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**Pixies – *Doggerel* Biography 2022 (Extended)**

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Over the wreckage of the modern world, a bad moon rises. Black Francis knows it spells bad news. He’s long aware of the adrenalizing effect of the lunar cycle on the human psyche - the way the drunks in his brother’s bar get more aggressive when, as one of his torrent of new songs goes, ‘There’s A Moon On’. “*There’s a storm in your brain on a full moon night*,” he howls, but he “*don’t like to fight, don’t like to spit*”. When that lunar fever hits, he’d rather turn the bloodlust to more lascivious ends.

“I'm into the civilised shit,” he says, “except for it's also passionate. There's another way to do this. We don't have to scrap, there's other things we can do with this extra special energy that we're encountering.”

Likewise, as a blood moon looms over mankind in the wake of the pandemic, Pixies come out to play, the alt-rock icons’ post-lockdown ardour channelled into a creative rage. In a virtually peerless 36-year history taking in a first era (1986-1993) that gouged out a raw, dynamic and influential new path for alternative rock over a clutch of seminal albums merging mythological savagery, sci-fi intrigue and collegiate pop charm, and a second since their 2004 reunion that has seen them alchemize more sophisticated dark arts, they’ve rarely been so fired up and wracked with that ancient hunger. Their fervour to be making music again has created an eighth album, *Doggerel*. A mature yet visceral record of gruesome folk, ballroom pop and brutal rock, haunted by the ghosts of affairs and indulgences, driven wild by cosmic forces and envisioning digital afterlives where no God has provided one. And all the while, right there on the news, another distant storm approaches.

*Doggerel* is an album that pounced into being. Where Francis – aka Charles Thompson IV – would usually show up to album sessions with scraps of songs that needed working up as a group, this time he arrived with 40 finished songs in the bank, largely penned in a rush of productivity over the winter of 2021-2. For a year or more he’d been compiling Fifties inspired country songs for an Americana solo album he was planning to make with Guided By Voices’ Bobby Bare Jr. But in initial remote Pixies sessions late in 2021 – producer Tom Dalgety working with Charles in Massachusetts before heading to LA to finish tracks with the rest of the band – Dalgety picked one of those tracks, ‘Human Crime’, to record with the band, and upended Pixies’ entire mindset.

“When I started to do the demos for the Pixies the last year or so,” he explains, “I initially had an attitude of, ‘well, the real country stuff, that's gonna go to Bobby's house, and the more indie rock sounding stuff, that'll go to the Pixies house, and that'll make everyone feel real comfortable’, right? They're not worried that ‘oh fuck, Charles is gonna make us make a country record’. Then Tom flipped it and said, ‘I want to do this ‘Human Crime’ song’, which is one of the country songs. I was like, alright, so that's the way it's gonna play out. It doesn't really matter what kind of song I write per se, if the producer and/or the band is attracted to the song, they're attracted to the song. I'm not gonna try to compartmentalise so much in my own mind, which works for me because I just want to fucking pick up my guitar and play. It was like, I’m just gonna write the songs and Bobby, sorry, you get second choice. The Pixies, they get first choice, whatever they want to pick.”

When ‘Human Crime’ emerged as a stand-alone single in March, accompanied by a video of disco pixies directed by bassist Paz Lenchantin, it had little country left in it. An effervescent Ramones-y party tune jiving darkly around a forlorn break-up story, it reflected the upbeat morale of this revitalised band. Convening for album sessions at Vermont’s Guilford Studios for three weeks in January and February, Pixies roared back to life. Paz - who’d spent the pandemic developing an Airbnb business in Palm Springs to loosen her dependency on music and taken up desert hiking and pottery to fend off the downtime blues (“touring, being in the band, it’s part of what I feel makes me a person, almost,” she says, “without that I felt real incomplete”) - was overjoyed to be back with her “brothers” in a studio with little historical overbear: “you got this feeling that it’s fresh, like we are making the history there.”

Drummer Dave Lovering was a new man, having turned the frustration of several cancelled Pixies tours (the global jaunt for 2019’s *Beneath The Eyrie* album was cut short just three shows in) into an opportunity to undergo surgery for carpal tunnel issues with both hands. And having demos of completed songs sent over from Charles from December for him to work on ahead of recording, he felt more confident than ever. “I’m a slow learner and I really want to know these things inside and out before I record them, or at least have a good representation of how they should be,” he says. As a result, “it’s probably the first record since *Doolittle* that I’m absolutely overjoyed by.”

Guitarist Joey Santiago, meanwhile, had found his songwriting mojo on a guitar shop couch. The couch at Norman’s Rare Guitars in LA, where he’d turned up ready to drop a figure “in the thousand-teens” on a guitar he adored, only to be mesmerised a mahogany 1950s Martin 0-18 instead. “I just love it,” he enthuses. “It doesn’t sound fully developed – nothing wrong with The Eagles but it doesn’t sound breezy. I guess I wanted something raw, and I started writing.” Back home on his own couch, the guitar carried him through some melodies he assumed must be junk. “I guess I was in kind of a zombie state, just playing. After I stopped playing I put it down and went ‘well, that was a fucking waste of time…what a piece of shit I am’. I beat myself up a lot, but my girlfriend, unbeknownst to me she was recording me. She played it back to me and I go ‘fuck! Hold on a second here! This stuff is good!’”

That song became the powerful, Who-like ‘Dregs Of The Wine’, Joey’s first song on a Pixies album (there will be more; Joey arrived for *Doggerel* sessions with his own clutch of finished tunes). Adding lyrics about hallucinatory Vegas nights and partying beneath the Hollywood sign, Charles turned into a track that both celebrates the pair’s wilder adventures “living in Los Angeles in the ‘90s with my then-wife, hanging out with Joey and his ex-wife, lots of trips to Las Vegas, a lot of drinking, little bit drug taking, some genuine good times” and hints at the downfalls to come. “The sinking feeling that this isn't going to always be, this is not going to last forever,” Charles says. “This is a nice moment that we're all having here but someday the moment will be too much for some people and will derail them. For some of us, maybe it won't completely derail our life but our life will become derailed anyway, right?” Indeed, the song opens with Charles relating the tongue-in-cheek reason he’d give for his extremely amicable divorce from his first wife: that she preferred the Van Halen version of The Kinks’ ‘You Really Got Me’.

“We did have a good time drinking and mulling and complaining about life, as you would,” Joey recalls. “Happy conversations never come out of it, and that’s a beautiful thing. It’s like therapy until the liquor becomes your boss and then it’s all downhill from there.” Sure enough, on *Doggerel* Charles pairs the ‘before’ imagery of ‘Dregs Of The Wine’ with its ‘after’ picture, ‘Vault Of Heaven’, a slab of brooding Morricone rock desolation which finds its crushed can of a protagonist heading to 7-Eleven “*to try to get me straight*” and ending up “*flat on my face*”.

Joey also contributed a lyric to *Doggerel*, for upbeat folk rocker ‘Pagan Man’: “I’ve always liked the pagans being outsiders, derided by the other sects,” he says. Charles’ words, meanwhile, explore the joys and frustrations of the past, the turbulence of the present and the possibilities of the future. Several songs appear to chew ferociously over broken relationships. Like ‘Bone Machine’ delivered with the sarcastic sneer of The Strangers, ‘Nomatterday’ trips between a sardonic spoken word Dear John letter (“*why do you come here lately, after all that we’ve been through?*”) and a surrealist rush rock rampage full of necromancers, easter bunnies and entreaties not to “*piss in the fountains*”. “The second half of song is just as relationship oriented,” Charles says. “It's just littered with a lot more verbose language and not told it a straight way. To me, that message of the song is ‘I'm done, I'm out of this particular paradigm here, I'm leaving. And here's this nice fountain, co-human, maybe don't piss in it’.”

‘Who’s More Sorry Now?’ is just as claws-out, while the bombastic ‘You’re Such A Sadducee’ likens an ex-partner to a draconian Biblical law-keeper. “The sadducees were obsessed with the letter of the law and following the rules, but they didn't understand the spirit of the law,” Charles explains. “There's this kind of rock’n’roll musical theatre period in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s which I thought was totally cool. In my mind it's like a song from *Jesus Christ Superstar* or whatever.”

More wistfully, the ‘50s inflected crooner pop highlight ‘Haunted House’ traces the ghosts of romance and human legacy roaming a reputedly spectre riddled house that Charles once frequented somewhere in England. “Ghosts is not just as in spirits, but also the ghosts of real-life human energy,” says Charles. “What went on when people were alive, what they did there and the remnants of their activities that you can find in the floorboards. Ghosts.” And the title track, on which Charles adopts a Tom Waits growl over Paz’s low-down funk pop bass, relays the strange history of the mountain town of Colrain (population 1,813) near Charles’ home, the first house of which was built, coincidentally, by another Charles Thompson around 1735. Named after Lord Baron Coleraine, whose gift of a church bell was lost or stolen en route to the village, early settlers there had a folk song about the place, telling of their failed attempts to leave. Each time they’d try to move on they’d find themselves lost in the mountains outside town and circling back to this inescapable hole.

“I find the whole thing really beautiful,” says Charles, who also took inspiration from an equally self-deprecating doggerel written by Coleraine’s son George. “That song that the Colrainers wrote about themselves, ‘*we'll never leave here again’*, it's just like, ‘we found our place in the sun’. My song is a love song I suppose, but the framework is this whole history of Colrain. It's ‘I'm never gonna leave, I'm here with you until the end, whatever befalls us, here we are. Let's just do this thing’, and I really like that.”

Inevitably, given overwhelming world events and the technological deluge, the modern age creeps in. On brimstone folk track ‘Thunder & Lightning’, a memory of Charles and his girlfriend dashing through the rain to grab vegetables in New York’s Chinatown - and the fear of their new love being destroyed in a lightning flash - transmutes into a metaphor for the way that distant events eventually engulf us, like thunder rolling across Western cities ahead of the storm. “I liked stealing a line from the old Beach Boys song ‘Vegetables’,” he admits. “So much happened in so few lines…I got to cover the Beach Boys, wondering how long can our love burn unmolested by the outside world, and then with just a couple more lines I have incorporated warfare, asking the same question under the same circumstances - how long until it tears us asunder? I was pleased with the way the song worked out. It's nice when you can say a lot of things in very few words.”

Then ‘Get Simulated’, all sonorous bass, steaming synth and thundercrack guitar, tackles the liquid concept of digital identities and the online afterlife we’ve invented for ourselves. “It's a William Gibson, Philip K. Dick kind of notion of who you are and who you're not,” Charles posits. “Where does you begin and where does the *idea*of you begin? And how are these ideas being developed here in the infancy, I suppose, of these sorts of concepts?”

It’s a more profound form of future-gazing that reflects Pixies’ direction of sonic travel. If 2014’s *Indie Cindy*was conceived as a belated continuation of *Bossanova*(1990) and *Trompe Le Monde* (1991) and 2016’s *Head Carrier* revisited some of the murky melody and exotic gristle of *Surfer Rosa* (1988) and *Doolittle* (1989), both *Beneath The Eyrie* and *Doggerel* are expansive and unfettered albums that leave behind any sense of expectation on this formative alt-rock band. Records evolved from, but not beholden to their past.

“This time around we have grown,” says Joey. “We no longer have under two-minute songs. We have little breaks, more conventional arrangements but still our twists in there.” “We're trying to do things that are very big and bold and orchestrated,” Charles adds, “not necessarily without any sophistication or complexity but it's nuanced…The punky punk stuff, I really like playing it but you just cannot artificially create that shit. I'm very hesitant to go there nowadays, simply because I know if I try to force it in any kind of way it's gonna fall flat, and there's all these other forms and moods that I'm interested in that when I attempt those, they don't fall flat to me. There's a lot of volume out there, but at some point the technology catches up with itself and it's like, okay, we can all be loud if we want to, we can all be as distorted as we want to, we can all be as rip-your-head-off as you want to. We can't really take it any further. Can we focus on some other things now? We’ve kind of done that. I want to try to make music that doesn't even involve electricity. I started to think like that, I started to think parameters.”

And Pixies’ forward momentum right now is unstoppable. There’s a creative moon on, and Pixies are gonna keep right on howling.

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