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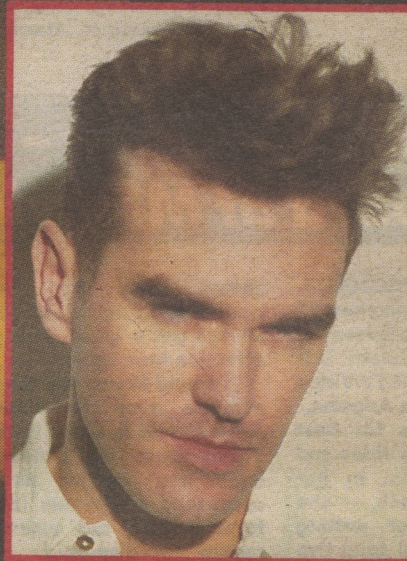
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

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*THERE'S NO
KIDDING THE
COCTEAUS*

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LIZ



ROBIN



SIMON

THANK HEAVEN FOR LITTLE GIRLS

"PEOPLE SAY we're melancholic," guff-aws Cocteau axe artist Robin Guthrie, trying to pre-empt that ghastly sixth-form "ether-eal" line of questioning.

"But to me that means you eat a lot of melons."

Not that we care. We're only interested in The Baby, and it's not even got its cheesy, blubbery frame in sight (absented from interview because it "behaves like a chimp" and "laughs like an old man").

All that's here is the aforementioned Guthrie, an affable, rogueish scruff wheezing away in an almost impenetrable Grangemouth slur, his longtime girlfriend Liz Frazer, a small intelligent woman with wild eyes and one of nature's more acrobatic singing voices, and long time bass player Simon Raymonde, strong, stoic and hideously hung over.

We're all sat here sunning ourselves at the end of summer to plug the Cocteaus' new album, 'Heaven Or Las Vegas', which despite all the hype about being a cleaner sound in which you can actually hear the words, is really just another adventure into the Cocteaus' overgrown imagination. Another unique statement whipped up from nowhere, with daft song titles. Seemingly able to switch from the Mothercare counter to the studio and plug back into the strange and magical world of their music, the Cocteau Twins are *lucky bastards*.

But there's are four things the world should know about the Cocteau Twins...

1. They couldn't give a f**k about interviews.
2. They've had a baby called Lucy Belle, now eleven months old. It has "changed their lives" and influenced the album.
3. They make incredible, moving records that bear no resemblance to the people shunted around to promote them.
4. They hardly ever tour, but in a six-gig burst are about to take on the Greasy Joe circuit once more.

SOME BANDS are beyond fashion, that rush of youthful attitude and ideas that restates each generation's pitch. Some gear is too good for that floor scuffle.

The Cocteaus fit in there, very nicely indeed, carving their own itinerant path on their own terms, on the edge of the chart showdown, releasing the occasional record and dipping a toe in the gig whirlpool when necessary.

Moving to London about eight years ago in the wake of The Birthday Party, the Twins' 'sensitive' gear made them a ghoulish post goth favourite. Their gorgeous melodies and flanged guitar made for some heavy fan worship.

"They liked to think that they understood us. We used to write back to them and say things like, *no, we cannae put your poems to music*," a still incredulous Robin laughs.

They also came in for some trad rock misunderstanding, principally from a music press that expected them to come over all art school cliché, only to be countered by the pair's bemusement or shields of quiet mockery. Interviews descended into great rambles about pets, no heavy duty impressionists got name-checks, and the band found a cosy corner to cut their flaming and gorgeously self-indulgent tackle.

"I just don't think we have to justify the

The COCTEAU TWINS are back with a new album, a new baby and the same old "cathedral of sound". But as JOHN ROBB discovers, it's not a case of, And baby makes twee. STEVE DOUBLE snaps the ethereal things.

music to anyone," spits Robin, a self-confessed "gossip", and "greedy lazy slob". And Liz, her half words slipping and sliding from her throat, seems at a loss to understand the lyrical process that seems to get all those tosspot journals so excited.

"I spend weeks, months writing the lyrics, twisting the words round to make them seem interesting. There aren't many ways to take a standard lyric, but with these there's no end to the interpretations," she says.

The Twins, all three of them, have been enjoying a long lay off, due mainly to the birth of Lucy Belle, their debut release child. The sprog has had a profound effect, drawing out the once introverted couple.

"Five years ago we were a lot more paranoid about doing anything, like going on the telly," says Liz. "I didn't like it at all, making a fool of myself. Now we've got the baby it's, Let's go on the telly. It's not such a horrendous task."

Robin: "The baby put things into perspective, I used to think it would be the end of the world."

"You really do see things as they are, five years ago we would have been in

trouble," agrees Liz.

Part of the post-punk set now in their late twenties with slobbering infants, a generation that turned the backstage area of this year's Reading Festival into a gigantic creche, the pair are still wide-eyed with the joyous event of another mewling, puking sprog to clutter up the planet.

"Yeah it's, like, our conversations now are swopping baby hints and baby clothes talk."

The 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' album is said to have the post baby feel on it, although I'm f**ked if I can find it. Is there anything about giving birth on there?

They scream.

"I was really worried about it, I just didn't want to be in a lot of pain, it was really sore. It was a breech birth, it had to be turned around," Liz remembers.

Sounds typical for childbirth in post Victorian England to be a painful process. It never knackered the Red Indians.

"They ate a lot of peyote. I mean it must really hurt. Can you imagine it? It's like Robin Williams said, it's like passing a bowling ball," ponders big Rob, scratching his jawline hedge, a scrawny beard trip that underlines the studio boffin look.

THE COCTEAUS' songs are the best example of that old chestnut, "they're open to interpretation", "about anything and everything". It is, according to Radio 1's Steve Wright, god bless him, a strangely effective "cathedral of sound".

And their trademark - that spiralling guitar gear and sweet, tremulous voice, all against a haunting atmosphere that was never quite in sync with the times so ended up being timeless - set the blueprint for acts as diverse as The Sugarcubes, The Sundays and the way cool Lush (Guthrie did, after all, produce the latter's debut 'Scar' album).

"All these bands, they claim to have never heard of the Cocteau Twins... funny that," leers Robin. He says he couldn't give a f**k. But it must be strange to see The Sundays getting rapidly Top 40 in the States while they're still on the 1,000 size club circuit.

"The Sundays could develop into something really interesting if they were not pushed too quickly, if they don't get too f**ked up," ponders Liz.

Don't you reckon, now in your late twenties with a baby etc, that you might be getting a bit old to be in a band.

Robin: "No ha, all the exciting new bands are in their thirties. House Of Love, you know."

Liz: "Old as Cliff."

Robin: "Haven't you ever noticed how odd it is that Guy Chadwick and Cliff Richard never appear in the same picture."

What do they think of the current post Mondays/Roses scene?

Robin: "I like a lot of that stuff, some of it seems to be like the Boomtown Rats. It's funny that some bands can change their image in such a short space of time, like they wear a different type of jacket to sell their records. I mean with every craze you seem to get one group that's making a twat of themselves, and this time it's the Soup Dragons."

NOT BEING on the road for four years, the band return in the early autumn for a "Theatres And Toilets" tour of Britain.

"We played the theatres and more upmarket places last time to give the people who came somewhere better to see us. But that got misinterpreted as us trying to be arty," complains Simon, the self-confessed football thug with a bad Spurs habit.

Will it still be as intense, as private, as painfully shy as those impassioned performances of years back?

"All the exciting new bands are in their thirties. The House Of Love, you know. Haven't you ever noticed how odd it is that Guy Chadwick and Cliff Richard never appear in the same picture."

ROBIN

COCTEAUS: "WE'RE the smellies"



"How do you know? You've never seen us!" Guthrie laughs.

I've seen you on the telly!

"Well, it's weird, there's 3,000 people looking one way and three facing the other, and you're thinking, Hey you guys, what are you looking at, turn round the lot of you, stop looking at my girlfriend," he jovially patters.

"We really crap our pants," Liz chips in.

Robin: "If you don't have this big ego to start with, then it's bound to be a bit weird."

Liz: "I need an operation. I need to get my sweat glands removed."

The line-up has now stretched to a five-piece with the addition of two further guitarists, Mitsou and Ben. Is Robin becoming too lazy, or are we looking at some kinda real rockout action?

Robin: "Really it was to get someone to play the fiddly bits off the record. In the studio you can just wind the tape back and play them again until they are right and there's so many layers of guitar to recreate. Some of the songs demand at least two guitar parts."

"Most people do it all the time," adds Liz. "They get used to it, it's a way of life for them. I suppose if you did that you could turn into those sort of people."

This neatly sums up that dabbling aspect of the Cocteauss, their magical ability to pluck their gear from thin air, switching from normal life to the cosy studio by the Thames they rent from Pete Townshend, and still cutting impressive vinyl.

Robin: "Over the last couple of years it was like the whole thing was getting too serious. We've been busy doing lots of other things though. By the time we got back to making music it was like a small percentage of our time, more like a hobby — maybe because of babies and business things (the band only recently relinquishing the chore of self management). Having the studio was great, I feel really hyped up to making music now."

With the fab single, 'Iceblink Luck', already a *Sounds* Single Of The Week and the fab album in a shop near you now, the Cocteauss are not breaking new ground but holding their own unique corner. Still as fresh and bizarre, and making the whole thing seem as natural as bringing up baby, this is certainly no rock show.

"It is, we carry our own amps, our own guitars every time we tour," lies Robin.

Come off it, you're yuppies now... posh studios and all that...

Robin: "Nah, we're the smellies."

Get away, this is the easy life.

"Go f**k yourself."

PHOTO-FILE: COCTEAU TWINS



ORIGINAL LINE-UP featuring bassist Will Heggie (right)



THE WAY THEY WERE