



Dublin Duck Dispensary

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Charismatic keyboard fiend Pockets, of Fight Like Apes fame, together with all of Grand Pocket Orchestra and a haversack full of Analogue writers, have piled into a tiny darkened room that whispers of its seedy past as the underbelly of perv-palace Spirit. The act they're here to see couldn't be less assuming. Bobby Aherne, a diminutive awkward hipster kid, his fashion hair sprouting self-consciously above a size zero Santa Claus outfit, is the mind and heartbreakingly deadpan baritone behind Dublin Duck Dispensary. I don't have much of a history of picking winners. King Tut, a stunning band I fated in Analogue's first issue, have yet to encounter mainstream success. Back in the day, I bought X-Worxs jeans when Eclipse were deeply credible. Dublin Duck Dispensary make me wish my record was better. When I stumble late into the Academy, midway through their curtailed set, catching only the last half of 'Electric Picnic', a track from 2007's *All Free Today*, I'm assaulted by something both harsher and more pared down than the band's recorded efforts; a little uncertain perhaps, but hinting at greatness. Dublin Duck Dispensary is part of a new generation of Irish musicians, folk like ambient techno influenced singer-songwriter Patrick Kelleher and underground indie rock guru So Cow, who are eschewing the traditional grind and please of the Irish gig scene, developing instead devoted communities of online fans. Despite having produced six previous releases (brief running lengths and online distribution make it hard to draw a line between EPs and albums) this is the Dispensary's first gig. What delayed the bands live debut so long?

"When I'm writing music, I don't really write something, I just press record, and then I play something and try and figure out what might go nicely with it. It got to the point, where if I was to play concerts I wouldn't be able to reproduce it. And when, eventually, it got to the stage where people started asking me 'When I are you playing live', I was like... 'Never'. What happened was Grand Pocket Orchestra found out about it somehow and seemed to be into it, and asked me to support them and I was like 'I can't'. And then within a week Karl [Analogue writer Karl McDonald, who performs solo as Treehouses] and Eoghan [Coady] offered to help. So we said 'you know what, we may do it'. Then I had to figure out how to play all the songs that I'd recorded... So we didn't actually figure out how to play it in time for that Grand Pocket Orchestra concert. I entered Hard Working Class Heroes, sort of taking the piss, and for some insane reason they chose it. We only started back practising a week ago, and we tried to pull something together by now."

There couldn't be a better time. This may be the year lo-fi breaks through. The distortion aesthetic lent its name to the Magnetic Fields latest studio release, Jeffrey Lewis is winning long-overdue plaudits for his freakfolk update of eighties anarchopunks Crass, and distorted nu-grunge acts like No Age and Times New Viking are dragging rock back into the mud (where it belongs).

"Some people said that the vocals, because they're processed and put through a guitar pedal, sound a bit like Times New Viking and

someone else said the guitar sounds like No Age. They just do that thing where they just press record, and when they're finished they just turn it up as loud as it goes, not giving a shit whether it clips and I like that, rather than having everything clean. I don't want to listen to clean music...and I can't. I get in that mood where I turn on my iPod and I'll scroll past all the clean stuff I listened to three years ago and look for something that's going to really hurt my ears. When I started up my MySpace a few years ago, I put a thing on it saying something about Guided by Voices and Daniel Johnston. They were like the only two lo-fi people I knew, I didn't realise it was such a big thing. It turns out there's a whole lot of other people who sound like a combination of those two as well."

With a little luck and a lot of hard work, the Dublin Duck Dispensary may leave the clefty obscurity of MySpace and enter indie rock consciousness. In Jeff Feuerzeig's stunning (if overenthusiastic) documentary *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*, there's a moment where Louis Black describes hearing Johnston's music for the first time. "You start off hearing this noise, and then eventually you hear The Beatles, you hear the whole symphony". Hyperbole to be sure, but there's something of this feeling to the Dispensary. The band make dainty, clever, original pop music, sounding like at times like Julian Casablancas fronting a lo-fi Cheap Suit Serenaders. Melodies built out of guitar, ukelele, trickling drum machine, and Hammond organ synths, emerge with the treasured/casual brilliance of early Mirah Yom Tov Zeitlyn. Melodically and in terms of

recording quality, comparisons to Daniel Johnston or Calvin Johnston perhaps more appropriate than to Times New Viking or No Age; but there's none of the precious crazed naif to the man himself. The Dispensary's internet distribution, distorted vocals, and rapidly iterated melodic pop are all almost inevitable responses to the current state of the music industry.

"Because my name starts with an A and we were the first class to do a music technology degree, I was the first person in Ireland to ever receive a music technology degree. That course was electro-acoustic music and recording engineering and things like that. In college when we were doing recording projects...

You're going to be going in recording a band that wants to be the new REM or the new Coldplay or whatever, and the piano has to sound fucking delicious and the guitars have to be really clean and the drums have to be all epic and everything has to be so good, and I really didn't like that approach, so I guess that's why my stuff is messy and overdriven and really detached, everything's in bits and pieces."

"Where most songs come from I just end up pressing record and recording the first thing that comes out, like an instrumental guitar thing, then I try to figure out a baseline to go on top of that, what kind of drums would sound decent, and then after that I try to

figure out what sort of vocal melody might sound good over that. I think it differs a lot from song to song, but on the latest thing I made (new album *Luanqibazao*), it was like that where I recorded loads of songs and I realised 'oh fuck, I have to sing over these', I have no idea where the melodies are going to go and I had to figure out melodies to go with them, and I think I might have done OK but I'll probably revert back to having a melody first."

The band are signed to a Dutch netlabel, Dean Birkett's Rack and Ruin Records established earlier this year, choosing to make their work available at no charge.

"There's two sides, the rack side is supposed to be indie pop and the ruin side is more experimental stuff. We put it up for free and he promotes it online. In this day and age I don't know if there'd be any point in me making up albums and trying to sell them for fifteen euro and all that kind of crap. If you did do that and people were in anyway into it, it would end up online for free. So yeah, cut out the middleman. If anybody who puts stuff online for free were to sell the thing, if people liked it enough they'd buy it anyway just to support them, so I think it's probably logical to give it for free. I probably don't have the steely nerves to start charging people for music."

So who else is worth listening to in the Irish music scene?

"My favorite's got to be So Cow. He's recording an album or two a year and everything's really good. I don't think he tries to get publicity, so there's only a handful of people who even listen to it, which is ridiculous. I think it's so good everybody should be listening to the stuff. He in particular has the right attitude when it comes to making music. Grand Pocket Orchestra, Fight Like Apes and anybody who isn't making music really really obviously to try and make money. Here at Hard Working Class Heroes I feel like they're everywhere. I feel like they're invading us like zombies. Bands who saw someone on Top of the Pops and that's who they want to be, and not in an Eddie Argos, Art Brut kind of way wanting to be on Top of the Pops. All these bands they want to be the next U2 or whatever, and it's never going to happen. I don't know why they bother. I think people like So Cow, and people on the underground are making music that's just coming out of them, not music that fits a particular structure. Not trying to get onto the new RTE teaser trailer for the next series of *The Clinic*. That's probably the best way to make music, and then if it ends up soundtracking the trailer to *The Clinic*, fair fucks."

Dublin Duck Dispensaries new album, *Luanqibazao* (pronounced Loo - an - zi - ba - zow) from a Chinese word meaning "a complete mess", is available free online.

"I though it fitted the album where it was sort of bits of things here, bits of things there, everywhere is a bit messy and nothing really fits in together, but they have to fit together because they're forced onto the same CD. So *Luanqibazao*."

You can download the LP, as well as two other Duck releases from the Rack and Ruin website www.RackandRuinRecords.com 

