

fuck buttons

Words: Abi Bliss

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'It was one big euphoric mush of people'

I owe my ears an apology. For making them accompany me to see Whitehouse, when they could have had a nice evening in with a soft pillow and some Radio 3; for persevering with a Merzbow set that brought no more connection than a mosquito whine; for every gig by anyone who thought that making clothing quiver and lungs dissolve to mush with 110dB was all, not half the point.

I do like noise, of course. But just as I wouldn't stare at the sun for 45 minutes unless it featured Apollo's chariot doing a stunt-riding special, if a future of deafness is surfing in on the wave of every slug of sub-bass or amplified rape alarm then it's probably not worthwhile. Forget petulant 'sonic terrorists' wielding their volume like a toddler's tantrum, I'm after something more sophisticated and meaningful. Like Fuck Buttons.

"I've lied so many times about where the name came from that I've forgotten where it originated," says Andrew Hung (one half of Fuck Buttons). "It must have appealed to us initially because it took something offensive and turned it into something playful, like our music."

Actually, in a subcultural area where it's almost *de rigueur* to (yawn) smash down the barriers of taste with an absolutely rigid poker face of nonchalance, the name Fuck Buttons sounds kind of cute, at once summoning images of women's, er, fancy goods and small but explosively belligerent haberdashery items. Even so, Andrew admits that he and Benjamin Power started out, "As an outlet for two little

boys' abrasive noise tendencies; intending to provoke and 'harm'.

"We started gigging within three practices," he says. "Our first show consisted of two 15-minute drone pieces with very little dynamic. We were turned off prematurely on our second show because – and I quote the landlady who came barging through the audience afterward – 'That's not music, THAT'S NOT MUSIC!' "

Somewhere, however, all became love and a noisy kind of peace. Using, in Ben's words, "Casio keyboards, synths, loops, effects pedals, live and sampled drums, toy microphones and whatever we can get our hands on", the Bristol duo craft tracks like 'Sweet Love For Planet Earth', where an unashamedly pretty icicle shiver heralds the build-up of flesh-grater vocals and molten lumps of decaying guitar that crash into each other with slow and graceful dignity.

Recently released single 'Bright Tomorrow' is as upbeat as its title suggests, throbbing with the secret frequencies of the universe as an organ drone gives way to a mass of guitar that, instead of flattening all in its path, lifts you up to enjoy the view. An album, *Street Horrrsing*, is due on ATP Recordings this month.

"I'd say we're kindred spirits with the likes of Stars Of The Lid, Growing, and more beat-orientated experimentalists such as Black Dice and Gang Gang Dance," Ben observes. "It would be wrong to compare us to more abrasive and offensive noise acts such as Wolf Eyes. They use noise to evoke a different feeling to us."

"Obviously if you can hear us breathing over the music, that's not good, but at the same time

the music doesn't have to be ear-splittingly loud. Having said that, it can be!" Andrew says.

But you'd be wrong in thinking that Fuck Buttons just turn it up to 12, sit back and go where the music takes them. "Our music is carefully crafted; we don't improvise, although one live set can differ from another depending on the length of time we play a segment for. If we are particularly feeling a phrase we jam it until we feel ready for the next part. It adds to the element of surprise."

Instead, songs are road-tested live – "Owing to not having a rehearsal space where we can listen to the track at a suitable level" – and then tweaked for maximum vibes. "The last time we played Oxford, because we normally play offstage, there were people onstage as well as off, surrounding us. It was amazing to see the room fluctuating to the music – it was one big euphoric mush of people."

So what kind of feelings inspire the pair to create such hunks of cosmic gooeyness? "I had a lovely moment at Truck festival when I looked up at the night sky and saw so many stars," says Andrew. "Those moments when you see vast landscapes like oceans and stars, and suddenly realise you're really small in this grand universe. Well, those moments, but shared with someone else. That's what I hope our music does."

Did you get that, ears? Fuck Buttons are loud, because oceans are big and mountains are heavy and death is final. Not because they hate you.

www.myspace.com/fuckbuttons