



PHOTO BY GAIL BUTENSKY

Fuckin' around: The members of Fuck—Timmy Prudhomme, Geoff Soule, Ted Ellison, and Kyle Statham—are taking their success in stride.

Expletive delighted

Fuck: Transcending pop through profanity. By John Paczkowski

JOHN PEEL called us the other day.” Kyle Statham, Fuck’s guitarist, violinist, and drummer, is gleefully bewildered. “It was just like on the radio: *[affects an English accent]* ‘allo this is John Peel from the BBC; I’m wond’ring if you’d like to appear on my radio program.’ It was sort of surreal. So we’re going to England in the fall.... Everything seems to finally be falling into place.”

Quite an understatement offered up by a band that’s only recently inked a two-record deal with Matador, with an option for two more. *Pardon My French*, their first for the label, is due on the streets June 24. “Matador was pretty much hands-off on this one,” Statham says. “We did all the recording ourselves, the way we’ve always done it. It’s a sweet deal, really ... and they didn’t give us any shit about our name.”

Things, then, have obviously fallen into place. Now it’s time to build the church upon the rock.

It’s difficult to know where to begin with a band like Fuck. The most obvious assumption to be made is that they’re one more in that lineage of bands that grab your eye with a contentious moniker and then

assault your unfortunate ears with something you’d expect to hear out of some self-immolating druid. Crotch-core. Grind. Noise. Fuck, however, is nothing of the sort. It might be pop and it might be country, but it’s probably something else entirely. Ultimately, what’s in a word anyway?

“Of course, the word *fuck* entails an array of possibilities in the vagaries of interpretation—none should be dissuaded. From the puritanical knee-jerk cringe to the joyous declamation of tourettes [*sic*], the mere utterance of this monosyllable rarely fails to invoke an immediate response, emotionally and/or intellectually. And in considering an implied negativity, the effect becomes confused, comical and

thought-enticing: fuck records, fuck product, fuck fans, fuck music.”

There you have it, straight from a Fuck manifesto that reads like one long smirk. Or as Statham puts it, with tongue lodged firmly in cheek: “Everyone dreams of naming their band Fuck. We wanted to live that dream.”

A dream worthy of a band, but one with an unfortunate consequence. You can’t copyright a profanity.

“It’s the old George Carlin shtick, the seven dirty words,” Statham says. “They’re all uncopyrightable. *Fuck*, of course, is one of them. If we were ‘Fuck something’ we could copyright it, but simply being Fuck, we can’t. We thought about adding punctuation to the name—Fuck’s probably best used in the interrogative sense—but apparently we can’t copyright that either.”

Fuck vaults an impressive stretch of ground in their recorded material. A few of their more languid, pensive numbers—“In the Corner” and “Shotgun (H)ours,” both from *Pretty ... Slow*—sit contemplatively on country’s back porch or mournfully out in the shed. Others spend time browsing through a broad catalog

of pop idioms but never really seem to settle on one for any length of time. “Hide Face” puts a hand at the small of your back and pushes you into a full-blown 4/4 rock-out. “Monkey Does His Thing” is a near masterpiece that spends the first two-thirds of its length on one of those long, slow builds, then meanders its way into a great sheet of screeching guitar and violin. The material on last fall’s *Baby Loves a Funny Bunny* is a bit more restrained, full of loping instrumentals and quieter, thoughtfully complex work. The songwriting here really is impeccable.

The pristine and poetic *Pardon My French* offers up a refined palette of pop aggression and abstract acoustic vistas. Listening to these records, you’re struck by the fact that the band is writing pop songs that transcend the

usual trappings of pop songs, whether it be with an oddly structured transition or simply a better turn of phrase.

As with anything cunningly oblique or transcendent, comparisons are the most-oft-relied-on method of description. Pixies, Palace, Pavement—all have, at one time or another, graced the list of objective correlatives conjured up to summarily fit the band within the boundaries of a pat definition.

“You know, people cite these comparisons all the time, but they never seem to mention the ones that really seem appropriate,” Statham says. “If you ask me, I’d say we sound like the Flaming Lips. Or the Beatles. If you really listen to them, our records just sound like the White Album over and over again.”

If Fuck’s music transcends pop’s normalcy, the packaging of their albums stands as a smirking anomaly to just about every container the industry has developed to distribute music in. CDs arrive in odd little boxes; seven-inches come packaged in old magazine pages. *Baby Loves a Funny Bunny* arrived in stores fitted into an enormous matchbook. *Pardon My French*, though it will be distributed by Matador in the standard and uneventful Digipak format, will be available directly from the band enclosed in more traditional Fuck array.

“We’re putting our newest album in a fancy, lacy French love letter ... in keeping with the theme of the title, of course,” Statham says.

“We like to do all our own packaging,” adds Geoff Soule, Fuck’s drummer and the mastermind behind the *Oakland Yak* ’zine. “All the covers are different. To do the [“Crush a Butterfly”] seven-inch, we went out and found a bunch of old magazines and cut them up to use as covers. When it came time to do the first CD [*Pretty ... Slow*], we decided to put them in boxes. Then we just hand-painted all the boxes

and filled them with some toys and this odd coloring book that Ted drew. Ted’s got a thing for stuff like that. Coloring books, toys.”

If you’ve ever seen Fuck, you know that Soule speaks from experience. Fuck often performs among a vast society of stuffed animals and toys, windup, motorized, and otherwise. All of them apparently belong to bassist and pianist Ted Ellison.

“We go through so many nine-volts we’re looking into getting a sponsorship from Duracell,” Timmy Prudhomme,

who shoulders most of Fuck’s vocal duties, deadpans. “Ted’s collection has grown exponentially. Sometimes

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if we stay in a town for more than a day while we’re on tour, Ted will go on a binge and come back to the van with a big box saying ‘Look what I got! Ten cents apiece.’ Ted’s a sucker for a good bargain.”

Surprisingly enough, Fuck is bi-coastal. Statham, Soule, and Ellison live in the Bay Area. Prudhomme packed up his guitar and moved to New York a few years ago. The situation presents the obvious predicaments and puns on the band’s name, but according to Statham it’s easily negotiated. “Fuck only gets together a couple times a year to tour and record. It’s problematic sometimes, but we usually manage fairly well,” he says. “We don’t have the same rigorous practice ethic that a lot of other bands have. We vowed early on that we would play out more than we’d practice. I wouldn’t recommend that for everyone, though. You need a bassist like Ted holding everything down to actually pull it off. Or Geoff. I swear, if things really just fell to pieces, we could walk offstage and leave Geoff up there and he could play the entire set by himself and be completely entertaining.”

The band’s most recent reunion coincided with a couple of shows Pavement played in San Francisco as part of a press junket for their new album. Fuck, in a coup to end all coups, managed to score the opening slot for both shows.

“Those shows with Pavement were wonderful,” Statham says. “We really enjoyed them. Those guys have some serious groupies.”

Did the band trade its laissez-faire practice ethic for a more rigorous rehearsal schedule in preparation for those shows?

“Not really. The shows we played with Pavement were the first of the tour, so the pressure was obviously on. Still, I think we’d probably only practiced about three times before we played them. The first few practices after we’ve been apart are always pretty rough.” Statham leans back, grinning. “A few nights before the first show, we were playing and things weren’t going so well. Then Ted just started laughing. He ended up in hysterics and actually had to stop playing. I asked him what was wrong and he said he couldn’t believe that we’d actually gotten these Pavement shows and two days before we’re supposed to perform we couldn’t even play our own songs.”

An unlikely story for some, perhaps, but for the band it’s one that’s unquestionably true. And one that points to the underlying sincerity and detachment that make their music so endearing. Fuck is as Fuck does, and Fuck are just doing as they see fit. With so much newfound success, who’s to question their process? ■

The above piece was taken from the files of Earshot, the Bay Guardian’s emerging music Web site: www.sfbg.com/Earshot/index.html. New this week: Chicago’s Pinetop Seven.