

# space waltz

## Spiritualized

THEY MAY HAIL FROM ENGLAND, BUT SPIRITUALIZED HAVE ALWAYS SEEMED CLOSER TO AMERICA, MUSICALLY AND, YES, SPIRITUALLY. LEADER JASON PIERCE (AKA SPACEMAN) WAS PREVIOUSLY IN SPACEMEN 3, A SO-CALLED 'SPACE ROCK' BAND HE HELPED FOUND AT AGE 16 IN THE LATE 80S, THAT WAS CLEARLY INSPIRED BY THE LIKES OF THE VELVET UNDERGROUND, SUICIDE, STOOGES AND MC5 — AMERICANS ALL. AFTER FORMING SPIRITUALIZED, JASON EXPANDED UPON THAT ATMOSPHERIC, DRONE-DRIVEN SOUND OVER THE COURSE OF TWO ALBUMS, 1992'S *Lazer Guided Melodies* AND 1995'S *Pure Phase*. THEIR NEW RELEASE, *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*, IS BY FAR THEIR MOST ADVENTUROUS AND ACCOMPLISHED EFFORT. A SPRAWLING 72 MINUTE EPIC, IT INCORPORATES GOSPEL, COUNTRY, R&B, AVANT-GARDE JAZZ, AND PSYCHEDELIC ROCK INFLUENCES, INTO A UNIQUE, FASCINATING HYBRID.

We reached Pierce in London just prior to Spiritualized's month-long North American tour. He's clearly proud of the record, but claims he's unaffected by the rave reviews it has been getting.

"I'm not actually bothered about the reaction to it. I don't do it for those reasons. *Lazer Guided Melodies* got that kind of response, the second one didn't. It is all so transitory, it doesn't really matter. In 20 years time, no-one will care how many out of 10 it got. The music will stand way beyond that. I don't read my own press."

Clearly not burdened with excess modesty, Pierce views Spiritualized music as being timeless. "We've never done stuff connected to fashion in anyway. We're into making soul music that'll affect people in 50 years. You don't listen to Stravinsky and say 'this sounds like 20s music,' or Hendrix and say 'this sounds like 60s music.' It sounds as fresh today as it did then."

With *Ladies And Gentlemen...*, Pierce stresses the band's goal was "to make something away above and beyond what we knew we were capable of doing. I don't like the idea of treading water musically, using the same formula to make the same old records. I could make another 10 records just like this one, but that's not a particularly fulfilling thing to want to do."

The album was recorded and mixed in studios in London, Bath, Los Angeles, Memphis, and New York, with the Memphis sessions being key. Spiritualized hooked up with Memphis producer Jim Dickinson, a colourful character known for working with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Alex Chilton and the Replacements.

Pierce admits that their work together didn't survive the final cut, but insists that Dickinson and fellow collaborator, famed New Orleans pianist Dr. John, "definitely had a big influence, conversationally and spiritually. We wanted to make a record I could take back to them and show what we'd done with it. Jim was very excited about our early sessions, and he knew there was a special record in there somewhere. Knowing that gave us confidence to see it through and not compromise at all."

Dr. John's stellar work did make it onto disc, and Pierce excitedly reports that both he and the London Community Gospel Choir joined Spiritualized onstage at the *Phoenix Festival* in England recently. Coincidentally, Dr John was set to play Toronto two days before the band, and Jason was disappointed they'd just miss each other.

In turn, the Doctor was full of praise for Pierce. He was recently quoted as calling him "a kick. I got along with him real well, whereas there's a lot of people I've played with that I've personally hated! When I listened to the tape Spiritualized sent me, I could hear chunks of stuff that let me know they were into some things other than what their own stuff sounded like — like something that came out of Miles [Davis] in that *Bitches Brew* time zone. I got the feeling I could take some shots with 'em."

As well as Dr. John's rollicking piano, horn and string sections, pedal steel guitar, dulcimer, autoharp and harmonica are also used to create the swirling potpourri of sounds Spiritualized have come up with on *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*.

Other musical peers impressed with Pierce's adventurousness include Neil Young and Crazy Horse, with whom the band share management.



Last summer, Spiritualized played a string of shows with Young in North America.

"A lot of people into Neil Young got into what we were doing, and Neil himself became a big fan of what we were doing. He saw us five times out of the eight shows we did with him, and the guys in Crazy Horse watched us nearly every night."

Jason has mixed feelings about festivals. "We just came back from a big festival in Sweden, and it was great. No sound or time restrictions, so we could see Grooverider at 4am at 110 decibels. Amazing! But sometimes festival bills don't work with what you're doing. Their idea is to bring in six different bands with different audiences and make a lot of money, but that's not necessarily the best way to do a show."

He does find audiences in Britain and Europe are getting more open-minded musically, something not really the case here yet. "Three years ago in England they'd say 'we're into dance music and that's it.' But now they're into drum 'n' bass and Hendrix, or both Spiritualized and the Chemical Brothers."

As his reputation spreads, Pierce is now getting production offers.

"I've been asked to do a few things. I may work with Mazzy Star and Dr. John later in the year if I find the time. I want to do it in a way that confounds expectations. I wouldn't want to work with Mazzy Star and have it sound like Spiritualized meets Mazzy Star. Anyone can picture how that may sound. It would have to go further, or there's no point." Plans are also afoot

for work with the surviving members of the Sun Ra Arkestra.

Peer respect and critical raves may be gratifying, but Pierce can attest to the fact they don't pay the rent. "We've been broke for six years, and can't really afford the rent anywhere. The one weird perception people have of us is that we make a lot of money out of this. I can't explain to people just how little money we have! If I was running the record label I'm sure I could be selling a lot more of our records than are being sold. It'd just be nice if people weren't living on the breadline!"

His real ambitions are less material, however. "I think good music is physical — something you hear in your spine or the hairs on the back of your neck. That's what music is about and that's what we're trying to achieve with our music."

Pierce now wants to take Spiritualized music to newer territories. "I'm trying to go to places where I think there is a big audience for what we do, but where people rarely go. Places like Portugal, Greece and Estonia that get completely overlooked. And I love travel. That's the reason I set the band up, not just to work in the studio."

And how about New Zealand? "We are planning to go, hopefully in January."

Judging from the sold-out Toronto show we just saw, you're in for a treat. Spectacular light show and intensely tight playing take the listener on a visual and sonic trip. Prepare to get Spiritualized!

KERRY DOOLE



IN THE BASEMENT OF MANIFESTO WINE BAR, SITUATED IN QUEEN STREET, AUCKLAND, ABBY DOBSON OF THE AUSTRALIAN BAND LEONARDO'S BRIDE IS WAITING PATIENTLY SIDE OF STAGE WHILE MORE FM DEEJAY JEREMY CORBETT INTRODUCES THE GROUP TO THE SMALL INVITED AUDIENCE.

Leonardo's Bride were in Auckland for three days midway through last month, on a promotional tour in support of their new debut album, *Angel Blood*, and on the morning of the showcase gig, played live on *Kim And Corbett's* breakfast radio show. Corbett was impressed; "When I first heard Abby's voice I got goosebumps", he announces to the Manifesto gathering, "then I realised Kim's finger was up my bum... anyway, there's enough of me to fill my trousers, here's Leonardo's Bride..."

Leonardo's Bride formed in 1992, when Dobson and guitarist Dean Manning returned to Sydney following a 12 month overseas sojourn through Europe and North America. The duo financed each stage of the journey by perform-

ing in cafes and bars; Dobson explains the experience gifted her the self assurance necessary to front a band.

"Nobody knows you overseas, so nobody's going to subtly remind you that you've stepped over some imaginary line and you've become too much of a show off. You can expand your horizons and exercise a few different personalities that haven't come out. I decided I was going to be in a band when I was overseas, and there was no one there to say, 'you can't do that!'"

Leonardo's Bride played their first shows in May that year. Prior to every gig, Dobson and Manning would mail out personal invitations to friends and acquaintances to ensure a good turn-out; "That was the only way you could get

another gig in the early days. The publicans don't care if the music rocks the world, as long as they get people there to drink beer."

After independently releasing two EPs, Leonardo's Bride were offered a record deal with major label, Polydor, but opted to sign with Michael Gudinski's Mushroom Records.

"We had a great relationship with Polydor, it was always assumed that we would sign with them. We negotiated the contract for ages, but by the end we had to turn it down — the contract was like a phone directory and they wanted our first born. We already had a relationship with Mushroom, we had friends there, we'd got pissed with a lot of them, so it was a natural process that Mushroom came to us and said quietly, 'come with us.' So we signed a four album deal with them."

Dobson pauses, then adds; "I know that sounds like it was a cruisy thing, but it's been a struggle, it hasn't been this fantastic yellow brick road that we've just skipped along to get to where we are now. We've worked hard and put a lot of energy into it."

After their New Zealand trip, Leonardo's Bride are set to embark on a full scale national

tour of Oz. And across the Tasman, the marketing men at Mushroom are selling the band as the fresh-faced saviours of Australian pop music. Dobson, however, offers the proverbial ocker knockback to any ambitious ideals — she couldn't give a shit.

"I don't have aspirations for the album, I just hope that people like it and have the opportunity to hear it, and that it makes them feel something. Singles charts and record sales, that is somebody else's concern — I got into music not accountancy."

"In terms of success for the band, I've never been very good at living in the future and planning what I'll do next. I think if you stay sharp and 'live in the now', then at least you're on your toes. I used to work in a job that made me pissed off from the moment I woke up. I'd wake, slam my hand down on the alarm clock, and there I was, pissed off first thing in the morning. Now I feel I'm one of the lucky ones, because I found that music is what I want to do, it's fulfilling to me. I'm already stoked because I know I'm not going to be an old person with regrets."

JOHN RUSSELL