

Dead Moon are living proof that, sometimes, the older you get the better you rock. Fred Cole's been singing in bands since the 60s (the Weeds, Lollipop Shoppe, Zipper, the Rats) and playing guitar since 1976. He's 44 now, his bass player and wife Toody is 43 and their drummer Andrew Loomis is thirty-ish. For the past four years, as Dead Moon, they've been knocking out some of the most primitive, passionate, psychedelic garage punk rock being made anywhere by anyone. If you don't believe me, check them out when they tour at the end of this month with the Hard Ons.

Dead Moon have released quite a few records (in mono) but they love to play live with no effects, no reverb, just sheer volume and Fred's blood curdling howl of a voice — dredged up from the depths of a soul lost to rock and roll, battered and broke and resurrected after decades of anonymity and penury. You don't get to sound like Fred by taking lessons.

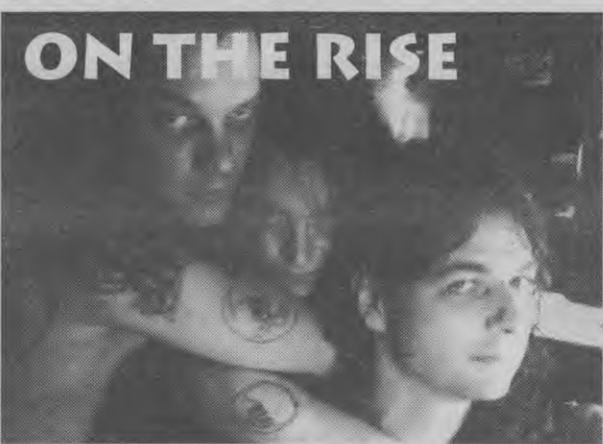
Just lately, Fred's been getting the kind of attention he's always deserved. Dead Moon turned down the support slot for a Nirvana/Mudhoney show in their hometown of Portland, Oregon in order to come here. They've been getting loving reviews in the US press and they play sell-out shows in Europe thanks to the efforts of Germany's Music Maniac Records.

Phoning Toody at the music shop she runs with Fred, headquarters of their own Tombstone label, I ask how come they've managed to keep the faith over the years.

"We all just love to play, this band has gone incredibly well as far we're concerned, and the fact that we've been over to Europe four or five times now — we're constantly kept busy. Fred and I handle everything ourselves. He cuts all the masters, I do all the bookwork, we send out everything, we distribute our product, so it takes up so much time, it's a lifestyle. Fred's been playing since he was 13 years old and I don't think he'll quit till he's 85 no matter what form of music it is. It's a passion, it's like being involved in a sport or anything else, it's impossible to give it up."

But in rock there's this idea that you're not supposed to be doing it after about the age of 22.

"Most people of 22 who think it's weird that you still like it probably won't like it themselves at that age. I'm 43, okay, so I talk to a lot of younger kids that I relate totally



with, I feel and act the same way I did when I was 18 years old, even the way I look hasn't changed, thank god. People see where they're going to be at in ten years and it's not where you are at that age. You've got to realise that it is a very unique thing and most people settle down and work a normal straight job and don't go out to clubs anymore, don't go to see bands, they listen to elevator music or some other slop, and there's a few that just don't. I don't know why, I'm just glad I'm part of that number. It's not even a matter of wanting to do it to feel young or be young. I've met people in their 70s and 80s who totally blast me out. They're just characters, they've probably always been characters. Those people are great, they have a lust for life. That's why I say I don't think you have any real control over it, it's part of your personality."

What were you doing between the Rats in 1979 and Dead Moon?
 "We played in the Rats for a long time, ten/ twelve years and then after that Fred started a cow punk band which is doing country and western punk style and we did that for a couple of years and then after that we started Dead Moon."

Were there periods of despondency when you thought you were never going to get anywhere?

"With the Rats it got like that, yeah. You were talking about people saying you're too old to be doing this anymore. It kind of got to both of us around 35 — I think everybody goes through their own little mid-life crisis — we just weren't having fun anymore. Every band has its length of time that it works and unless it's doing something for you... I don't know, we just got really bored with it. It's almost like

falling in love with someone and then getting real bored and falling out of love and wanting to have that first jazz all over again. Then we got bored with the country thing, there wasn't too much you can do with it, so we started Dead Moon which is really a combination of the stuff we were doing in punk and going back to Fred's roots in the 60s and doing just kind of garage psychedelic type stuff, mix everything together. And so far this is fun, I don't see this as ending for quite a while."

How come you didn't play bass until 1979?

"I had really never thought about it. I've always loved music, always been around it, but at that point there was very few women in bands. What's cool about the whole punk thing is that then you got a lot of women taking up instruments, especially bass because bass is the fastest to learn and for me it was great for the style of music we were playing — totally simplistic stuff. Even if you were just beginning to learn you could still get up on stage and sound great in a punk band 'cos that's exactly what that form of music needs — you didn't need to have 15 years of experience behind you."

Are you and Fred on a mission to keep that raw spirit in you music?

"It's not really totally intentional, it just happens to be what all of us like and it suits his singing style and it suits our musicianship and our particular playing style and performing live. We all like to get up on stage and go crash and bash."

We use a lot of dynamic but not a lot of finesse."

Are you technically better than when you started?

"Fred and I are both naturally much better on our instruments, what parts we're doing are a lot more intricate, I do a lot more singing. It's not quite as fast, quite as desperate or quite as depressing as the punk rock stuff."

Are you making happier music now than before?

"Not so much happier, this has got a different type of anger, maybe because we're a lot older now. You may be saying a lot of similar things in your lyrics but as time goes by it gets frustrating, you get cynical about things and then you hate being that way because you're still idealistic at the same time. So there may be a lot of the same themes there but it's the way you're saying it and the way you're looking at it that I think is different. We do a lot more love related stuff. People always request it because they know Fred and I have been married since we were 18 and are still very much in love. We just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. I think people feel very personally involved and love to hear that stuff because they know when we sing it to each other we mean it."

Fred has sung some scary stuff about opportunities missed. Is he excited now about being more famous?

"What's really cool about this time round is that it's all on Fred's terms, he hasn't had to suck up to anybody to get anything done, he hasn't had to sign to a major label which he did when he was a kid and got burnt really bad and doesn't own rights to his songs anymore. He has a real animosity towards what major labels do to bands because they realise what a money maker they can be and all the band wants is to have the record out and get up on stage. Most people have no business sense and these guys know it. Yeah, there's a lot of bitterness and there's a lot of pride and sense of accomplishment in doing it yourself even though it's the hard way. And realising that persistence does pay off — if you don't give up on it, it can happen. There'll always be a lot of anger there for time lost and chances missed out on. Now it's like, do it my way or I don't do it and if you don't want me to do it fine, I can do without it."

DONNA YUZWALK

A RINGING IN THE EAR

Sick of the same old well-rehearsed bands playing the same old well-rehearsed songs at the same, tired old venues? Seeking excitement, non-conformity, surprise? There could be a cure. You need ... Tinnitus! An ear affliction of the most positive kind, that is, one where even the performers don't know what's going to happen next; it could be good, it could be bad, but, hell, at least it's interesting.

Mike Hodgson (aka The Projector), Angus McNaughton (he of Incubator fame) and Ashley Turner have been the core of Tinnitus since 1986, when they performed regular shows to Christchurch audiences ranging in number from 36 to 400. Their most recent work was the second *Rotate Your State*, a surround-sound-visual-scape at Auckland's Gluepot, which Hodgson organised and which involved about 50 performers. It lasted eight hours ...

"I like time," says Hodgson. "I think that music should pick you up and shift you to another place in your mind and when you come back down to the realisation that you've actually gone somewhere within yourself, that you've shifted your subjective state to another space and that's why we've worked with long form, like seven hours live to air on radio and nine hour all-night shows."

So that people will have been on a journey?

"Yes — which won't always be pleasant. It's not always about being nice, it's about being challenged, to be prepared to find yourself somewhere else five hours later which you would have no way of getting to if you hadn't participated in the whole process."

There's a definite thrill in the spontaneity of a Tinnitus performance. At their first live show at an art gallery in Christchurch Hodgson, McNaughton and Turner played bits of metal, drums, trombone, guitar, effects machines and a sampler while the audience painted canvases. Sounds groovy. A guitar line in a piece you'll hear on their soon-to-be-released CD won't have existed a minute before it was played live. Hodgson says it's a sound and a feel that couldn't have been achieved in a rehearsal room and it's this constant surprise that drives him.

"We live on the edge because we're doing music that people have never heard. Like we put out a tape once that's on the studio side of the CD and that got thrashed on UFM, then we put on a show a week later and got a really big audience and we did this piece of really industrial construction work where we actually built a sculpture and everything we used was wired up with triggerable mikes and we had video and stuff — completely the opposite of that tape and the audiences couldn't cope. By the end of it most of them had gone."

"Maybe it's totally anarchistic in a way. We don't do it for money, we don't do it for our careers — we give value for money every time because we give to the maximum and we also use systems that other people don't even think about using. But maybe we don't supply enough for people to hang around. Most things work, they definitely work for us. I've got hours and hours and hours and hours of documentation and we use that all the time and we're always bringing work back."

It seems to pull apart ...

"And pulls together. Entropy with form. It's not just break down — it's break up."

Is there a danger that it's more fun for you than it is for the audience?

"For sure — without a doubt and I'm sure that's often been the case. That's another reason why we've never gone for reviews. I don't particularly want my work criticised by a music journalist, I prefer to have the work taken for what it is by the people who are there who want to be there. We've had some successful shows and we've also had some disasters."

Involvement in a 'normal' band does not interest Hodgson at all.

"I like to break down the traditional form. I go and see bands and I've got nothing against what they're doing. I always wanted to be a musician, but I've never been able to, because I wasn't prepared to put in the time it takes to learn an instrument. So I've managed to master the art of being able to play a really wicked guitar line once, or spot edit it onto the multi-track."

These days, Tinnitus is largely a technical process, less and less live, but still the organised confusion it has ever been — as the dictionary definition of entropy goes, a measure of the disorganisation of the universe. Their next performance is in conjunction with *Freak The Sheep* in a couple of weeks' time. Expect the unexpected.

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