring about us in Ireland, France, and the U.K. A good chance to get to know the place a little better perhaps.

Words: Karl McDonald



Le Loup are an act that are all too convenient to pigeonhole. Starting out as the solo project of Sam Simkoff in Washington D.C., it quickly mushroomed into a 7-piece collective to reflect the ambitiousness of the music. Most songs are banjo driven and are characterized by vocals breathing ethereal lyrics doused in imagery of gods, storms and the night, and dealing with the ever-cheery end-of-the-world. Despite the sometimes morose subjects of the songs they manage to still be triumphant, uplifting, buoyed by the collaborative vocals of the

entire band. Thus Arcade Fire references abound, and if not Arcade Fire, Sufjan Stevens. Sam balks at these common touchstones of reference used in so many reviews of the band. "We've garnered a lot of hype through the internet, which has its good points and its bad points. Of course it's great that kids are listening to your music and want to talk about it, but I've read many things about us that just aren't true."

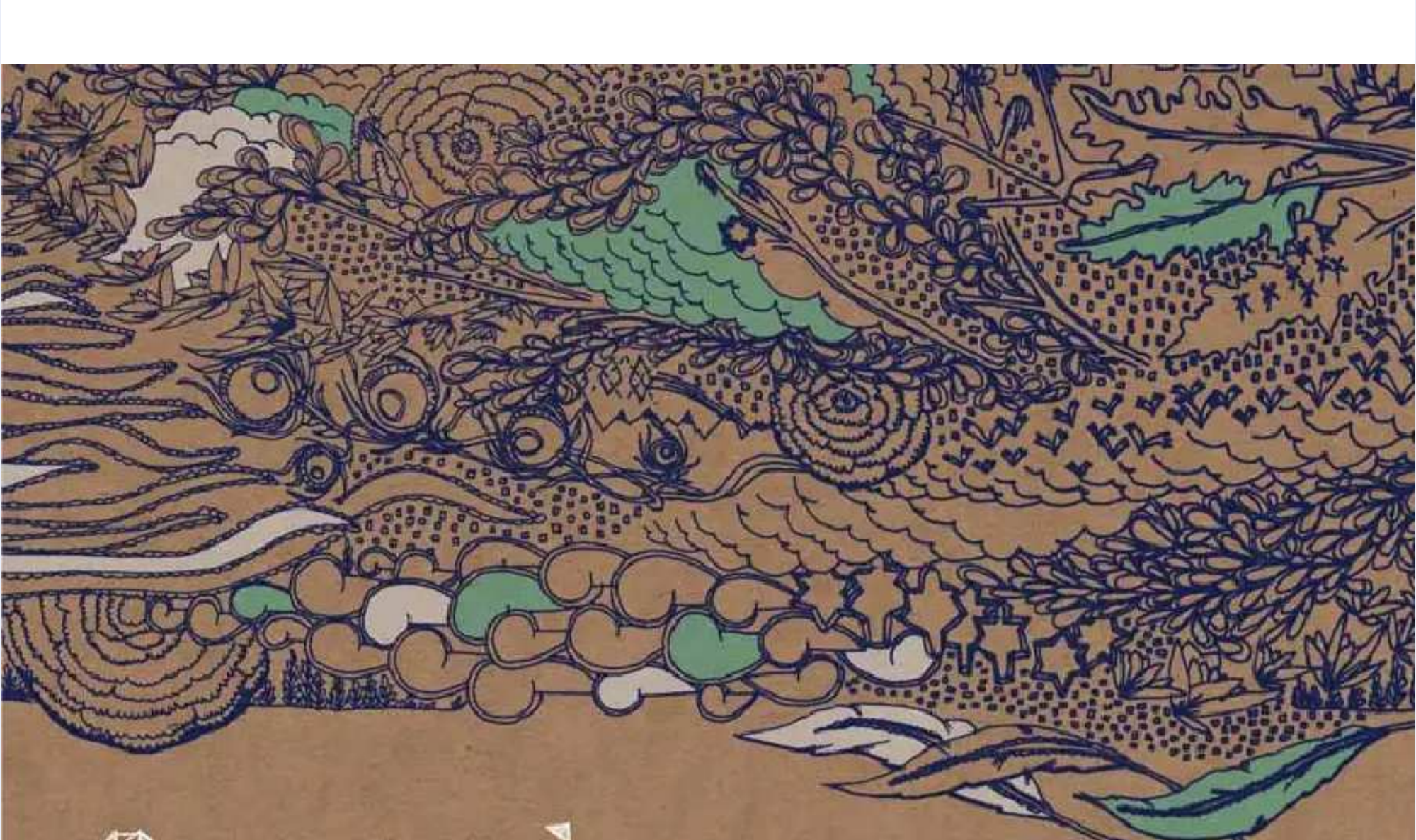
Comparing Le Loup to other acts is to miss the very special talents of the band. One such talent is a Jesuitical self-control. Debut album "The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium" shows an act with tight reigns over their own sound, and a confidence as to what direction to take. The cadence of songs is gentle, but all the better for it. About to embark on their first tour in Europe, Sam promises that "we're a lot more chaotic live, definitely. In recording you have all this time to deliberate over what mix is perfect, and listen back to what you've done. That's just not possible live, so we tend to let it go wilder. We make sure to ramp up the energy a lot more live." Another talent that permeates the album is an artful expressiveness Simkoff wears well. Using Dante's "Inferno" as a recurring metaphor he expresses themes of isolation, destruction and conjecture regarding the past. By hyperbolizing the anguish

he distances himself from it, as he grows away from it, makes it a fairytale rather than a personal confession. Music as art is particular close to Sam's heart. The band's name and album title are of notorious artistic origin, and their artwork is striking. The graphic design of the album and website is an aspect Sam sees as vital- "I'm very closely involved with that aspect of things, a good friend does that work. I think it's important for the artwork to reflect the music, very much, and I think with the album it does so successfully."

Simkoff originally had plans for the band to balloon to Polyphonic Spree proportions. However, he realized after working with the 6 like-minded individuals who replied to his Craigslist advertisement that the group dynamic was just right as it was. While many of the songs were written early on by Simkoff himself, he feels their subject matter was highly interpretative and the whole band could relate with it. They were originally contacted to make live shows of the music possible having had label interest from Hardly Art, but since then Le Loup has become very definitely a "band". "We haven't really written many songs together, but I'm looking forward to doing so when we get a break to do so", Sam iterates, aware that the band's hype has given them a busy year. He would rather deliberate on a new album for 2 or 3 years than release one quickly, and feels that the each second of effort put into a record can be heard in the final product. Quite clearly "The Throne" was lavished with just such particular attention.

Le Loup play Whelans on the 21st of February.

Words: Daniel Gray



REVIEWS

NADA SURF // LOS CAMPESINOS // OUR BROTHER THE NATIVE //
XIU XIU // SPANISH PRISONERS // VAMPIRE WEEKEND //
CAT POWER // DAWN LANDES // BRITISH SEA POWER //
SONS & DAUGHTERS // SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE // BLACK MOUNTAIN
// HOT CHIP // BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLIE // LIGHTSPEED CHAMPION



**Lucky
Nada Surf
City Slang**



Major label drop-outs Nada Surf are so suited to a post-Garden State world that this album is guaranteed good sales in America from birth. That's not a reason to dismiss them though, and

Lucky definitely has a sort of endearing melancholy to it. Five albums into their career, Matthew Caws' band have a reasonably good idea of how to write an indie rock album, so it's not surprising to find a collection of songs with catchy choruses and few curveballs. *See These Bones* is the opener and one of the highlights, building into a wash of overlapping vocals that seem to hypnotise. The next track *Whose Authority* comes complete with the line "There's a feeling I get when I look to the West" in a serious context, but forgiving classic rock references is easy as the album progresses. Another highlight is *The Fox*, which pulsates over a

cut-up drum beat, and *The Film Did Not Go Round* is a simple but rather beautiful closer. A little saccharine for some tastes, but a set of sad, catchy songs with an undeniable allure.

Karl McDonald



**Songs To Forget
Spanish Prisoners
Exit Stencil Recordings**

Leonid Maymind has laid a trap for reviewers, surely, with an album title like that. It can only be reverse psychology, or complete idiocy. Fortunately it's the former. Spanish Prisoners' album is a resoundingly unique album marking the experimental artist as a consistent and intriguing prospect to remember.

Spanish Prisoners flits from an almost Bonnie "Prince" Billy folk humalong with *Ballad of an Unfolding* to anthemic singalongs in the Bright Eyes style with *Song For The Weary* and a Pavement-worthy lo-fi shoutalong in *A Thousand Zimmermans*. However, these comparisons are all too unlike the sum of *Songs To Forget* essential edge- its individuality. Maymind dives into unexpected structural and musical volte-faces, providing the album with a sit-the-fuck-up-and-listen effect that sets it apart from the slew of sleepy lo-fi bedroom projects across America.

Songs To Forget is by no means an outstanding album, nor is it designed to be. Rather it serves as an extended introduction to an exceedingly exciting artist.

Daniel Gray



**Hold On Now, Youngster
Los Campesinos!
Wichita**

'The song titles are too long. They left their best song off it. They try to be too clever. The girl singer's accent is irritating. Though at least she can sing, the male singer is atrocious. They're far too cutesy (I mean, "Send me stationary to make me horny"? Please.) They try to fit far too many melodies into one song. The glockenspiel is so superfluous. The album is trying too hard to be big, it's so unashamedly pop. I mean I liked them when the first EP came out, but they've gotten far too big now. Only 12 year olds like them anyway'

There are your lines, you have a month

to learn them. By then *Hold On Now, Youngster* will be so overplayed, so inescapable that you'll have to latch on to the few ostensible faults from which the band actually suffer so as to avoid fitting in with the crowd of Los Campesinos! obsessives who, like you, haven't been able to claw the thousand-and-one hooks the album is made up of out of their brain. In reality, it is exactly their faults that make them fantastic. We all secretly want our favourite bands to be over-indulgent, super-referential, brightly-coloured and fun to sing along to. And, of course, have superfluous glockenspiels.

Daniel Gray

**Sea From Shore
School Of Language
Memphis Industries**

This Field Music side-project of Sunderland's David Brewis is a strange one. It is a solo effort that sounds thoroughly impersonal, like the work of his band recreated with fewer hands. He does employ the help of a Futurehead along the way, but the seamless sequencing of layers of instrumentation and vocals within the songs creates the sound of a master craftsman at work..

While the intention of the album is not altogether clear, its execution is faultless. Each song seems meticulously planned and artfully rendered. Closer "Rockist 4" builds to a frenzied climax

that still sounds perfectly controlled and calculated. It may suffer even from over-perfection. There is a sense that Brewis isn't quite letting himself loose of the confines of his compositions for even a minute.

If you're a fan of the jerky, tight art-pop that characterizes Field Music, School of Language offers an album worth revisiting. However, the first and final three songs bracket a rather inconse-

quential heart of the album that may prove too off-putting for new listeners.

Daniel Gray



**British Sea Power
Do You Like Rock Music?
Rough Trade**

British Sea Power have carved out the rarest of achievements: a "big" album that doesn't reflect its creators' egos. The album maintains the band's charming quirks (cynics, read: gimmicks), their diverse historical references and oblique metaphors, which

keep it from seeming like a calculating, self-conscious grab at the big time which has eluded them rather unjustly thus far. Nevertheless, *Do You Like Rock Music?* sets itself out as a confident early contender for album of the year lists.

Thematically *Do You Like Rock Music?* antithesizes itself from both its post-rock and post-punk contemporaries. Rather than playing the Ian Curtis card of isolation and urban discontent, BSP have created a rallying cry for inclusionism. Lead single "Waving Flags" is not a patriotic hands-on-hearts affair, but an alternative anthem calling for cross-cultural bonding with Eastern European foreign nationals via the most unexpected of means: alcoholism. The album opens with the chant "We're all in it now", and an embracing hopefulness permeates the album's tremolo-heavy guitar lines and military drum beats.

In a similar fashion BSP's music has much to offer any listener, thanks to a diverse range of producers and recording locations, and the merging of the cornerstones of several genres plainly evident in their sound. Though one suspects *Do You Like Rock Music?* will increase British Sea Power's fanbase exponentially, they have learned a valuable lesson that grandiosity does not always mean bloating a band's sound, and ambition does not always lead to stadium-filling songs.

Daniel Gray

**Kitsune Maison 5
Various
Kitsune**



Having built up quite a reputation amongst hipster dance fans and indie kids alike, you'd expect the guys at the Kitsuné label to deliver something out of the ordinary in their 'Gold Edition' fifth compilation. The result, however,

does not quite live up to expectations. While the album is not lacking in danceable tunes, there's something slightly passé about the playlist. All the hipster favourites are on there, including Rex The Dog, M.I.A., Fischerspooner and The Teenagers but the collection itself pales in comparison with previous compilations. That's not to say that the album is without merit. It includes some excellent remixes, most notably the Digitalism Robotic Remix of *Pogo* and the hidden track; TEPR's remix of Yelle's *A Cause de Garçons*. However it would seem that like many other current dance faves, the Kitsuné lot have become victims of their own hype. While there's plenty on *KM5* for those looking to acquaint themselves with the hottest dance acts of the moment, fans expecting something mind-blowing will be left disappointed.

Olwyn Fagan

**This Gift
Sons & Daughters
Domino**



I'm not sure if it's something in Adele Bethel's accent or if it's just the style she employs, but her voice is fantastic.

Sons and Daughters' third album, *This Gift*, kicks off in a rousing fashion and gradually builds through its forty minute duration. While many albums start off with heavy hitters and trail off towards their conclusion, *This Gift* takes the opposite approach. Everything seems to be moving along nicely as expected, not too adventurous but by no means uninteresting, when the album builds up and closes with a couple of truly excellent songs. Worth a specific mention are *Iodine* and *House In My Head*, both of which make great use of Bethel's brash yet beautiful voice. Probably the only negative worth mentioning is that perhaps there's a little too much use made of non-lyrical vocals. Ultimately *This Gift* is a thoroughly entertaining listen from a band that is comfortable in their sound without being complacent.

Aidan Hanratty

**Vampire Weekend
Vampire Weekend
XL**



Bringing afro-pop to the Upper West Side of Manhattan is not the most predictable way to become a super-hyped band in the blogosphere, but it worked for Vampire Weekend. Their debut album is born into an indie scene which has had the leak for a few

months, but they're still refreshingly original, borrowing from touchstones that are almost completely overlooked by everyone else except Paul Simon. That's not to say it would be difficult to guess that they're from New York just by listening to them. There is a definite sound, exemplified by The Walkmen and earlier Strokes, from which Vampire Weekend emerge and diverge. *Walcott*, for example, could come straight off Bows and Arrows, and no amount of quasi-African diction can cover that up. That is no crime, however. The unrestrained pop melodies on the likes of *Mansard Roof*, *Oxford Comma*, and *The Kids Don't*

Stand A Chance make the album a joy to listen to. Made to be listened to in the back garden in glorious sunshine.

Karl McDonald

**In The Future
Black Mountain
Jagjaguwar**



Naming their sophomore release *In The Future*, Vancouver's heady prog rockers Black Mountain are using the term future liberally. Highly referential, Black Mountain sounds like a kitchen sink of everyone's favorite 70s psychedelia. Kneeling at the altar of vintage rock gods like Floyd and Sabbath, *In The Future* is dense. The riffs are pulverizing and vicious, and the drums thundering, creating an undeniably righteous album. While Stephen McBean's falsetto on the decisive *Stay Free* is excellently retro, on cuts like the almost 17 minute *Bright Lights*, Black Mountain's trippiness goes too far out stranding the listener in a void of reverb and darkness. *Wild Wind* offers a loping palate cleanser in between the arrestingly axe heavy *Evil Ways* and *Bright Lights*. On *Tyrants*, drummer Josh Wells is apocalyptic, annihilating the skins with McBean and Amber Webber's vocals wailing through lamentation. The dirge-like *Night Walks* is chilling and poignant owing to Webber's Icelandic wintery vocals and lyrics. While the album can be lugubrious and taxing, it's worth slogging through the sledge. In the end, *In The*

Future is kaleidoscopic and consciousness expanding.
E.M. Gallagher

**Fireproof
Dawn Landes
Fargo**



Recorded in a Brooklyn firehouse, Dawn Landes's debut *Fireproof* is hardly incendiary but charming all the

same. Sometimes at risk of falling into the predictability of the mid-90s Sarah McLachlan girl-and-a-guitar canon Landes manages to diversify herself enough to create a prettily peculiar album. Filled with accordions, \$8 guitars and glockenspiels Landes is at moments alt-country, at moments crunchily folky. Her lyrics are quirky—on *Picture Show* she sings sweetly, "Your next life's a pony show/Ponies turn into glue hey hey hey hey"—but her tones are dulcet and addictive. Landes gets it right on tracks like *Dig Me a Hole*, *Goodnight Lover* and *You Alone*, by far the best cuts on the album, evoking Joni Mitchell's ethereal sweetness.

At the end of *You Alone* is a cover of Tom Petty's *I Won't Back Down* (perhaps and homage to her Southern roots) that is haunting and soundtrack worthy. On *Toy Piano* and *Picture Show* Landes's experimentation produces somewhat irritating tracks, detracting from the overall pleasantness of the album. *Fireproof* isn't a five-alarm but it will leave your playlist smoldering for a bit.

E.M. Gallagher

**Ask Forgiveness
Bonnie 'Prince' Billy
Domino**



One of the greatest things in this life is to acknowledge your own faults, to recognize that you are utterly beyond redemption and to place your trust and salvation in the palm of a higher power. As such, musical recidivism is what makes Bonnie 'Prince' Billie, or Will Oldham such a loved singer.

'Ask Forgiveness' is an album made up of several covers and one original song. It is not a covers album and it would be lazy in the extreme to describe them as such. Billy seamlessly moulds the tracks into an album that demands to be seen as a whole. It is the story of an everyman wrestling with the essentially disappointing nature of his soul, but rather more it is a selection of often beautiful songs brilliantly sang. Throughout Oldham is accompanied with a female singer, which some-

times leads to his voice sounding sharp, but often is beautiful, reminding us he is not alone.

There are some stand-out tracks: 'I've seen it all', originally sung by Thom Yorke and Bjork, is stripped back, losing some of lushness that lent some of the emotional integrity to the original version. Instead we are left with Oldham's voice and the appropriately silly/heartfelt Bjork lyrics.

Andrew Booth

Jukebox Cat Power Matador



Jukebox is for most parts a covers album covering songs by Billie Holiday and Bob Dylan. Cat rehashes them in her own semi-mournful way, throws in a good blues sound, a hint of jazz and does a good job at it. But there's something missing. I don't know what it is. There's nothing striking that makes you sit up and take note of the nuances or voice or instruments. It's just *normal*.

That's a shame, because Cat is a woman of such intensity and talent. Is that a bad thing? God no, far from it. You just get used to it being on, you may even forget it's on.

Jukebox is a good album overall but being a second covers album you sometimes feel Cat's getting a bit lazy and the auld wan needs a good shake, a rattle to drag some of her own tunes out. Ah to hell with it, it's listenable, enjoyable and sultry. But nothing new.

Conor O'Neil

Women As Lovers Xiu Xiu Kill Rock Stars



'Women As Lovers' is being touted as being more approachable "on a basic human level" than any of Xiu Xiu's previous material. That's an interesting pitch, because Jamie Stewart's music has always operated on a basic human level. Stewart sings unflinchingly personal lyrics with such emotion that he is often accused of being dramatic. But he is never being dramatic. The connection is always a primal one, an earnest one. Women As Lovers is no different to, say, 2004's *Fabulous Muscles*, in this respect. It is also no more accessible musically its predecessors. The bursts of static that have always harassed the sparse beats of Stewart's songs are still present. Though the likes of opening track *I Do What I Want When I Want*

and *No Friend Oh!* contain buried pop hooks, the barrier of Stewart's whispery, confrontational voice still means that Xiu Xiu aren't likely to win many new fans here. The inclusion of a cover of Queen and Bowie's *Under Pressure* with Michael Gira might be an attempt to coax the neutral, but however inexplicably excellent that track might be, it probably won't help. The things that make Xiu Xiu great - the earnestness, the rawness, the

bleakness and the well-hidden melodies - are still here though, so it is never boring. And for a zealot (such as myself) that makes it a great album on conception.

Karl McDonald



Falling Off The Lavender Bridge Lightspeed Champion Domino

Appearances can be deceptive: upon seeing the cover of Lightspeed Cham-

pion's *Falling Off the Lavender Bridge*, I expected to hear something like the off-beat thoughts of a nerdier Saul Williams, firing off rhymes about what's wrong with the NME. Instead I discovered the more sensitive, and less politically driven, Kele Okereke. That isn't necessarily a bad thing - the album, a mixture of dreams and experiences, is a delight. At points painfully honest ("I feel the nigger eyes, they're staring, makes me want to rip off my skin"), at others comically light-hearted, it is, throughout, a moving and entertaining listen. Produced by Bright Eyes member Mike Mogis, it is charming in its arrangements, using a variety of instruments outside of the standard repertoire for indie singer/songwriters. Reminiscent of last year's *Cassadaga*, it features delicate uses of clarinets, flutes and cellos, all of which lend an even greater sensitivity to each song. All in all, with this debut *Lightspeed Champion* sets a high standard for future releases, one which he will hopefully equal, if not surpass.

Aidan Hanratty



Make Amends For We Are Merely Vessels Our Brother The Native Fat Cat

It is a difficult task to make an 80 minute album of atmospheric, ambient post-rock sound interesting. Step

forward *Our Brother The Native* and take credit, then, because *Make Amends...* rewards a keen ear. Even the songs over ten minutes long are arresting if attention is paid to the music as it subtly swells and recedes. An obvious comparison to make is to label-mates Sigur Rós, who are the archetypal band of the genre. The general approach is similar, but *Our Brother The Native* have a much softer focus in their sound, and they are not

nearly so optimistic. It is not a hopeful album. The songs are dark and uneasy, with distant screaming underlying the claustrophobic atmosphere. *Trees Part II* is one of the more accessible moments, recalling the hypnotic guitar moments of Mogwai. Album closer *The Multitudes Are Dispersing* is a properly haunting chant that sounds like a sing-song of ghosts around a creaky piano. The overall effect is an earthed kind of chaos, slightly apart from the myriad other post rock bands around today.

Karl McDonald

Made in The Dark Hot Chip EMI



Made in The Dark seems to be a pretty apt title for Hot Chip's third full length album. Their sound does, after all, contain undeniable elements of darkness despite it's omnipresent indie-pop aesthetic. This latest offering is no exception. But while their music is still tender and melancholic lyrically speaking, the band are now use of heavier electronics, making for a sound that is altogether more dancey.

While the *Made in The Dark* does still contain some beautiful ballads, tracks such as *Shake a Fist* and *Hold On* show how Hot Chip have embraced the more energetic elements of live performance and applied them to studio recording. The band remain true to their indie roots yet their sound has grown up in such a way that this may be the album to project them into the mainstream. Having proven themselves to be a great live band on various festival stages over the course of the summer, this latest offering may just bring them

the commercial success they deserve.

Owyn Fagan



Elemental Forces

TEDDY DUNN, ALL NATURAL, AND THE MUSIC OF THE SOUTH SIDE

Hip-hop is obviously no longer exclusively an American phenomenon. Like jazz and blues before it, it has left its African-American context and travelled to London, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Moscow, Havana, and (rather poetically) back to Africa. It has now permeated not just music, but also international culture, commerce, and language. It has surged in Eastern Europe, where b-boys (breakdancers, for those unfamiliar with the four elements) are a commonplace sight in the cities, and where some youth clothing seems a bizarre reflection of Brooklyn circa 1987. I experienced a stark illustration of hip-hop's global reach at Talib Kweli's concert in Tripod during the summer of 2007, when I tried to talk about Boston with one of the on-stage b-boys wearing a Red Sox cap. He was from Warsaw and spoke neither English nor baseball.

It is also interesting that this occurred in Ireland, which is not historically — nor, shall we say, demographically — a bastion of hip-hop culture (notwithstanding DJ Wool and Scary Eiré, whose names I did not make up). Reflecting its political origins, rap's vibrancy is felt mainly in the immigrant and economically disadvantaged communities in Dublin. Even those locals who are knowledgeable fans of the art form tend to appear at concerts featuring international acts, generally American; the Irish college student or club-goer may experience the most globalized and commercial level of the genre, but the origins of the culture and many of the best contemporary artists remain unknown here. Indeed, this fracture between quantity and quality is visible even in America, where the tragic category of "conscious rap" has arisen to describe skillful, socially aware, positive and back-to-basics hip-hop. As in the American bookstores that separate "Literature" from "Fiction," the existence of this niche presupposes the impoverishment of the majority, and shows again how few of those who speak actually have something to say.

As a result of these factors, writing about hip-hop while in Ireland feels refreshingly like preaching to the unconverted. The opening line of my sermon would be: "I was once as you are now." That is to say, I grew up totally without this music, and spent the 90s largely immersed in how much could be done with an electric guitar. Before high school, I fronted a short-lived grunge band, wore long hair parted in the middle, and enjoyed flannel shirts. My budding eclecticism permitted blues, jazz, classical, dance, and folk, but whenever asked what kind of music I liked, I would say "everything except rap and country." This was the answer that I gave my high school roommate, Teddy Dunn, on the day I met him. His answer to the same question, due no doubt to the mad calculus of some accommodation officer, was "only rap and country."

Being from Texas and not liking country was rebellion, but my dislike of rap was fundamentally a fear of the unknown. Teddy was from Durham, South Carolina, which is a classic Southern American city with a strange combination of division and diversity. He had been immersed since childhood in both hip-hop and James Taylor — artists covering all sides of the Durham tracks, reflective of his friendships — and had an extensive CD collection of the classics. While the first year probably involved both of us gritting our teeth through a "broadening experience," it didn't take long for me to memorize every lyric to *The Chronic*, and within a year I was borrowing CDs and listening out of something more than just a spirit of compromise. Since that time, and largely

thanks to his introduction, my interest has only grown. (As it turns out, all streets are two-way, and he also became a fairly serious Radiohead fan.)

I am not here to offer an entire “starter kit” that will convince someone who is instinctively opposed to the genre, but rather to introduce and recommend Chicago’s own underground rap duo All Natural, some of the best hip-hop around, to the open-minded and ruthlessly eclectic readers of *Analogue*. Many American hip-hop fans, including Chicagoans, are unaware of Chicago as a quality rap venue in the first place, because of the east coast/west coast framework which characterized so much commercial rap of the 1990s. The Windy City only has a handful of MCs who have broken out nationally, Common and Kanye West being the most notable. The budding underground scene of recent years has been helped not just by All Natural’s timeless LPs and 12”s, but also by their D.I.Y. record label, All Natural Inc.

All Natural is based, in their music and in their attitude, on the fundamentals of hip-hop. There are only two members, Tone B. Nimble (Tony Fields, DJ) and capital D (David Kelly, MC). The partnership goes back more than 20 years, when they met in south suburban Chicago during high school. It was 1985 and they each had one turntable; clearly, the match was made in heaven. After two years of rhyming and cutting together, they formed a group called Two Man Posse, or TMP, in 1987. They separated for college, but rejoined afterwards as All Natural. After making some small noises on the South Side in 1993, their manifest talent separated them from the pack, and they were signed to Wild Pitch (a widely renowned hip-hop division of EMI) to release their first disc. Within months of the contract being signed, the label was dissolved, and they were again



on their own. After two years of rhyming and cutting together, they formed a group called Two Man Posse, or TMP, in 1987. They separated for college, but rejoined afterwards as All Natural. After making some small noises on the South Side in 1993, their manifest talent separated them from the pack, and they were signed to Wild Pitch (a widely renowned hip-hop division of EMI) to release their first disc. Within months of the contract being signed, the label was dissolved, and they were again

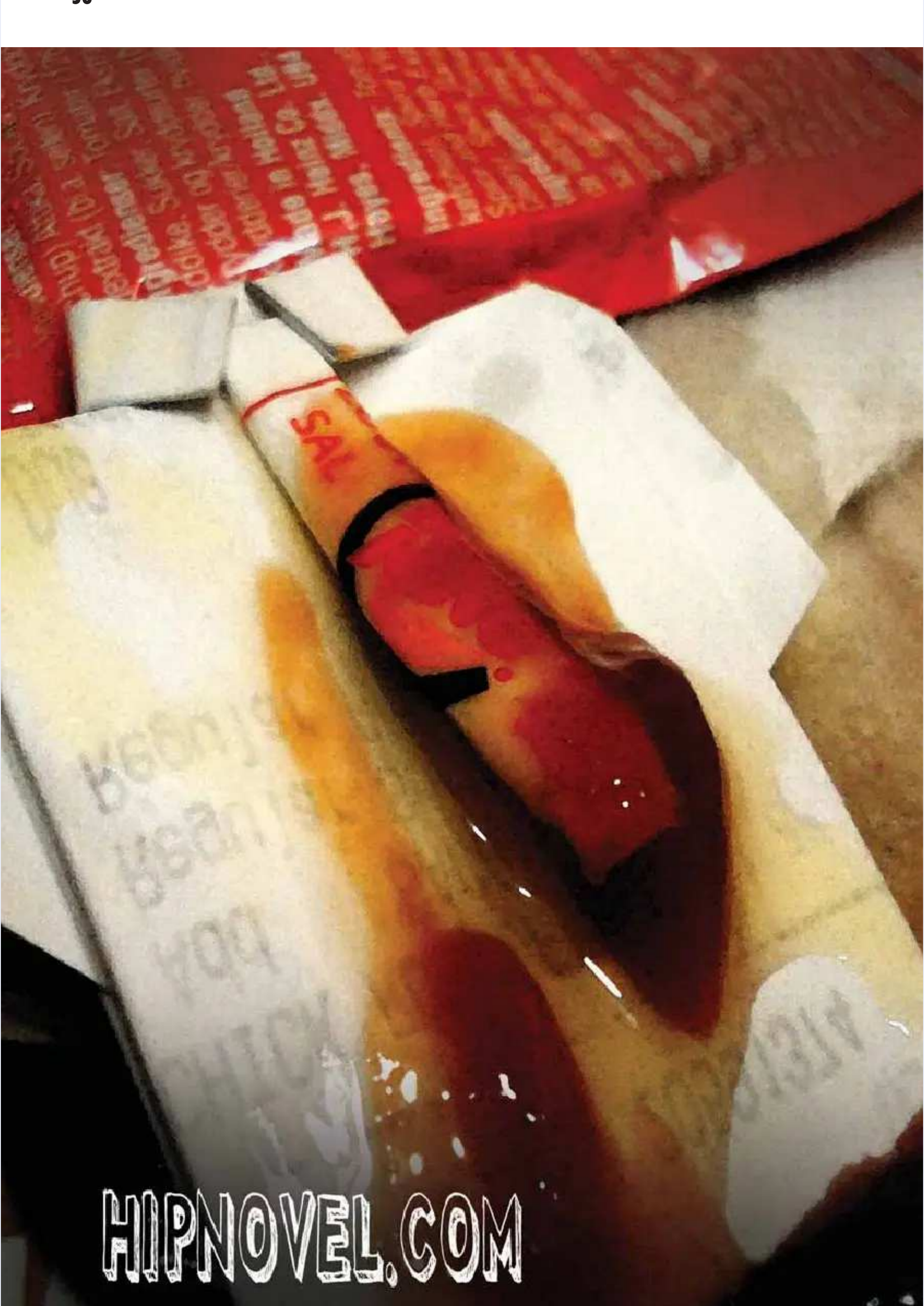
on their own. Their next moves were revolutionary. Cap and Tone saved their own money for four years, and in 1998 they launched their own label, All Natural Inc., with a four-song 12 inch called “50 Years” (the title track having been the only song they recorded with Wild Pitch). Shortly afterward they released a full-length album, *No Additives, No Preservatives*, which was sold together with a 95-page booklet called *Fresh Air*, full of capital D’s sketches, poetry, comics, and lyrics. Capital D said that they had reasonable expectations just to make back the investment: “We didn’t think we were gonna go platinum or nothing crazy like that,” he told the *Chicago Tribune*. The album’s title encapsulates its ethos: no gimmicks, no weak beats, no machismo foolishness about bling, blunts, bitches, or big-screen TVs. Their track “It’s O.K.” was aggressively countercultural simply by being so pleasant. The hook is: “You ain’t got to live a life of a thug/you ain’t got to rhyme about selling drugs/you ain’t got to fit the commercial niche/you ain’t got to call your sister no bitch/you ain’t got to play the role of the fool/you can be dope and still finish school.” In a sense they were talking about themselves; Kelly was just starting his law degree while they kept running the label. They used their own album to introduce label mates like MC Allstar and Daily Plannet, while beginning to release the others’ solo music.

The sophomore release from All Natural was *Second Nature* (2001), a tremendous disc on which they bumped up their game considerably. The old-school vibe is still quite strong, but there is something beyond either the rap battle/freestyle sensibility of “Phantoms at the Opera” or the pure social consciousness of “It’s O.K.” The album shows the full range of what an MC and DJ can really do together by staying true to the roots of the art form. Tracks like “Think Again” feature a barrage of multi-syllabic fire that actually makes sense, while cap D’s rhymes on “Liquid Paper” and “Godspeed” admonish us to appreciate life. The cuts by Tone B. Nimble on “Return of the Avenger” and “Stick-up” work on every level, backing up the MC but standing out on their own. Purely on skill, it was picked up for distribution by Thrill Jockey, one of the most influential indie labels in America, which then re-released *No Additives, No Preservatives* in 2002.

After another break from making music, due in large part to capital D’s increasing emphasis on his Islamic spirituality, they decided to rejoin and find a way to keep speaking the truth. The first result was 2005’s *Vintage*, which is like a call-to-arms for modern hip-hop. It feels like 1989 again, but with improved production and more contemporary rhymes. “Check the Time,” a single positioned near the end of the album, is an homage to A Tribe Called Quest, spinning off Q-tip’s “Check the Rime.” There are flavours of KRS-One, probably cap D’s first influence, on the opening “Uprise.” Guest artists include Slug from Atmosphere, another Midwest crew (Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota) with phenomenal skills. “The one thing we’ve always wanted to prove is that we can do any style of hip-hop,” says cap D. “Whoever you think is the dopest, we as dope as him. That’s how we look at it.”

The All Natural Inc. roster, like their guestlist, is a great place to start if you’re looking to investigate the best of the Midwest. Allstar, Mr. Greenweez, G Riot, Iomos Marad, the Pacifics, Rita J., Primemeridian, and the Eulorhythmic are all label-mates. And if you can find it in Dublin, go out this March and buy their upcoming album, *Elements/Fire*. We can only hope that it is the start of a four-part series, and that these artists finally receive the acclaim that their reclamation of hip-hop deserves.

Words & Illustrations: Nick Johnson



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