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Fuck Buttons – Boys And Their Noisy Toys



Fuck Buttons

Experimental UK duo Fuck Buttons, comprised of Andrew Hung and Benjamin John Power, have been knocking out sounds from keyboards, computers and children's toys since 2004.

On well-received debut Street Horrrsing, they craft a type of noise that you can get lost in, sounds that wash over you and absorb your being.

musicOMH.com caught Andy and Ben in the midst of their first tour of the USA to chat about their art school origins, the process involved in crafting noise, and how they don't hail from Bristol any more...

International tours can be an exhausting business, but morale was still strong in the middle of Fuck Buttons' frenzied tour, which has taken in gigs in different cities nearly every night for two months straight. "It's been okay, actually," Andy says. "I expected it to be more tiring, but I've been concentrating on eating well and stuff, so it's not something that's difficult." The current tour kicked off in early March with an appearance at SXSW in Austin, Texas. "That was so great. It was fine in the end, but it was so hectic."

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Fuck Buttons will continue to circle the States, covering every area of the map and even crossing into Canada at times, until they venture back to the UK in May. Such far-reaching travels could hold a lot of potential dangers, as evidenced in the recent mishap involving the drummer from **Caribou** (their touring mates), who broke his wrist after a fall from a stepladder. "Yeah, it was a real shame," Andy laments. "We've been lucky so far and nothing's happened to us. Nothing bad yet."

And what if their noise-making equipment doesn't hold up on the road? "Well, the thing is, most our equipment, you can't really buy it in shops because they're all old little toys," Andy says. "I've been collecting all this

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stuff for about three years, so I've accumulated a lot of toys. But we've had to buy spares for this tour because we're out on the road for so long. So we've got a backup plan."

 Fuck Buttons

The toys and keyboards end up having the most important role in the band. But you'll still see Andy fiddling with a laptop onstage from time to time. "The laptop actually plays a minimal role in the band," he says. "I use it basically for a sample, but most of the work is done by the keyboards and the other toys that we use."

Fuck Buttons: Bright Tomorrow

While those unfamiliar with Fuck Buttons might take all this talk of toys as a playful indication of the band's sound, fans of Street Horrrsing know that the group is far from cutesy with their songs. "Our music is really loud and encompassing, and the initial reaction would be to be pushed away," Andy says. "But I've found more and more that you sort of forget you're in this loud sound, and you end up in another space, because you're not able to communicate with other people." This was true, at least in the most literal of meanings, at one of the band's Florida gigs, where Fuck Buttons filled the air with music and the audience had no way of talking over the band's sounds (though they did manage to strike up a few conversations during **Caribou**).

Trying to pinpoint the genre that the band fits into can be a difficult task. There are groups solely dedicated to noise, while others are solely dedicated to inoffensive harmonies. Fuck Buttons meets somewhere in the middle of the spectrum with a juxtaposition of light, glimmering sounds forced against the loudest racket imaginable. "We do have these different kinds of elements involved within our sounds," Ben offers by way of a description. "It's not a kind of purest noise, and obviously it's not what a lot would consider pop music. But I guess the fact that we do have lots of different elements with parts that could fit with other genres gives us an advantage. I think it opens up potential audience."

Some parts of the songs contain tribal-sounding backing beats that repeat constantly under keyboard parts that also push the limits of acceptable repetition. Might this be an attempt on the band's part to evoke a type of trance in their listeners? "I can see how it can be interpreted like that, but it's not something that we consciously strive to do within Fuck Buttons. If we've achieved that for certain people, then that's a great thing, but we don't consciously do anything particular with Fuck Buttons. It's all kind of like second nature and a projection of our subconscious."

Fuck Buttons' current sound has its beginnings in Bristol, where Andy and Ben attended art school. "We both were art students," Ben says. "Andy did a degree in fine arts, and I did a degree in illustration." And although the band continues to be labeled as hailing from Bristol, they've since moved on to the big city. "That's a bit of a common misconception – we actually live in London. We grew up in a town called Worcester, but

the band started when we were in art school in Bristol. We don't live there anymore, that's just where we first got together, sat down in a room and started to make music."

"We always stood alone from anything – we've always been quite alien." – Ben Power

The two have an eclectic background in music, going back well before their involvement in Fuck Buttons. "I've been in bands since I was 16, playing guitar in raucous punk bands, and in instrumental bands as well," Ben says. "Andy had been making electronic music. We both started to get into the noise side of things; we both approached it from those different angles and met at noise music, which was an interesting turning point. I think it reflects in the music that we started to make and we still make today."

The music that comes out today has a diverse range of influences – apparently everything experienced by Andy and Ben filters into their subconscious and then out through their music. But where did this all come from – were there other groups doing this sort of thing in Bristol? "There really weren't (other groups doing what we were doing), actually," Ben says. "I really felt like we were standalone. I guess in a way, we always stood alone from anything – we've always been quite alien. A few of our friends were in bands, but nothing similar to what we were doing. I like to think that our sound doesn't really have a specific location."

Although they started out alone, Fuck Buttons are now gaining scores of loyal supporters. So are there any plans to explore musical territories outside of noise for the experimental duo? Ben responds quickly: "I had a dream the other night that Andy and I started a punk band with Dan from **Caribou** called **The Thigh Masters**, so maybe we'll get that together... I'm only joking – that's not going to happen, I just had that idea." Too bad. That would have been the loudest punk band on the planet.

– *Justin de la Cruz*, 4/2008

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Fuck Buttons' album Street Horrrsing is out now through ATP. They tour the USA in April and May and return to the UK for ATP vs Pitchfork at Camber Sands on 9th May and a date with Battles and Liars at the London Astoria on 14th May.

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