

T H E J E S U S L I Z A R D



HEY, MAN, NICE SHOT

For those of you who witnessed the *Big Day Out*, I'm sure the Jesus Lizard need no introduction. They have a way of making their presence known in the live situation, throwing down a brutally tight and assaultive sound, and generally pushing audiences hard. It's the payoff for close to a decade of work as a band, honing their music down to a razor sharp edge, and taking their stage personae to extremes, with little regard for personal safety.

Historically, the band evolved in Texas from Scratch Acid (a fine combo with a hint of the Birthday Party to them — I happily recommend their *Greatest Gift* compilation) and Cargo Cult, then relocated to Chicago in the late 80s, where they found a drummer and wound up on Touch & Go Records. The story from there is pretty simple: a lot of touring, punctuated by the release of five full LPs. Each album has sounded better and more focused than the one before, and by the release of *Liar* in 1993, the Jesus Lizard were a band capable of inflicting some serious damage. Two years later, and the band causes some surprise in the insular indie community by making the move to Capitol Records, which brings us up to the present, with the Jesus Lizard poised to release *Shot*, and bassist David Wm. Sims talking to us from Chicago.

Quite naturally, the shift to the corporate entity is the current 'most asked' question, and it's obviously something Sims takes very seriously.

"We went into it with our eyes open. I think we were very careful about the kind of deal we entered into. We took a long hard look at who we were working with. So far it's been the way it's meant to be. We recorded the album, and the people at the label were very good about making themselves scarce. When we were done we gave them the tapes and said: 'Here's the record,' and that was it. "That was kind of why it took so long for us to sign to a major anyway: we knew the problems people have had and were very careful. Basically, you can't trust those people."

Certainly, it's an admirable attitude for the band, but playing the devil's advocate, you can't help but wonder if the band have just plain jumped ship for the cash. Sims was prepared for that line of attack, but has been let down by those who see themselves as the indie moral setters.

"It's remarkable how little sell-out criticism there has been. I don't know whether it's because people have gotten used to it by now (because there's so many bands like us on major labels now), or if it's a case of people waiting to make their decisions until after they heard the record — which is, frankly, how it should be. I think the music on the record can address the issue far better than I can."

It's the old 'proof is in the pudding' cliché, and it's actually pretty valid here. *Shot* is not only a good Jesus Lizard album, it shows how the band are capable of developing their own distinctive sound. They've become, if anything, even more

tightly focused and malevolent sounding, while vocalist David Yow heads further out into the world of aggressive psychedelia.

"What we set out to do was, on one hand, make a record that was way meaner and louder than any record we'd made, and at the same time, avail ourselves of more production techniques. We could spend more time experimenting with sounds, and with stuff we wouldn't have tried in the past because we were working under stricter time constraints."

Personally, I like the whole idea. If a big label is going to throw some money at creating an 'alternative' presence, I'd rather see a band who's taken the time and effort to build their own identity be able to record the album they've wanted to record, instead of the money land in the hands of some punk-by-numbers opportunists record companies seem so adept at signing. (Whatever happened to all those bands like Paw and Quicksand?) The Jesus Lizard's situation seems to be pretty good at the moment. They're not expecting unrealistic results from the record, but it's definitely one of their stronger albums, and they're in a situation where it may find its way into the consciousness of an audience they would never have reached before.

"It's a weird position we find ourselves in, because the band's been going since 1989, and we haven't really changed anything we were doing. There's no way we would have gotten signed to this deal when started the band, and there's been the strange process of watching the mainstream move closer to us, while we kept doing what we like to do. Some of it became something bigger labels would be more interested in, and more mainstream kids might be interested in. I don't think in 1989 any of us would have dreamed that."

And what are the band's dreams for the future?

"Well, I suppose the easy answer would be, in an ideal world, the record would become hugely successful and we'd never have to worry about money, and would just keep making the records we want to make. Realistically, however, the idea is the record will do relatively well, and we'll continue to do what we've done all along, which is make our records and settle for being less than fabulously wealthy. I'm not complaining though. I've had a good life the last few years, and I still really enjoy everything about being in this band. It really is a satisfying life."

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