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The first hardcore punk band to record a John Peel session

June 1st, 2007 by Ed

Andrew Fryer's notes from the 1990's Clay reissues CDs: Disc 1

I first spoke to Tommy Stupid sometime in October 1984, when he rang to ask me, 'Do you do Punk? We're called The Stupids, can we come and record at Treetop Avenue?'. 'You can come' I replied, 'just so long as you don't smash the place up!'. So they came - and smashed the place up. (In fact the ceiling fell down after several sessions of Tommy's drumming, and anyway, as the Captain had already broken the bathroom sink trying to wash both feet at once, I was getting good at DIY).

The Stupids arrived at 10am on a Sunday morning (24th Oct), with a guitar, a bass, and a borrowed Marshall 100, and proceeded to try out every instrument in the studio. Wolfie (who went on to form Perfect Daze with Lawrence Bell, founder of Domino Records, and then Lovejunk with Toad from The Space Maggots) reckoned he could play the violin, and Marty the Maltese percussion (check out the intro to Elephant Man), but they eventually got round to playing their own instruments. A few sessions later they were to swap instruments completely and record 17 tracks as 'The Coolest Retards' (sadly, unreleased).

There is a rumour that Tommy learned the drums playing along to Motorhead Lps at 45rpm, but what amazed me about the Stupids was the ability of Marty and Wolfie to keep up with Tommy, and actually land on the same chord at the same time. Peter Davidson (from The Addicts) who had come with them for their first session, kept saying 'You're playing too fast, try it slower'. But they wouldn't listen. If they couldn't get it right they just played it faster and faster until it was right.

For the second session a week or so later (3/4th Nov) my parents (whose house the studio was in) locked themselves in the living room with the telly up loud, while the remaining tracks for the 'Leave Your Ears Behind' cassette were 'committed' to tape. This cassette was mainly used for swaps through fanzines such as 'Punk Lives' but it was quickly discovered by Children Of The Revolution who released it (minus 4 tracks) as the Violent Nun E.P. (So called because of the sleeve photo of a nun pushing a policeman during the Pope's visit to Ireland), this was described by John Peel as 'tolerably brief', but later as 'tolerably collectable'.

Two months later the Stupids were back to record a flexi disc, the 'Feedback Session', and the 1st track of the Coolest Retards - and it wasn't until a year later (12/13th Oct 1985) that their 1st album 'Peruvian Vacation' came to be produced. By then there was a fourth member in the band, Ed Shred (went on to form Sink), who I first saw trying to skateboard up the stairs to the studio. Ed played guitar, wrote lyrics and wore shorts.

The best track on the album for me is 'Always Never Fun' which uses an electric drill instead of a lead guitar solo. This was also noticed by the music press. Peruvian Vacation was reviewed in Sounds (3rd May 1986) as 'a torrent of audio abuse' (4 stars) and in Melody Maker (7th June) as 'a hardcore classic'. It reached number eleven in the NME indie charts. The Stupids were no longer merely stupid - people actually liked them.

Andrew Fryer 1993

Andrew Fryer's notes from the 1990's Clay reissues CDs: Disc 2

After a peaceful interval of eight months, I received another telephone call from Tommy Stupid, 'Yah dude, ride the ramp, we wanna record another album', he said (or words to that effect). I informed my parents - who immediately booked a holiday and quickly put the finishing touches to the plasterwork on their bedroom ceiling.

Retard Picnic was recorded in two sessions. The first, on the 8th June 1986, was a marathon 24 song thrash - all completed in 12 hours. Of course, four were released as the 'Stupid Flexi', two actually made it to the final album ('All I Wanna' and 'Yah Dude') thirteen were for the (unreleased) 'Coolest Retard EP' and five were (until now) consigned to the dustbin of music history - my bedroom.

The second session took place three weeks later (on the 29th of June) and gave me time to try out the new mega digital reverb unit I had just bought. The album opens with a group of geeks and retards going on a picnic, and ends with them joining the Sesame Street song - an effect achieved by putting the voices of Tommy, Marty, Wolfie and Ed through the reverb unit and pressing all of its buttons at once. This technological leap meant also that the drums could be recorded with two different types of reverb! a major advance, giving the overall sound an extra clarity and punch. The down side was, of course, the necessary increase in recording costs - I mean we were into double figures here!

There is a lot of talking (and shouting) on 'Retard Picnic' and I am sure this was due partly to the increasing presence of the irrepressible Ed Shred. As well as singing (backing vocals) he plays bass on a few tracks and in fact took over as bassist when Wolfie left to join Perfect Daze. The talking in the gaps between tracks had become a kind of trademark of The Stupids. The best examples are the so-called 'Feedback Sessions'. This was recorded before 'Peruvian Vacation' (3rd Jan 1985) and was intended to be an album (never released) 'Mr Adult' The multitrack tape for this session had already been used to record a funk band from Chelmsford (who shall remain nameless) and we were wiping as we went along. This meant that at the end of each Stupids' take, the funk band started up. Tommy and Co. just pretended that they were at a disco and improvised silly disco scenes on the spot.

'Retard Picnic' was greeted by the music press with critical acclaim equal to that of 'Peruvian Vacation' 'a smouldering bomb - fire of white noise!', said Sounds and gave it four stars. A certain London based record label also took notice (Vinyl Solutions) - The Stupids were about to break out of Ipswich and hit the big city...

Andrew Fryer 1993