

New York City

NYC IS FAMED FOR BREEDING AN IMPRESSIVE LINEAGE OF MAVERICK TALENT AND THE CITY CONTINUES TO PRODUCE PRODIGIOUS ARTISTS WITH RAW POWER. AARON BONDAROFF AND ETHAN SWAN PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON A POSSE OF NEW YORK HEROES

NO FEAR

T: Aaron Bondaroff PH: Shaniqwa Jarvis

Michael David Quattlebaum Jr came to New York at the age of 16 as a runaway from Northern California. I met him around this time. He was a young kid with a lot of energy – living the life of a true artist – telling stories of the streets, survival, celebration and sex.

Michael is a poet and the founder of No Fear, a performance collective and the musical component of his artistic practice. Other members of the No Fear collective are sculptor and musician Jeffery Joyal, the collective's guitarist, and Daniel Fisher aka DJ Physical Therapy, once the drummer and now No Fear's producer.

No Fear is loud; at times, they are industrial dance synth and heavy with the guitar. When No Fear are on stage, shirtless frontman Michael absolutely captivates the audience. He is young, sweaty and loose, screaming his words and singing his life away. It is a performance from an artist which is both honest and romantic.

What drives Michael is laid bare when he proclaims: 'Death and reincarnation. Fuck reincarnation. I want to live as many lives as I can in this life. I don't feel trapped by contemporary life, I don't feel trapped by cosmopolitanism or money. I'm an explorer, I have nothing to lose and everything to gain.' ✖

Debut single will be out soon on aNYthing



T: Ethan Swan PH: Shaniqwa Jarvis

LED ER EST

Led Er Est haven't played live in over a year. It seems a shame, especially considering their hustle in the 12 months preceding the break: the release of their debut LP, a European tour with Xeno and Oaklander, countless loft parties, basement bar nights, and warehouse shows. Rock biographies insist that such drastic reversals are rooted in tragedy, creative shortcomings, or band fights euphemised as 'musical differences'. Pressed for an answer, Shawn O'Sullivan goes in a different direction: 'Speaking for all three of us, I think our attitudes towards doing this has definitely changed for a number of reasons. We're just now connected more than ever.'

Sitting in Shawn's living room – a careful arrangement of keyboards along one wall and a well-used kitchenette on the other – it's easy to see the fruits of this connection. 'We're not just making music constantly,' Sam Kklovenhoof explains, gesturing towards a supper table of hand-rolled dumplings, fresh bread, and newly picked kale. 'As you can see, we're hanging out a lot of the time just eating and whatnot.' This break has teased Led Er Est into becoming the healthiest, most well-adjusted band in New York, and this attitude has invigorated their song writing.

The one document that's emerged from this year-long silence is *May*, a hard-packed EP that wends from skittering pop to tonal shards in just six songs. The title track is particularly compelling – a clenched-fist lament for a bygone revolution – and its strength could be pinpointed on the exasperated howl of the chorus, or it could be the subterranean echo of the drums of the elaborate, interlaced synths squaring off each pass. Ultimately it isn't any of these, but the way the three members figured out how to balance these sounds and bring the language-less communion of a shared meal to the dynamic exchanges of a song. Led Er Est plan to return to stage this autumn, in time for harvest. ✖

'May' EP out now on Captured Tracks

PRURIENT

T: Ethan Swan PH: Shaniqwa Jarvis



Prurient's *Let's Make A Slave* is probably the most appropriately titled song of 2011. Tonally somewhere between the exalting swell of church organs and the dire gallop of *Suspiria*, the main theme creeps at ankle level, rising up to inhabit listeners like a puppeteer's hand. Falling into its sway is an uneasy, addicting experience, heightened by Dominick Fernow's strained whisper. 'Leave your family behind/lock the gate hide the key', he begins, with a closeness and perseverance that must be obeyed or shut off immediately. A vision of joining one thousand bodies snapping along with its relentless snare is a terrifying warning away from a Prurient concert.

For many years, Prurient concerts were avoided by many simply for the sake of self-preservation. These intensely physical performances didn't just rupture eardrums, they cut into sinuses and shook parts of the body that most listeners rarely acknowledged. But a decade of touring taught Dominick about another disconcerting physicality: the body in travel. 'There's so much tedium to sitting in a van, being isolated,' he described, 'you're travelling through environments but at the same time you're divorced from them.' The alienation doesn't end there. A second break takes place at a more fundamental level for Dominick: 'You're moving fast, but your body is not moving.'

After a particularly savage stretch of travel, Dominick set out to address this physical disconnect in song. This task required a clean slate, and the finished project, *Bermuda Drain*, uses no equipment from previous Prurient recordings, down to the cables and microphones. The outcome is a forceful, enthralling masterpiece, conquering listeners with crystalline keyboard archways and chiseled tunnels of sound. Music is rarely this precise, and therein lies its power: as it moves, you cannot help but move with it, and as it voices its alienation, you have no choice but to concur. Another slave is made. ✖

'Bermuda Drain' is out now on Hydra Head

When describing the years of consideration and refinement that preceded the inaugural live performances of Xeno and Oaklander, the duo of Sean McBride and Liz Wendelbo refer to 'the bunker'. This metaphoric shelter can signify the band's Brooklyn studio and its racks of vintage synthesizers; the weekly Wierd party, a longstanding celebration of obscure electronic records; or the duo's critical stance against cultural alienation. The rise of the laptop performer and the post-September 11 dissolution of New York dance culture helped necessitate this armoured seclusion, but not as much as the duo's intense love of the synthesizer and desire to refigure its role in music.

'The synthesizer is this thing you hear every day, it's ubiquitous, it's virtualised, it's hybridised, it's everywhere,' explains Sean McBride, 'but there was never a longstanding tradition of analog synth music, of people developing new ways to use it and new kinds of songwriting around its limited scope.' The competition between Roland, Korg and Onkyo to develop smaller, cheaper, and more powerful instruments carried such momentum, it swept away any possibility for community or shared evolution. Two decades later, the scorched-earth surroundings of the 21st century drove McBride and Wendelbo into this abandoned history, emerging from this excavation with an intensely melodic, mournful, and emotive new strain of minimal electronic music.

Onstage, Xeno and Oaklander engage an elaborate network of machines, but the most important link in this circuit is themselves. Bending the current to form soaring sonic arches and deep static trenches, this isn't some cyberpunk fantasy, but the realisation of a resonance between supposedly obsolete technology and human nature. Exploring the limitations and flaws of both, Xeno and Oaklander have found liberation: 'There's freedom in the minimum,' reminds Liz Wendelbo. 'You can be free within these very small boundaries and explore ad infinitum.' ✖

New album 'Sets and Lights' due out on 11 October on Wierd Records

T: Ethan Swan PH: George Harvey

XENO & OAKLANDER



TV BABY

T: Aaron Bondaroff PH: Shaniqwa Jarvis

TV Baby is Matt McAuley (aka Skizzlord) and Brain McPeck. Matt writes lyrics, provides lead vocals and plays the sax, while Brain plays the guitar. The music is stripped down rock'n'roll, infused with a funky saxophone and a raw lyrical attitude.

Matt is a seasoned musician, and one of the founding members of ARE Weapons. He and Brain jam in a studio located on the Lower East Side that we call 'The Downtown Motown', where they sometimes spend the night, and provide an opportunity for other musicians to work on new ideas and collaborate. Jailbait is one of several new interesting music projects conceived there. They characterise the changing times of New York City culture, and are an important voice of the revolutionary downtown community.

ARE Weapons and TV Baby have an extensive body of work that nestles neatly beside an legendary point in time for the downtown art scene. In 2010, an eponymous book inspired has been published by OHWOW around TV culture; featuring new pieces by the same iconoclastic NY artists Dash Snow, Agathe Snow, Dan Colen, Nate Lowman, Hanna Liden, and Paul Sevigny; included with this is a TV Baby album.

TV Baby always feels like a musical premiere, never a re-run. TV Baby speaks to a generation raised with their TV as a surrogate parent. Perhaps we are all TV babies, brought up on the tube, visually stimulated to the limit with reruns, primetime shows, season finales, infomercials, and scrambled porn. ✖

'Wild Joy' featuring a T-shirt with artwork by Spencer Sweeney is available from aNYthing