

PERE UBU

David Thomas: vocals, melodeon, guitar
Jim Jones: guitar, Hammond B3, vocals
Tony Maimone: bass, EML synthesizer
Scott Krauss: drums, percussion, short-wave

Though it may sound like one of (rock) history's great anomalies, post-punk sprang fully-formed from the industrial underbelly of Cleveland before most people had an inkling that punk even existed. **Pere Ubu**, the sires of the genre, continue to make a joyful noise that's every bit as fresh and startling as it was eighteen years ago.

Story of My Life, **Pere Ubu**'s first album for Imago (and ninth studio set overall), like a hall of mirrors, brings all faces of the pioneering "Avant Garage" band into focus simultaneously. From the languid melodicism of the first single "Sleepwalk" to the modern dust bowl tragedy "Heartbreak Garage" (fired by Jim Jones' snaky guitar work) to the stately power of "Last Will & Testament," the sonic vistas are as limitless as they are beautiful.

In the two decades since he fired off his first surreal, angular lyrics as a member of the legendarily volatile Rocket From The Tombs, a band which combined red-hot MC5 assault with cold Teutonic experimentation. David Thomas has cut a figure quite unlike any rock has ever seen. That band mutated into **Pere Ubu** late in 1975, and ever since, the members (while the lineup has seen its share of flux, the current quartet all have roots in the Cleveland music scene of the early '70s) have stayed a challenging but resolute course that's skirted the fringes of popular culture while maintaining a clear vision of what rock ought to be.

"The perfect vision never needs changing," insists Thomas. "It's perfect in and of itself, therefore it will brook no alteration. My musical ideas haven't changed an iota since 1974. I don't particularly see why they should. I haven't stood in one place; I haven't done one thing over and over again; some things have succeeded, some have been better pathways, but all are consistent with the original vision.

"Maybe it would have been much better for us to have quit in anonymity, which is what our intention was," he muses. "We did the first record not as a beginning, but as an ending. We wanted to leave an artifact that someone would discover. We were done -- we were about to move on to real life."

But instead of breaking up with only "Heart of Darkness" as a legacy (one that would still have earned them a spot among rock's seminal influences), these blue-collar visionaries found themselves further and

further removed from the real world or as far removed as possible in a burg like Cleveland. More singles followed -- the dada-surf "Street Waves"; the Seeds-tinged "Cloud 149"-- and then, as fate would have it, they were "discovered" by the world outside through The Modern Dance, an album that sounds as far ahead of its time now as it did 15 years ago. It also gained them a reputation as art-rock oracles, a description that still rankles Thomas.

"We never saw what we were doing as being art, particularly," he insists. "We were always a rock band -- our antecedents were all rock, we constructed music on rock terms. We just happened to have a vision of sound and its place in music, as shaped by the evolution of rock music -- it's quite clear that pure sound is as much a part of the rock vocabulary as a G chord."

Story of My Life proves **Ubu** still believes in sonic chance: The loopy narrative of "Postcard" -- which takes the listener on a cross-country tour using nothing but a few 3-by-5 glossies as passage -- was entirely improvised in one take. Likewise, using the singular **Ubu** method of building songs from the outside in rather than the inside out, they wrote the insistent melody of "Come Home" on the inspiration of some short-wave spy signals picked up by drummer Scott Krauss, who Thomas describes as "a scanner nut."

"It's effectively a return to a way of doing things that we'd given up on Cloudland and Worlds In Collision, which were very worked over albums that took months and months of recording," Thomas says. "We had become deeply dissatisfied with that method and we wanted to record by the seat of our pants again. For the foreseeable future, we've abandoned the experiment of massive amounts of time and extensive operations in the studio in favor of more haphazard means."

Accident, coincidence and fate have always played a part in the lore of **Pere Ubu** -- from billing an early show in Cleveland as Disasto ("so that nothing could go wrong") to reforming in 1987 ("because basically, we looked around and found we *had* reformed"). In listening to the band's groundbreaking late '70s releases -- albums like the dark, dense Dub Housing (1978) and 1979's spacious New Picnic Time -- it's easy to see the impact their found sound/garage rock hybrid had on the face of rock to come.

At the dawn of the new decade, (and abetted by *outré* Texas guitar legend Mayo Thompson) they issued The Art of Walking, which still ranks with rock's most disorienting listening experiences. "It may be one of my favorites," Thomas has said. "But I wouldn't *buy* it or anything!" One year later, after touring in support of their somewhat restrained fifth album, Song of the Bailing Man, **Pere Ubu** disbanded, the members moving on to individual projects.

Following a five-year break (during which Thomas' solo career brought six albums chock-a-block with magical visions of everyday life), **Pere Ubu** reformed -- or more accurately, evolved ever so slightly from the lineup of the Pedestrians, the band that recorded Blame The Messenger.

"Over the course of my solo projects, we were coalescing again and like I've often said it looked like a duck and quacked like a duck, so..." Thomas laughs. "The only question was whether we wanted to take on the mantle and history and take up the language of **Ubu** again. We went to a lot of trouble to create that language and we still thought that way, so it seemed cowardly not to call it **Pere Ubu**."

The first album from the refreshed **Ubu** (Thomas points out that the band had never formally broken up) came in 1987. Fraught with all the restless musical curiosity of their finest work, The Tenement Year proved that their language had lost none of its resonance over the years. It did, however, crystallize enough by the release of Cloudland (1989) and Worlds In Collision (1991), to bare a wide and wonderful pop streak -- one that brought them to the attention of a far broader audience, thanks to songs like the alternative radio staples, "Waiting For Mary" and "I Hear They Smoke The Barbecue."

With its combination of that modern pop sensibility and the aural whimsy that's marked their most singular material, Story Of My Life is a joyful reaffirmation of a band that's stayed remarkable true to its ideals.

"We had the misfortune to have a dream and vision at an early age that was too powerful to shake in older life," is Thomas' explanation for the tenacity of the beast that is **Pere Ubu**. "If you're young enough and if the vision is strong enough, you will never lose it -- like the people who became Communists in the '30s. They had no alternative but to continue.

"With us, it's a similar thing," he says softly. "We saw what rock music should be and could be and nothing less than that would ever do for us. Not that many people that had that dream are still working -- most have disappeared and gone on to other lives. But we're still on that ghost ship, circling like flying dutchmen... sailing the seas until eternity... doomed."

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