

THE YOUNG GODS Bio 2010

Twenty five years and still no sign of wearing out. However youthful and godlike your name claims you are, it is still quite an impressive feat. Bigger, stronger, higher, the Young Gods chose a manic pace five years ago and they are taking no break in 2010. Never let routine get the best of you, always go forward, this is the new motto of the Swiss trio, now a quartet since Vincent Hänni, the creative sidekick of many years, has become a full time member. Let us be clear, 2010 is going to be quite the year in the band's prolific history; not only because of their fascinating new album („Everybody Knows“) but also because of the audio-video boxset of their recent and diverse sonic adventures. Their twentieth anniversary, celebrated on the prestigious stage of the Montreux Jazz Festival two nights in a row with, amongst others, the participation of a symphonic orchestra, marked the beginning of a frantic course of action for the band. After a best of ("XX Years 1985-2005" packed with surprises) and a musical magazine soundtrack for Truce Diaries, they went straight into the excellent "Super Ready / Fragmenté" album, where they bravely linked psychedelic experimentations with brutal punk abandon. Even then, the biggest shocks were to come on stage. The Young Gods took their audiences on a faux-acoustic musical journey, creating in the same breath one of their most impressive albums: the timeless "Knock On Wood". Once again, they turned the whole musical formula on its back and, for one mythical show at Les Eurockéennes, unleashed their collaboration with electro hip-hop pioneers Dälek, followed closely with the Barbouze De Chez Fior string quartet performances and finishing the collaborative trilogy with Koch-Schuetz-Studer ("More To Come" in 2010). There was also the long running Woodstock project, a sound and vision performance played first for the Fête de la Musique in Geneva and later showed all around Europe for the fortieth anniversary of the legendary hippie gathering. On a few occasions, they were joined on stage by Richie Havens himself, for a moving performance of the classic "Freedom" that said a lot about the shifting evolving career that our Swiss industrial heroes have crafted for themselves since the early eighties. Twenty five years later, the Young Gods are still part of this never-ending dream, still running down many of the adventurous paths that electric music has taken and still crucial to most of these fascinating directions, past and future.

20 years since The Young Gods formed, you might have expected the rest of the rock world to have caught up with them. Instead, it has receded, as if in fear of the 21st century, into the retro, the kitsch, the neo-conservative, the corporate facsimile of yesteryear. The Young Gods are further ahead than ever.

By the early Eighties, Franz Treichler was already bored with conventional rock music, the so-called 'new wave'. He was an excellent guitarist, classically trained but he lay aside the instrument and instead started to toy with a device new to the market - the sampler.

When The Young Gods formed in 1985, in Switzerland (home also to fellow avant garde pioneers the Dadaists), samplers were not widely heard of. However, by 1986, they were all over the pop marketplace, a source of controversy and technological fascination as they enabled you to plunder from pop and rock history. Still, in the hands of most artists, samplers were used in a depressingly non-futuristic way - "quoting" the classic sounds and beats of old hands like James Brown and Led Zeppelin with a sort of fatigued irony, as if to suggest there was nothing new under the sun, nothing left to do in rock but refer back to a lost, golden age.

No such defeatism for The Young Gods. They used samplers in a radically different way - to reconfigure and reinfuse rock, recycling its dead matter as a means to create new shapes, fresh fire. Their line-up was as follows; Franz Treichler (vocals), Cesare Pizzi (sampler), Frank Bagnoud (drums). This was unheard of. So, while their opening broadside, "Envoyé", though it sounds like quintessential, high octane rock music is, on closer inspection, the product of machine loops rather

than handmade riffs. This was a new, modernistic version of rock, brilliantly synthetic, capable of bending and discharging, fading and glowing, disintegrating and reintegrating, in a manner unknown to the traditional punk or metal guitarist.

With their first two albums *The Young Gods* (voted album of the year by *Melody Maker* in 1987) and its follow-up, 1989's *L'Eau Rouge*, *The Young Gods* wrought a noisy yet unheard sonic revolution. It wasn't just the way they recycled and bent new shapes from the discarded metal of rock's scrapheap (from *Motorhead* to Gary Glitter, whose "Hello, Hello, I'm Back Again" they memorably covered on their debut album). It was also their borrowings from classical music, which they used, not in the banal manner of an *ELO* or *Deep Purple*, hoping some of its pomp and prestige would rub off. Rather, they ripped away chunks of its more clamorous moments. So, on *L'Eau Rouge*'s "La Fille De La Mort", which begins with what sounds like a wheezy, grinding organ, before stormclouds gather and an excerpt from Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 5* breaks like a looped thunderclap. All this, plus Treichler's unabashedly elemental lyrics, which cite the moon, the sun, the ocean in all of their movements and arcs, add to the sense of a music that is imperishable, indelibly inscribed in the granite like the stick figures that were their album cover's motif, epic, both pre-and-post rock history. As *L'Eau Rouge* demonstrates, this was a music that wanted not to destroy rock but warp and melt it, rediscover its liquid essence. One discernible 'quote' does burn through the album's title track; a snatch from the raging, incandescent fadeout of Jimi Hendrix's "House Burning Down".

While in the late Eighties the likes of *U2* were paying reverential but uninspired homage to Americana with the double album *Rattle & Hum*. With projects like 1991's *Play Kurt Weill*, however, *The Young Gods* were reintroducing a sense of Europe's great musical wellsprings. Their cover versions of songs like "Mackie Messer" and "September Song" were like sonic cubism, enabling the listener to rediscover these subversive mock-cabaret ditties from new angles.

It was in 1992 and *TV Sky*, however, that *The Young Gods* made their long-deserved commercial breakthrough, particularly in America. Their decision to sing in English undoubtedly helped them but this was no "sellout". Though *The Young Gods* were never Goths, the more adventurous of that black clad wing did embrace them; meanwhile, a growing thirst for so-called industrial music, much of it inspired by *The Gods* (*Nine Inch Nails* in particular) meant that they now attracted a wider audience.

By now Cesare Pizzi and Frank Bagnoud had departed, replaced by Al Comet and Use Hiestand. The Gods' *modus operandi* did not fundamentally change. But *TV Sky* is more recognisably in the urban traditions of rock than previous offerings - like *Suicide*, they sound like they've got right down to the genre's basic, oil-stained, motor pulse. But there are still huge vistas and digressions for those who dare follow, like the 20 minute "Summer Eyes", which re-views the desert Prog terrain of a *Pink Floyd* through a cracked, modernist lens. What was most gratifying about this period was seeing the band perform to large, packed houses. Despite the computer-generated element of their music, *The Young Gods*, as their two live albums attest are a band to be experienced in the flesh, in their element. (This writer has a photo of himself after a *Young Gods* gig in a state of sodden bliss, shirt half ripped off!).

Come the mid-Nineties and *The Young Gods* developed their (always strong) spatial awareness, began to investigate the "ambient" and beyond. Check "Moon Revolutions" on 1995's *Only Heaven*, one of their greatest, extended works. It kicks in with a backward riff, a sped-up nod to Hendrix's "Are You Experienced", as sampled guitar snakes up and spurts volleys of lava into the air. Then, a mid-section, which hovers like some engine-less, metal condor high, high above the Andes, before once again the almost-tribal drums kick in and the track eventually blazes itself out. "Moon Revolutions" measures the expanse of *The Young Gods*' range - from the very bone marrow of the rock riff to the outermost reaches of orbit.

A further Nineties album, *Heaven Deconstruction* would see *The Young Gods* meander further into ambient, while on the assured *Second Nature*, Franz Treichler would come upon a keynote concept, that "Lucidogen", a fictional drug which doesn't render people comatose or enable them to escape from life but rather gifts them with hyperconsciousness, enabling them to see life for what it is. By now, Al Comet and additional member Bernard Trontin were more involved in the compositional side of the *Young Gods*, their input and exchange of ideas subtly altering and upgrading the fabric of the sound.

Such is *The Young Gods*'s present-day take on ambient, as evinced on their most recent album, *Music For Artificial Clouds*, with its Hubble Telescope-like visions of a fictional beyond. Ambient isn't a soothing, bubblebath New Age snooze, nor is "nature" something to drift passively along to, as if dozing in a boat. As *The Young Gods* showed when they first set out 20 years ago, the great thing is not merely to accept the dead facts of things as they are but to engage, to use machinery to bend, "artificially" contrive and reshape the "natural" into the ideals posited by the imagination. Long may they carry on doing so.