

FUCK BUTTONS

Leading Fisher Price instruments astray to disturb the rest of the toy box

PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON LEAK WRITER: DEAN DRISCOLL

The chances are that if you haven't heard them, you're reading their name and are unsure what to think of a band named Fuck Buttons. The odds are that even when you do hear them for the first time you'll still be somewhat confounded as to what to make of them. Fuck Buttons are all about contrasts, opposing forces that push and pull against each other yet somehow achieve equilibrium. They say that in music everything's been done before, which may be so... but it's never been done quite like this.

Good and evil, innocent and disturbing: it's right there in the name. When you hear them, it all makes sense that Fuck Buttons are the most aptly labelled musical act you could come across. Both of those words are key not only to encapsulating their essence musically but also to the creation of the music itself. It's the combination of something unthreatening with something abrasive – it's everything they do. And their lo-fi approach brings up further contradictions: the fierce, dark sounds they create are often made with toys – two of their key instruments are a toy keyboard and microphone, which they distort with myriad effects to defile their original purpose. Fuck Buttons are the sound of a nightmare in Toytown.

If you're unfamiliar with obscure occasional characters in the genius Matt Groening cartoon *Futurama* you might want to look up the Hypnotoad on Youtube, it'll go some way to describing the sound of Fuck Buttons. The Hypnotoad has the power to control people's minds, emitting a deafening shrill metallic drone, which hypnotises all that hear it. It's also the star of its own sitcom 'Everybody Loves Hypnotoad', which consists of the Hypnotoad using its mind control powers on a captive television audience for a full half

hour (a bit like Paul McKenna, only noisier and slightly less slimy). Anyway, Fuck Buttons could be described as Sigur Rós fronted by the Hypnotoad. Subsequently, they're as hypnotic an act you're ever likely hear.

Since they released their debut album 'Street Horrrsing' on ATP Recordings in March it's become apparent that Everybody Loves Fuck Buttons. Despite being a deeply challenging record, it has garnered unanimously positive reviews, not least from Pitchfork, who granted it an 8.6 rating. It's not a record for the faint-hearted – there are moments in which it's downright terrifying, like the aural equivalent of a new *Saw* movie directed by Pinhead from *Hellraiser*. The track 'OK, Let's Talk About Magic' might sound like it might be some happy, unremittingly twee Los Campesinos b-side, but the only way they could have made it is if they'd been locked in a dungeon for 6 months with no natural light and only a crystal meth addiction to keep them occupied. The tribal drums and echoey yelps and screams of 'Ribs Out', meanwhile, could be Can providing the elevator music for the Temple Of Doom. But we come back again to that name and the notion of opposing forces. There's something about their sound, in the way it envelopes you, that makes it strangely comforting and beautiful in a way it shouldn't be.

Backstage at the Astoria before they open a bill with Dirty Projectors and Battles, does Andy Hung, one half of the Fuck Buttons duo, find the music comforting to make? "I think it is comforting actually, yeah. I like not being able to hear anything other than the sounds: It's enveloping." Andy and Ben Power formed Fuck Buttons whilst at art school in Bristol. They initially teamed up to record the soundtrack to Andy's student art film, with the

goal initially to make something 'almost unlistenable'. "We did first start making things with the intention of confrontation. But it got really boring. I guess we stumbled on sounds and melodies, and it seemed more natural – and more fun! – to carry on working like that."

Whilst so much of Fuck Buttons is about opposition, Andy and Ben are both friendly guys – the balance between them has come from their respective musical history: Ben in punk bands, Andy making electronic music. The influence of both genres is apparent, and their live show is enough to win over fans of each, the hypnotic element being even more apparent than on record as the waves of noise are almost deafening. An Astoria crowd will rarely have been as captivated by two guys in centre stage, facing each other and making strange noises with toys. At one stage the audience bob their head in unison to a beat that isn't actually there.

Capturing this effect on record was therefore especially important. Luckily, Fuck Buttons had the help of Mogwai's John Cummings on production duties. According to Ben: "John had a good vision of what we wanted to sound like before we even stepped into the studio. He managed to portray our live sound in a recorded sense. He's a great guy to work with, he knows exactly what we're going for."

What they're going for, and frequently achieving, is summed up in their track 'Bright Tomorrow'. Starting off with a somewhat trancey techno kick, the euphoric nature gives way to a blast of metallic noise that comes from out of nowhere. Listening to Fuck Buttons is like an ice-cold plunge pool: at first it's disorienting and alarming, but refreshing too. You'll feel better about it afterwards if you take the plunge.