

Great Jumping Donkeys

"Great jumping donkeys," it was all because of you. it was fun and prizes and lots of friends" Deedle-dee-dee. Deedle-dee-dee"

With dodgy punctuation intact, this is the strange message those of the fine print scouring persuasion will find at the end of the liner notes of Grant Lee Buffalo's new album *Copperopolis*. As I had the band's bass and assorted keyboards player-cum-producer, Paul Kimble, on the line from Los Angeles, I figured an explanation was at hand... or maybe one wasn't.

I was wondering if you could solve the mystery of the 'great jumping donkeys' for me.

"The great jumping donkeys?"

It's in the liner notes to the CD.

"[Laughs] Wow, what is the mystery of the great jumping donkeys?"

I nutshell the gist of the above phrase for him.

"Oh, yeah, who knows? I'm not sure what that's all about really. I don't know."

So much for going straight to the source.

Paul is a friendly guy, who mulls over each question he's asked, before finally taking a couple more words than it takes to say a lot less than he needs to. This fools you into thinking you've been answered, when you're really no wiser than you were to begin with. Nevertheless, *Copperopolis* packs plenty of verbiage in singer-songwriter-guitarist and two-thirds band namesake Grant Lee Phillips' lyrics, which are more complex and unusually delivered than those on previous albums *Fuzzy* and *Mighty Joe Moon*. Paul agrees.

"I don't think they started out that way, they sorta developed into that in the studio. I think Grant and I both went into the studio with a willingness to explore that side of things more, which we hadn't necessarily done in the past, but it was something we were interested in, definitely."

The band took (by their standards) a luxurious six weeks to record the album, their third in just four years.

"We're a lot more prolific than we can make records, so it's sort of agonising, the whole record industry process, 'cause we would've probably recorded long before now if we'd had our choice. And there's always more songs than there is space for. I think if we can turn out an album a year, that's a pretty good sense of timing for us."

Paul says the extra time the band were able to invest in recording, during a rare break from practically non-stop touring, is probably responsible for the satisfaction he feels with *Copperopolis*.

"In some ways it's easier for me to go back and listen to this record after it's finished than the other two records were, 'cause it seems more complete to me."

Grant Lee Buffalo are back on the road now. Anyone who caught them live during their visit here in 1995 will be pleased to know they plan to return around December of this year.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

Another Earache

As one of the originators of grindcore, Birmingham band Napalm Death shaped a fair slice of mid-to-late 80s, extreme underground noise, with their combined use of brutally raw guitars, growling vocals, and superfast non-rhythms. This month Napalm Death come to New Zealand for the first time — a show that promises to be a mind blowing, teeth rattling affair, witnessed as it should be, at frighteningly close quarters.

Napalm Death have happily operated well outside the mainstream for the past 10 years, releasing a steady stream of albums and EPs, each one sounding like the soundtrack to a new Armageddon. The current band line-up features none of the original members, and while various guitarists, drummers and singers have stepped in and out of the group since 1986, Napalm have consistently remained on the cutting edge of severe, guitar based music. On the telephone from a hotel in Phoenix, Arizona, bassist Shane Embury talks in pedestrian clichés ("We just do what we do," is about as profound a statement as you could hope for), though he attempts to explain the Napalm philosophy.

"Musically we just want to take another step each time we do a record, and experiment with guitars and stuff. We try and make each record different in some way, but ultimately, the record you do is just how you feel at that particular point. We're really into what we've done on the new one, *Diatribes*, and it's a basis for what we'll do on the next album, though we'll take it one step further."

All but one of Napalm's recordings have been released by the UK label Earache. The band's 1994 album, *Fear Emptiness Despair*, went out in the USA on the giant Columbia label. Napalm are now back with Earache for the world, no worse off for their corporate dalliance.

"It was an experience we're glad we went through because people always talk about majors being better, but for us that wasn't true. It wasn't that anything went wrong, just that nothing happened. When the album came out they expected it to go platinum — they had totally strange expectations for a band that operates in our field."

Embury says the American major label

believed Napalm to be destined for great things, no matter how vehemently the band insisted otherwise. He's the first to admit Napalm are an acquired taste, and unlikely to appeal to an audience who aren't already familiar with their style of sound.

"Basically we've just maintained a level of record sales and of people coming to our shows, and those people know what to expect, so you're playing to the converted a lot of the time. It would be nice to play to a wider audience, but as yet that hasn't happened. Otherwise, things are going as well as they always have."

Napalm's first visit to New Zealand coincides with their tenth anniversary. Embury is aware Earache are making plans to cash in on the occasion, but says the band are staunchly refusing to entertain the idea.

"The 10 year thing doesn't enter our minds, it's just not relevant. I think too much emphasis can be placed on how long a band's been together, people don't go up to Bad Religion and say: 'You've been around 15 years, don't you feel like old farts?' You can't put any time frame on a band because a situation will dictate different things, whether a band keeps going or not. With Napalm we'll know when it's time to call it a day, but for now, if you're in it, you're into it."

JOHN RUSSELL



Not so long ago, Canadian singer/songwriter Hayden recorded a bunch of folk songs in his bedroom at his parents house in Toronto. The lo-fi home recordings were originally released on the album *Everything I Long For*, midway through last year, on his own label, Hardwood. Twelve months on, Hayden is dumb-founded his tunes are being released worldwide, courtesy of the much respected label Geffen.

"Don't even ask me how this has happened. I ask myself that almost everyday, and I still can't come up with an answer."

Simply though, Hayden has done it through sheer hard work. In the past two years, he's criss-crossed Canada four times, playing countless tiny rock clubs, often supporting big names like Grant Lee Buffalo, Weezer, and G Love & Special Sauce. His profile on the live scene was such that *Everything I Long For* sold over 15,000 copies following its release on Hardwood, and that was enough for several labels to fly Hayden to the USA to discuss international record deals. Not bad for someone who, in the beginning, couldn't bring him-

self to sing.

"When I first started playing live I wasn't comfortable about singing at all, so I got other people to sing my songs. I was the type of person that would laugh at my voice, I thought it was a joke."

But to the owners of the LA based label Outpost, Hayden was no laughing matter, and they should know; the Geffen-distributed indie is run by Mark Williams (the Virgin Records A&R whizz who signed Smashing Pumpkins and the Geraldine Fibbers), the Pumpkins' former business manager Andy Gershaw, and longtime REM producer, Scott Litt. The trio signed Hayden early this year, and have just

re-released *Everything I Long For* on the world market. Hayden, who still lives at home with his folks, is now hoping for some degree of fame outside his homeland, and just across the border will do.

"The weird thing about Canada and the United States is, we in Canada get everything the United States puts out, even if it's total dog poo, and they don't like to get everything we put out. Often there's bands that are superstars in Canada, but they don't have any impact in the States at all. I'm hoping, for my sake, that trend will soon be reversed."

JOHN RUSSELL



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