

OUR POOL RULES



PHOTO BY ANGELA JONASSON

Dinosaur Jnr (L-R) Donna, J. Mascis and Murph.

Leapin' Lizards

Dinosaur Jnr

Dinosaur Junior have made it all the way from Amherst, Massachusetts to Great North Road, and look poised to head right back again, sit down, and think things over.

J Mascis, guitar noise godhead for the over-ripe 90s, is sprawled in the darkest corner of the dingiest hotel room in all Grey Lynn. "Are those new DMs?" he mutters at my feet, meaning "Did mommy pay for them?" This turns out to be the most animated he gets during the whole interview, but before you decide that there's anything unusually laid back about that, just think of any local band who've tried to (not) talk about their music on radio or TV in the last five years.

J would make a great CV presenter, actually. The endless minutes Larnie and Robert usually spend in paroxysms of giggling inanity would be used up in the time it would take J to draw "Here's... another... clip." Fortunately drummer Murph and new bassist Donna (also of the Screaming Trees) are also in the room, and although they're not interested in spouting media-friendly platitudes they're articulate and easy to talk to.

Some questions, however, can only be answered by J. For instance, surely the world has a right to know whether he's considered running for the presidency of the USA after being nominated by no less a political kingmaker than Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth. When the idea is put to him, J just laughs momentarily and exhales an almost inaudible "No." Then there's the other question on everybody's lips: what kind of wah-wah pedal does J use? This time multiple words are forthcoming: "A Dunlop Cry-Baby — the generic wah-wah pedal."

This descent into darkest muso-dom sets off a lengthy digression between J and Donna about "that pedal" which turns out, at

the Powerstation, to be a particularly extreme phaser not heard on record since 'Forget The Swan' on the band's debut LP.

Dinosaur Jnr were formed as Dinosaur a few years ago in Amherst, Massachusetts, a small university town in America's north-east. J and original bassist Lou Barlow had been playing guitar and drums respectively in a Minor Threat / Rudiimentary Peni influenced group called Deep Wound, but one day something moved J to grow his hair long and buy the Dunlop Cry-Baby. They switched to their current instruments, recruited Pat Murphy on drums and the most sweeping, spiralling sound to ever be falsely labelled "hardcore" was born.

Since then they've kicked out Lou and been forced by a bunch of outstandingly irrelevant hippies called the Dinosaurs to add "Jnr" to their name, but the rush of blood to every part of the body sonic swoon that made them famous has remained. The real change, according to J, has been crawling from the closets of an army of sycophants back home.

"People who always hated us try and turn around and talk to us to see if they can get a record out of us or somethin'. They're bummed that they weren't nice to us years ago 'cause now they want our help but we just don't care, really, we don't wanna give them any. It kind of makes me sick really."

J is also "kind of sick" of the Amherst atmosphere, as he thinks "anyone would be after living there for a long time," but Murph likes it because he "doesn't really know anyone there now". He likes visiting big cities but wouldn't want to live

away from his "fresh air and greenness" for long. Donna does live in a big city: San Francisco, roughly 2,800 miles away from the rest of the band, and whether for this or some other reason she's not necessarily a permanent fixture in the line-up. This tour is seen as "a kind of try-out" for the bass-player and at least one prominent Auckland radio announcer has already proclaimed undying love. Murph makes it quite clear that Dinosaur Jnr and "permanent fixture" are almost mutually exclusive concepts. "We don't have any plans for the future as far as writing new stuff or recording goes. We don't really know what we're gonna be doing." The idea of the work ethic applied to music, of playing huge stadia night after night just so more people can see them doesn't hold any appeal for them whatsoever. "I just saw the Pixies at a stadium somewhere," says J, "And they were horrible."

"I hate big shows like that," adds Murph. "I hate to see them and I hate to play them. But unfortunately it's one of the only ways bands can make any money."

Do they hate the business the more they see of it, or is it possible to build up a sort of numb tolerance?

"No, it's evil!" expounds Murph. "Rock is evil! Get a job and a haircut. Your parents were right."

So if devil music isn't the be-all and end-all of life, what else could the future hold for the disparate thirds of Dinosaur Jnr? Have any of them ever done anything they like better than, er, rocking?

"Yeah, I want to be a professional badminton player," J smirks, a mind boggling thought on par with Gibby Haynes joining the Darling Buds or a Flying Nun artist winning a New Zealand music award. "Actually, I've never really had a regular job so I don't know. Donna has a regular job. Do you like it better than touring?"

"No way!" Ten minutes later J changes his ambition, decides that he wants to take up acting, become part of the Brat Pack. Murph, meanwhile, wants to go into Shakespearian theatre. We probably won't even believe it when we see it.

Trying to ask Dinosaur Jnr earnest questions about the music they play is not a recommended pastime. J does manage to get across that he doesn't have much time for the Bob Dylan / Bob Mould acoustic singer-songwriter ethic, but when I try and ask him something about tension and catharsis he just shoots me a look that loses itself somewhere in the gulf between withering and withered and says, "Well, that one just sailed over my head."

Understandably, the band don't want to talk about "influences", especially not N.I.Y...g, but at the moment they've been listening to My Bloody Valentine, Nirvana, Black Sabbath and Niggers With Attitude. They acknowledge that the latter might offend some people, something they think the likes of GG Allin and Killdozer can't hope to do anymore. Mention of Killdozer brings J to frighten all present by threatening to play a Lynyrd Skynyrd tape he has with him, but Murph mercifully changes the subject, steering the conversation towards Johnny Rotten, and revealing acute perception by saying that Public Image Limited have turned into Adam and the Ants.

Dinosaur Jnr aren't about words. J insists that the lyrics are "the least important thing" in his songs, and that even then his half-heard tricks of the language are more significant than any "content". If they're not overflowing with any shrink-wrapped, pre-italicised quotable quotes, it's for the same reason. Their genius, as anyone who was at the Powerstation on October 4 will know, is most evident when words fail them, when all sense of rhyme and reason is overwhelmed in the inarticulate skyward surge of the most heavenly guitars that never left the earth.

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