

# THE PIXIES

## TYRANNY AND MUTATION

**A PIXIES album that isn't drenched in murder, mutilation, death, crucifixion, blood, evil and barbarism? It's hard to imagine, but that's exactly what the band have come up with on their new LP, 'Bossanova'. What's happened to the formerly lawless renegades? Have they gone soft? Sold out? Why does Kim Deal think the record is closer to 'ET' than 'Eraserhead'? Why is Black Francis writing love songs to pigs? JON WILDE discovers the answers to these questions and more. Pics: KEVIN WESTENBERG**

"WHenever we talk to MELODY MAKER," SAYS KIM DEAL, "WE ALWAYS SEEM TO end up talking about shitting or livestock. We must be obsessed with these things. There's no reason to stop now."

"I was up in Cambridge recently and I got into a conversation with a couple of guys. We got really drunk and started talking about bestiality."

As you do.

"Right. So, one of the guys confessed that he'd had sex with a sheep. Hell, that was something of a conversation stopper. He even showed me how to do it. Wanna see? Right, you just stand up and stick the sheep's back legs into your boots, just like this, and you start pumping away."

While Kim demonstrates the ancient Welsh art of how to amuse yourself while your best friend is away, the bar comes to a standstill.

"I grew up in Dayton, Ohio, where conversation revolves around corn and livestock. Down on the farm, have a shit and feed the pigs. Story of my life."

An afternoon with The Pixies is always something of an education.

Hey! Kim! Can you demonstrate that one more time?

**AFTER** a decidedly low-key start to the Nineties, The Pixies are back. The latest single, "Velouria" has grazed the national Top 30. The album, "Bossanova" is likely to penetrate the Top Five in its first week of release. It seems like an immaculate return. Then again, the group have spent their latest round of press interviews defending themselves against charges of compromise.

"I guess people have been thrown by the fact that this new album is so pretty," Kim shrugs. "You can't keep clubbing people across the back of the neck. Not that that's what we've been doing for the last four years. It's just that you have to find new ways of moving people. Sure, lots of people are gonna say we're selling out or something, but it doesn't feel like that. We're a lot older now. Maybe we're not so keen on screaming and hollering. Maybe we feel sweeter this time around."

"It's not that we thought we couldn't go any further the other way. It just sounded cool to do it this way. The songs were pretty to start with. If we'd tried to rock them and rough them up, they would have just sounded dumb. We just felt different this time. The band feels better about itself. Our self-esteem is higher. Doing the album in California had a lot to do with that."

In the space between "Doolittle" and "Bossanova", the four Pixies have been following their own peculiar mazes: guitarist, Joey Santiago, went off in search of his in the Grand Canyon; Charles drove across America in his canary yellow Cadillac, playing solo gigs to pay for some new furniture for his LA home; drummer David has been, "concentrating, real hard"; bassist, Kim Deal, has been busy with The Breeders, making a dirty depraved album.

"It wasn't a matter of getting the dirt and depravity out of my system though," she says. "There's an endless supply of that stuff. I just wanted to sing. So I sang. I have a lovely voice and I should use it. If I can't sing in this band, I'll sing in another band. If I'm good at something, then I'll do it. At least I'll try. If I can't do it, then I'll soon find out."

"I've been singing less and less in The Pixies. Just oohing and aahing. You can get a

synthesizer to do that. but Charles is lead singer. Not only that, he sings every f\*\*\*ing one! Who does he think he is? Mr Hog! Mr Bigshot! Shut up Charles! Shut your f\*\*\*ing food-hole for three minutes and give Kim a chance."

Was the making of "Pod" a fulfilling experience?

"Oh sure. the only problem with The Breeders was that the other two (Tanya from Throwing Muses and Josephine from Perfect Disaster) always use big words. I had to carry a big dictionary around to find out what they were talking about."

When The Pixies finally regrouped in Los Angeles to plot and hatch the new album, the earth moved. Literally.

"We were in the middle of a rehearsal and this f\*\*\*ing earthquake started up," Kim recalls. "The first thing we could see were these lights shimmering back and forth. Then the whole room started shaking. We just picked up our instruments, threw them to the ground and ran like crazy. We got outside in the car-park where there were all these guys from heavy metal bands scared shitless. One of 'em yelled to his mate, 'Hey! That was some bass sound you got there!' Very rock'n'roll!"

**WITH** "Bossanova", Pixies appear to have reached a similar impasse to the one that Sonic Youth shambled towards with "Goo", The Sugarcubes with "Life's Too Good", Butthole Surfers with "Hairway To Steven" and Throwing Muses with "House Tornado". If anything, this is The Pixies' difficult transition stage.

"Bossanova" offers precious little of the seismic frenzy previously contained in "Gigantic", "Vamos", "Crackity Jones" and "Gouge Away". Little evidence too of the tensile pulse that crushed "Where Is My Mind?", "Cactus", "Bone Machine", "Debaser" and "Wave Of Mutilation".

These 14 new songs confirm the murmurings that The Pixies' fourth album was set to explore a less cacophonous radius. Only the hardcore surf orgy of "Rock Music" and the feverish cover of The Surftones' "Cecilia Ann" maintain continuity with The Pixies' intense bombardment. Most of these songs track the lineage of "Tame", "I Bleed", "Here Comes The Man", "River Euphrates" and "Monkey Gone To Heaven", a more atmospheric and melodic tilt. The Pixies go pop. Hell, there's even love songs, even if one of them is a serenade to a pig.

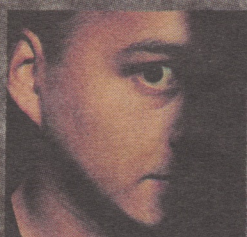
"If you're gonna write a song," says Kim, "you might as well write about something that matters. Charles makes up all these big movies in his head and spills them out into three minute songs. This album is more like Spielberg than David Lynch. More like 'ET', 'Indiana Jones' and 'Raiders Of The Lost Ark' than 'Eraserhead' or 'Blue Velvet'."

"Havilina", the album's closing song, was composed after Charles and his girlfriend were chased by a wild pig in Arizona.

"So he decided to write a real pretty love song," Kim laughs. "I've been thinking about this... I don't think there's anything innately erotic"







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about pigs. But, generally, they are sweet, shy, mysterious creatures. Especially the little ones. When they get big, they get kinda gross."

"I always said that I wasn't interested in writing love songs," Charles explains. "But I guess I have this time. In the past, people would listen to certain songs and assume they were love songs. But a song like 'La La Love You' (off 'Doolittle') is about anything but love."

"I guess 'Velouria' is a love song about time travel. 'Blown Away' is like one of those Neil Young love songs that exist out there in space somewhere. It's not about anyone or anything specifically. It's not about her eyes or the back of her knees. 'Make Believe' is like a love song to Debbie Gibson, but it's something of a joke really. I don't really want to marry her. Honestly."

If with "Doolittle" The Pixies appeared to have exhausted their obsession with the apocalyptic art-thrash guitar ethic, they also seem to have purged their imaginations of the kind of barbarous impulses that then prevailed. This time around, there's no mention of mutilation, suffocation, death, bleeding, gouging, hanging...

"This album doesn't sound at all evil," Kim agrees. "Maybe there was evil in Charles' brain but it hasn't come out like that."

"I never saw the songs as particularly evil anyway," says Charles. "People would listen to something like 'Wave Of Mutilation' and think, 'Oh yeah, murder, crucifixion, extermination', but it was really just a song about sea currents and nice animals. It was nothing to do with cutting throats."

Charles Michael Kitridge Thompson (25) hardly looks like your average surrogate mass-murderer who has turned to rock'n'roll to distil his homicidal instincts. More like a slightly profligate Bill Haley with O-levels.

"I'm a nerd basically," he laughs. "Mr Square. Mr Normal. I don't really see myself as the murderous type. I'm not really that violent. My girlfriend is a bit of a criminologist. A big fan of murder. I've got nothing against crime and murder particularly. But, maybe, it's just not for me."

"You get these bands claiming that if they hadn't found rock'n'roll, they'd have turned into mass murderers. I'm not so sure about this theory. People who manage to organise themselves to get a band together, hire a studio, pay their studio bill, they've got their shit together. They don't strike me as the kind of people who would otherwise be chopping up bodies and burying them in the Utah desert."

Kimberly Deal (ex-Mrs John Murphy) is now 28 and has just given up her childhood ambition to be a cheerleader for local baseball teams.

"Hey! Jon! You look like Henry from 'Eraserhead'!" She's charming like that.

"I guess my background was pretty normal. I got into a lot of trouble though when I was young. Lots of mischief. Criminal and otherwise. I never ended up in prison. But I think I was put in a holding-cell once. I think it was for loitering or something. I was too drunk to remember."

What's the most evil thing you've ever done?

"Forget it! I'm not gonna tell you that! Get outta here!"

Okay, what's the filthiest thought on your mind right now?

"Hey, I'm generally clean, right, I don't usually have anything filthy on my mind. But, for the last five minutes, I've been sitting here thinking that there's nothing I'd like to do more right now than go to my room and take a giant shit."

Kim saw Madonna last night. What was she like?

"Bette Midler with smaller tits."

Who's the most desirable Pixie?

"All of them. They're all dishy in a certain way."

Who's the least trustworthy Pixie?

"All of 'em. I wouldn't trust any of 'em to pick up a prescription. Wait a minute tho', I'm the least trustworthy Pixie! I'm hopelessly late. Totally unreliable."

Who's got the most uncontrollable libido?

"All of us! We're f\*\*\*ing monsters! The Pixies are all very highly sexed. But we're getting older now. Our appetites are more normal."

Joey and David, the quiet, boring ones, drop by for two minutes, talk about farting and go to bed.

David just has time to demonstrate his psychic powers.

"Okay, do you have a cigarette pack there? Right, count the cigarettes in it... put the pack to your head... and concentrate. Let me see... SIX."

Nope, twelve.

"Okay, I was just squaring it."

Stick to the drums David you stupid bastard.

**ROCK**'n'roll should be loud, lewd, lusty, lawless, legendary, ludicrous, lurid, luscious...

"When you listen to good rock'n'roll," Kim agrees, "you wanna feel f\*\*\*ing dirty afterwards. You should feel so dirty you have to take a shower. Rock'n'roll should be nasty, horrible, disgusting. Rock'n'roll should be like pornography. I'm all for it. Dirty pictures? Sure! Dirty films? Sure! Sex with sheep? Why not? Film it, tape it, send it to your friends. Put it out. I'll buy it. The filthier the better."

"You put on a good record, right. You wanna get high. You wait for the little tickle. Then you get that fuzzy feeling that brings on the goosebumps. Then you're away. Take off your clothes and do something dirty. You go. Like 'Sympathy For The Devil'. You just feel... molested."

"Rock'n'roll has become an artificial experience," Charles continues. "It's got nothing to do with rebellion. Rock music is just a part of mass culture now. It's all acceptable. Nothing is extreme, dangerous or subversive. Nothing is gonna frighten my mother. She loves The Pixies."

"Basically, the heroism has gone out of rock'n'roll. There's a great deal of fake heroism but it's so f\*\*\*ing bad. That whole Guns N' Roses thing. I'd rather hear Guns N' Roses on the radio than a lot of other things but, c'mon, that whole bandanna thing is so f\*\*\*ing tame. American MTV is inundated with all this fake hard

rock and HM. Where do all these bands come from? They just spring out of nowhere and they're completely clueless. It's not the lack of real heroism that bothers me. It's not even the music. It's their f\*\*\*ing outfits I can't stand."

Since 1988's "Surfer Rosa", the pop swots have chosen to hold The Pixies up to the light as personification of rock'n'roll's last glorious tremors. In his forthcoming book of essays, "Blissed Out: The Apocalypse Of Rock", our own Simon Reynolds writes: "Pixies are what's left when all the obstacles and absences that once prompted rock'n'roll into being have faded away or been catered for, and all that remains is the urge to holler, shriek and whoop it up for the arbitrary, unnegotiable hell of it. They're a poltergeist whose restlessness can never be pacified, the ghost of rock'n'roll."

I prefer Steve Sutherland's more succinct assessment.

The Pixies just can't help it.

"I don't think we represent anything," Charles shrugs. "It's like, we're just trying to come up with a bunch of songs. It's the same panic as always. Have we got any lyrics? Have we got a guitar part for this one? What's the song about? What's going on?"

"We never wanted to be connected with reality. If anything, we wanted to be larger than life. We certainly didn't feel like we were the continuation or the end of some great big rock'n'roll dream. We just went out there and played... with a certain kind of desperation. There was a desperation in trying to come up with a good song. There was a desperation in the way we performed that song. Our biggest fear was to be bad. To embarrass ourselves. That's the worst. We're scared to death every time we record something in case it ain't any good."

"When we started out, we felt we were competing with our favourite records. We had all that to live up to. We felt there were all these great bands looking over our shoulders. Then there were too many practical things to worry about. We were too distracted to think about the past. We were more concerned with how the tickets sales had gone, whether we were more popular than last year, were we rocking, were we selling out."

"But we never thought of ourselves as coming from any great rock'n'roll tradition. I mean, I missed out on punk and hardcore. I grew up listening to John Mayall. I didn't see The Pixies fitting in anywhere. We were aiming at something but we didn't know what exactly. I just thought it would be good to attain U2 status and be seen as totally weird. That would be an accomplishment. I don't know if there's many people who have done that. There's a genius in appealing to a massive amount of people and being totally weird."

"I'd like to get at the front of something. Rather than do this treadmill. It's a good treadmill, but it doesn't feel enough. I need my own pirate TV station. I wanna go to the moon. I wanna do this duet with Morrissey. I wanna keep making good rocking music that takes me. I just wanna be reduced to skin and bone. I want my songs to paralyse me."

"I look around and there's so much crappy music out. That's for sure. There's always been Top 40 music and stupid pop songs. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm just being nostalgic, but it seems that all the stupid pop songs from yesterday are better than the stupid pop songs of today. There's a reason why 'Sealed With A Kiss' is better than 'I Should Be So Lucky'. I doubt we'll look back on Stock, Aitken, Waterman songs as we look back on The Shirelles or The Shangri-Las. Then again, I totally cheer Stock, Aitken, Waterman from a capitalistic point of view. You have to admire their audacity for a start. They've got a lot of f\*\*\*ing nerve."

**CONSIDERING** the current state of rock, "Bossanova", despite its occasionally muddled condition, might yet prove to be the album of the season. Even when it's not reminding you just how disembodied The Pixies can be at their far-gone best, there are more subtle moments of nervous derailment that suggest they might find a way through. "The Happening", in particular, achieves an intensity as it reels from slow-mo buzzsaw scrub to cliff-hanging melody. Imagine if Dennis Wilson had done the decent thing and invited Charlie Manson to join the Beach Boys...

"I used to say all the time that The Pixies didn't move me enough. Well, I like this album a lot. It might be because it's new and I haven't listened to it a lot of times."

"But I'm happy we made some mellow tunes. It's important for us to try that and pull it off. It's still effective. It doesn't always have to be hard."

"In a way, this was the first time we got specific. We listened to a lot of surf music recently. So we



thought it would be fun to come out with a kind of surf/sci-fi thing. With the sci-fi thing, we weren't really thinking of any inter-galactic goings-on. Maybe something like 'Eraserhead' or 'Repo Man'. Something otherworldly. Like with Lynch's movies, where you get totally sucked into the lives of these ultra-normal people and then you suddenly realise something's not quite right. It's not like, 'Hey! There's a three-legged monster in my living-room.'

"So, with this album, surf and sci-fi were like buzz-words for us. They helped create an atmosphere. I'd drag producer, Gil Norton, into a car and drive him around the Hollywood Hills, listening to all these old surf tunes on the tape-machine."

"I guess we'd always had those kind of leanings anyway. This time, we got so absorbed that it affected the music. It's not as though we've sat down in the past and said, 'Right, think mutilation, think strangulation'."

**LATER** this month, The Pixies play their most prestigious British gig to date, headlining the last night of the Reading Festival.

"Now it's got this big," says Charles, "I'm really beginning to realise what a strange thing this is. I'm standing there onstage and I think, 'What a f\*\*\*ing absurd thing to be doing! How the f\*\*\* did I get here?'"

"Just four years ago, we were studying bands in Boston, figuring out how long a set should be. Now we're real proud of what we've done. Borrowed some money off our parents, bought some guitars, dropped out of school and, BOOM, we're making twice as much money as they are. The only thing that bums me out is that this whole thing isn't very romantic. It's just not very cool to be in a rock band these days. Then again, I think The Pixies are pretty cool. Ruined cool."

"So you start playing these huge gigs and you pause for a second, look out at the crowd and think, 'Why do these people love us?' I guess we've got some catchy songs. There's some neat lyrics that people can shout along to. We're not totally stupid. We're a little f\*\*\*ed-up. We're pretty hard. We're kinda sweet. We're dark. We're beautiful. That's enough for anyone I suppose."

"Basically," Kim concludes, "We appeal to everyone but the criminally insane. They're too busy thinking of their next meal to bother about The Pixies. They're too busy plotting their next move. Preparing for their next breakdown. Getting ready for their next lobotomy. I guess they'll get round to us sooner or later. Hey, Charles, can we play some prisons?"

Next stop: Charlie Manson's play room. **"Bossanova" is released on 4AD. The Pixies headline the Reading Festival on Sunday, August 26.**

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