

Scene *but not* Hurt

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Kurt Ralske writes tales of religious and emotional bondage under a hail of post-Mary Chain amp bleed, and his new single even boasts a duet with Pixie Kim Deal. So why does she hang round with that sadist? Beats us! But Roy Wilkinson has his theories. . .

MAYBE IT isn't quite long enough to cram in the street-tuff rock opera dimensions of his 'New York' album, but the new Ultra Vivid Scene single echoes a familiar croak.

"Yeah, that's Lou Reed, that one," says Scene linchpin Kurt Ralske. "A real suicide boogie sleigh-ride."

Something of a duet too. 'Special One' takes off with the vocal intervention of Pixies bassist Kim Deal. Wild 'n' furious, 'Big' Deal may have a personality poles apart from the famously introverted Ralske, but their vocal pairing is probably the most striking since Cliff teamed up with Van.

"I had a girl's voice in mind from almost the start," rasps Ralske. "Kim was in town working on The Breeders stuff at the time. We were staying in the same flat and she came home at like six in the afternoon from a party she'd been to the previous evening. I just said, Kim, come and sing this in the studio. It took ten minutes and it was perfect. I like those '60s pop records with girl vocals, but Kim is never a backing singer. She's always upfront."

With Kim vying for the Nico role with new UVS girl and fellow Breeder Jo Wiggs, Kurt is well placed to resurrect a latter day Velvets scheme.

In the past Kurt's talked about "using the weight of rock and roll history" and it's a fair bet that he was conjuring some rock-historical swathe with the title of his album, 'Joy 1967-1990' (which was released last spring).

"The album title's just a big joke," he mutters with characteristic diffidence. "It could mean so many things. It almost sounds like a compilation album in a way, and I also think of it as something that could be written on somebody's tombstone. It's not meant to be the rock record to end all rock records!"

Tombstone? Very classic rock-gothic, but why 1967?

"It just sounded good."

AS WITH Ultra Vivid Scene's 1988 eponymous debut album, 'Joy' is essentially nothing new.

Both albums had a late 20th Century recording crispness, but the records worked or failed in their reinvestment of terminal rock clichés. 'Joy' is specifically a homage to Kurt's rock 'n' roll golden years.

Kurt: "I get increasing returns from old records and diminishing returns from new ones. Though you do hear good things now – the last My Bloody Valentine single kinda restored my faith – maybe it'll never be like it was from 1965 to '68. At that time there was so much change going on in the world and in the way people were thinking. That was really reflected in the music: there was a feeling that anything could happen."

"Today people are thinking about gradual change, whereas in the '60s, it was like f**k it, rip everything down. Now if you go around talking about revolution you can't help but sound a little naive."

'Joy' basks in a feeling of resignation, but it still backs this with pop music's classic techniques.

"That came from listening to Beatles records and Byrds records. I just noticed that the way they did pop songs then was much more succinct, maybe a little smaller in scale than the things you hear in the Top 40 now. They didn't have to have big sounds over four and a half minutes like they do now. If the track 'Staring At The Sun' had different sounds on it – it could well be a Byrds song or a Beatles song. Er, that's probably not a very clever thing to say, is it?"

THE FIRST Ultra Vivid Scene album had Kurt detailing sado-masochism as a favourite lyrical theme and naming the Marquis de Sade as a hero.

This interest obviously went back a way. His earlier band Nothing But Happiness recorded on a label called Justine – from the de Sade book – and this fascination was rammed up against a holy host of religious imagery.

The same undercurrents are there on 'Joy', but this time they aren't shoved into the front window.

"The first record was mainly about how a religious attitude is actually close to a sexually masochistic one. The attitude the masochistic has toward his or her master is actually very close to the way a religious person thinks of his or her god."

"This time around the songs sound up, but if you listen to them, quite a few of the lyrics are about suicide, love and sex. I like it when you hear a song and get a certain feeling from the music and have the lyrics going cross ways to that."

'Beauty #2', with a title nicked from Warhol, is a case in point. While 'Three Stars' is another muted return to the first album's S&M strands.

"Some people have said it goes back to the religious stuff – it could be the Holy Trinity – but it's a dirty song. Probably some of the greatest moments of my life have come during sexual experiences. There's not much else that can mean that much."

"All the, Baby, I wanna do it to ya all nite long stuff makes sex sound so banal, so ordinary. Especially on the first records, I wanted to get something of the power dynamic between people – that's much more interesting, much more true to life."

THE THEME of control is reflected in the UVS recording technique.

Although a band plays on the record this time, the instruments – drums and bass particularly – are processed in the studio to give 'Joy' a rigid backbone free from human error.

On record, real abandon is precluded, because although the guitars writhe in a beautifully wrought hail of post-Mary Chain amp bleed they do so within a compartment.

"Yeah, I'd agree that's how we've worked so far. I hope the records we do in the future will be more out of control."

"I knew someone in New York from Haiti who was involved in a voodoo cult. What they do is go into a trance where they pretty much lose control. And the people who are respected are the people who can go into these possession states but still be lucid. The thing is to give yourself up to whatever moves you, but somehow be conscious of what your body is doing. That's an ideal I aspire to, rather than any rock ideal of a performer f**ked up on drugs and falling over."

"The best performers are very uninhibited, but still know what they're doing. Madonna works like that."

Watch out Kim and Jo, with Maddie's fondness for spanking, she too could be up for a job in UVS' blue velvet S&M heaven.