

FUCK BUTTONS

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PHOTO: MATTHEW WALFORD

"We are sonic collage-makers, editing and refining our naïve sound outputs."

Fuck Buttons are perhaps one of the most unlikely industry buzz bands for 2008. The duo (Andrew Hung & Benjamin John Power) initially started life in 2004 after Andy had completed a film which required a soundtrack. Enter Benjamin and so began the life of eloquently foul-mouthed duo, two nihilistic-noise-inks intent on inflicting sprawling gigabytes and mega-watts of digital dirge on unsuspecting audiences.

So far so underground. But the duo has, over the course of their existence, undergone a process of gradual musical refinement, curbing the more strident tendencies that often typified their noise-inclined past endeavours, while slowly introducing melody and rhythms to their already immersive sound. They now occupy a space somewhere between the 8-byte mechanical grind of Wolf Eyes and the evocative, cryptic, meditative ambient drone of Stars Of The Lid. If most noise acts are about decay, then Fuck Buttons' slowly unfolding electronic compositions have become all about flourishing beauty.

People have subsequently begun to sit up and take notice, particularly on the back of some show-stealing live performances. The band stormed the Portishead-curated ATP in the UK, winning over many new fans in the process. They have also recently been invited to participate in the Pitchfork-curated ATP later this year, while Dan Snaith asked the duo to embark on an extensive tour of America and Canada with his group Caribou. The buzz is now building, with fervent support emerging from within prominent media and musical circles, ensuring that for Ben and Andy 2008 is set to be a busy year.

"We knew each other from Worcester, a small town between Birmingham and Bristol, famous for its sauce," says Andrew. "We both grew up there, though we operated outside of each other's social circles and it was only at university we both started being friends and ultimately begun Fuck Buttons.

Ben had grown up on a diet of hardcore and punk which led to post-rock, before the term became dirty, which led to noise. I, myself, was interested in electronica which led to the noise, where we both congregated. Noise was an extremely attractive prospect when we both came into contact with it at the same time. And initially we were interested in its abrasive, confrontation properties. Ultimately, it became a tool for what we are interested in now - no longer confrontation but embracing."

Whereas multiple releases are quite common from artists working within the realm of noise and power electronics, with acts such as Wolf Eyes and Merzbow regularly amassing dozens of releases over the course of a single year, Fuck Buttons' low recorded output attests to their gradual and considered structural evolution. The group's debut LP, *Street Horrrsing* is undeniably deliberate in both form and sound with carefully sculpted melodies forming an integral part of their music, even though there is still something primeval and guttural about the end product. Andrew agrees. "You're absolutely right, spontaneity and improvisation is what allows these musicians to proliferate. As for a means to approximate genuineness, authenticity, originality and other ideas of immortality it can be, at most, ideologically sound and, at least, interesting. However, we're not interested in improvisation as a means to approximate ourselves and instead we allow our jams and writing to be the act of naivety, as subconscious, then let our sensibilities edit and define our intentions. We are sonic collage-makers, editing

and refining our naïve sound outputs."

The duo's burgeoning reputation can in part be attributed to their ability to make noise palatable to even the most discerning of ears. The slowly unfolding dynamics at work within the core of their drones is neither overbearing nor underwhelming. Rather they choose to draw the listener in one small step at a time, upping the ante in minute ebbs and flows. By the album's end the listeners can often find themselves immersed in a kaleidoscopic tunnel of sound. Andrew, for his part, feels the duo's background in the visual arts has played a significant part in the development of their sound. It begs the question, however, of what side of the noise fence they are ultimately sitting on.

"Both Ben and I are very much active in producing visual art, and have been throughout our lives, so I would readily assume both our visual and audio outputs are linked. In that sense, I would have no qualms with a correlation being drawn up between our visual and musical aesthetics. However, terms are very restrictive if adhered to and their purpose should be for reference points only. How I describe Fuck Buttons depends entirely on my mood and the person I'm communicating with. However, I have found the easiest way to describe our music is to replicate the sounds and hope the recipient can get an idea of the evocation. After all, it's the evocation that we're interested in, with sound, melody and rhythm being the means to do so."

The band received some notable help on their recent debut LP *Street Horrrsing* with John Cummings of kindred spirits Mogwai helping the recording process. That noted producer Bob Weston (Shellac) handled the mastering might give some indication as to dynamics at work within their electronic drones. "When we first signed to ATP/R, Barry (Hogan) asked us to have a think about where we wanted to record the album and with whom. Our initial thoughts were to record at Castle Of Doom, Mogwai's studio. This led us to taking a step further and having John produce the album. We weren't able to find a slot at the Castle Of Doom and in the end we recorded at Tim Cedar's (Part Chimp) studio in London. We lived in the studio for a week and it was a bubble of activity during that time. When it came to mastering, it was ATP's idea to use Bob Weston, and we were more than happy with that. Because Bob worked from the other side of the Atlantic, our correspondence was restricted by email. However, he knew exactly where we were coming from and with the aid of instructions of intent, he was able to do a great job with the record."

And what of the hype and expectation that has attached itself to the Fuck Buttons bandwagon? "Honestly, last year has been the most exciting of my life so far. We never envisaged all this. I remember thanking Barry after *Release The Bats* for all he's done and how great a year it's been. He replied back with 'next year's going to be even better!' Roll on 2008."