

Bittles' Magazine | Interview

As future music historians will no doubt agree, there is a lot of derivative and unimaginative MOR-type music in the world right now. From the pop-dance of **Avicii** to the wet indie of **Bastille** there is enough rubbish around to make the average music purist's ears bleed. What we really need is a record that hits the listener hard, like a well needed slap to the face. That not only alienates your ›nice‹ friends but makes your parents scream »What the fuck is that crap you're playing? It's not even music, you know!«



If this is the type of album that you've been looking for then well done you. May I introduce you to my new best friend *Slow Focus* which is brought to you by those mischievous noise mavericks **Fuck Buttons**. Wilful experimentation and messed-up electronics feature heavily in a set that positively roars at the listener like some strangely deranged beast (this is a good thing, of course). Yet please don't stop reading here having convinced yourself that you have no interest in playing an album of unlistenable noise. What would be the point in that? No, the reason I am so in love with this record right now is the fact that its seven long instrumental tracks also manage to contain moments of heart stopping beauty that could even make Jason Statham cry.

This is music more comparable to the prog-rock sound of the seventies, or the reckless sonic experimentation of the late sixties than the conveyor belt like production of most music released today. The tracks on the record are strange and will not sound good on your mobile phone. Listen to it in public and people will look confused and think you're a bit weird. Let them! Because what you have here is an intelligent, thoughtful album that has many different layers but still manages to sound as cool as a **Daft Punk** helmet with the Cookie Monster inside.

Brainfreeze opens the album by kicking you in the head with its size ten boots. This is a brutal, punishing track that somehow contains a groove so hypnotically mesmerising I swear it almost hurts. After this aural onslaught

we get the bastardised trance of *Year of the Dog*, the soaring **Sabres of Paradise** style electronics of [The Red Wing](#) and the *John Carpenter* like synths of *Stalker*. The real star of the show though is final track *Hidden XS* which is surely one of the most exquisitely moving pieces of electronic music you will hear all year and which is worth ten minutes of anybody's time.

Formed way back in 2004 **Fuck Buttons** (or **Benjamin John Power** and **Andrew Hung**) have, over the last few years, given the listening public some of the most visceral and electrifying music this side of the sound of the **One Direction** boys receiving particularly nasty Chinese burns. Debut album *Street Horrrsing* introduced the world to the band's unique style of electronic noise with some strong dirge like experimentations. Needless to say the record won instant acclaim with the hippest of the blogs. I quite liked it too!

But it was second album *Tarot Sport* that really saw the duo thrust into the public spotlight. Topping the 2009 ›best of‹ lists everywhere, the record saw the band introduce a sense of patience and melody into their aural palette to create something that simultaneously managed to sound reassuringly familiar yet also completely outlandish. Single *Surf Solar* even managed to become a minor hit and was featured together with *Olympians* in the British Olympics opening ceremony that was shown to a global audience of millions.

But now their third album *Slow Focus* has just been unleashed onto an unassuming world. Having already proven itself to be both a critical and commercial success it seems as if 2013 will be the year when **Fuck Buttons** receive the plaudits and sales their music deserves. So I was pretty ecstatic when the band took time out of their incredibly busy schedule to answer some of the questions I sent their way.



AH = Andrew Hung

BP = Benjamin John Power

*Your new album **Slow Focus** is coming out imminently. What can fans of the **Fuck Buttons** sound expect with the new album?*

AH: For us, **Fuck Buttons** is a manifesto whereby experimentation and our sensibilities in that process constitute the ›sound‹ of the music. So expect more of our sonic explorations!

BP: Our sound palette is constantly on the move, as we tend not to get too attached to any one particular piece of equipment. The sound is constantly on the move and we like to keep surprising ourselves, so you can expect some very different sounds altogether.

People might have expected you to have mellowed out sound-wise with this being your third album. Early listens suggest that the music is as uncompromising as ever. Was this a conscious decision?

AH: I don't really know what ›mellowed out‹ means. We certainly take pleasure from this music so in a way it's relaxing for us!

BP: In the first instance, when the writing process is concerned, there is never any type of conscious decision to do anything. It's a very free and explorative process to begin with. It's interesting to work in this way. It's almost a type of 'automatic writing' (disregarding any metaphysical ideas here) so our draw towards the uncompromising, as you say, was purely organic and not pre-planned. Plus we're only in our early thirties. Not too old just yet.

Opening track Brainfreeze is a particularly punishing listen. Was this designed to be a statement of intent?

AH: Our tracks are never designed or intended to be statement of intents. In the particular case of *Brainfreeze*, it just felt right for us to come in pretty hard on the first track of the record!

BP: It's definitely a different dynamic to start off the record compared to our last few. *Streethorrrsing* and *Tarot Sport* both crept in, where as *Slow Focus* starts off with a full on assault.

How would you describe the album if you had met your new partner's granny for the first time at a dinner party and were attempting to explain what you do?

AH: Crude first impressions and assessments often dictate my articulation of the band. The answer would vary from the ambiguous (»we're an electronic band«) to the more tangible (»we're keyboard players«).

BP: I would be more concerned with making sure I kept my elbows off the table than trying to explain what the album sounds like.

In many ways album title Slow Focus is a very apt description of the Fuck Buttons sound. Where did the title come from?

BP: As with all of our album titles, once the album writing process is near completion we both like to discuss any kind of mental imagery the overall narrative conjures up for us. This time around, it almost felt like the moment your eyes take to readjust after being asleep for a very long time only to realise where you have awoken is somewhere very unfamiliar and unwelcoming.

Lead single The Red Wing is a gloriously fucked-up listen and has already been described as »psychedelic« by the press. Was this always going to be the album's first single?

AH: Choices for lead singles are often more to do with practicalities as opposed to favouritism.

BP: Not necessarily. It was hard to choose a lead single as it's hard to pick a track out of it's designated context (the album, listened to as a whole) and have it stand alone for the purpose of releasing a single.

After the success of Tarot Sport and the exposure of the Olympics did you feel any pressure with recording this album?

AH: We were already amidst the recording process of the album during the Olympics so it didn't have an effect on the record at all. Would it have done? Who knows..

BP: Not really. We had already finished »producing« the tracks in a creative sense before the whole Olympics thing happened so it didn't really have any impact creatively whatsoever.

Did the Olympics change everything for Fuck Buttons? Or not very much?

AH: We haven't really seen any evidence of a financial spike during the Olympics but in terms of what it did to us personally, it was an incredibly self-affirming for us; we had our music played on that goddamn massive stage!

BP: Not that we have really noticed, but I'm sure it has helped us reach a wider, perhaps previously unaware audience somewhat.

Have you ever regretted naming the band Fuck Buttons?

AH: Not regret as such, but there are hurdles that the name erects for us.

BP: It would be a lie to say that perhaps it hasn't proved detrimental on a few occasions, but no, we have no regrets overall.

Andrew Weatherall produced your last album Tarot Sport. What was it like working with him?

AH: Magic. He's a very rare individual; one brimming with a moral compass and extremely robust in his beliefs. It's always a delight people like that.

Are you looking forward to playing live again? And are you planning to tour Germany anytime soon?

AH: Yeah absolutely looking forward to it. Germany is one of our favourite places to play!

BP: Most definitely. It's great to play the new material out. Tracks are written in a live sense so to play them out live is part of the whole process. We are coming to Germany in late September.

What do you listen to when you just want to chill-out?

AH: Mostly Ibiza Chill-Out. Not really. I actually like listening to silence quite a lot these days when I want to relax.

BP: Ariel Kalma, Stars of the Lid, Ennio Morricone

Finally, if you could change one thing about the music scene in the UK what would it be and why?

AH: Mmm ... It's actually fascinating, maybe morbidly so, to see the speed in which a band's perceived popularity rises. Bands can start playing massive venues within a few months of forming. I wouldn't change it per se, but there's a lot to be said for bands that have had space and time to develop. This is probably a crap analogy, but it's like those kids who are really good looking at school and really good at sports, and because of that silver platter handed to them, they grow up to be complete arseholes.

BP: The >pay to play< scheme.

To find out more, or to buy the album you can find the **Fuck Buttons** website here

<http://fuckbuttons.com/NEWS>. The band are also setting out on a huge European tour from September.

If you are in Germany this October you can see them at:

1st October - Berghain Berlin

2nd October - Hafenklang Hamburg

3rd October - Club Bahnhof Ehrenfeld Cologne

Additional Tour Dates:

,9th October - The Independent, San Francisco, CA

10th October - Detroit Bar, Costa Mesa, CA

11th October - Culture Collide Festival, The Echo, Los Angeles, CA

13th October - Corona Capital festival, Mexico City

14th October - Subterranean, Chicago, IL

16th October - Wrong Bar, Toronto, ON

17th October - U Street Music Hall, Washington, DC

18th October - Le Poisson Rouge, New York, NY

19th October - Making Time @ Voyeur, Philadelphia, PA

20th October - Sinclair, Boston, MA

Live the band are awesome, so catch them while you can.

| JOHN BITTLES