

New Dwarf Named Stumpy

An Interview With Chris Knox

Two-thousand people! Two-thousand of them. Sounds like quite a few if you're hosting a country wedding, but when it comes to worldwide sales of a brand new disc from one of the world's (well we thought they were, who's been lying? Bet it's the government) most respected and enduring lo-fi 'alternative' rock 'n' roll bands, it ain't really cutting the mustard.

Yep, so not a lot of people bought the last offering from the Tall Dwarfs, 3 EPs, but there is a certain comfort in knowing the rest of the world has crap taste. It's a sort of intimate feeling, realising there are kindred spirits out in all four corners scaring their friends (ha, those with friends we count as only 'fair weather' fans) with tales of 'Phil's Disease', 'The Brain That Wouldn't Die', and 'The Slide'. We, of kindred spirit, should always be together in our damp, and sometimes slightly unhygienic world, but never really to know one another. It's all a bit... surreal.

That is, until the Tall Dwarfs became the International Tall Dwarfs (album name: *Stumpy*) and transported — through the magic medium of popular music — the melodic ramblings of their fans to their other fans. Wow, what a be-in! Yes, on the notes for the last Tall Dwarfs recording Chris and Alec offered an invitation to send in tape loops etc., and the band would get them down, so fans could get down (if that's the right phrase) to their very own TDs creation. Interactive in a postal sort of way.

Chris Knox: "Part of the reason was to get some sort of fresh perspective on the music. It's been a while since Alec and I started doing this, and it seemed a way to get different ideas happening. There's only 12 notes to use, and only so many melodies, and I'm a fan of melodies. So, you have to keep things interesting in some way. I use the example of Lou Reed; he started doing that bubblegum stuff, which I guess was Toy Love, then on to the Velvets and experimenting and shit like that, which is the Tall Dwarfs, and now he's run out of melodies, has gone to the monotone thing and relies on lyrics. We don't give a shit about lyrics, they're always the last things we do, so we have to keep coming with the melodies."

A few of the reviews of *Stumpy* have said International Tall Dwarfs was a good idea but, like many good ideas, its execution has not been quite as successful. Yet, it is an album of Tall Dwarfs songs, created around a base of unknown quality and unknown quantity; those unknowns being the loops and the fans that made them — unhinged? Unwashed? Or just plain freaked out?

"It did give us a bit of an insight into the average fan. I guess they're a bit sad. I don't want to reflect badly on them, but much of the music they came up with seemed quite introspective. [Maybe not a be-in?] We did receive loops we thought we couldn't use. But with every album we do we try and create a loop we think is like that, and challenge ourselves to do something with it," says Chris.

Tapes came from Croatia ("The most amazing thing is, he actually found the

record," Chris points out.), America, and even Hamilton, to contribute. Thus *Stumpy* was born. With 21 songs all around the two-to-2.5-minute mark, it was left up to the last track to provide the guitar wank epic. Ironically (considering Chris' thoughts on his own fans) titled 'Up', the song lets the duo loose with unrestrained passion and fury, all in a sensual ritual of the deity of rock.

"I like guitar wanks," says Chris. "I like them if they go on for ages and let me get lost in them. I hate ones that have all changes and are there to show off the musical skill of the band."

The Tall Dwarfs have again entered our lives and we should be happy (or sad, depending on what you like better), and Chris and Alec will again be in the Empires



and Bodegas of this world (did you catch them with Will Oldham?). Then to part for solo projects. Chris has resumed an on-again-off-again relationship with the *Listener*, drawing cartoons (and writing Kiss reviews — is Shayne Carter better than Kiss? Is a rabbit better than a duck? It's a hard one.), as well as numerous other creative ventures, all for bloody little cash.

"Why doncha do some ads on TV, what Jan Hellriegel and Pumpkinhead do?," someone asks.

"I'd only do ads for something like tofu luncheon."

A Tall Dwarfs song of the consumable market?

"Yeah, that's right."

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