



PERE UBU "NEW PICNIC TIME" (CHR1248)

If you go down to the woods today, you're sure of a big surprise...

The wheel, ironically, has gone full circle. Last November your biographer was despatched to Cleveland (as in "four dead in Ohio") to interview Pere Ubu on their home territory.

The band had just signed to Chrysalis Records and were about to release their second twelve-inch offering, "Dub Housing" - have you noticed how they have an inspired knack for album titles?

Contact was made and it was arranged for everyone to assemble in Allen Ravenstine's flat. The journalist arrived to find the wizard synthesiser player leafing through some rough drafts of advance publicity hand-outs. His demeanor was ruffled to say the least. What he read had - to paraphrase words - scared the hell out of him. It was, you must remember, the period when Cleveland and nearby Akron were deemed to be the hippest environments in the galaxy.

Said Allen: "It was just real pompous stuff. I know that I'm just like everyone else and so I don't like the kind of stuff that makes you out to be a really big thing. It was almost as absurd as 'in 1975 in Cleveland, Ohio, the course of human events was changed'. I don't believe that. And even if it's true, it doesn't have anything to do with me. It's like fate."

And now, of course, said journalist finds himself writing one of those hand-outs to celebrate the release of their third album, "New Picnic Time".



**Chrysalis**



It doesn't do anyone any good to lavish excessively drooling praise on a band when new product is imminent but I can say with complete conviction that Pere Ubu have furnished me with some of my most rewarding hours of listening since their inception in 1975.

The outfit grew out of the semi-legendary Rocket From the Tombs, a Cleveland combo that numbered amongst its ranks Dead Boys Cheetah Chrome and Johnny Blitz. They broke up around September '74 and vocalist David Thomas, who at that time also depped as a rock critic under the bizarre handle of Crocus Behemoth, decided to form a band in order to put out a single.

He recruited Ravenstine, Scott Krauss (drums), Tom Herman (guitar), Peter Laughner (guitar) and Tim Wright (bass). What emerged in December '75 on their own Hearthan label was the six-minute opus, "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo", which was based around the Doolittle Raid in World War II when American bombers flew off with just enough fuel to drop some big ones on Tokyo and then crash-land in China. The cut aimed to re-create the feelings inside the death carriers. Technique was unimportant. What mattered was intuition and the crew made exactly the right noises, painted exactly the right pictures and evoked exactly the right atmosphere. Whoops, am I going over the top already...?

Anyway, after various personnel changes and another single, "Final Solution" (which some have mistakenly interpreted as referring to the Nazi Holocaust), the current line-up of Herman, Krauss, Thomas, Ravenstine and bassist Tony Maimone emerged in the winter of '77 with their third seven-incher, "Street Waves". Two albums followed, "The Modern Dance" and the above mentioned "Dub Housing", and they were both twenty-four carat gems.

We have now come up to the present. A whole host of critics have tried to pin down the mechanism that makes Ubu tick - the name incidentally, if you didn't already know, comes from the grotesque character in a turn-of-the-century play written by Alfred Jarry. They have been described as everything from a 'modern musical Marx Brothers' to 'the empty space between memory and nerve-end...: intense, banal, nonsensical, obscure and obscured, idling, irritating and fragmented."



People tie themselves up in paradoxical and polysyllabic knots in their descriptions of the band but, for me, the uniqueness of Ubu lies in their unflagging ability to surprise, experiment and entertain. In a nutshell, they play music that is both danceable and thought-provoking and "New Picnic Time" is no exception.

They call what they do folk music. As Allen also once explained: "It's in the truest sense of the term, which recalls pioneers coming together and expressing themselves. In some cases they were primitives and in some cases they weren't. That's true of us too. We are a combination of primitives and people who have a much more sophisticated knowledge of music."

But maybe it was David Thomas who best encapsulated the strike force that is Ubu. "The only things I can ever break Ubu down into is (a) we want to try and keep pushing further, reach further than you know you can grab onto, and (b) to never repeat".

The teddy bears won't know what has hit them when the stylus drops down on "New Picnic Time."

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