

ENFANTS TERRIBLES

BRITISH POP'S LATEST INCARNATION, **LADYTRON**, REINVENTS THE EIGHTIES SOUND - WHEN ELECTRO CAPTURES THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

The emergence of a new group comes from a particular configuration, a geographical psychology that exaggerates the randomness of encounters. Objective chance operated when the four members of Ladytron met each other. Four characters scattered around a country where pop-rock culture excites affective attachments between a town and a sound. Liverpool is inseparable from the ghostly silhouettes of the Beatles. The nineties decade wove other links like those in Bristol from whence the trip-hop sound emerged; more to the East, Sheffield was conspicuous with a deleterious electronic scene, a unified technonic screech around one label, Warp. As many elective urban sound stories.

Ladytron escapes the dominating model. Reuben, one of the four members of the group comments on their geographical quartering in the four corners of the Kingdom, "Helen comes from Glasgow, Danny is based in Cambridge, I'm more or less still in Liverpool, and Mira - who lived in Bulgaria and Israel for a long time - everywhere and nowhere," before concluding, "it affects our state of mind. We don't have to submit to a one place in particular." Amused, he adds that all four share a sign of recognition, a haircut. Short, tomboyish, Jean Seberg style for the girls, it bears the hallmark of darkness and frames the pale faces. All four of them seem to come out of a XXIst century play by Cocteau, carrying their fugitive adolescence like an ultimate form of elegance. The striking character of their duality is divided in the symmetric squaring of the group, two girls versus two boys. The versatile musical articulation accentuates this fusing creation even more; as during their concerts, emerging from a wall of old-fashion synthesisers, recuperated Moogs (an old sonorous artillery next to the latest technological inventions) they operate indifferently. No guitars, no charismatic female singer in front of the stage, the group works in ubiquity. Through stylistic reduplication during their last concert in London they wore the same metallic uniform, resembling something between a space suit and a biker's jacket, a borrowed reference from the cinema that presides over the last part of their name. Helen comments and corrects the misleading first impression that led me towards aesthetic retro-futurist memories of the Cold War, the iconographic Eastern block with robotic rhythms. "When we're dressed in the same way, we really become a group. It's a factor of unification and equality. Then it's no longer possible to distinguish one member rather than another which allows us to obtain greater visibility. It is also a way of conserving a distance,

but in a natural way." They are preceded in this game of image adaptations and manipulations by a lot of pop-rock groups, not least, the Beatles, the Residents or again Kraftwerk. "At the moment there is a rather a trend in this direction, for example the Hives," adds Reuben.

The plethora of names, tendencies and resurgences that accompanied their brief existence does not seem to either encumber them too much or absorb them too much. We have rarely seen so much logorrhoea in the musical press. The release of their LP 604 and their single *Play Girl* (of which a mini-album of remixes by Felix da Housecat, Simian, I Monster or again Zombie Nation & King of Woolworths exists elsewhere) was accompanied by seductive media coverage. A dithyrambic semantic celebration articulated by terms such as "electro Blitzkrieg, electro-modernist-pop group, teutonic black techno, Neu sound European music, Kraut-synth-pop tunes". As many references that propelled them higgledy-piggledy into the eighties, sticking them to 1981, pop's fantastic year. Then groups like Visage, Human League or Blondie reigned as maestros. A seizing contrast to the blandness of today's hits and the allegiance to stupidity by boys and girls bands. When a possible return to the eighties is mentioned, Reuben exclaims peremptorily, "It's a common, current mistake that pursues our music. If you listen to our album carefully, there are only 25 % really electro influences." The rest is a product of chiselled melodies and tender, bitter chants punctuated by succinct lyrics. Their pieces come partly from old machines, whose sound is enough to give birth to nostalgia: synthesisers, Moogs, rhythm boxes. But the equation is distorted, there is no mawkishness in their approach, "What's more, in the eighties we were ten year olds, adds Reuben, "At the time I played violin and I listened to more Bach than anything else." No fetishism accompanies their predilection for these outdated sounds, "We like those old machines, but most of our songs come from very recent programs that reproduce the eighties electro sound very well. We must remain modern and try out accessible technology," Reuben concludes.

Faced with the verbal overstatements that the success of *Play Girl* generated, propelled to the top of the charts with best single of the month in the magazine NME and the choice of 604 as album of the month adopted by the magazine Sleaze Nation, they found themselves encumbered by a mass of references, torrents of names, a vertiginous enumeration of promising filiations, all stifling

and ramified. Maturity like determination are the best ramparts against this untimely wave. What's more their aim remains sincere: become a pop group. Reuben explains, "Pop possesses enormous potential, one can touch a lot more people than if one remains underground. I think that the approach of the more underground groups functions as a denial of themselves. It is not so much the question of increasing sales but more of opening up to a wider public." When questioned on their influences, they remain wisely vague, Georgio Morodor, French pop, Air, Blondie... This elusive,

laconic character is a distinctive mark of their music; elliptic, dreamy lyrics stand out on the foggy, syncopated tracks that are, "deliberately ambiguous. We don't want our songs to be deciphered and analysed. What's more the best lyrics are not necessarily those that have an obvious meaning. We like to retain the intangible element in what we do." Nomadic, they will leave for Berlin this Spring to record their second album, squaring the circle... ■

PLAY GIRL AND REMIX LABEL INVICTA HI-FI

