

NEVADA THEY CO

● They've almost got a pop hit! They've almost got dance beats on their new LP! Will the rock pig beast forever shrouded in the ectoplasmic mists of swirly guitar shapes and ethereal warbling that is the COCTEAU TWINS finally emerge? Will they finally drop the grumble-grunt approach and drop their trousers instead? Find out as ANDREW COLLINS delves into the prawn mayonnaise of Robin, Liz and Simon's collective consciousness.

Twin freaks: AJ BARRATT

The Cocteau Twins are bastards. Wilfully obscure, massively deluded, self-important bastards. They exist only within a safe, woolly cocoon of their own making; they create something vast and unlikely out of virtually nothing; they are embarrassing, extravagant, gutless, self-obsessed, over-precious, world class WANKERS.

Or at least I hope they are. Because if they're not, then it must be us!

MY HEAD EXPLODES INTO A MILLION INCANDESCENT FIREFLIES

"IF PEOPLE are sitting back and waiting for us to say something profound, they'll probably have to wait a few years," warns Robin Guthrie.

Well, it's been a good eight years now since the Cocteau Twins started making that fuzzy and mad and problematic music—and they haven't said anything useful yet, despite the scores of nauseating press interviews they have conducted throughout that time. They've obligingly grunted and bickered and shrugged and burped, leaving scores of nauseating journalists to fill in the blanks when they get home. Which, if not a crime, is certainly a royal pain in the ass.

If Bananarama bring out the lecherous sexist pig in even the most alert, liberal New Man, then the Cocteau Twins must attract to the surface of every level-headed, objective hack something even more horrific—THE STUDENT!

For never is the Cocteau Twins' stubborn, diaphanous music more helpful than when your Art History essay's going off at all the wrong tangents, and you're clean out of Five Pints at 11.30 at night, and you've decided that relationships are for the empty lives of the proletariat anyway, and *not* expressive types like you. This is a Cocteau Moment. And Cocteau Moments rarely happen at the Marquee bar, or at wedding receptions, or at football matches, do they?

Thus, it is no surprise that the Cocteau Twins (or 'The Cocks', as Robin so quaintly has it) turn everybody who loves them into a stupid bastard. Theirs is not the push-button executive relief that is Ambient House, nor the mid-life crisis-balm of New Age—the Cocteau Twins' exceptional muse is Stuff Made By A Band. Farty, impressionistic, virtually instrumental Stuff, but Stuff all the same. Its source is three ordinary people, and this is what gets it in the charts and the pop mags. For inaccessible music, it is bloody accessible.

That's why it is talked about so much and at such length.

Although the band themselves dismiss their earlier material, they still leave behind a substantial and consistent back catalogue that is testament to their unflinching conviction. The kind of workaday conviction that pays bills and dresses babies.

If the Cocteau Twins are remarkable, special, God-like even, it is when they close the studio door firmly behind them; when we can't see them. Just as you can never actually see yourself—except in reflection or snapshot—you can never really see the Cocteau Twins. But boy, can you *hear* them!

SPECIAL NURSERY RHYMES FOR THE AURALLY DYSLEXIC

THANK YOU, Vic Reeves—you have just broken the ice. An idle conversation about drum machines led to me describing the one I have at home as "very poor". The Cocteaues latch onto this Reeves-ism immediately, and "very poor" echoes round the table.

It's midday, and Robin Guthrie, Liz Fraser and Simon Raymonde have come out to play—or at least to grunt and bicker and shrug. That these three people in their late 20s *don't* look how their albums sound is now well documented. Today they look as if they've just got up, each one poured bleakly into a pair of comfy tracksuit bottoms.

"Oh f—, I need some sleep!" sobs Liz, head in hands, "I'm total shit!"

Don't break down now, I request, calmly—you're meant to break down at the end.

"Well, this *is* nearly the end isn't it?" inquires Robin, hopefully.

Two minutes of tape, one moment of Vic-style recognition, a breakdown and a sarky dig. This could be the most concise Cocteau Twins interview ever, I suppose. I am reminded of that immortal opening line from 'Ivo' on the 'Treasure' LP:

"Pongpooong peachfleuur pandoor pompadoouur/Payleee pigswiiiiiii Persephoneeeeeee-eehee-he-heeeee"

STAGGERING SPLENDOR AND GOSSAMER BEAUTY

FORMED IN Grangemouth, Scotland, 1982, Cocteau Twins (there is no 'The') weren't named after turn-of-the-century French director Jean Cocteau, but a Simple Minds song (which was). Oil refinery engineer Guthrie and pal Will Heggie spotted Liz dancing in a club and signed her up. The three of them began to make a bleak, sparse, Gothic noise together that would become the 'Garlands' LP once a deal had been struck with nascent London-based indie 4AD. The abrasive, Banshee-wail guitar and the brooding bass were all very well, but it was the unusual vocal approach of Liz that lifted 'Garlands' from the post-punk malaise of the time. A frightened, shakey yowl whose words were masked by an upsetting quiver, it was this built-in 'effect' in Liz's throat that pricked up ears.

The plaudits, the proclamations and the diarrhoeal adjectives



"Our single? In the charts? Bollocks!" The Cocteau Twins, Robin (left), Liz and Simon, get the great news

ME!



began to pour in, and, while a gruelling (and premature) 50-date OMD tour finished off bassist Heggie, the Cocteau Twins continued to carve out their very own niche in an increasingly image-conscious, slogan-shirted, Kaja-googooed pop world. Raymonde joined at the end of '83, and the trio had a Number 29 hit with the twee 'Pearly Dewdrops Drop'. The decision not to 'do' TOTP hampered any further progress it might've made, and the myth kept on snowballing.

Christmas '84's phenomenal 'Treasure' topped the NME Readers Poll, reached Number 28 in the Real Album Chart, and the Cocteau Twins stopped making LPs for four years.

A series of sterling, no-waste EPs punctuated 1985, and an acoustic Liz-and-Robin-only venture called 'Victorialand' delighted critics and college corridors alike in '86. But it wasn't until late '88 that 'Blue Bell Knoll' burst forth from the Elysian womb, so to speak. This was the most clear, confident, rigidly-constructed Cocteau LP to date, and it consolidated the band's position as a viable option in pop's mainstream marketplace.

This month sees the Cocteau Twins' sixth album shoved, blinking and squirming, into the unforgiving spotlight. A work that took two years to complete, mainly due to the arrival of Liz and Robin's first baby, Lucy, right in the middle of it, it re-establishes the Twins as Kings Of Rococco'n'Roll. Edging dangerously close to convention, 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' contains a Radio 1 A-list single 'Iceblink Luck', and features songtitles with words in them ('I Wear Your Ring', 'Road, River And Rail' etc). Not only that, but it's about to get promoted live, on a 30-date UK Tour.

"At the end of the day, we're just another group and we're making records," shrugs Simon. "The records will be reviewed and people will read the reviews and they will or won't go and buy them."

But don't you feel slightly *separate* from the rest of the rock circus?

"I don't feel any affinity to anybody," grumbles Robin, almost inaudibly. When the Cocteau Twins' publicist John was sent out for sandwiches earlier, Robin ordered a bottle of Listerine with his. I'm not leaning any closer to decipher his nasal mumblings.

"We don't decide to do things on the back of what other people do," offers Simon.

So you *do* see yourself as separate.

"I think everybody thinks that," says Liz.

"You said that!" mocks Robin, triumphantly, as if she's broken a house-rule by half-admitting that the Cocteau Twins *do* view themselves as different. Liz breaks down again.

"I didn't! Oh, I'm sorry, everybody! If there was a teapot, I'd climb into it and put the lid back on. Oh dear."

That 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' is not an overtly dance-tinged album will automatically single it out from the opposition. If its creative, atmospheric guitar work and shuffling drum machine give it some unplanned currency in the anti-Rock climate of 1990, then that's 1990's doing and not the ever-revolting Cocks'.

While widespread acceptance might unsettle the graduates, the Cocteau Twins' product survives fundamentally intact. There is sufficient beauty and vagueness in the new album to ensure that the established Cocteau fans will love it.

"Apart from those guys in Germany who like 'Garlands' better," Robin points out. "We were doing interviews over there and it was 'Why did you make another record after 'Garlands'?' To them, 'Peppermint Pig' (second ever single) was a sell-out! (Laughs) If anybody's got that by the way, they should burn it." Are you serious?

"Oh yeah. Have you heard it?" This disregard for the early stuff prompts the question: how far back will you go for the

forthcoming live shows?

"Don't know," snuffles Robin. "What do you think?"

You've got to go back to 'Treasure'.

"We're going a bit further back than that, but we're not playing anything from 'Treasure'."

What are you doing then? "Something from 'Head Over Heels'."

Which song?

"Is this for you personally, or for the interview?"

Both.

"From The Flagstones'."

Phew. And for my next trick...

THOUGHT-FLICKERINGLY KINDERGARTEN JOYCEAN

'TREASURE' WAS a turning point in the Cocteau Twins' career (even if they'd rather it were buried, six years on). It was around 'Treasure' that the band's public image (three ordinary tossers) began to jar most



Liz and Robin try out their nice new padded cell

unhappily with the recorded output (glorious, sepia-tinted majesty) and 4AD's packaging (exquisite, fussy artwank). And it was around 'Treasure' that our own Danny Kelly wasted seven hours of tape attempting to strip-mine tossers for gold. He set out to captain a voyage of discovery into the heart of darkness, and found himself becalmed on a park lake in a paddleboat.

The Cocteau Twins remember it well.

Robin: "It was seven hours of 'WHY? WHY? WHY?'"

Simon: "He was on the verge of breaking down - 'You're lying to me! Why don't you just tell me? You're just being obscure! You're just being wankers!'"

Robin: "Hey, Big Fella, calm down. We've got nothing to hide."

Simon: "It's because some people *do* know why they make their music, I suppose. But we never talk about what we're doing. Ever."

But this is a largely wordless music - you can't blame someone for looking for clues.

Simon: "But looking for clues insinuates that there's some f---ing mystery to be solved."

But that's what we like!

"Who's we?"

We, the fans; we, the critics.

Robin: "And we, the members of the band, think that's really f---ed up!"

What do you say to fans when they approach you after gigs?

Robin: "I always say 'Oh, Liz is over there'..."

Liz: "He does actually."

So you're the public face of the Cocteau Twins, Liz?

"The *pubic* face."

At this, we launch into a long and diversionary discussion about 4AD Records, the highlights of which are Liz sighing "It's been a *long* time," and Robin muttering "This Mortal Coil" whilst effecting a masturbatory mime with his right hand. Then he comes over all restless and impatient.

"Where is John? He's been gone for f---ing hours, man! I'M STARVING!"

"Shut your face!" scolds Liz, dead serious.

"It's just a f---ing record label!" finalises Robin, also dead serious. "Nobody would give us a hard time if we were on EMI!"

I'm not giving you a hard time, I'm merely playing devil's advocate.

"I didn't say that! Oh, I'm sorry everybody. If there was a teapot I'd climb into it and pull the lid back on . . ." - Liz

laugh; Liz looks immediately uncomfortable about her mini-outburst (she has, after all, just called me stupid).

"Get yourself out of this one, Fraser!" wheezes Robin.

"Well, it's not like they're reviewing your records at all," she whimpers. "It's more of a chance to work on their book."

"ABOUT F---ING TIME! JEEZUS!" shouts Robin, leaping up from the table. The sandwiches have arrived. And the breath-freshener.

"Please don't write that we eat," Robin warns me, tucking in, "we don't like the fans to think that we eat!"

I note that food often crops up in a Cocteau Twins interview, as if their eating habits offer an insight into that magical, mysterious

accusation that you are *too* self-contained, self-important, self-obsessed?

"We'd have to agree with that," shrugs Simon, "we are incredibly selfish."

"Self, self," mutters Robin to himself.

"But if you want to be proud of what you do and retain some dignity about it, you've got to feel that you actually did it. It was *you*."

So does the idea of an 'outside' producer coming in to produce the Cocteau Twins appall you?

Robin: "No, it doesn't appall me."

Simon: "Because it wouldn't happen."

Robin: "What's the matter with our production?"

He seems wounded, as if my suggestion is a personal attack.



"Because you're a shit-stirrer." Where are those sandwiches?

A PRE-RAPHAELITE BEAUTY SWEEPS THROUGH TRAILING FRONDS

TALK HAPPILY turns to the George Michael *South Bank Show*.

"It just made him look so *thick*!" exclaims Liz, seemingly much more interested in gossiping about other people than herself.

"They shoulda had a comedy act in it," suggests Robin, "Andrew Ridgeley!"

So would you be up for a Cocteau Twins *South Bank Show*?

"What would you *do* though?" asks Robin, rhetorically. "'Here's the Cocteau Twins making tea; here's the Cocteau Twins in the studio'. It's ludicrous - and it's putting the people ahead of the music *again*. Why don't they just wait 30 years, and then we can do two hours."

"Half an hour," corrects Liz.

Will you still be here in 30 years?

"Probably," Robin sniffs, "Like f---ing luggage."

"Still waiting on the sandwiches," whispers Liz.

Do you get embarrassed by what's written about you - especially the gushy stuff?

"It's like reading about someone else."

Are you glad you haven't got the job of describing your music?

"I wouldn't be STUPID enough to take it on!" snaps Liz. They all

music. Robin is one step ahead of me here.

"Prawn mayonnaise," he whispers, lifting his bread for me to see inside his soul, "and the enigmatic Simon Raymonde has cheese and mayonnaise."

They're not daft, these people. They've had their lunch psychoanalysed more times than you've had hot dinners, and they're well-versed, now, in the art of hack-baiting. Robin even offers an impression of the Cocteau Twins photo session:

"Liz, you stand there - it is Liz, isn't it? - you, the fat one, just behind her, and the tall one at the back."

They're very good at being bad at interviews, the Cocteau Twins.

INTRIGUE, PASSION AND SORROW KISS THE SAME LIPS

THE COCTEAU Twins are self-sufficient. Totally. They own their own Habitat riverside studio in leafy Twickenham, and they recorded the whole of 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' there. Robin now produces and engineers everything they do; they actually have 'complete control' over the nature and the look of their own product, which, as the new album proves, still appears to exist only in parallel with the rest of the music world. It might be said that the Cocteau Twins are oblivious to any nasty outside influence. Three twins and a baby, and that's it.

What would you say to the

"I'd kick his f---ing ass down the stairs!" Robin threatens. "He'd be in the river by Day Two! Short of my furry friends here, I couldn't have somebody else coming in here and saying 'Well, that bit doesn't sound right'. 'Go f--- yourself!'"

So you wouldn't be interested in someone taking a tape away and remixing it, as is all the rage these days?

"No, no. There's so few good ideas about. It'd be stupid. I'd dread to think what it'd sound like."

But don't you think it would be an interesting experiment?

"No, we don't want that input. I'm talking hypothetically."

"I think you should change that shirt!" Robin cuts in. He's had enough. "You wouldn't like somebody coming and rewriting your f---ing piece for you. Can I rewrite your article when you've done it? You wouldn't like that, would you?"

I think it might be interesting! "Well I don't."

OK - Liz - what's the track 'Cherry-Coloured Funk' about?

"I can't remember which f---ing song it was," she says.

It's the first one on the album.

"Oh right. Well - it's self-explanatory isn't it?"

"What do you think," Robin challenges.

I think it's about the graphic details of childbirth.

"That's the one song on the album that *isn't* about childbirth! Hahahahahahaha!"

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COCTEAU TWINS

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JUST A LOT OF CHORDS AND NOTES AND STUFF

ROBIN (TO Liz): "I'd just like you to know that I didn't take the bottles to the bottle bank."

Liz: "I know you f——ing didn't, you motherf——er."

Robin: "I'm sorry."

Sonny and Cher, Paul and Linda, Ben and Tracey, Paddy and Wendy — ah yes, Robin and Liz are a *bona fide* Couple In Rock, and they admit that most band arguments are "usually domestic, carried on into the studio". That they are now also proud parents ("I could sit here and talk about Lucy all day!") lends the world of the Cocteau Twins a further air of cosy, closed-off domesticity (ie, they have the power to make babies; they don't even *need* the rest of the world in order to continue the species. They could re-populate the planet with ordinary folk who do heavenly-sounding things if the rest of us pissed off tomorrow and left them to it. But who'd ask them about their lunch for seven hours *then*?)

No, the Cocteau Twins aren't bastards. They are canny, credible, slightly defensive *musicians*. And, as Robin so understatedly puts it, they've "been going for a while now".

"But it doesn't feel like it. If you add up what we've done in that time, it doesn't add up to very much really."

Surely some mistake.

"I think people are fed up with us, and they've decided to give us a break. They think that if they give us a hit, we'll split up and f—— off!"

A million incandescent fireflies can't be wrong.

