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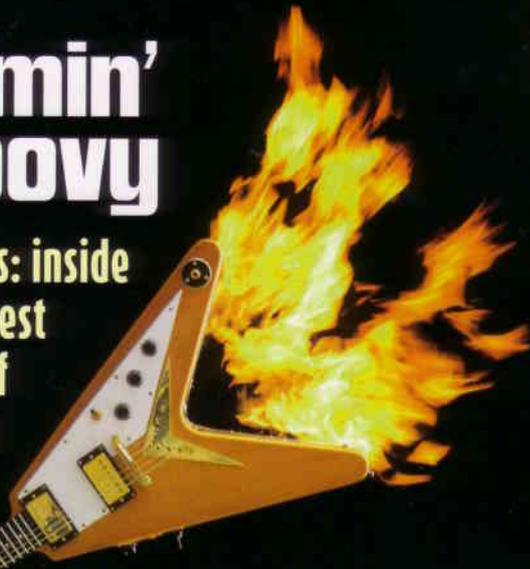
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THE FLANGING, THE BICKERING, THE BORROWING OF LIPSTICKS... FIVE GUITARISTS WHO SHAPED THE SOUND OF GOTH TALK ABOUT ITS '80S HEYDAY AND TRY TO REMEMBER WHO HAD A WHITE FALCON FIRST. JENNY KNIGHT EMBRACES HER DARK SIDE...

# Back To The Batcave

**‘W**e hated being called goth,’ muses the impeccably suave Flesh For Lulu frontman Nick Marsh. ‘If they called you a goth then you couldn’t be taken seriously.’ He takes a swig of Guinness and delivers the immortal line: ‘But now I actually look for myself in all the books about goth and think: “How come we’re not in it?”’

He’s not alone in this outlook. Goth’s one of those genres no one

wants to be seen with, but a shedload of shockingly diverse ‘80s bands found themselves bound to. It’s a shadowy beast in more ways than one: some feel it dovetails with New Wave, some feel it’s reincarnated in industrial... others swear it only applies to The Sisters Of Mercy between February and December 1983. Whether it has its roots in glam, The Stooges, the Alex Harvey Band, Joy Division, King Crimson or snakebite and black is another moot point.

What is clear is that a discernable movement was born out of the ashes of the punk scene around the turn of the ‘80s. Suburban branches of punk that were distinctly artier and more middle-class were morphing into something more refined and theatrical, with Siouxsie And The Banshees and The Cure leading the way. If you’re looking for a place to start, check out Robert Smith’s Moorish guitar pattern on The Cure’s Killing An Arab, or the recently reinstated Porl Thompson’s work.



The Banshees drew heavily from Hammer Horror films, with Siouxi Sioux reinventing herself as a haughty pin-up. While John McKay delivered some angular chops on *Hong Kong Garden*, their finest moments were with John McGeoch, who also served time with Magazine and PiL, and died in March 2004. 'I loved the fact that I could say, "I want this to sound like a horse falling off a cliff", and he would know exactly what I meant,' Siouxi said. Armed with a Yamaha SG1000, an MXR flanger and a Yamaha E1005 Analog Delay, John McGeoch set the tone for goth soundscaping.

Barrelling in from another dimension altogether were Melbournean chaos merchants The Birthday Party. Their guitarist, Rowland Howard, was pliant in the midst of the onstage hurricane, coolly flicking out icy licks as frontman Nick Cave and deranged cowboy-bassist Tracy Pew attacked the audience and each other in a drug-fuelled frenzy.

'When we moved to London we had two records that we played all the time,' says Rowland, safely entrenched in Melbourne again. 'One was PiL's *Metal Box* and the other was by The Contortions. I always loathed bands like Killing Joke that were regarded as our peers, but I loved Richard Lloyd from Television, and Robert Quine. They weren't obsessed with techniques – they were far more interested in the sounds they were producing.'

Rowland was producing some otherworldly sounds himself, even though the only guitar he ever used was a '63 Fender Jaguar.

'My basic set-up was my Fender Twin with full reverb, an MXR Distortion Plus and an MXR Blue Box, which is like an octave divider that doesn't track properly so you get all these really strange harmonics. That's how I kept my sustain going for so long; if you've got a lot of treble it's got a really strongly gated effect that adds deep sustain to a note, before ending dead. Neil Young used it for the solo in *On Broadway*.'

Instead of using his boots like his bandmates, Howard would punish the audience for its blanket hostility by combining squalling feedback with whammy-bar abuse – something drummer (and surrogate dad) Mick Harvey was none too pleased about.

'Mick was appalled when I got a guitar with a whammy bar,' Howard chuckles. 'He was always trying to lay down the law, but in those days he didn't have the creative authority to back it up, so Nick and Tracy and I were like the naughty boys and Mick would try and keep us in line. He went absolutely spare when Tracy got a Fender Bass VI, and told him it was to be gotten rid of *immediately* – he just



Left, Rowland Howard of The Birthday Party; right, Nick Cave

## 'The beauty of electric guitars is you can defeat their original purpose to a huge extent' – Rowland Howard

couldn't cope with the idea of Tracy playing a baritone guitar at all, which is a shame, because the results would have been quite interesting.'

Despite this friction, the band were united in their mission to let all hell break loose in the studio.

'It seemed that every new song we learned, Nick would say to me "I want you to play a really horrible sound here, but it has to be completely different to all the other horrible sounds you've done",' Howard remembers. '*Junkyard* was a flawed experiment in that we were looking for extremes of sound, but it just turned into this white noise. Just as on *Release The Bats*, we surrounded my amp with a tunnel of corrugated iron and then attached contact mics to it. I was running the guitar through a 24-band graphic EQ

to distort it without everything turning to mush, and you just couldn't be in the room, it was so unbelievably offensive.

'I think the beauty of electric guitars is you can defeat their original purpose to a huge extent,' he reflects. 'They're very mechanical, so you can get all these kind of sounds by doing things that were never intended to be done on them – whereas you can't just punch a pedal on the side and make a weird noise. Particularly with Fender Jaguars; they've got bits of metal everywhere, so you can get a lot of sounds out of hitting them on the strings, above the neck, below the bridge, all that sort of stuff.'

The resulting cacophony certainly made an impact on the British goth scene. Nick Cave wrote an appraisal of their 'peers' in the *NME*, labelling them 'paper tigers all'.



The Cure, with guitarist Porl Thompson on the left and Robert Smith, centre



The Sisters Of Mercy, with Wayne Hussey seated far left and, top right, with Ovation

## 'Pete Burns put all the guitars through a sequencer, so I became redundant' - Wayne Hussey

The Sisters Of Mercy were particularly crushed after getting a dismissive reception from The Birthday Party when they supported them.

Formed in Leeds by the dark lord of don't-call-me-goth, Andrew Eldritch, The Sisters drew from the theatrics of The Damned, adding a dirty, distorted bass. Guitarist Wayne Hussey came onboard in 1984, and endowed the band with more textures, including his trademark 12-string acoustic. Thoroughly neglected during the punk years, acoustics were making a dramatic comeback, with Gene Loves Jezebel, All About Eve, Psychedelic Furs and The Alarm all introducing them into the mix.

Prior to the Sisters, Hussey had drifted from band to band before hooking up with Pete Burns' rather 'flamboyant' project, Dead Or Alive. 'When I joined them they were a goth band into The Doors,' Hussey assures us. 'Then they started listening to a lot of gay disco music and it evolved that way. The catalyst was I had a little SH-101 synth I used to play around with, and I

discovered that if you ran a guitar through it you get a gated "duh-duh-duh" effect. Pete loved it, but instead of using it sparingly he went the whole hog and from then on all the guitar parts ended up being put in a sequencer, so I became redundant.'

The Sisters offered Wayne Hussey a chance to experiment guitar-wise, and for a while they could do no wrong – to most people, at least.

'We toured with the Sisters and I remember Wayne and Craig as being a couple of basic northern lads,' Flesh For Lulu's Nick Marsh wheezes. 'They'd sit there and take the mickey for half an hour: "Give us a go on your lipstick, then! Look at you – you look like a right girlie!" Then that tour finished and Wayne started adopting the full look.

'Our guitarist Rocco Barker was a champion fencer at school,' he continues, on a roll. 'He found out that Andrew Eldritch also fenced, so he walked onstage during their soundcheck with a leather glove, slapped it around Andrew's face and threw it down.



'On a college campus in Leeds there was a big duel arranged by the students. They had adjudicators and proper gear, and it was held in a big courtyard on the Sisters' home turf. Rocco ended up whipping Andrew's arse – we didn't get any soundchecks after that because Andrew's such a bad loser...'

Hussey obviously thought so, too, as after an acrimonious split with Eldritch he started The Mission, a name allegedly pinched from Andrew's forthcoming album. Their 1986 debut, *God's Own Medicine*, was recorded with the help of a hefty dose of amphetamines.

'There's more guitar orchestration on that record than on any of the others; lots and lots of guitar overdubs,' Hussey says wryly. 'I also used to slow the tape down to half speed a lot so that when I put it back at the normal speed it was an octave higher. You can't get the same effect with any modern box or computer.'

Wayne and lead guitarist Simon Hinkler were using the staple goth effects – phaser, chorus and distortion – for a grand, doomy effect. 'Around that time I got a Roland GP8 rack, which was basically eight Boss pedals that you could program. I've tried many things over the years, but I always go back to that for live music,' declares Wayne.

The band adopted a spaghetti western image and added a touch of Ennio Morricone to the windswept guitars, quickly aped by The Bolshoi and Fields Of The Nephilim. They hit the stadium trail with U2, and The Edge's innovative style rubbed off on Wayne.

'I was listening to *Joshua Tree* a lot at the time, and I thought I wouldn't mind a bit of that myself. I love *With Or Without You*, and *Butterfly Wheel* was my emulation of that song,' he admits. 'We were making a bit more money by then, so Simon was using a custom-built Zemaitis and I was using Gretsches, Starcasters, Les Pauls, 12-string acoustics,

and of course my old Vox Teardrop and Gretsch White Falcon...

'I had a guitar from Flesh For Lulu once,' he adds darkly. 'They toured with us and I borrowed this really beat-up, cheap thing, and they borrowed a Telecaster from me. During the course of the tour I trashed their guitar so I ended up having to let them keep the Telecaster in return for this plank of wood.'

Another band pioneering acoustics were The Alarm. Guitarist Dave Sharp was heavily into Woodstock folk and British rock music, but it was his combination of electric and acoustic guitars that gave The Alarm their organic, yet anthemic sound. Sharp ripped the components out of a Les Paul and installed them into his Epiphone acoustic for a gnarlier sound, and souped up frontman Mike Peters' instrument in a similar way.

Live, they'd use a hot-rodded Marshall, getting inside the chassis and messing with the components. 'In the early stages we used a lot of outboard equalisers, but eventually I found that really getting inside the chassis was the way to go,' he says. 'I was working with a great amp doctor called Peter Hartley, who'd been modifying amps since the early days of Marshall. More or less all through The Alarm I was using master-volume Marshalls converted back to the same specs of the model 1959 amp. It exploited the rhythmic style I played with, and gave me a measure of fluidity when moving over to playing lead guitar.'

Over the years, Sharp also used a Tele, a Strat and a Zemaitis, 'and I had a flutter with an E-Bow on *Howling Wind*, just as a textural thing.'

Despite legions of loyal fans and faultless production on all their albums, The Alarm were winning no fans at the music inkiest during the '80s. The Cult's Billy Duffy once admitted at a time of critical unacclaim that if it wasn't for The Alarm, he would have committed suicide.

## GOTH'S NOT DEAD

No, it's just morphed into new genres. For doomy metal, check out 'darkwave' bands like *Die So Fluid*, *Lacuna Coil* and *Switchblade Symphony*. Industrial music is perhaps the strongest descendant of guitar-based goth, with *Ministry*, *Murderdolls*, *Marilyn Manson* and *Nine Inch Nails* all taking the music and imagery to extremes. Eighties *Matchbox B-Line Disaster* do a grand job of channelling *The Damned* and *The Cramps*, while bands like *Interpol*, *Queen Adreena* and *The Rasmus* uphold the poppier end.



Flesh For Lulu in their heyday. Guitarists Nick Marsh (left) and Rocco Barker (front)

It's not at all surprising that he was relieved – you can distinctly hear shades of Cult's classic *She Sells Sanctuary* in The Alarm's earlier track, *The Stand*.

'I wasn't too aware of them,' says Sharp, 'but we were rehearsing at a studio at one point and I happened to hear a sound coming from next door. I popped my head around to have a look and there's Uncle Billy. It was interesting because he was doing things that I'd just begun to do, like running multiple amps within the same rig.'

'The majority of people seemed to be listening carefully to each other at that time. I'd heard what The Edge was doing, and after that began to understand how to use the delay in a dynamic sense, to create different depths of perspective. A lot of bands started to use that heavily chorus sound as well, but I was thinking back to Hank Marvin and Pete Townshend, and the purity of their tone.'

At the opposite end of the sonic spectrum were the raucous, atom bomb-haired Flesh For Lulu, influenced by Marc Bolan and The New York Dolls, corrupted by *The Damned* and *The Cramps*.

'Bands like us and *Alien Sex Fiend* and *Specimen* and *Southern Death Cult* were always rubbing shoulders at the *Batcave*,' says Nick Marsh, who virtually lived at the infamous London club. 'I never felt there was competition at all. There was more of a competition to see who could do the longest projectile vomiting or wear the more ridiculous haircut.'

Flesh For Lulu were signed to Polydor on the strength of a demo ('that would never happen now!') and wound up releasing six albums on various labels.

Marsh freely admits to owning the obligatory Boss delay, flanger and chorus, as well as some more curious beasts.

'Rocco used to have a Melos tape echo with a little tape inside it that kept breaking, so he'd get a secondhand cassette from Oxfam and take the tape from that, so there'd be *Zorba The Greek* coming through like an old ghost. He'd churn out loads of caterwauling feedback with a lot of echo on a double cutaway White Falcon that he bought from Matthew Ashman from *Bow Wow Wow*, but it got stolen by a roadie, so then Billy Duffy sold him a single cutaway version. We used to call it 'the wardrobe' because it's so enormous it's like strapping a piece of Ikea furniture to your stomach.'

Nick has owned his '62 Fender Jazzmaster, 'Hank' (once owned by Elvis Costello), for 25 years. 'It's the only guitar with a whammy bar that you can use to slacken the strings right off or bend them almost to breaking point upwards, and it will always spring straight back into tune,' he purrs. 'I'll never forget Brian from *The Damned* getting up on stage with us once and borrowing it. We played a cover of *1970* by *The Stooges* and he took my guitar off at the end, swirled it around by its strap and sent it sailing across the stage. It flew through the air about 60 feet and this heroic roadie just made a dive for it and caught it when it was about to land – this was my beloved Hank – what a wanker. I wouldn't have done that to his SG.'

Flesh For Lulu hit the big time in America when cult teen movie director John Hughes used their track *I Go Crazy* in the film *Some Kind Of Wonderful*.

Mammoth tours with PIL and Gene Love Jezebel followed, before the band imploded after recording a new album in Australia. "We went over there to have a fabulous adventure but Rocco stole the bass player's girlfriend and it all went tits up," recalls Nick. 'Doesn't it say that in the history books? Well, that's what actually happened!'

Another band that got the John Hughes treatment was The Psychedelic Furs, whose early track *Pretty In Pink* was reworked for the hit film of the same name. Guitarist John Ashton had been on the fringes of the goth scene since its inception, and had played on an early Sisters single, *Alice*. He brought a Les Paul and a John Birch guitar to The Psychedelic Furs, the latter procured from The Banshees' John McKay.

'I went to the London Synthesiser Centre and got an ARP Avatar, which looked like a Moog and had a setting called Hex Fuzz that I liked,' he remembers. 'It came with a pickup that would go into my guitar, and I ran it through a little telephone extension speaker or my Fender Twin. I got a lot of the ambient sounds for *India* off that, and the solo for *Fall*. I learned how to do the same thing with gain and distortion in the end – it's a lot less hassle!'

Ashton was also a big fan of traditional valve amps and interesting distortion boxes. 'I spent a lot of time doing overdubs on our second album *Talk Talk Talk*, and I always had four guitar parts for quite some time after that. In *Dumb Waiters* I did some elephantine feedback on some of the solos, and some atmospheric slide on the outro. We got bigger, more ambient sounding and reverby, but it was still very in your face.

'I played acoustic for the first time – a J-200 on the intro and outro of *All Of This And Nothing* – but my main guitar was a Music Man Sabre II. I put a Les Paul pickup in the neck and a Bill Lawrence in the bridge, and cranked it up through a



John Ashton of The Psychedelic Furs, plus appropriately pink Zon Stiletto guitar

## 'I was always into effected sounds, with textures and volume swells and harmonics' – John Ashton

baby Vox and a Pignose. Pedalwise, I was using an MXR flanger, a Rat, a Roland Space Echo, delays and wah. I was always much more into effected-sounding lines than straight ones, and I also used a lot of textures and volume pedal swells, as well as some harmonics.'

The Psychedelic Furs recently reformed and are recording a new album, as are Flesh For Lulu, who plan to release their future records over the internet. Look out for Rocco in the forthcoming reality TV series *A Place In Spain: Rocco And Dawn*. 'I think all these TV bigwigs were sitting around and someone said, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a cross between *A Place In The Sun* and *The Osbournes*?"' offers a laughing Nick Marsh.

Over in Melbourne, meanwhile, Rowland Howard is working on a new solo album with local band The Devastations, and up in Manchester, Dave Sharp continues to play with his new band Soul Co. Wayne Hussey is living the life of a glamorous expat in Brazil, but will be touring extensively once The Mission's new album is released next year, and plans to collaborate once more with on-off Mission guitarist Simon Hinkler, as well as Echo & The Bunnymen's Will Sergeant.



The Alarm, with Dave Sharp, left, and Mike Peters, far right



## GOTH BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Lack of space means we can't properly doff a cap to all the greats. However, we recommend that you also check out...

- Daniel Ash** Bauhaus, Love And Rockets
- Billy Duffy** The Cult
- Blixa Bargeld** Bad Seeds, Einstürzende Neubauten
- Brian James** The Damned, Lords Of The New Church
- James Stevenson** Generation X, Gene Loves Jezebel
- Tim Bricheno** All About Eve, Sisters Of Mercy
- Kirk Brandon** Theatre Of Hate, Spear Of Destiny
- Geordie Walker** Killing Joke
- Steve Stevens** Billy Idol