

- King Tut

The sign on their Myspace says Asheville, North Carolina, but King Tut's pyrotechnic psychedelia might be more at home in Scandinavia. An understated yet frenetic fusion of acoustic instrumentation and electro beats, Tut are perhaps closer to Sigur Ros or even Aussie improvisationalists Architecture in Helsinki, than American contemporaries 'Explosions in the Sky'. From Appalachian guitars plucked over heavily sampled vocals on 'Alone Together', to cathedral electronica on 'Luke's Hymn' - a slow-burning forest fire of a track, reminiscent of Agaetis Byrjun's 'Staralfur', to the shoegaze theatre of 'Somehow I Found You', and the 8bit electroclash of 'The Ocean of Motion', Tut's debut album 'Chopping Wood and Carrying Water' is an acid mouthful of fruity originality.

King Tut are Mark Boyd and Drew Veres, school friends out of Bay Village, Cleveland, who've taken time off from college to live and play music together. Tut are currently signed to Amaro Dolce, a tiny Boston indie label. Their upcoming album will be the label's debut release. In July 2006 the boys struck out for Asheville, NC; a manicured Tuscany of the Mid-East, drawn by the area's artistic community and outstanding natural beauty. The 'self-consciously amateur' music that's emerged since, and from months before spent trading loops in isolation, is a complex fusion of folksy improv and electronic experimentalism. 'Chopping Wood and Carrying Water' was laid down in bedrooms, dorms and college studios, in Garageband on an aging Macintosh; while Mark and Drew worked minimum-wage jobs to fund recording. The album's rustic origins, its stylistic variety, raw layered harmonies, and epic refrains (Mark calls them 'Peak Moments'), bring to mind Mirah's collaboration with Ginger Brooks Takahashi, 2003's 'Songs from the black Mountain Music Project'; and indeed Carrying Water shares the sizzling fury of Phil Elverum's discordantly thrilling Microphones productions. Says Mark of such moments - "When it's done right it's a kind of holy thing to me, it really reaches out to you and into you and surrounds you and you just understand. There is a clear open channel of communication between you and the musician and it's beautiful."

There's so much variety here that it's hard to draw general comparisons, but fans of Mogwai, Broken Social Scene and even Grandaddy should all find something to enjoy. Likely to draw attention are the album's spare but intricate drum loops. Drew cites the influence of everyone from John Stanier, to JoJo Mayer and Thelonius Monk. "A good drummer is able to sing through his instrument and compliment the parts of his fellow musicians. John Coltrane is a personal favorite. He literally sings through the tenor saxophone. His playing has influenced me to really hear the tonal qualities of the drum set and fit them with the guitar lines to create a fuller more distinct sound for a song."

Tut have arrived at an understanding of the contemporary music market that often eludes more established acts. Aware that obscurity is a far greater threat to young artists than piracy, the band have gone beyond using MySpace (where Analogue heard first heard them), and set about directly emailing songs to a growing list of fans. Mark is particularly positive about P2P, "I love peer to peer sharing. I think it's got corporate big guys in a bundle and that's great. At least some of the reason people don't buy records any more is that they know it's not going to the band. Why should we require people to toss some paper with imaginary value into our hat? Music has real value. Emotions have real value. That's what matters."



I ask him to explain how the birth of the net and the drawn out passage of the 'industry' proper have affected the bands promotional decisions.

"Being able to spread music so easily and to such a large audience is a beautiful thing. We have the ability to play our music for someone on the other side of the world, by just clicking away from the comfort of our own home. As for the death of the major labels? Well it's about fucking time... It's so easy for people to overlook one of the true meanings of making music, self expression. The idea that there are corporate know-it-alls deciding what the general public should be listening to is a joke. Now there's finally a way for damn good musicians to get their music out, and it has these big types on edge."

Mark is similarly dismissive of Radiohead's latest foray into digital marketing, 'In Rainbows'.

"I think what Radiohead did was great, but it's by no means revolutionary. Big bands in Japan and other countries had done this years before, figuring that if people like them enough, they'll buy the CD, but they'll definitely go to see them in concert."

King Tut are the kind of band we're seeing more and more right now; a potpourri of influences, keener on developing as musicians than aspiring to a traditional major label recording career. With independent releases this year from everyone from M.I.A to Prince and indeed Radiohead; the group's independence shouldn't prevent them from making a splash deserved by this fiery, original and charming release.

It might be a while before they tour, but King Tut release their album 'Chopping Wood and Carrying Water' (title taken from 'Be Here Now') soon. If you're in the neighbourhood of Asheville, you would do well to catch them. Otherwise, hit the band up for demos at keepyourkingsinthebackrow@gmail.com or check out their new material on MySpace (hint, Google 'king tut asheville').

**Words: Gareth Stack
Illustration: Zoe Manville**