Yob Funk Theory

"Love, authenticity and energy" — what Shriekback say:

It's 9.30pm on a Friday night, I'm sitting at desk with phone, currently missing Goblin Mix at the Windsor. Barry Andrews, on the other hand, is on the other side of the world and has just risen to greet the day. Hasn't even had a cup of tea.

Says something for the man, then, that he's affable and co-operative. Chooses his words well, enunciates the good ones in the manner of a man who likes words. Sense of humour, appreciates the twin edge of a good adjective.

He is, of course, keyboard player for Shriekback, the thinking person's supergroup that formed in 1981 from the debris of several other lineups. Andrews left XTC in 1979 and was for a time part of Robert Fripp's short-lived League Of Gentlemen and his own rather curious Restaurant For Dogs, before meeting up with bassman Dave Allen (just ex Gang Of Four) and guitarist Carl Marsh for what was originally to be a shortterm project in early 1981. Drummer Martyn Baker took the oath in 1984.

Contractual hassles mean we'll never get last year's Jam Science LP but Andrews doesn't see much of a gulf between the new one, Oil and Gold, and the last Shriekback album released here, Care:

"I think, in a way, it's the same kind of album as Care, whereas Jam Science was a bit of a mutant," he explains.

The sound is different, however; altogether

"Yeah, we've just been learning more about the tools of the trade really. So, if you like, Oil and Gold is Care moved on a little bit, it's made by people who know what they're doing a bit more

Since Care, the band has shifted from ill-fated indie Y records to a position under the wing of Arista Records. Did that mean a move to expensive, state-of-the-art studios? (Care was recorded in 19 days at a small 16-track studio.)

"This album was mixed in expensive studios, because we felt that that justified the cost, using a computer desk. But it was actually recorded fairly cheaply — although it was incredibly expensive in the end because we ran over quite a

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lot — but the actual studios were not that expensive. We wanted to use the money on getting in expensive people, and we thought that as long as everything goes down on tape cleanly it doesn't matter very much."

One of the first impressions from Oil and Gold is that it would sound great on a big sound sys-



Shriekback (L-R): Dave Allen, Martyn Baker, Barry Andrews, Carl Marsh.

tem, really loud, but Andrews claims it wasn't envisaged that way.

'It was actually mixed on little hi-fi speakers. The theory behind that of course is that if it works on little ones it should sound great on big ones. But it's not a 'play lou" record particularly.

The stuff on the album does sound as if it

must be a lot of fun live ...
"I'm glad you said that," Andrews smiles back over the phone, warming to the subject. "I think the live band is really one of the better things about this year. We've just put together an eightpiece live band — the four Shrieks plus two girl singers, a guitar player and a keyboard player who also plays guitar. Quite a formidable array of forces. We did these gigs in London which were absolutely wonderful — and I think it's only scratching the surface of what we're capable of. So by the time we get to you, which should be the end of the year with any luck, it should be a finely-honed fighting machine."

Shriekback do not use sequencers or computers when they play live:

"Don't believe in 'em! It's obvious really, Martin's drumming is the heartbeat and depart from that and you're in big trouble. So we just let him get

Has the tendency for people to nail them-selves down with electronic rhythms had a

detrimental affect on music?

on with it.'

"I don't know really. If it's a natural kind of expression to you, then that's fine. I mean, there's a place in the heart for those kind of things -I personally don't get any excitement out of doing it any more, it's finished. On this last album we really completed a two year romance with a drum computer and I just feel that's behind us now, we're not interested in the digital pulse any

"For me, certain kinds of real drumming are far more interesting — and Martin's is one of the kinds of drumming I find very exciting. I like the variables, there's such a lot more richness to it than boom-krr boom-boom-krr ... I suppose also the hip-hop thing came along and really took that as far as it could go in a way. Like 'Okay, this is mechanical and pure, no imperfections — what do you think?' And having said that there wasn't a lot more to say about purity and lack of imperfection.

Would Shriekback object to being called "white

Laughter: "Call it what you like! We call it 'yob funk' — funk as played by noisy young herberts. I think actually 'funk' in a way is a bit of a red herring with it. It's one of the areas we dabble in but I don't think it's the actual core of the band. I think in a way the spirit of rock 'n' roll is more central to it. The big, noisy kind of 'fuck you!' thing is more it than the quite subtle thing which is funk. I suppose we would try and appeal to the body in that way

On the other hand, Shriekback have generally been publicly perceived as intellectuals or "serious" musicians

"Yeah, that's right, you bet (laughs). We just go as far as we can with the things we've got really. And if that be arty or intellectual then so be it."

Andrews has been quoted as saying that when Shriekback was formed, the central aim was to "express love, authenticity and energy" - an in-

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terestingly non-musical way for musicians to phrase their objectives.

"Yeah, I hadn't thought about that for a long time actually," Andrews admits. "But I think that's true, I'll stand by it. I think it's good not to get too bogged down in the day-to-day muso-ness of it all. To retain this kind of overview of what you're actually doing it for, which on those long, dark nights is a good thing to have."

Would you say you believed in music for its own sake, or should it evoke something? Songs on the album like 'Nemesis' and 'Hammerheads' carry a pretty definite political message, rather than just being pieces of music

"I think what those songs are meant to evoke lyrically is very much part of the overall musical thing we wanted to have happen on it. It's not separate any more than the sound of the snare drum is separate. It's all one thing. Like the idea of 'Hammerheads' was to do something that would sound sort of heroic and taking itself very seriously like a political anthem or something, yet completely ridiculous at the same time, in the same way that those kind of things are."

And even by the fact that it is "body music" it encourages the listener to do something?

'Yeah, I think it's got to work in that way really, before it does anything else. It's got to hit you with something that's very physical — and then if you choose you can thread your way through the Shriekback labyrinth of meaning," he laughs.

Do you think it will get played in dance clubs? "It would make me very happy if it was. I think there are three or four tracks on it that are eminently suitable for playing to the drug-crazed vouth of Auckland."

One of the things that has always stopped Shriekback from being quite as good an actuality as they are an idea is the generally dry vocal delivery, courtesy Andrews and Marsh. Not natural singers, they've a tendency to enunciate while the music wails ... but Barry Andrews has no thoughts of bringing in an outside lead vocalist for a track or two.

"I think Carl and I are far too huge egomaniacs for that to happen. And we're interested in getting good at it really. And also on this album we've worked very much within our limits. Neither of us are fantastically gifted vocalists, so we've tended to work within our limits and do what we do as well as we possibly can, just really getting by by having it 100 per cent. To me that works I don't think there's a vocal on this album that

"But I see how you can say that sort of thing but 'Nemesis' and 'Malaria' are quite songy really, we were bellowing along — tunes and all that. Whereas some of the quieter ones that I sing, I'll get close to the mike and whisper it, so CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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