

Big Jim

The Jesus & Mary Chain

The Jesus And Mary Chain — a couple of Scottish boys called Reid who are not the Proclaimers and who just might be the only lasting success story thrown up by the English indie rock ghetto this decade? Their new LP *Automatic*, seems like a confident stab at cementing the Reid bros' position as a right royal pain in the UK charts, a reflection of the star quality they've shown all the way down their road to fame.

"In this grey street, they shone like sun gods. They didn't seem human, they were like creatures off another planet, impossible to reach or understand but most exotic, most beautiful in their ugliness."

— *Nik Cohn on the Rolling Stones, 1965.*

"I might have spots on my face and might not be the most glamorous looking guy in the world, but that's what we're getting at. You don't need to change your underwear to be a sex symbol."

— *Jim Reid on the Jesus And Mary Chain, 1989.*

The Rolling Stones set the 60s alight. They were the archetypal Band That Every Mother Hates—brash, loud and snotty. Andrew Loog Oldham, their infamous manager, amplified the young Stones' latent anti-establishment traits simply because there wasn't enough space for another Fab Four. Yeah—everybody loved the Beatles, but Oldham wanted The Kids, and for a while, The Kids only wanted the Stones. The band might have stolen all their licks off black American musicians, from Robert Johnson's 'Love In Vain' to Marvin Gaye's 'Can I

Get A Witness', but they were good and they were enormously popular. Unfortunately, they're still going strong.

The Jesus And Mary Chain turned up in 1984 as the Best New Band Since The Sex Pistols. They too had a manager to thank for the initial effect that they had on the rock industry—Alan McGhee, who owned their first record company, Creation—but, like the Stones, they were to deliver beyond the hype.

By the end of 1985, the Jesus And Mary Chain had a new title under their belt, that of Best Debut LP Since *Never Mind The Bollocks* for their *Psychocandy* album. They had made a record that matched their pop sensibilities and coy, barely-enunciated melodies to feedback, noise and intensity. Like the Stones and the Sex Pistols (with Malcolm McLaren as their svengali), the Jesus And Mary Chain excite The Kids, they don't really scare them, and that's the trick that's got them into the charts with every record since *Psychocandy*. The Reid bros' have stolen all their licks too—mostly from Velvet Underground and The Beach Boys, but one or two good ones from Marc Bolan and even, on their new LP, a song that could be an early Stones' 'Route 66'. Don't forget, though (as anyone who saw them live last year shouldn't) that it's all good fun and all just pop music.

A Bit of Noise

Darklands, the studio LP that followed *Psychocandy*, had seen the Reids strip away most of their "sinister" feel, but it wasn't really happening. The new LP, *Automatic* takes its cue from last year's 'Sidewalking' single. It's just Jim and



William and a drum machine, but it rocks. Like the accompanying press says: "more power, more drive, more assurance."

"The last record that we do is always the closest thing to what we want to be," says Jim Reid, taking a break in London after the band's first UK tour in two years. "The most recent record is always exactly what we're into right now really. I'm sure that in a year's time *Automatic* won't satisfy us anymore, but that's the reason why you keep making records."

He agrees with the "back to their roots" description that *RILU*'s Matthew Hyland tagged to the album:

"There is a bit of that really. We did deliberately try and get back into a bit of noise. There's been so much said about the record that I can't really say—I think people have just said the opposite in this country! I think it's rock n' roll too, but there's a bit of dance music influence in their somewhere—'Take It' and 'UV Ray'—well, it was supposed to be anyway, but nobody seems to have picked up on it."

Why dance music?

"I don't like to go on about it 'cos

everybody goes on about dance music at the moment, and you feel a bit like you're jumping on the bandwagon. But I like De La Soul, S-Express—mostly the popular stuff. I think dance music's like everything else though, most of it is shit and the only good stuff is the stuff that surfaces."

But you're not looking to gain any sort of credibility with the dance crowd?

"Not at all, 'cos people who are into dance music are incredibly snobbish about it. They tend to listen to dance music and nothing else and that's just the way it is. I like a lot of what goes on in dance music, but it depresses the shit out of me in some ways—like right now, everybody over here is making dance music and they're basically not saying anything. I've never seen so many records that are released at the same time all singing about dancing. 'Cos right down to it, who gives a fuck about dancing? The music is good, the rhythm is interesting, but all these people just singing about the dancefloor makes me sick. It's all these people with great ideas but nothing to say."

Perhaps the people aren't prepared to look for that dance stuff from the Jesus And Mary Chain?

"People make too much of a big deal about influences. You can't read a Jesus And Mary Chain review without reading Phil Spector's name in there somewhere and that really irritates the shit out of me, to be honest. It's totally unnecessary and absolute laziness on the part of the person who is gonna write the review."

The Beach Boys...?

"Yeah, then again they'll say we sound like the Beach Boys. But the truth is I don't know much about Brian Wilson. I don't know much about him at all except that he gave all of his royalties away to some fucking psychiatrist. It doesn't sound like a smart idea to me. I think Brian Wilson is one of those people that, like just about everything else, was probably overrated. I was never a Beach Boys fan and I'm not really a big Brian Wilson fan—and I'm not just saying that either, it's the truth of the matter. The only reason we've ever done Beach Boys songs is that we didn't think they were done very well at the time. Great songs that were done really badly, and we thought we'd do them in our style. We'd never cover a song that we didn't think we could add something to."

A Nasty Rash

"All this 'influence' stuff really does stem from a couple of years ago when we did a *Melody Maker* interview and it was supposed to be about choosing your heroes and your favourite records. It was supposed to be like half a page inside, like one of those small features. We got drunk with the journalist and spent hours talking about Bob Dylan and Iggy Pop and all that stuff, and it ended up as the cover story. They put it on the cover and we came across as the biggest music fans in the business. Ever since then we've never heard the end of it, we've been 'Phil Spector this' and 'Scott Walker that' and it just gets a

bit tiresome."

So I decide not to go on about it. Face the facts though—even if they don't wanna admit it in the interviews, there's not a lot for the Reid brothers to hide once they climb onstage or put out a record. They may be a "nasty rash in pop music" who "gatecrash the charts" in Jim's mind, but in reality they get there because they are as obvious as everything else that gets there. But you don't have to hate them for it, not at all, because what they're doing isn't so bad at all. At least they have decided to take the good bits from rock's rich tapestry and (so far) haven't had the time to mess seriously with the all-new hard rock trend in indie rock—probably because they've got big enough to get beyond all that. *Automatic* sees their posturing getting pure; they owe less to the Beach Boys and Velvets in terms of outright plagiarism (though I swear I can hear 'Sweet Jane' in there somewhere, again) and unlike *Darklands*, they have some songs to challenge the listener. Will it be a record for the "broken down Jesuses with a taste for trash" of 2010? Jim Reid hopes so—if it's not, then he's wasting his time. "It's not just music for people just now, it's music that will hopefully last longer than I do."

Is it easy? "Nothing to do with the Jesus And Mary Chain is easy," says Jim. "I don't really think it should be. I think if it was easy, I would be worried."

True, but if you believe that the Jesus And Mary Chain's greatest asset is their image—their wonderfully morbid fixations, William's introverted guitar anti-hero stance and Jim's javelin tricks with a mic-stand—then it is their effortless way of being cool that still sets them apart. The Jesus And Mary Chain are cool and they know it.

"I don't care about the state of my hair / I got something out of nothing."

— Jesus And Mary Chain, 'Blues From A Gun'
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