

Notes on a ‘Masterpiece’

by Ian Critchley

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Notes on a ‘Masterpiece’

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Regular readers of this blog (hello Mum!) will know I have an eclectic taste in all things cultural. I’m just as likely to talk about the latest goings-on in the world of Manga as I am the new ballet at Sadler’s Wells. But despite the fact that I’ve long dabbled in song-writing, it’s rare I discuss music. Today, though, I’m going to make an exception for *Whistling in the Dark*, the new album by indie flavour of the month Christ’s Cavalcade.

[I could say more about my song-writing, I suppose, though probably nobody’s interested]

Some people, including the band’s lead singer, Aaron Futura, have labelled the album a ‘masterpiece’. I’ve always shied away from using the word myself – it seems hyperbolic to me, if not a bit unseemly. But it’s fair to say the album has at least four songs that are bona fide bangers. In particular, the second track and first single, ‘Mona Lisa’s Lips’, is two minutes, thirty-four seconds [check] of sheer

rock'n'roll bedlam, the jangly guitars melding perfectly with the rhythm section, the lyrics a howl of sweet anguish.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

[cut this?]

Let's delve into the band's background. *Whistling in the Dark* is their third album, following *Barking at the Moon* and *Phew! It's Christ's Cavalcade*. Formed at school in Barking, Essex [give name of school?], the band were originally a five-piece before deciding to ditch the keyboard player and settling on their line-up: Aaron Futura on vocals, Sam Drinkwater on lead guitar, bassist Lenny 'Lenners' Cranbrook, and Squid Brakes on drums.

[add note here that Squid Brakes is not his real name? Or is it obvious?]

The band's moniker, incidentally, has nothing to do with Jesus or Christianity or religion of any sort. Futura once explained it came from an exclamation: 'My dad

used to say it, trying to avoid swearing. I'd often hear him shouting it when he was trying to do a bit of tricky DIY. I thought it had a certain ring to it. We put it to a vote – this was still when our keyboardist was with us – and it came out four to one in favour. That's democracy.'

[am I doing sources of quotes? Don't want this to turn into some kind of academic tract]

[something about how they got signed here – the flukey convo with the bloke in the pub]

Barking at the Moon was a terrible flop. You might recall the cover photo – the four of them looking up and 'howling' in front of the 'Welcome to Barking' sign. Rumour has it they had to be talked down from their original idea of mooning at the camera, but the final version wasn't much better. Pretty nonsensical, in fact. A short *NME* review called the album 'derivative', and indeed its debt to the Arctic Monkeys was obvious. By Futura's own admission, the album sold almost no copies at all, and they came close to being dropped by their label before they'd really got going.

But they were on a two-album contract and the label felt they had to fulfil their part

of the bargain, so the band holed themselves up at Sam's uncle's place in Redbridge to work on the songs that would eventually form *Phew! It's Christ's Cavalcade*.

I've often thought the title was a recognition of how relieved they all felt at finally getting this album finished, though Lenny maintains it was imagining how their fans would react upon learning there was a new album. Given they barely had any 'fans' at that stage, this seems at best wishful thinking and at worst completely unfounded bullshit.

[overlong sentences – edit.

And cut the swearing? Don't want CommonSenseCommentator on at me again]

If anything, this album performed even worse than *Barking*, and its failure led to the band being dropped. It looked all over for the floundering foursome, and although they didn't officially split, they took an indefinite hiatus. Squid went back to his old supermarket job and didn't speak to the rest of the band for months. Sam and Lenny were on the dole and could often be seen nursing a pint for hours on end in their local. Futura landed on his feet, suited and booted at his dad's advertising firm.

[why not call it what it is: nepotism. He's never had to worry about anything]

Of the four of them, Sam was the one with the real talent. He could have gone solo and left the rest of the band in his wake. He'd been the only one against getting rid of the keyboard player and he always seemed an awkward fit. But he was too quiet, too easily cowed by the others. And Futura wasn't done with Christ's Cavalcade. Bored rigid by the nine-to-five of the advertising job, he started to go through his old notebooks in search of lyrical fragments, snatches of melody, anything that could, as he put it, 'reignite the old creativity'.

[What the fuck am I doing?]

It paid off, big time. *Whistling in the Dark* has been called 'the future of indie' and

Blah, blah, blah.

Just come out and fucking say it. Don't pretend this is some kind of review.

All right then. In reality, what's happened is that Aaron Fuckhead Futura has nicked all my ideas. Four of those songs – yeah, including 'Mona Lisa's Lips' – are mine. Oh, well, I suppose he did change one or two words, as if that's going to make the songs his. But the rest of the lyrics, and the hooks, and the bridges – I came up with all of those when we were still at school. He must have recorded me playing them on the keyboard somehow. And when he was desperate – *desperate* – after the shitshow of those first two albums, he must've have thought, *I know, maybe there's something in old Dazza's back catalogue I can use*. When at the time, he said – and I quote – 'This is all crap, Daz.'

I bet he doesn't even know the meaning of the word 'plagiarism', the fuckwit. But he's going to find out soon enough, cos I'm going to sue his fucking arse. He'll deny it all, of course he will, but I must have something that'll prove I'm right. I'll find it, you see if I don't.

Either that, or I'll kill the bastard.



Ian Critchley is a freelance editor and journalist. His fiction has been published in several journals and anthologies, including *Neonlit: Time Out Book of New Writing, Volume 2*, *The Mechanics Institute Review #15*, *Structo*, *Lighthouse*, *Litro* and *Storgy*. He has won both the Hammond House International Literary Prize and the HISSAC Short Story Prize, and been shortlisted for the Exeter, H.G. Wells, and Plaza short story competitions. His journalism has appeared in the *Sunday Times*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *Literary Review*. He can be found on Twitter @iancritchley4, and his website is iancritchley.wordpress.com.