

# Deja Voodoo: Sludgeabilly music to sweat to

interview by Stephen Noble

I dream about your  
face, about your perfume and your hair  
But I wake up in the  
morning and you're still there  
How can I miss you  
when you won't go away?

I wanna hurt  
I wanna cry  
I wanna fear  
I wanna sigh  
I wanna be  
In misery  
But you're always  
close to me

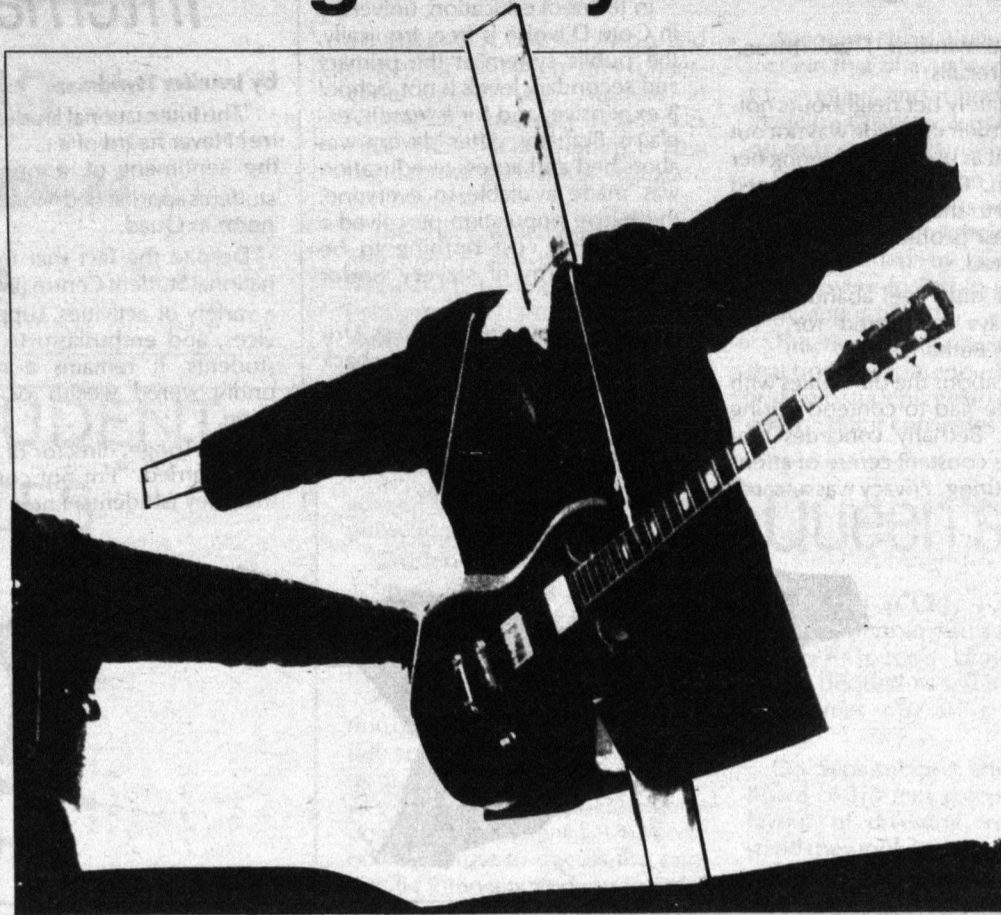
Deja Voodoo

One of Scotland's most renowned voices in the contemporary music scene, Jim Kerr, once said that the only music which deserves to be taken seriously is that which goes against the common mean. If this is the case, or even anywhere near it, Montreal's Deja Voodoo deserve a lot more attention than they've had up until now.

To put it quite simply, you've never heard anything like them before. They play the kind of music that parents cringe at, no matter how hip and cool your parents may be. Their style is freshly unique. If you're watching them for the first time you might find yourself staring confusedly at the stage: no, you're eyes are not fooling you, the drummer has no cymbals and is playing an old battered-up set; and yes, that's correct, the guitar does not have all its strings. It might seem like a gimmick at first, but with four albums on the shelf and having recently given up their day jobs in order to devote themselves solely to music, you would be a fool to doubt their commitment.

In the music business today, there are just too many people strutting about with egos the size of David Bowie's stage show: trying to approach them can be a bit like trying to get through U.S. customs. After meeting too many of this sort, it's a joy to talk to Deja Voodoo, a band who treat their music in an unpretentious manner, yet who still manage not to lose their seriousness and humor.

The band members call their style 'sludgeabilly', and Tony Dewald, the crazed rhythm man, tells the story of its origin. "Well, when we began recording, we were using a ghetto blaster and when you use cymbals with one of those things you get this terrible scratchy sound. They don't have a good enough range; so I did away with my cymbals and I haven't used them since! Gerard's guitar style came about simply



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because he can't get his fingers around all the strings; so he got rid of a couple." And so you have the origins of sludgeabilly.

If, at this point, you're shaking your head and thinking how daft it all sounds, then what you need is a strong dose of their live show. There are many bands nowadays who rely upon advanced studio technology to put their message across. Quite often at concerts you find yourself thinking that if the musicians spent as much time practising as they did at choosing their wardrobe and putting on make-up, then they would be fantastic. Such is not the case with Deja Voodoo.

They play honest, beat-bopping music to which you can't help but shake your hips. Their live shows are overflowing with assiduous energy. Sometimes you have to wonder if they won't collapse before the end of the night.

"It's a sweat thing," says Gerard Van Herk, the band's lead, and indeed only, guitarist. "We rely heavily on audience participation; we like to see them sweat too, it shows us they're enjoying themselves. Sometimes we have to work really hard to get people on their feet, and when we're doing three sets a night, that means a lot of sweat."

Back in their home city, there is a tradition which embodies this fact very well: the Voodoo Barbecue. "It's just a night that we put on so that everyone can come down and have an all around good time. We have barbecued chicken, beer and lots of music. People can come and eat, drink and dance. It's all about enjoying yourself." In the spring, Deja Voodoo held a BBQ to celebrate the release of their album *The Swamp of Love*. Approximately 300 people had to be turned away from the door, but not because they weren't cool enough, nor because they had no Elvis in them, simply because The Spectrum was completely full. It seems that this new idea of the BBQ-and-concert has caught on, at least in the east.

So, what's it like to play in front of 1,200 people with an incomplete guitar and drumset?

"It's only the first 200 or 300 people who really matter," explains Van Herk, "the other 1,000 are just like human wallpaper; their sweat isn't making it to the stage."

Behind all this humour and good fun, though, there is a serious side. Ever since the release of their first album *Cemetery* in 1984, the Voodoos held down day jobs when they

weren't off in exotic, sweaty basements giving the country a taste of sludgeabilly. Their commitment has meant that now they are able to exist solely by means of their music.

## Too Cool To Live

## Too Smart To Die

However, it's not simply their own music which keeps them going. The Voodoo boys are the proprietors of Og Music, a small label which is devoted to Canadian independent artists. Tony Dewald explains: "The idea is to give smaller bands a chance, bands that can't afford albums. Singles are a waste of time in this country, so if a band sends us a demo that is good, they'll have a chance of being heard all across the country. We're just giving the smaller people who deserve it more exposure." The compilation series is called "It Came From Canada", and Volume 3 has just been released.

Meanwhile, on their own front, they have just returned from a short hop around Europe. They played successful dates in Athens and Finland, the sludgeabilly capital of the continent. Their fourth album is also hot off the proverbial presses; it's called *The Worst of Deja Voodoo*, and includes 24 tracks, some brand new, some very old.

"This album will be weirder than any other album of ours," says Van Herk. "There's a two second song on it and another one under four seconds long!"

The Voodoos are also planning on another video which should be available to Much Music in the near future. The song will be called "Expresso Bongo", and I say WILL BE because it isn't written yet. Tony Dewald provides the drastically needed explanation: "We've got this great idea for a video: this time it's going to be animated. By doing this we hope to get a better quality than we might have been able to get using film. Much Music are desperate for well-produced Canadian videos in order to fill their 35 per cent Canadian content requirement. The only thing left to do is write the song!"

I had one more query for the Voodoos: everybody is talking about those boys from Dublin; so what do you think about the U2 phenomenon?

"U who? U2? Oh yeah, I saw them once in a video. They were riding horses about in the snow, or something. I can't imagine that they have too much Elvis in them!"

# Haley comments on *Getting Married*

interview by M. Pidruchney

On September 14, over a Sprite at the Saucy Noodle, Susan Haley talked to me about her work. Despite a busy schedule fatigue, and the fact that she hadn't seen her eleven-month-old daughter all day, Haley was animated, engaging, and easy to converse with.

Having just finished reading her novel *Getting Married in Buffalo Jump*, I was eager to find out about her personal background. Was she a WASP, a Ukrainian, or an Indian? It has to be one of those three, or else how could she have written the book with such accuracy and knowledge? Her answers surprised me.

To begin with, Haley hails from Nova Scotia. Her ancestors were American. She got a B.A. from Dalhousie University and then came out west to do graduate work. This was during the "boom" years. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the U of A eleven years ago, and now refers to herself as an "ex-philosopher". She lives in Fort Norman, a community of 300, in the Northwest Territories, and with a partner owns and operates a small charter airline.

Haley has lived in Fort Norman for seven years, enjoying the beauty and the solitude and doing community work. She finds her home very conducive to writing, and looks forward to the future with pen in hand — literally, for she is one of what must be a dying breed of writers who do not use com-

puters or typewriters to work. She maintains that she has a sympathetic publisher and enjoys the writing business.

Haley has enjoyed great success thus far. Her first novel (*Nest of Singing Birds*) has been made into a CBC movie by the same name in Saskatoon. It will be aired in January.

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She completed this novel in six weeks, "roaring with laughter" all the while. Why did she begin to write? "To remember good school memories," she guesses. Her book is a satire of the philosophy department. Her fourth (but the second to be published) novel, *Getting Married in Buffalo Jump*, took about one and a half years to complete. Haley admits that it takes her longer to write now than it did before, especially with the addition of her daughter to her life. When asked how her two books compare, she replied that "nothing will ever be as funny as my first book." She is delighted to hear when people laugh at the comedy in her books.

The most startling facts revealed in the interview were that *Getting Married in Buffalo Jump*, Haley's portrayals of the Ukrain-

ian characters and their lives as well as the farm life in southern Alberta are "predictions", or fabricated depictions in which the author is guessing at the truth. She even asked one whether I thought that there was any verisimilitude in the story. In fact, this novel is quite far from Haley's own experience, in spite of her living in an Indian village.

The author explained that the people in the book are all figments of her imagination, that she just puts together tidbits of information, and that she doesn't really know very much about southern Alberta. Many of the experiences she writes about came from personal stories that others related to her as casual information. Haley has never been to Buffalo Jump, and the title of the book is actually one of several given to the editor to choose from. (Haley thought of it one day last summer when she switched on the television and saw the Duke and Duchess of York officially opening the historic site!)

Haley appears to enjoy writing immensely. She has never taken a course in creative writing, however, and never thought that things would turn out this way. She is eager and excited at future prospects, and is refreshingly optimistic about what will come next. Her novels prove that a Ph.D. in philosophy can take one anywhere; and it just goes to show that one doesn't necessarily have to have gone somewhere or experienced something to write well about it!



Author Susan Haley

Photo Bruce Gardave