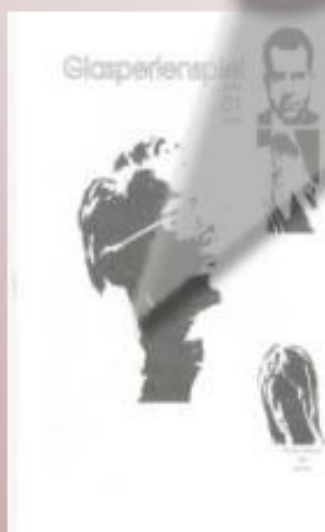


# Glasperlenspiel 06

The Sisters of Mercy fanzine



Gary Marx interview  
James Ray interview  
Summer 2003



**Glasperlenspiel**  
mixing memory and desire

**GPS 06  
is a  
Glass Bead Collective  
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This isn't a war, it's a national nervous  
breakdown

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## Editorial

**Venice, Italy.** Chronic writer's block had kicked in at GPS HQ, and a last minute decision to relocate the entire operation for 06 to somewhere more amenable and sunny was the only option. Yet was Venice any better? No. Clearly this is not the right town for any rock/gonzo angle on anything whatsoever. Once you get underneath the tourist sheen, the mood of Venice is hedonism, Catholicism and the ghosts of an empire. (Which maybe isn't too unadjacent to the Sisters.) But what the hell? Let's do it anyway.

The gravitational centre of GPS 06 lies in two interviews with people who at one time or another have appeared on stage with The Sisters of Mercy: James Ray and Gary Marx. Both gentlemen seem, to varying degrees, to be active again after long absences. Marx having got as far as releasing a single and album, which we review.

And what of the Sisters? Since our last issue they have played a handful of festivals on the mainland in Summer '02 and then blazed through Europe in Spring '03 with the 'Smoke and Mirrors' tour - a tour which I personally think was their best for some years. One new song was showcased, 'I have slept with every girl in Berlin', which could be seen as a companion piece to 'You could be the one'.

As for new Sisters products, of the DVD and free net audio tracks promulgated in GPS 05 there has been some progress. Prior to the start of the tour a 100Mb draft video cut for '(We are the same) Susanne' was uploaded onto the Sisters official site and promptly substituted by an audio MP3 of the same track as high demand crippled the Sisters' servers. But there is, as ever, no sign of a new record deal being signed.

Elsewhere we feature a couple of articles on Interpol: the best new band we've heard for years, a review of the new Hunter S Thompson tome and the usual array of stuff about the Sisters.

Chris Sampson

## (We are the same) Susanne

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 2003, a rough cut live video for '(We are the same) Susanne' was uploaded onto the Sisters' web site, representing the first widely distributed material from the Sisters in the decade since Under the Gun. The Dominion list - in a thread that made me lose the will to live - definitively stated that the footage was recorded at either Bonn 2001, Ternat 2002, or in the studio. Given the lengthy interregnum it was perhaps unfortunate that six hours later the file was taken off-line as overwhelming demand for the 100Mb behemoth crippled the Sisters' web servers. A mono MP3 of the soundtrack replaced it a few days later.

The timing of the video's appearance just before the Smoke and Mirrors tour and the unusual, perhaps unique, instance of the Sisters releasing a clearly unfinished cut led to speculation in certain quarters that tour promoters had been promised new Sisters product prior to the tour and the Susanne vid was simply a typically Eldritch-esque attempt to fulfil a contract obligation with the minimum of effort. GPS would prefer not to comment on this cynical interpretation of events. Except to say that it is true.

But what of the song itself? Susanne was first played at the Erlangen gig on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1998. While Field Marshall Eldritch retained control of the lyrics - some rumours date the initial ideas for the lyrics as far back as Tim Bricheno's time in the band - Mike Varjak came up with the primary concepts for the music. We start with a rumbling, mid-tempo bass riff reminiscent of James Ray's Edie Sedgwick. There is a ghost of guitar before the comforting, distinctive Doktor Avalanche snare thunders in and a lead guitar snakes around a complex arpeggio. This is utterly unmistakable: it is that most addictive of things, The Sisters of Mercy at their best - there is a cruel yet vulnerable swagger to the guitar, a gloriously stupid insistence to the rhythm.

Eldritch's vocal in the verse sounds like Sinatra's croon would after five years as maggot food. He sounds utterly ravaged,

wasted like he has spent the decade since Under the Gun strung out on speed and vodka, debauched by a thousand women. Simultaneously. Yet there is undeniably a hunger and menace in there, characteristics that belie the lyric.

Eldritch says the Sisters are at their best delineating inter-personal fallout and Susanne certainly falls into this category. The verse initially describes a state of limbo: the narrator is lost in the "haze around" Susanne and begs her to "let the ether fall"<sup>1</sup>. Ether, of course, has a dual function. It can be a drug used to anaesthetise patients during operations<sup>2</sup>, but also has an archaic use as a fluid filling all space. Eldritch combines both meanings in two words, "haze around". We're at the end of the first couplet in his first song for ten years and that claim to be the best lyricist on the planet is already looking secure.

Susanne isn't a rabble-rouser in the grand tradition of Alice or Dominion (a tradition that is continued and extended elsewhere in new songs such as Crash & Burn and Summer), and the chorus is emphasised by the guitarists stomping the 'distortion' pedals and launching into a descending power chord motif. It's hardly the supercharged switch into hyperdrive that the Sisters are capable of, but perhaps that wouldn't be appropriate given the main themes introduced by the chorus. Here our (a)etherised narrator has "no pain", but plainly retains enough consciousness to be cognisant that he's "lost for stupid again". What does this curious phrase mean? "Lost for words", i.e. dumbstruck, is a common enough phrase in English. Perhaps the answer lies in the next couplet: "we are the same / give it a name Suzanne". As the latter line

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<sup>1</sup> Or possibly the relationship is already over - Susanne has gone forever, and he wants her to anaesthetise his memories, as though it were in her power to allow him to forget. I'm reminded of Borges' comment in *The Aleph*, about the world 'growing away from her' after she has gone and the sense of grief in new things that distance the loser from the lost.

<sup>2</sup> And is also the recreational drug of choice for GPS staffers.

is repeated the English two-syllable version of the name ('Suzanne') turns into the three-syllable German version ('Susanne'). Eldritch has commented that this "deft and mellifluous" change is a comment on the concept of sameness within a relationship. This works several ways. Clearly the mercurial Susanne/Suzanne's personality is subject to dramatic mood swings, but if the couple are "the same" then is our narrator also owning up to his own bouts of volatility? Or is "We are the same" intoned with bitter irony, a comment on the ludicrousness of the idea that the two individuals in a relationship should somehow lose their individuality and become some sort of composite personality? This seems the better reading of the song and would

explain the barely conscious, anaesthetised ethereality the narrator finds himself in. He is lost and stupid for ending up in such a situation. He has no words for the situation he finds himself in and can only ask Suzanne to "give it a name".

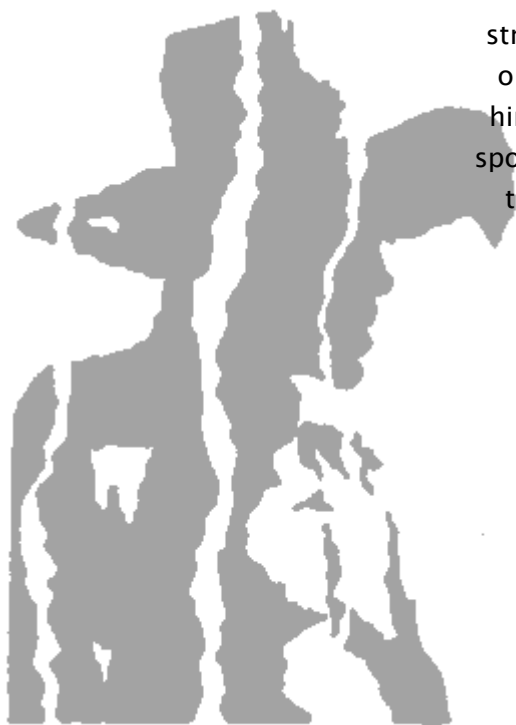
The lyric is barely six lines, yet it is thought provoking, poetic and highly complex - a masterpiece of economy of expression. The music is a simple live arrangement, yet it is a supremely accomplished melding of arrogance and vulnerability. (We Are The Same) Susanne, then, is a Sisters of Mercy song in the truest sense.

Chris Sampson

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## Interview[1]: James Ray

Between 1986 and '96 James Ray produced a string of eclectic, aggressive singles and albums on Merciful Release. We haven't heard much of him in recent years, but after the great man was spotted in the audience at the Sisters' Bristol gig, the GPS team decided it was time to give him a grilling. As it happened, JR was a pleasure to interview.



**Glasperlenspiel:** The rumour mill has been humming for a while with reports that you're either back in the studio or about to play some gigs, but there's been no concrete news. What's happening? Are we about to get a Gangwar comeback?

**James Ray:** John & Damon have been wanting to resurrect Gangwar for sometime as it was my decision to stop not theirs. I get pangs to return to the stage every now & then but the longer we leave it the more difficult it then becomes to arrange any decent gigs & I certainly don't want to start playing pubs again. We have enough material to play an entirely new set but we would need a venue that would be geared up in the sound & lighting department to make it worthwhile so unless we were offered something suitable attached to a relevant financial deal then I don't really see the point of 'starting again'.

## Glasperlenspiel 06

### What type of music are you doing?

The music is basically a logical progression of Psychodalek written mainly by John, as he has been very prolific with his own thing – Volatile Headspace.

As for releasing anything, well I can't be bothered to trail around labels looking for a deal & I don't have the time or the inclination to release anything myself, I'm too busy eating everything else on my plate.

**The first time most of us heard of James Ray was when you sang on The Sisterhood's *Giving Ground* single. How did you get to work with Eldritch? For contractual reasons *Giving Ground* had to be released in a rush, what are your memories of the recording?**

Eldritch heard the first ever four tracks I created – Mexico, Edie, Johnny Goodbye & Dance (evolved into Bad Gin). He

**The Sisterhood went on to make the *Gift* album. Were you involved with any album tracks other than *Giving Ground*? It's always been very difficult untangling who did what.**

I wasn't involved too much with the album as it was taking ages for Eldritch to formulate any concrete ideas & I wanted to be writing my own stuff. I personally think the album transpired to cash in on the sales of the single. Lucas Fox done (sic) the spoken word stuff.

**And then we had a string of singles from James Ray and the Performance on Merciful Release. I thought Texas in particular had what it takes and should have sold by the truckload, but the Performance didn't quite seem to make it as big as they should have. Did you get much support from Merciful Release, or were they only there when the Sisters were on a break?**



“What the fuck are you looking at?” – leather, shades, Gangwar. 1990

offered me a deal and off we went to the studio. Whilst there Wayne Hussey & Craig Adams started playing gigs under The Sisterhood name which pissed Eldritch off, so in order to claim the name he had to release a record. So during the recording of Mexico / Edie we made & released 'Giving Ground'. We then spent weeks on what was to be The Sisterhood's second single – 'This Corrosion', but Eldritch decided he was going to use it to kick start The Sisters MKII.

Eldritch was contractually the manager of 'The Performance' but he gave his duties to the inept Boyd Steemson who was to all intents & purposes the Merciful Release spokesperson & had no abilities as a manager. He didn't want us to perform live which really pissed me off and as 'Texas' was one of the big hits on the beaches of Goa in 1987 we really should have been kicking doors down. Eldritch kind of liked the idea that we should remain quite enigmatic, which is cool in one respect but if your output of releases is minimised to retain that enigma it becomes a bit of a

backward step and therefore reduces your profile sufficiently for no one to really care. If we had been German this may have worked. By the time The Sisters MKII were up and running I became quite disillusioned with everything which caused friction between Carl & myself and as Dustboat had been recorded a year before its release I called it a day with 'The Performance'.

**Was there ever a temptation to move onto a bigger label?**

I would have loved to have moved to a bigger label but a contract is a contract and that was that.

**Listening again to the Performance's records it's clear that the use of electronics was ahead of the field, at a time when a fey, cardigan-wearing acoustic style or outright Goth was the fashion in indie circles. Which bands influenced you?**

No bands influenced me but many inspired me – Chrome, Suicide, Cabaret Voltaire, Die Krupps, Tangerine Dream, John Foxx, Black Sabbath, Hawkwind, to name a few.

**You've moved between a fairly minimalist electronic style, through guitar alt.rock to trance. Yet listening to the back catalogue there's always something distinctive in there if you listen carefully, a James Ray watermark, if you like. Is there some sort of attitude or emotion that you think characterises your music?**

I'm pleased you hear a 'watermark'; many people think it's an eclectic collection of releases. I would say the main attitudes and emotions would boil down to anger & loneliness & love. These are the essential and governing aspects of my make-up. I've always said that Trance was Goth without the horror . . . the horror.

**There was always an aura of violence about the band, especially early Gangwar. The cover of Without Conscience in particular was extremely aggressive and assassination was a repeated theme. Do you think it's an essential component of a decent rock'n'roll band to be overtly aggressive?**

Being brought up on punk & heavy rock in the Northeast I was constantly surrounded by violence & aggression that permeates itself into everything, rightly or wrongly. The imagery of Gangwar was based on Black American Gang Culture, which as you know became Gangster Rap. Rock music without aggression is Bon Jovi et al, which is not my bag at all.

**It was absolutely impossible to buy a copy of the second MK Ultra album, Beluga Pop - terrible distribution, which was a pity because it was great. Why? What was the problem?**

Don't ask me! Ask the fucking train driver!! have recently remixed it and recorded some vocal tracks for it so if someone wants to release it then here I am.

**I guess over the years music becomes less of a crusade for artists. You realise you're not going to change the world and sell ten million copies of your next album. What acts as the motivation to keep going?**

Art, passion. The knowledge that if Radiohead can sell ten million records then so can anyone given the right release at the right time.

**The music industry has changed enormously since the days of Mexico Sundown Blues. It seems more difficult than ever for an artist like yourself to have hit records, but I'd guess that the upside of that is that you have more freedom to make the music you want, that there's less pressure to be commercial. Is that how it feels when you're making music?**

I have never made music for commercial reasons. I couldn't. I make the music I want to hear and if others do and it sells then fuckin' A, I get to make another.

**You were spotted in the audience for the Sisters' recent gig at Bristol. What were your impressions?**

Jules Verne didn't need a time machine. He just had to wait. I enjoyed it.

## Lights

GPS has previously discussed the dissonant ethic and pleasure of live Sisters performance and the recorded experience. For me, listening is a completely cerebral thing. I've never dabbled in the kind of clubs that play Sisters material, not shaken my booty to their pulsating basslines. Listening to recordings and experiencing them live have become highly distinct experiences. Listening, one appreciates the subtexts, the allusions, the metaphors in the lyrics, you spot the cunning and perfect opposition of warped guitars generating the dialectic torque that drives this machine.

Live is a different matter. Like the majority, I frequently approach the whole thing in an enhanced state, often the result of well-spent bar time in the company of the GPS crew, or, fatally, time spent alone in bars. By kick-off you're already working overtime and, in contrast to many, the specifics of the experience periphera like the setlist, band's attire, presence of additional personnel and so forth, don't leap out at me; rather it's one hyper-experiential blur, intense and protracted, as the "*grinding metal dub*" counterpoises with a perfect visual display, Eldritch's own utopia-apocalypse becomes a distended and distorted, permanent and perfect moment.

Which brings me to the curiously cerebral epiphany I had at a recent gig, centering on another dialectic - this time between The Sisters and Everyone Else, something acknowledged and almost certainly arising from Eldritch's training in Brechtian method, but which has attained a new level in recent times. In perhaps a "differently"-enhanced state, and in the middle of Summer, I had a moment around which perception swung. Eldritch has written about the heavily backlit stance of the early Sisters, but latterly this has been revisited in an updated and perfected form. The backlighting is still there, but now the combination of lighting effects and technology has produced a swirling ocean of photons, an everchanging interplay which interacts and



complements the Sisters' material. The lighting for Summer captures the oppressive luminance of desert light, the searing, blinding retinal irritation. Acute, piercing ochres burn across magenta, fusing and blinding. Lights interplay, and their manifold and dissonant hues emerge at random from the nigh-impenetrable fog of dry ice. A sandstorm, matched by the fierce maelstrom of all the industrial-grade noise two guitars and a computer can generate. It's chaos. It's beautiful. It's nasty. It's perfect. Amidst this the perpetrators are lost. Then, fleetingly, momentarily, Eldritch appears, a shadow in a sea of light. Or is it? Eldritch is a short, 3 dimensional blond, who paces about in combats fretting about his beloved band. The apparition here is the antithesis to Eldritch, to humanity, to every fame-crazed, front-lit front man. This apparition is a dimensionless void, having shape but no form, impervious to light. And this flat black shape is having a fag and screaming about The War. Then the shape is gone. The screaming continues and out of the fog the neck of a firebird makes a fleeting appearance. As one becomes immersed in this parallel world, it's almost shocking when the face and guitar of Chris Sheehan appear from the fog, alarmingly close.



This is modern Sisters, yet it is also an echo of the vintage performance, enlivened by modern technology perhaps, but still the presentation of the band-as-void, as anti-space in the meta-environment created that they may be that anti-space. The personae thus become non-beings, define their antithetic opposition to the over-riding ethic through an aesthetic antithesis. Fabulous.

Only Eldritch and The Sisters could be this.

Only Eldritch and The Sisters would want to be this.

The Sisters are utterly and completely at odds with any rock/pop performance ethic.

They are the dialectic antithesis of it all, of every mainstream artist. The point of being a rock artist is fame and, now more than ever, fame rather than record sales is the currency and barometer of success. Artists are products measured by their instant recognisability. Tabloid success is all. Aiming to be evaluated by one's music alone is a fierce and unique stratagem in this market. Particularly when the new material is only available in live performances which are so impenetrable to the lazy.

Only time will tell whether the strategy will work, but in the meantime it is goddamn beautiful to watch.

Dr C

## Interview [2]: Gary Marx



When I look back at the Sisters of Mercy's history and their past members, I worry. Clearly, Wayne is problematic, Tony James' career arc is a warning on the risks of championing hubris over talent and Patricia seems to wake up every morning grinding her teeth... Gary Marx has been one of the few that I haven't worried about. He seemed to have his life sorted. Yet here we are with a new Gary Marx single on my CD player and an album recorded. We needed to investigate.

**GPS: Why go solo? Did you consider getting Ghost Dance back together?**

**Gary Marx:** I'm reminded of the line from 'Lights' which Andrew used to have nailed to his wall when I first met him which read '...there have been better plans, but none

that I could ever understand.' I'm not someone who could be accused of being a careerist with a very single-minded approach to what I do. I made an album because I wanted to, I didn't think anyone would read that much into it. I made it largely on my own because I could cover

most of the roles the material seemed to require myself. The thought of reviving Ghost Dance wasn't an option as far as I'm concerned and certainly not for this material.

**Was it a conscious decision to use "Gary Marx" rather than your real name? Did/Does Gary have a different identity to Mark?**

It made perfect sense to me to stick with the name I'd used on every prior recording – I'm not sure there's a delineation between the two personas as such, but it helps keep the taxman on his toes (which was the original reason for using a pseudonym at all).

**The new recordings are fairly basic - typically an acoustic guitar being the only instrumentation. I can imagine a fuller arrangement of "Like Low Life" in particular going down a storm with the pyramid builders. Why choose a low-fi arrangement?**

I think it was a combination of reasons – I presented demos of the material in a 'one voice/one instrument' way to Choque (Hosein who produced the album), which he really liked, and so when we started recording we decided not to add arrangements to them unless we felt the 'unplugged' version wasn't working. I'd already got it in my head that I didn't want to use bass on the tracks – he twisted my arm about using it on a couple of songs. While it's not meant to represent any kind of crusade, there's a sleight of hand at the heart of most rock music – songs last four minutes despite the fact half the song is usually padding, and they have instruments doubling up information that's already there or implied. I just chose to compress the songs horizontally and vertically and let the listener hear the idea closer to how it first came to me.

**How do you feel about the description of "quintessential English whimsy?" Does Pretty Black Dots work align with, say, Viv Stanshall, Neil Innes, Syd Barrett and so forth? Where would you place it in context to other work or indeed in relation to your own canon?**

The reference point is a decent one in relation to certain songs – I think 'Stripes and Stars' has a kinship with the parody

songs of Neil Innes. Syd Barrett is the most appealing comparison and was a reference point we used during the making of the album. The child-like aspect is there on 'Picasso Says' and 'The Boy In The Sea'. I would have included the first solo albums that Eno made after quitting Roxy Music as well. Certainly I like the 'English' reference because that is something that leapt out at me listening back to the differences between Sisters' and Ghost Dance stuff. Andrew was always very particular about avoiding Americanisms and steering clear of adopting that Mid-Atlantic singing style. That's rubbed off on me over the years, especially as the full flowering of their insidious cultural monopoly has become clear more recently. I was keen to make sure you got some idea of who the person singing was on this album. While the outer shell is very different from the earlier work I've done, there are themes which can be traced through. It's all essentially post-punk music, dealing with the violence and absurdity of the world we find ourselves in.

**Are you comfortable with singing? Is it the natural thing to do with your own lyrics? Were you comfortable not singing with those other bands?**

It's a natural thing to sing *these* songs – they were written with no other singer in mind. The Sisters' songs, with one or two exceptions, were always conceived with the sound of Andrew's voice as the focus. Similarly the Ghost Dance songs were written to be sung by Anne-Marie. I can remember singing 'Poison Door' at the BBC for a session we were recording (because I'd just written it and I was teaching Andrew how it went). I came into the control room where the band and some of our friends were listening back to it – it sounded great. Andrew suggested leaving it with my vocal on, but I told him to have a go at a take and see what it sounded like. Needless to say as soon as he opened his mouth there was no contest. I was never a frustrated singer in those bands - I was frequently frustrated by the singers in those bands.

**Do you have any plans to play live?**

I am still unsure about how to present it live. If I were to stay close to the sound of the album it would make most sense to play solo acoustic, but there's something

really awful about the idea of being a 'singer/songwriter'. It just conjures up such chintzy images to me. I will wrestle with this over the Summer and look to put some select shows together for the end of this year or early next year.

**There was some talk about your trying to re-join the Sisters in the Nineties. What was the story there? Was there a story there?**

I have never tried to rejoin the Sisters (other than a brief moment of folly before the Royal Albert Hall gig). In '95 I approached Andrew about writing some songs for him. Like most people who like his voice I hate having to wait years on end to hear any new material so I suggested I help write an album's worth. He was agreeable and I delivered 11 backing tracks. It seemed like we might find some common ground but the songs have gone the way of many others in the last eight years. I last heard from him around the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary gig – an invitation to 'participate' was made....I didn't.

**How do you view the changes in the music scene over the years? I'm quite interested in exploring how the Leeds and UK alternative scene has changed since the early 80s - it seems to me that it's the spirit of punk / new wave that's missing. Either musicians are trying too hard to impress labels or are isolated and reclusive in their home studios (which is maybe a downside of technological advances, PCs and the Internet)...**

I am less involved in the Leeds scene than I was but from my vantage point there is a shift in terms of the make-up of the City itself (cafe society, designer stores) which seems to have translated into the music I witness coming out of there. If I had to sum it up in one word I would say 'fashion'. Leeds operated in a different way to London and some other major centres in the UK when I first moved there in 1979. There seems to be a greater desire to be industry friendly, and Leeds bands tend to be as recognisable by their haircuts as anything else at the moment. Clearly the nervousness surrounding the record industry at the moment is making it tougher for new bands to break through who don't appear to conform to a trend of

one sort or another - there wasn't the same pressure in the 80's, but even so there is shift in emphasis or attitude which could well be categorised as a move away from the punk stance I adopted and still adopt today.

**Your comments about Eldritch on your website are double-edged, but you'd be comfortable having him sing your work [to date Marx is the ONLY Sister to have a lyric sung by AE]. Have you offered him to join your band?**

That definitely raises a titter. In actual fact there was one song from the sessions which didn't quite work. Choque (who is also a good friend of Andrew's) did suggest we get him in to do it. My memory of Andrew's work rate ruled it out. We could write and record a double album in the time it took him to get the headphone mix to his liking. As for joining my band? There is more chance of him joining the Mission.

**Deep apologies for this but can we get into Sisters trainspotter mode for a while? The Sisters' first single came out in 1980, but there are very vague rumours about the band existing in various guises before then. Can you remember any details about what happened before Damage Done, and whether Merciful Release Records existed before then?**

*The band didn't exist, but a band did. Andrew was the drummer, his girlfriend was the keyboard-player, I was the guitar-player (despite never playing guitar before in my life), the bass player was called Johnny (every band around that time was obliged to have at least one person called Johnny) and a local Leeds 'face' called Keith Fuller sang. It's so long ago that I can't remember if we ever had a name – we certainly never played a gig or recorded a note. We barely made it through a rehearsal without scud missiles being deployed. The only thing that band did was throw me and Andrew together. The pair of us set up Merciful Release to create a label identity for the Damage Done single.*

**In retrospect, the period when the Sisters were releasing records independently seems perhaps to have**

**been the band's happiest. Did it seem that way at the time?**

The liner notes to 'Some Girls Wander...' give a fair indication of how it was. Those trips to Bridlington and the gigs around the time of 'Alice' 1982/83 were very special, far less sanitised than the bigger tours which followed – chaotic, violent, sexy, distorted (in every sense) and a word which evaporated quicker than the dry ice – fun. I don't say this with any real sadness – it seemed part of the natural arc of being in a band, later audiences actually got to hear the songs played properly. I didn't place particular emphasis on that, but it was a trade-off people seemed largely happy with.

**The impression I got was that Eldritch was in control of the Sisters in the studio whereas you developed the live sound. Did it divide up like that?**

The notion that Andrew could be happy leaving anyone in control of any area is comical. He was on top of whatever we were doing. I will say that I took less interest in the studio sound – believing that to be Andrew's strong suit. I certainly enjoyed the live side more where things weren't so pre-ordained. That may have led to me leaving a more obvious footprint on them.

**After the Sisters signed to Warners it seemed like they'd moved up into a bigger league. But the cracks soon began to show. Walk Away was allegedly about tensions within the band, and Eldritch had some sort of breakdown during the recording of the album. What went wrong?**

The question you always dread because there is no easy sound bite to cover this. If I focus on Andrew's breakdown it makes him sound like some cartoon rock casualty, which he wasn't (even if it might amuse him to think he was). If I try and explain my stance at the time it has a habit of sounding like I'm applying for a Sainthood. If I focus on the power-struggles and the contracts and the money, nobody comes out of it well. In essence the securing of the Warners deal had taken an awful lot out of Andrew (who was sole manager of the band by this point). It had also caused a rift between him and the rest of us and, perhaps most

significantly, it had taken him away from being a singer and a songwriter. In the studio all this was amplified - it's a surprise an album emerged at all and no surprise to anyone close to the band that we had all parted company within a few months of its release. A very messy end to it all and annoyingly a very clichéd end on the surface of it at least – the drug-addled lead singer on a power trip and the 'dum-dum boys/spiders from mars' squabbling over a few quid in the back-room.

**Eldritch seems reluctant, even embarrassed to acknowledge the stylistic influence the Sisters had pre-1985. What were your thoughts as you saw the Sisters' reputation and success grow after you left the band?**

The release of Floodland was quite difficult. On the one hand you were faced with a great record, and a record that was free of the production weaknesses of 'First and Last...' Andrew sounded back on top form as a lyricist (all that 'blood-line' stuff was hysterically funny but spot-on) and his voice was great. At the same time you were watching the band you had formed and spent five years pushing up the side of a fucking big mountain suddenly cruising and reaping huge financial rewards for something which you had no stake in at all. It's only with 15 years' hindsight that I can ignore the negative part of that equation.

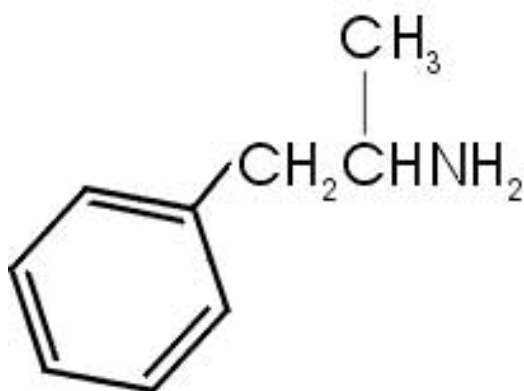
**You then went on to form Ghost Dance with Anne-Marie from Skeletal Family and initially put out records on your own label before signing to Chrysalis. Everything seemed to be going well on Karbon, but the music became more commercial on Chrysalis. Was that your own choice or was there pressure from the record label?**

The Ghost Dance story has to be seen very much in the context of what I've just said. The success of 'This Corrosion' and the Mission's run of hit singles and albums definitely had some kind of effect on me and led to me going along with Chrysalis when they presented the argument for a more mainstream direction. In fairness they never actually said that at all – it was just the day-to-day decisions they helped us to make which stacked up to that. Having alienated most of the people who had championed the band (even the

Karbon releases were seen as too pop for many of the Sisters' fans) we really had nowhere to go after Chrysalis dropped us. Whereas there were loose-ends when I left the Sisters, it very much felt like Ghost

Dance had more than run its course. It really was just a case of backing the truck up over it to make sure it was dead.

(Pretty Black Dots is reviewed on Page 16)



Dissecting Eldritch's lyrics has long been a popular pastime, and with no releases scheduled for the foreseeable future it seems apt to concentrate on the unreleased material.

*War On Drugs* is perhaps Eldritch's most overt drug anthem to date, despite being lyrically brief - consisting of two short verses that are virtually identical and a heavily repeated chorus.

Before examining the song itself it is necessary and beneficial to examine references from previous songs. Drugs have long been a feature of Eldritch's song writing canon, with the for or against viewpoint apparently shifting according to the use or abuse of controlled substances by the dramatis personae. Early songs such as *Body Electric* and *Adrenochrome* have a crazed euphoria about them, with the song's protagonist revelling in his hedonistic delight. *Adrenochrome* in particular sees *The Sisters Of Mercy* ripped and wired on Hunter S Thompson's stimulant of stimulants.

By contrast, *Anaconda* is a rare departure, wherein the drug in question (undoubtedly heroin) is portrayed as dangerous and destructive. The metaphor of a young woman having the life crushed from her by her addiction is perhaps clumsy by Eldritch's later standards but serves

## War on Drugs

admirably to illustrate the point. The unreleased *Driver* circa '82 is similarly naive in its approach. Here, amphetamines are compared to a road trip along a highway where "ethics yield to speed and power" and "we ain't never coming down". The song's opening lines "Lay me down the long white line, leave the sirens far behind me" later reappeared as the opening to *Heartland*.

After this initial flurry the drug references take a back seat. *Fix* is used metaphorically to provide a framework for the examination of what might best be termed the needs of a nation and the hypocrisy that goes hand in hand with the dubious benefits of nationalism. *Temple of Love*, despite its cryptic run-out groove message of "Long Live Gonzoid Amphetamine Filth", settles for mentioning "a shot for the pain inside", a reference obvious within the context of the song. However, it is with *Afterhours* that the first cracks start to appear in Eldritch's psyche. The spartan lyric weaves over a slow and ominous musical backdrop that threatens to build to a crescendo that is never quite reached - perhaps an indication that the drugs no longer retain their former efficacy? The despair of sleepless nights, drifting from bed to bed in the early hours, fuelled by another line of amphetamine from off the mirror is palpable. Clearly, the rock 'n' roll lifestyle has begun to turn sour. Endless touring fuelled by drugs is starting to take its toll.

This, by way of Eldritch's physical collapse in '84, brings us to *Amphetamine Logic*. Now, even his much beloved speed has become the enemy, although despite the bleak tone and his own near death experience, he cannot bring himself to condemn his drug of choice outright, and the song remains strangely ambivalent.

## Glasperlenspiel 06

The albums *Floodland* and *Vision Thing* by contrast feature more subtle references and show a greater maturity in Eldritch's song writing. "Looking for the can in the candy store" and "gimme something fast" seem to imply the scoring of drugs. Amphetamines, with the exception of the use of the proprietary brand name



Methedrine in *Lucretia My Reflection*, are only alluded to, e.g. the line "pink noise, white noise" in *Detonation Boulevard*. This appears to be a reference to the regular white/yellow appearance of speed and a derivative known as Pink Champagne, a theory given further credence by the reappearance of the pink and white reference on *Will I Dream* in the line "pink and white and steely blue". Here the concept is augmented by the notion of a steely blue razor blade chopping out lines.

Much, however, can change in a decade. Eldritch resumes touring, goes on strike for seven years, and eventually is released from his contract with East West. Previous bad habits appear to be resumed and he becomes ever more vocal in his support of amphetamine abuse. *Amphetamine Logic* is reinterpreted live as a celebratory anthem rather than a cautionary tale, as Eldritch slips further and further into the character of the Gonzoid Amphetamine Overlord, whose aims culminate in doing the *War On Drugs*.

The song's title, like many of Eldritch's best lyrics, can be interpreted on a number

of levels, the most mundane of which afford the artist plausible deniability. From "acid on the floor so she walk on the ceiling" and "she looked good in ribbons", to the mantra of "let's do the war on drugs", Eldritch, like some forties film maker fighting censorship, can always claim that he is innocent of any such inference.

Of course, it is highly doubtful that Eldritch is urging his listeners to support the War On Drugs. Instead he weaves from the scant lyrics images of the crazed Vietnam seen through the eyes of the protagonists of *Apocalypse Now*. Eldritch's love of the film and the Joseph Conrad novel, *Heart Of Darkness*, on which it is loosely based is well documented elsewhere. It encapsulates both the idea of the soldiers being high and, more politically, the use of drug money to finance the war: a reference to CIA Black Ops, responsible for air freighting heroin from the Golden Triangle.

The line "seven shades of Shiva rising, I am come" invokes both images from the film and the reports of GIs becoming addicted to heroin, supplied by the Viet Cong to weaken the war effort. In this shadowy place narcotics transcend the horror of war.

From the Vietnam delta of the first verse, Eldritch shifts closer to home, returning to Kirkstall in the shadow of the sun. The setting may have changed but the protagonist has failed to progress. If anything, he seems more intent on repeating his actions. Thus the song builds to a crescendo, the chorus repeating as it counts down from eleven to seven shades of Shiva rising, indicating the futility of the War On Drugs. The Gonzoid Overlord knows full well drugs are endemic in our society and no amount of prohibition will ever eradicate their presence, although ultimately, it will probably be successful in eroding our civil liberties completely.

Leon Steelgrave

# Chris Starling

Sala Apolo, Barcelona

16 May 2003

What better way to recover from a long Sisters tour than flying out to Barcelona for a long weekend, check into a cheap hotel on Las Ramblas and witness Mr. Starling play an acoustic set?

The Sala Apolo turns out to be an old, and very beautiful theatre. The floor is filled with small tables intimately decorated with suitable tablecloths and red candles. The turn-out seems to be higher than expected as all seats are filled and some people have to stand at the back. It's a free show after all.

After a warm up by fellow label-mates Dorian, a local Spanish act, Chris takes the stage. He takes off his sandals before mounting a bar stool<sup>3</sup>. In his best Spanish he introduces the first song: "Bother Be". It's a song from his never officially released album "Out of the Woods" (which was recorded under the name Chris Sheehan). It sets the tone for what to expect tonight, relaxing music and a fragile voice. The song ends with a fluent "Estes mio amigo Tony". Tony Fisher, a regular in Chris's live appearances and co-member of the late Mutton Birds (the band that made Chris skip touring with the Sisters from '97 to '99), accompanies him on bass. It's obvious they're a perfect match. It sounds like they've played these songs together for years.

Next up, "The Word", the second single from his previous album ("Planet Painkiller"). It's one of the songs from that album that made it onto the second version of "Sounds Like Chris Starling", the album he's promoting during this show. (By the way, also check out the great video for this song that's available for download on the Popchild site<sup>4</sup>). "Took a Trip" is a perfect example of how vulnerable Chris can sound. After "Lost & Found" it's time for the first fast song, "Unhealthy" from his first album, "Valid",

which was recorded when he was still working with Anxious Records. "Wendy May" brings us back to the calm and mellow Chris that we know from his last two albums. By now it's obvious most people who turned up are very familiar with the songs from his new album.

Chris even goes back to his first solo recording, the "Letter from Heaven EP" and more precisely the song "Razor Girl". After "Mouths & Brains" follows the very intimate "Start Again", which seems to be some sort of a sequel to "Razor Girl".

"Tender" is very much like the title and takes the crowd in its grip, an icy silence. A silence only broken by the applause that invariably rang-out at the end of each song. Obviously "Bobby Slaughter Saw the Light" is one of the songs that gets played a lot on Spanish radio. Some people seem to know the lyrics while others are humming the tune.

After a word of thanks for the support band and Popchild Records it's time for "cancion ultimo, si?". And what better song to finish with than "Let It Soak in"? With another big gesture of appreciation Chris and Tony leave the stage to warm applause.

Chris returns just by himself for the encore. All I can make out from his intro is that it'll be a short song (I don't understand any Spanish after all!). And short it is. "Halloween Candy" (also from the "Letter from Heaven EP") is no longer than one and a half minutes, but you've just got to love this song!

Hearing these songs in an acoustic version makes them even more interesting to listen to than on CD. A private meeting, complemented by a sober mix of lights, guitars and vocals. What more can be asked of a concert? It only leaves us wondering what it would sound like with a band. Maybe next time Chris?

<sup>3</sup> ROCK AND ROLL! - Ed

<sup>4</sup>

[www.popchild.com/popchildrecords/chrisstarling.html](http://www.popchild.com/popchildrecords/chrisstarling.html)

Sven Togni

## Gary Marx reviews

### [1] Pretty Black Dots

Gary Marx's time with the Sisters saw them make the transition from rough-edged punk to the UK's foremost alternative/post-punk outfit. That he left in 1985 with the band on the brink of a global breakout, and failed to recoup - either with the Sisters or his post-Sisters outfit Ghost Dance - the cash and kudos he deserved seems to have left him with much to be reflective and philosophical about, including two sharp experiences of acrimonious splits.

It's therefore unsurprising that Marx decided to go solo, and that 13 year gap between releases indicates some serious reservations about the music business. Faced with Pretty Black Dots, the critic finds himself on the alert for activity on two fronts: is it a tired re-hash of the 1985 Sisters / Ghost Dance sound, and are any of the songs about former band members? Answers: an emphatic no, and a maybe.

The most striking thing about the album is the extreme low-fi arrangements and production. There is certainly no sign of a classic Marx "snake-charmer" riff, nor of his distinctive guitar sound. Many of the songs are recorded with just an acoustic guitar and vocals. This shows a continued association with the punk roots of the late Seventies, and the fact that the album sounds somewhat odd is perhaps an indication of how glossy even the roughest of modern albums have become.

What of the lyrics? Album opener, "The Boy in the Sea" is hugely cynical with "Just a bucket of hope with a fucking big hole" being the stand-out lyric. Elsewhere, "Death of a Sandwich Board Man" has some lines that could be relevant to Eldritch, but that theory doesn't quite add up.

But the majority of songs paint little soapish vignettes of modern life, with an emphasis on what used to be called the underclass - the lost and lonely, down and outs who can't quite deal with life. There are kids getting wasted on alcopops and cheap drugs; people who can't cope living in pigsties and drinking cold tea from polystyrene cups. It's noticeable that there is little emphasis on the abstract or the emotional or the political.

I really wanted to like this album, but found it a difficult listen - mainly because there is little here in terms of musical hooks or lyrics that resonated with me. But Gary Marx is undoubtedly a talented man and with the difficult hurdle of his first tracks in over a decade behind him, we'll see a bit more of him. And maybe the twisted, eccentric and unaccountable taste of the GPS staff will intersect with wherever Gary's musical instincts take him next. Hope so. We'll be listening.

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### [2] Black-Eyed Faith

As GPS 06 was going to press, a curiosity of extreme interest appeared on the Gary Marx web site. Black-Eyed Faith is one of 11 tracks that Marx recorded in 1995 for possible use by The Sisters. Field Marshall Eldritch's reaction isn't on record, but as no Marx compositions saw the light of day on record or in the live set we can assume they met with the usual apathy at the Reptile House.

Black-Eyed Faith, though, is rather more than the rough backing track Gary

described in his interview. It's a fully worked out demo, complete with vocals. The style is very much a development of the '85 Sisters sound and perhaps indicates what Marx's contributions to "Left on a Mission and Revenge" would have sounded like. If Eldritch's genius for arrangement, production and lyrics had been added this might have added up to something quite special - the quickening pace and momentum in the chorus in particular are loaded with potential. Intriguing stuff.



# Hunter S Thompson

## Kingdom of Fear (Penguin)

*"What the fuck is going on in this country?"*

*- Never ask that question unless you already know the answer.*

*"I do, we are fucked, utterly fucked."*

The first four years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century could not have better prepared the ground for a new Hunter S Thompson book. Politics is suddenly interesting again: we have a dubious war, which has no end in sight, to argue against; an unelected President who seized power by a judicial coup and whose every move is a torment to the liberal minded; and hard-won freedoms under attack from the Republican hawks. The parallels with Thompson's high-water mark during the Nixon era are hard to ignore.

In retrospect we can see that HST has been on guard ever since the day JFK was assassinated, a day he coined the phrase "Fear and Loathing" to describe the mood that descended and failed to lift. There is a sense that not only was HST present at the major counter-cultural landmarks since the JFK assassination, but that they became landmarks because he wrote about them so well, particularly the democratic convention in Chicago, 1968, at which police gassed protestors under instruction from Democrat Mayor Daley, and the '72 Presidential election, immortalised in the classic "Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail", still the best book written about American politics.

With Tom Wolfe, Thompson pioneered New Journalism, a paradigm shift in journalistic writing that favoured subjectivity over objectivity, and publishing first draft material, written in the heat of the moment under the influence of whatever chemicals were available at the time. Thompson coined the term *Gonzo* for his own highly distinctive brand of New Journalism.

Undeniably, Thompson's writing peaked in the 70s and his books since 1979's collection, *The Great Shark Hunt*, have been fans-only affairs: you need to be

indulgent to find much of interest in *Songs of the Doomed* or *Generation of Swine*. The impression that HST had snorted, popped and drank just too much to be able to maintain coherence and structure over 200 pages was hard to shake off. Indeed, the last time I saw him on TV his speech was so slurred that *subtitles* were needed. That this is the logical consequence of HST's *raison d'etre* didn't justify the feeling that he wasted his talent in some way: compare the two volumes of the collected letters: some of *The Proud Highway* (volume 1) is beautifully written, whereas *Fear and Loathing in America* (volume 2) comes across as the angry, ill-focused ramblings of the town's acid casualty.

*Kingdom of Fear*, ostensibly a memoir, is a better read than I'd expected. Although there is nothing that compares with the bladder-rupturingly funny "Memo from the Sports Desk" that introduced HST's "Watergate Notes" in *The Great Shark Hunt*, about a third of this is well-written and coherent. There is an excellent, thought provoking section on political protest, the nub of which says that protest is worthwhile when the impression of a dialogue, however difficult, can be established - when the potential is present for the leadership to change its mind. When that potential is not there, protest becomes worthless. So, Thompson argues, protestors could be optimistic of change under Johnson, but the dialogue failed under Nixon. (Which gives us some uncomfortable comparisons for Blair, and the failure of massive anti-war demos to make any difference to policy on Iraq - Blair as bad as Nixon, anyone?). Also well written are pieces on HST's legendary campaign to be elected sheriff for Aspen on the "Freak Power" ticket, and new material on HST's trip to Grenada after the '83 US invasion.

But too much of Kingdom of Fear is given over to his 1990 trial after he was arrested on a series of sexual assault and possession charges. He loses his sense of humour here, and the story is rambling and incomprehensible. It's partially salvaged by a strong letter by HST's lawyer Gerald Goldstein, which places the case in the wider context of the erosion of personal liberties in the US since September 11. Surveillance of internet traffic, he argues, "is more sinister and dangerous because you cannot see it or feel it. Stealthlike, it steals our thoughts. It steals your conversations. It invades the crossroads between the Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure and the First Amendment rights to free speech and association." Indeed.

Kingdom of Fear is not the best starting place for the Thompson neophyte: that should be The Great Shark Hunt or Campaign Trail '72. But it is a welcome addition and in no way tarnishes the Great Man's reputation. We need Hunter S Thompson in the world. We need him to tell us that rationale and reason are not sufficient tools against American politics. We need him to tell us that, yes, the state of American politics is worth getting angry about. And quite frankly, we'd rather it was someone else doing the dangerous business of getting into the kind of insane mental state needed to write sanely about America. They should carve his face on Mount Rushmore and then blow it to smithereens with high-powered explosives. He'd like that.

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## Interpol[1]

### Turn on the Bright Lights (Matador)

Britain in the late seventies and early Eighties was a fucked-up country. Still struggling with the nation's decline from the first rank of world power; political tension; rioting that nobody bothered to report; lousy industrial relations; the boiled-cabbage whiff of austerity still lingering over the country. Not really a fun place to live. Punk was essentially a middle-class, art-school genre; the North's reaction to the dismal state of affairs never really had a name.

So why have I retreated nearly a quarter of a century to talk about Interpol, a new(ish) band who were probably still in diapers (half of them are American) during the Winter of Discontent? The answer's simple: Interpol have assimilated the sound of discontent and alienation perfectly, and developed it to a peak that it never quite reached first time round.

Popular wisdom says that they're a bunch of Joy Division copyists. Popular wisdom is wrong. If we're talking influences, yes, Joy Division and New Order are there - but I don't think they're even the key influence. Hannett's production is evoked more than the musical contributions of Curtis or Albrecht. Interpol certainly inherit the boundaries of their musical territory from the North of England - it's difficult to believe that they are essentially a New York band. The rest of their influences also tend to cling to the M62 - it's not hard to hear Echo and the Bunnymen, the Chameleons, Teardrop Explodes, Bauhaus and perhaps most neglected of all Magazine in Interpol's work. There's only one place I found myself thinking the music was at all derivative - the single "Say Hello to the Angels" leaves me very much in mind of Bauhaus's version of Eno's "Third Uncle".

These guys know their New Wave. No denying it. But despite the occasional nod at their elders they haven't given us a preserved tribute - anyone can cover Joy Division and perhaps astonishingly the best version of Novelty I've ever heard was by Half Man Half Biscuit - instead they've taken the bleak, bracing vision, the wordy and intelligent lyrics and the fusion of electronics and conventional instruments in a distinctive direction themselves.

Lyricaly they're as sharp as their suits. These are not tales of adolescent mopey - for the most part the lyrics are vignettes of urban isolation, and possibly mark the point at which Interpol first start to sound American. They're tales of the city - and the city is unashamedly NYC. Big, scary, full of strange people doing strange and inexplicable things. I found myself thinking of "Taxi Driver" the first time I heard the track "NYC" (a line from which gives the album its title) - it's such a simple, plaintive and ultimately hopeful song about looking for some kind redemption in the city...

- a crisp, analytical tale of a descent into dysfunctional relationship hell. It's not difficult to see these songs as being two sides of the same endless story of isolation, miscommunication, misunderstanding.

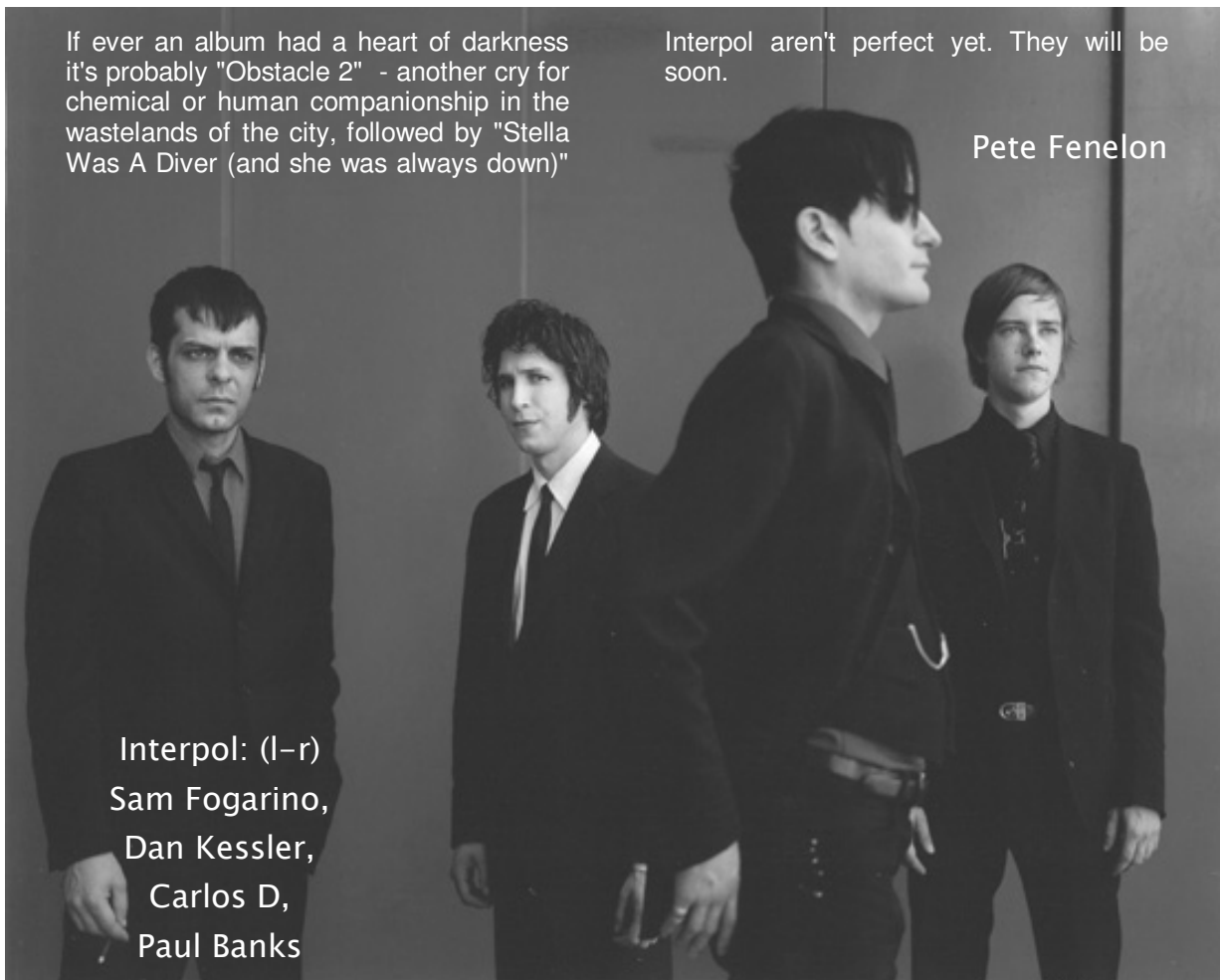
Everything on this album has been assimilated, processed, filtered through a distinctive attitude - and the result is as fresh and compelling an album as I've heard in many years. Interpol conjure vast space inside their music - but it's the vast space of abandoned warehouses, derelict railway stations, not cathedrals - marrying epic guitar to rigorous, almost stifling percussion and keyboards. In the dramatic space between these, twisted lyrics have room to slide into your head.

This is powerful stuff. That it's a debut album is almost incredible - the few tentative edges will surely be machined away as the band evolve. Think of this as a beginning - a jumping-off point from whence Interpol will start producing music of unprecedented subtlety and power.

If ever an album had a heart of darkness it's probably "Obstacle 2" - another cry for chemical or human companionship in the wastelands of the city, followed by "Stella Was A Diver (and she was always down)"

Interpol aren't perfect yet. They will be soon.

Pete Fenelon



Interpol: (l-r)  
Sam Fogarino,  
Dan Kessler,  
Carlos D,  
Paul Banks

## Interpol[2]

Astoria, London

22 March 2003

The pre-gig plan to “take it easy on the beers” has predictably gone awry (despite the horrendous refurbishment of the Royal George into a 4 quid-a-pint Yuppie bar) and we are well on the way to another disastrous evening staggering around the capital after hours in search of something or other unattainable, but most likely finding nothing more outlandish than the way home. First, though, there is some rock’n’roll to be done. Interpol, the best new band to emerge in a good while, are headlining the Astoria. As GPS 05 pointed out, the alternative guitar scene in the States is currently unusually healthy; we highlighted BRMC (new album imminent) and The Strokes (fast disappearing up their arseholes) in the last issue, but the best of that scene was yet to come. Interpol’s debut EP wasn’t released until June 2002, and the (flawless) album followed a couple of months later.

Interpol are a New York four-piece, but I don’t think I’m succumbing to misplaced patriotism by pointing out that two of the band - vocalist Paul Banks, and guitarist Dan Kessler - are British ex-pats. As Pete Fenelon says in his album review, Interpol’s music is highly influenced by early 80s British new wave, but the songwriting and playing are strong enough to dispel any fears that their appeal is simply nostalgic in essence.

Tonight the Astoria is sold out. The band come on stage to ‘Untitled’, the short, beautiful album opener. (Interpol’s ballads, of which the single ‘NYC’ is easily the most impressive, are grandiose and gorgeous). The sound is crisp, the band - sharply suited, with Banksie sporting what appears to be a cravat - look the part. Bassist Carlos D is the most active stage presence, throwing angles. Kessler looks more nervous, but it’s Banks who is the focal point: at ease with himself, effortlessly doubling up on vocals and guitar - they used to call it cool.

‘Roland’ follows and is more typical of the Interpol sound. The guitars are warm and ringing (Kessler is playing a cherry-red Rickenbacker 330), with little distortion. The bass is rumbling and heavy, prominent in the mix and adding weight. The drumming is crisp and edgy - the band date their improvement from Sam Fogarino’s arrival in 2000. But the overall sound is greater than the sum of its parts. It’s a furious, massive noise, full of drama and tension. The richly melodic lyrics are bizarre, sometimes nonsense: “The subway is a porno”, “Her rabid glow is like Braille to the night”, “We can find new ways of living make playing only logical harm / And we can top the old times, clay-making that nothing else will change.” But Interpol’s music is not an alien, uncomfortable place to be. It’s warm and confused, like being half-asleep.

Tonight’s third track, ‘Stella was a diver...’, completes Interpol’s early themes by introducing a clear sexual element to the proceedings. If there is any ambiguity in the verse’s lyric (and there shouldn’t be), “From crevices caressed by fingers / A fat blue serpent swells”, there is none in the chorus: “Well, she was my catatonic sex toy, love-joy diver”. Love and sex are powerfully dysfunctional in Interpol’s young, early twentysomething urban world. The elegant ‘The New’, says it most obviously:

Baby, you know someday you’ll slow  
And baby, my heart’s been breaking.  
I gave a lot to you  
I take a lot from you too  
But I can’t pretend I don’t need to defend some  
part of me from you  
I know I’ve spent some time lying

While the beautiful but strange ‘Lief Erikson’ hints at sentiment and impotence:

She feels that my sentimental side should be  
held with kid gloves  
But she doesn’t know that I left my urge in the  
icebox  
She swears I’m just prey to the female,

before soaring into the album's most optimistic spell:

It's like learning a new language  
Helps me catch up on my mime  
If you don't bring up those lonely parts  
This could be a good time  
You come here to me.  
We'll collect those lonely parts and set them  
down  
You come here to me...

All of this goes down a storm with an enthusiastic Astoria crowd. It's early days yet for Interpol, and many bands have faded after a promising debut album. Who knows what the future holds? Now is the time to hitch a ride with this juggernaut.

Chris Sampson

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## News

### FC St Pauli

The Bundesliga's finest are apparently in dire financial straits and in even more danger than usual of being wound up. In true St Pauli style a benefit concert at the Millerntor was held on 30<sup>th</sup> August. Andrew Eldritch was reported to be playing bass in tandem with New Model Army main man Justin Sullivan. The rest of the line-up consisted of every cheap Hamburg punk band you can think of. Full report in the next issue. Meanwhile, check out Von's new mohican, below.



### Gary Marx

Gary Marx has resurfaced with a free single, Butter Fingers (my copy came autographed), and a 15 track album, Pretty Black Dots. Both are produced by Choque Hosein. More albums are planned for the near future. More info from [www.garymarx.com](http://www.garymarx.com) or:

Info Service  
PO Box 157  
Pudsey  
LS28 5ZF

### Chris Starling

Chris Starling has shifted his website from [www.starlings.com](http://www.starlings.com) to [www.chrisstarling.com](http://www.chrisstarling.com). Maybe this time he'll plug his gigs *before* they happen.

### X-Tinstar

Tinstar have apparently folded and various former members are - depending on which rumour you care to choose - either playing live, not playing live, about to release a live album, in the studio or embarking on an Eldritch-esque decade-long silence. The 'new' group is called JOK, which is a name vocalist Dave Tomlinson has previously used for a side project. Clear as mud. We asked Spencer for clarification, and he sent through a picture of a young lady not wearing any clothes.

## Smoke and Mirrors

4 am. Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2003. Definite lightning of the sky as dawn approaches, and the black monolith of the Pudsey Asda becomes silhouetted against a grey, eastern sky. Leeds, again, always Leeds. The only other visible lights are distant orange glows dotted around the horizon; burning cars on the Kirkstall Lane, probably.

Eldritch sucks on a cigarette, but is silent, and I reflect on the different qualities of light that I have seen on tour: the red neon reflecting off the water in Amsterdam canals ("SEX" is almost the same upside-down), the snowflakes skidding across the pavements outside the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the yellow-brown of English pubs in the afternoon. And the primary colours of the Sisters' stage set: the blue and red and green fogs that obscure the band throughout the sensory overload of a Sisters gig. Those senses, what a battering they take: the staggering wall-of-noise, the smell of the smoke, the proximity of the crowd (and the bruises and tinnitus the morning after). Only the taste buds escape tour fatigue<sup>5</sup>.

In Amsterdam he says, "I don't really notice time passing". Yes, the world recedes on tour, and removed from the newspapers, the web and TV, time becomes more cyclical. The locations (the colours) change, but the routine is much the same from day to day. There is no structure on a larger scale. The overnight bus ride, the soundcheck, the gig, the snatches of sleep when you can. The roads are all the same, the dressing rooms are all the same, the fatigue is the same; the rock star's Groundhog Day.

I heard The Star Spangled Banner in Berlin. The American Embassy was cordoned off and someone had placed a sign there, "YOU ARE LEAVING THE CIVILISED SECTOR". Is this a war we're fighting? Where are the new Berlin Walls? Is there one between the stage and the front row? (And which side of *that* barrier is the

civilised sector?) Between me and Rumsfeld? Between all of us at the Columbiashalle and the American Embassy?

Eldritch sings, "I have slept with all the girls in Berlin". You strain to hear the new songs. The lyrics in the verse are inaudible from the crowd. Chris plays 12-string acoustic. Adam plays arpeggios rather than chords. Doktor Avalanche puts up a wall-of-noise as thick as the smoke and although it's deafening, it's as difficult to hear the people on stage as it is to see them. The Sisters are loud, but paradoxically, hard to hear; 'your lips move, but I can't hear what you say'.

When it comes to Sisters gigs, I'm not sure I know what the difference between "good" and "enjoyable" is anymore. I'm not too worried about technicalities like whether the guitarist played every note right, or even whether the singer was in tune. But do the Sisters continue to have a broader cultural impact? Does that sound still say something that resonates with our everyday experience? The dimensions of a Sisters performance are painted in broader strokes; primarily, it's all about power and intensity. Too much so, perhaps. You can't really say that the Sisters, live, have much of a range of emotions. On this tour only Marian has really moved me. You don't leave a Sisters gig overcome with a heightened awareness of the human condition (unless you've overdone it in the pub beforehand), but you do leave with a grin on your face.

A random girl at a random gig somewhere said, "I first took E to Orbital. Been chasing that same buzz ever since." Well, yeah, aren't we all? Trouble is, Sisters gigs are the buzz for me and when the tour's over there's a sense of something missing.

April was the coolest month.

This tour was *damn* good.

Have we finished now? Is this the end? Now can I switch this bloody computer off?

<sup>5</sup> Except for those sampling the cuisine in Wolverhampton.

# Chatter in the System

## Reflections on Gulf War II

*We accept that there are legitimate casus belli: acts or situations "provoking or justifying war". The present debate feels off-centre, and faintly unreal, because the US and the UK are going to war for a new set of reasons (partly undisclosed) while continuing to adduce the old set of reasons (which in this case do not cohere or even overlap). These new casus belli are a response to the accurate realisation that we have entered a distinct phase of history. The coming assault on Iraq may perhaps be the Last War of the Ottoman Succession.*

Date: Mon, 10 Feb 2003 22:44:21 +0000  
From: Pete Fenelon <pete@fenelon.com>  
To: Chris Sampson <chris@cgs123.demon.co.uk>  
Subject: Isolationism

So we're at the point where Blair has to shit or get off the pot. Does he remain Bush's one remaining lapdog, or does he stick with Europe?

Date: Sat, 28 Sep 2002 23:59:01 +0100  
To: Pete Fenelon <pete@fenelon.com>  
From: Chris Sampson <Chris@cgs123.demon.co.uk>  
Subject: Re: john major II

>Did you turn out for the demo today?

Yeah! Was good stuff. Turned up at Waterloo and planned on mooching on over to Embankment for the 1 o'clock kick off. Hungerford Bridge was rammed solid - Socialist Workers, students in red/black stripy tights, loads of Arabs very unhappy about Israel. Lots of whistles being blown and those klaxon things the Indian fans have at the cricket. I picked up a discarded "Not In My Name! StopTheWar.com" placard and was off. Finally found a gap in the crowd and got off the bridge into the main crowd. Rozzers on horseback beginning to get a bit irritated and it looked for a while that it might kick off if the anarchists had showed. We finally began to move at about 2 o'clock. To my left I had someone dressed as Darth Vader (figured I'd want him on my side if it got ugly), behind, the Swansea branch of CND, complaining about something or other. Overhead, helicopters. The main action was with the Free Palestine lot up front, though.


Hutton Ref CAB/XX/223

### **Alastair Campbell**

From: Alastair Campbell [mailto:ACampbell@no10.x.gsi.gov.uk]  
To: Baxville@aol.com  
Subject:  
Date: 10 July 2003

Bax,  
Take out Kelly. Usual arrangements. £250k in used notes. Do it soon.  
AC

**US GOVERNMENT**  
**I spit my faith on the pavement**  
**You're gonna know that they were never, never yours to kill**



## Glasperlenspiel 07

“On the lone and level, sand stretch far away”

Where do we go from here? Where will things Sisterly be in a year's time? Some gigs, probably. A new song, possibly. A new album, seriously unlikely.

The current scene seems to GPS to be the most suited to the Sisters world-view for years. A new generation of, predominantly US, bands are mining the bedrocks laid down by the Sisters in the 80s and early 90s. Dance is dead, pop is dying.

Surely it's time for the Sisters to take whatever's on offer from whomever and return to the vanguard of political, literate rock with attitude.

GPS will still be here. We're waiting.