

THE STONE ROSES - THE CARDIGANS - FRANZ FERDINAND - THE STREETS - JIM JARMUSCH - RYAN ADAMS

FILTER

GOOD MUSIC WILL PREVAIL

MEET THE IMAGINARY
PJ HARVEY





MIAMI SPRINGS ETERNAL

IS IT HEAVEN OR HELL?

by Mark van Heijden Illustration: Elizabeth Harris

I'M NAKED says a pair of fantastic meshlike chaps and a remarkably realistic replica of an 11th century Viking helmet. The rhythmical chaffing of the former against my tender thighs is the only thing keeping my mind running safely along the thin red line between expanded consciousness and complete anabolic shock. How I got to this stage of undress I don't know, but as it is I'm onstage alongside a handful of people, face to face with fellow de Mouscron, and he's just segued into "White Horse." My bare ass flares crimson—flushed with a radical, purely musically induced euphoria and burning with deep-seated shame that dates back to some Freudian stage or another I never successfully navigated. The moment stretches, pauses and explodes...yes the moment literally explodes as 2004's Winter Music Conference shoulders to its annual climax.

For the uninitiated, the Winter Music Conference is a weeklong orgy of dance music etc. that takes place in Miami Beach, and is attended by nearly every artist(s) who has ever held a synthesizer or turntable. And their fans. Their fans come from every corner of the world, from the super sober and self-obsessed to the raving wackos who freestyle ecstasy and laxatives in a 144-hour Dionysian screw fest. It is rumored that up to a decade ago the conference had a sort of structure. There were speeches, symposiums and panel discussions; people networked and became learned on the course and returned of electronic as a genre. The networking thing still holds, but it's evolved into a madley smorgasbord of concerts, product demos, record releases, celebrity sightings and free buffets. It's a magical place where careers can be made, pri-

vate daydreams realized—where glitter really is made of gold, gingerbread men keep the peace, folk drive on rainbows instead of roads and Oprah was never born.

It's no longer a oneering circus. Numerous independent events like the Ultra Festival, the Dancostar Awards and Motorola's M3 Summit give artists, celebrities and retailers—particularly those in the technology sector—a chance to pander their wares. To wit: Motorola spirited a group of journalists—of which I was a part—to a luxurious yacht where beautiful maidens cooed us with palm fronds, and Paul van Dyk, one of the biggest DJs in the galaxy personally unveiled Motorola's new, admittedly impressive, MP3-playing EDGE model mobile. This, in the world of electronic music, is directly analogous to having live-stage Elvis swear by your brand of sequined jumpsuit in front of a group of rock 'n' roll loving rednecks.

But let's stay away from my mind as I sit eating raw cake batter on the back porch of my Chicago apartment and harken back to the stage where sweet is blurring on my storm head and thousands of fellow fans are being exposed to my device for the first time. I'm conducting a casual, quasi interview with New York's "bad boy" of house Armand van Helden that goes something like this:

Mark van Heijden What's your favorite color?
Armand van Helden Black.

MyV: Why?

ArV: Because it's not a color.

MyV: Ah.





"Boy, he's tough...and so mysterious," I thought. "It Amused black himself...or Middle Eastern?" I didn't ask. Truth be told, I was recalling with large-eyed nostalgia the first time I'd ever met the man currently behind the decks, Felix da Housecat. It had only been three days ago...but it seemed like a lifetime. Had we known one another in another life? I couldn't be sure. As I sat my coke better and type this, I remind myself to ask my psychic.

I arrived at the hotel as Felix was taking an MTV Europe live crew through their paces. They'd given him a list they'd authored of his "favorites" videos. Felix, it can be said, is a rather jolly cat, laugh-



tronically, with the massive success of his previous albums, *Kitten* and *The Gitz*, the majority of Felix's posse abandoned him like drunken boat-reers deserting their captain after a particularly heady wave. After the jangling and "other things" are done, they scatter to all corners of the globe to gloat and gorge themselves on whatever the hell catches their fancy. Yes, many of the peeps that had their fingers in *KaTG* were suddenly transmogrified into "somebody's." Doors that were chained, nailed and bolted thus have splintered asunder. Record deals, product endorsements, questionable possessions—the list goes on. As we step into the helicopter and are shuttled to the roof of his hotel he comments:

Felix da Housecat After that album everyone separated, everyone just ran off. There was no loyalty...well, I don't want to say that, just everyone wanted to do their own thing. I said, "OK, well, I'm going to do a new album, I'm gonna work with new

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WHO FREEBASE ECSTASY AND LAXATIVES IN A 168-HOUR DIONYSIAN SCREW FEST.

ing in two-second staccato peels at least eight times a minute. This gives the poor limo's 20 seconds a minute to pump him for their leads, but they are smiling—they damn well better be. Felix's lovely and gracious wife Sophie and I discuss the finer points of the Roy Loper opening and the early works of Anne Rice over martinis while I wait.

Ecstasy is a relatively new genre of electronic and Felix is its current monarch. Characteristically, it is spare and to-the-point sounding, making no attempt at staying super current, as is the tendency with much electronic. It embraces the retro synths and simple sound design of early '80s electro-pop with a kitschy zeal. John Selway (Clash) and Frodo (Spencer) are fine examples if you've got the money, or are broke and morally corrupt enough to shoplift. We're tread here before though (Lindbergh, Grandmaster Flash, Gary Numan, Baryteronica), and electro's grand wizards have no shame in admitting it. Indeed, as the English poet William Yeats points out:

Tearing and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold

—*excerpt from The Second Coming, 1921*

ie.—This has a way of repeating itself, often due to ignorance. Negative examples of this are easily found in the furious attempt at reviving the music of the '60s hippie movement in the '80s and early '90s, spearheaded by bands like Blind Melon, Gole Bricks and the Spin Doctors.

Hi hi! Calm down there, I've got to concentrate... concentrate... concentrate...

people—find new characters." The only one who stayed aboard was Dave the Hurdler. Tommie's in the Devon Daxxle and the Neon Fever in a lesser role. The new girls are called the Neon Fever.

Tommie Sunshine is the bearded boy wonder of electro. My interview with Tommie, later in the week, went something like this:

MF: Tommie, you wear eccentric-looking sunglasses at night. Do they give you special powers?

Tommie Sunshine: People never know what I'm looking at...especially women. That's special. Oh manna...

MF: Wow, I've never seen anyone leer like that before.

Back to Felix...

MF: Is Miss Kitten, the infamous European dropout, on this upcoming LP?

Felix: You know what? She didn't want to do another album. I called her up and asked her, she said it was "more special" if we just left it alone. She was right. I'm glad.

MF: How do you follow up a smash hit like *Kitten*?

Felix: It's Kitten on steroids, but it don't sound like Kitten. I didn't want to repeat myself. Kitten was all about European, Eurotrash influences. Devon Daxxle is more like New York, Chicago, L.A. in the late '80s early '90s style going on.

MF: That the majority of Americans are suspicious of LPs that have no real stringed instruments is a worthwhile blanket statement. Another would be, "All men who do fags are either trying to impress a gal or gay." But let's talk about the first one for a bit.

How much live instrumentation is on the album?
NBE: "Hissing Season," "Robot Ride" and "Everyone is Someone in L.A." Everything from the guitar to the drums and tambourine are tracked live.

Left Magazine the "world-famous" correspondence of Southern Florida high society is meeting Felix after my interview. And here is an interesting exchange between Felix and the President of Emperor Norton Records Steve Press:

Felix: Who is Left?

Steve Press: I have no idea. They're going to do a photo shoot.

Felix: And they're bringing clothes?

SP: Yeah.

Felix: Do they know my size?

SP: They know your size... someone gave it to them. You don't have to do anything you don't want to, just be open so when you say "no," they'll feel you've considered it. So you can already know that you're not going to be doing it, but make believe you're considering wearing the clothes.

Felix: Thank you, that's well put.

SP: You want a designer?

MVP: I know you gathered fame abroad before you hit in the States. As far as electronic, how would you characterize the difference between the audiences?

Felix: The Europeans are more educated. They have more access to all the dance press. It's more a part of their culture. You hear it in the streets, when people are driving, it's on TV, in stores, it's everywhere. It's like how hip-hop is here... or was here. People are more liberated there, it spans generations from 18-50. In America it's stereotyped, everyone thinks of glow sticks and 18-year-old kids. This is my seventh or eighth album and if it weren't for Emperor Norton getting behind me, I doubt if America would ever have gotten me. America tends to jump on the bandwagon when it comes to electronic. I like the scene though. I like playing parties in America. I love playing in New York, but New York isn't really America—I'm talking more about the small clubs in Dallas or Atlanta. I'll play different in Europe than I do in America. In America I'll try to educate them by playing stuff that they're not up on. In Europe you've always got to be playing new stuff. Cause they've heard it all... you know what I mean? It's really weird.

MVP: What's the future of hip-hop in America?

Felix: I don't know man, but too much of anything ain't good for ya.

MVP: Ah, the Greek rule, everything in moderation.

Felix: There's just so much. I like Mos Def, OutKast, A Tribe Called Quest, Gangster. I'm more into the people who stay true to the old stuff. I like Led Zeppelin. I like people who entertain.

MVP: Electroclash, the weaving of the electric and the electronic in the gains, what does the magic right ball say there?

Felix: I hate the term "electroclash." When I think of that word I think of some guy or girl in make-up and

crazy hair holding a guitar or a keyboard and they don't even know how to play it. They're up on a fashion and that's it. My other definition is cheap straight drums and oh baby oh baby you, oh baby oh baby oh baby you. Real new wave, back in the day, most of it was high quality. With electroclash, you're lucky if five percent of the songs are good and the rest is crap.
MVP: That can be said of just about anything.

The next time I see Felix I'm wearing chaps and the following day I escape Miami, but not before a final lunch-by-the-pool with two of the San Francisco house scene's promising young field commanders (Kaskadee and Miguel Migs)...and their ace publicist from QM Records, the credit card wielding Gumar Hussain.

MVP: I bet you've been coming to the conference for a good while, what's the closest this city has come to stealing your soul?

Miguel Migs: Last year, me and Benji Casaleiro opened a tab...38 beers and 40-plus shots of tequila. A \$7,800 tab. We had to perambulate to cover the bill. It was titty and fun.

As this point a drunken mirror slides her way up to us and asks Miguel, whose turquoise-blue eyes are "... like liquid pools," to sign her shirt.

Kaskadee: It's not Miami, but this is a great travel story. When I was 15, I went with my family to South Africa. I smuggled a monkey out—stupid fun, out with sleeping pills and paid a vet to say he'd been quarantined. A lady on the plane who worked in the L.A. zoo ratted me out. Well, when I arrived in the States they scolded me about the diseases it could spread. When the supervisor took the cage out of the sack there was shit everywhere. It was a nice cage. There was shit all over her desk.

Gumar Hussain: She was a mean lady dude, and the monkey got her.

And that...is the greatest sentence I've ever had the pleasure of ending a piece on. It's an odd place—Miami, strange things happen there. Too much Art Deco for anyone's sanity, most of it rotted so hell in decaying pastel shells. The ratio of topless women on the beaches is equal to that of diaper-wearing geriatrics and no one seems to be frightened or sexually paralyzed. But for one week in early March each year it is transubstantiated into the Pit. Olympus of electronic, where the red-eyed gods walk the same two square miles of earth in peace. Much can be learned, much can be lost, but nothing beats a bowl of raw cake mix on a spring day in Chicago. ■

