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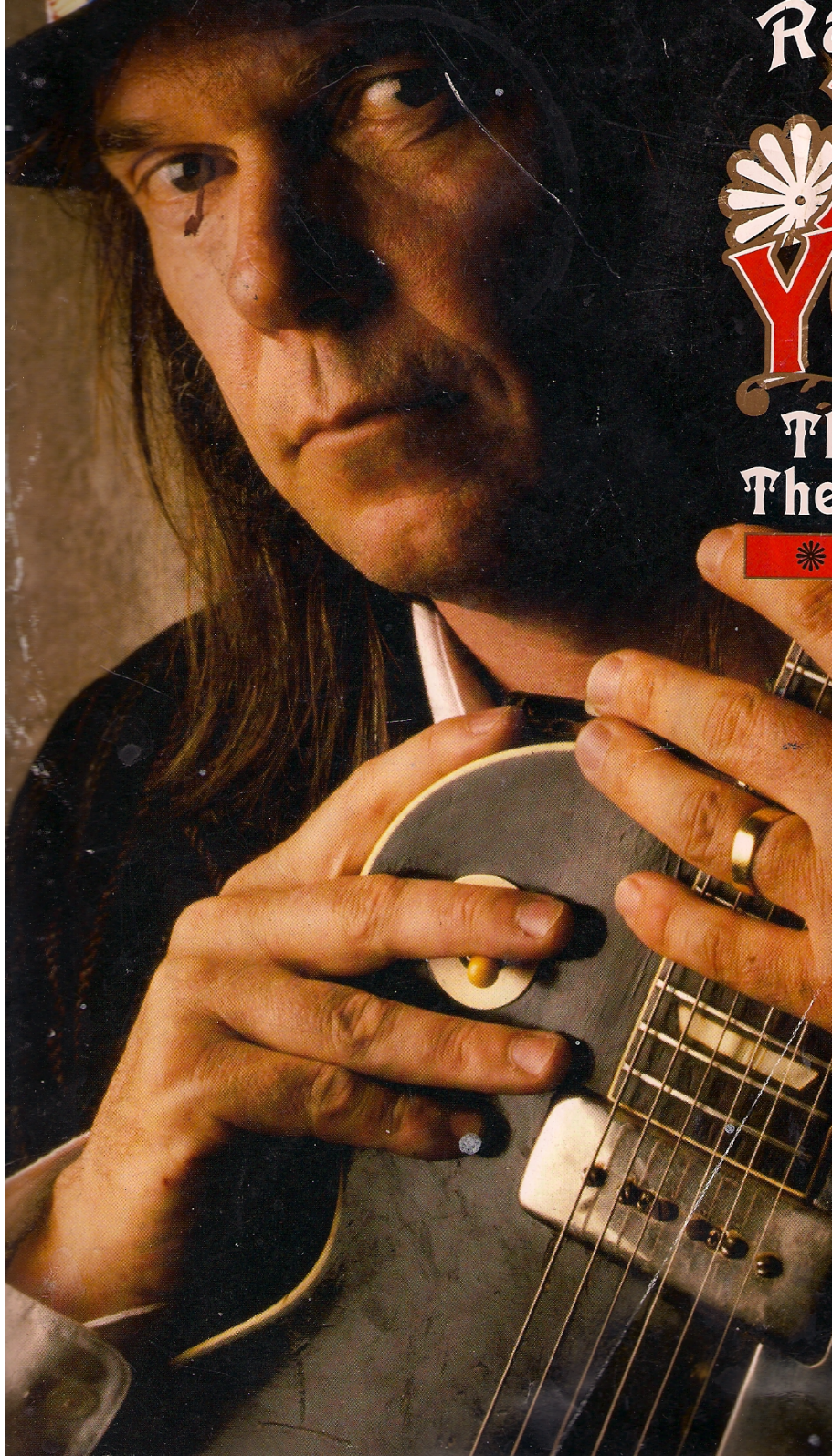
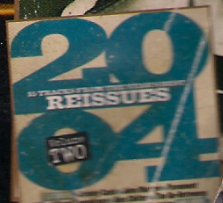
THE PIXIES

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The Pixies in '91: "We were brought together completely by accident, not by design" — Charles Thompson aka Frank Black Francis



BACK TO THE PLANET OF SOUND

It was the comeback they said would never, *could* never, happen. But in 2004, **THE PIXIES** reformed, and blew everyone's minds again. Here, the band who invented Nirvana and Radiohead talk exclusively to *Uncut* about their dramatic rise and fall and rise again

Words: Nick Hasted Portrait: Kevin Westenberg

“DIDN'T DO THOSE songs for a long time, because I was already demonised and made a fool of—‘Oh yeah, he used to be cool, and look at him now! He's hardly selling any records, the fucking idiot!’ So I felt, I'm not going to give people more fuel and go up there and sing ‘Monkey Gone To Heaven’ so they could go, ‘Yeah, look at him, the only decent song is his old hit.’”

It's September 2004, and Charles Thompson, aka Frank Black, aka Black Francis, is in an LA hotel room, midway through the triumphant tour that has reunited his band the Pixies after 12 long years, and seen his reputation miraculously revived. But he hasn't forgotten the contempt heaped on him in the time between. He has some scores he's been itching to settle, and he's about to explode with rage.

“It's frustrating to think, ‘Oh yeah, I was a genius five years ago, and

now I'm an idiot,’” he simmers. “That doesn't add up for me, neither one. It bothers me when people get personal and lampoon me because I'm overweight, or because I have male-pattern baldness. I'm 39 years old, you dumb fuck. You think I'm gonna go and get a fucking hair transplant? I don't really give a shit if I have a bald spot on my skull. Does that mean I'm not supposed to be in a rock band? You're not gonna tell Biggie Smalls that he's a fat fuck, are you, you lameass motherfucker? But you're gonna make fun of me because I'm a chunky guy? I just wanna get into a fist-fight with these people. I feel like I'm back in junior high school, and people are making fun of the fat kid. I'm a middle-aged man, and I'm an artist, I make →



KEVIN COMINGS/GOALS KEVIN WESTENBERG

THE PIXIES

fucking goddamn art. I'm contributing, for better or worse, to higher culture. I tour around the fucking planet. There are people who pay me thousands and thousands of dollars, even at the lowest point of my career, to come and bring art to their town. And you guys are lampooning me because I don't look like some fucking heroin addict? Fuck you! No!"

The Pixies have loomed so large over Thompson's wilderness years that those around him dared not even say the band's name till recently. But others have not been so bashful. Nirvana, Radiohead and PJ Harvey are among those who have freely admitted to cribbing the core of their sound from the Pixies, a chain reaction without which rock's last decade would be unimaginable. The band may have sounded like no one else in their five short years of making records, with their soft verses of bone-crunching incest and outer-space dreams and unholy, shrieking choruses. But their reunion shows have been places of reverence, as if whole generations want to make up for lost time; as if, rather than humble prophets lighting the way for Cobain, the Pixies were rock's real messiahs all along.

It's a story that Kim Deal, always the band's most unrestrained voice, has been dissuaded from telling *Uncut*. But Thompson, Joey Santiago and many others from their glory days speak long and freely, clearly still in love with the band that changed all their



The road less travelled: the Pixies were band with secrets

lives. It is one of rock's strangest tales, fuelled by repression and denial as much as riotous abandon. As Jeff Craft, the Pixies' agent to this day, warns *Uncut*, they were always a band with secrets.

"There is another world that's underneath everything," he warns. "On the face of it, they all appear to be very polite, ordinary people. And then you listen to what they do. You can't make music like that and be as they appear to be. That means that there is always something below the surface. But if

break in his upbringing came when a UFO apparently passed over him when he was an infant, fuelling a life-long obsession with outer space and alien abduction. Then, aged 12, his whole family became Born Again.

"I've been affected by the charismatic Pentecostal preacher thing," he confessed in 1988. "I grew up exposed to a lot of preaching and righteous rage, and though I've rejected the content of all that, the style has left an impression on me. It was pretty American: all hand-clapping, Heaven and Hell and sin. It was all

DEBASERS: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PIXIES

CHARLES THOMPSON, aka Black Francis, aka Frank Black, Pixies and Catholics singer-songwriter.

KIM DEAL, bassist, singer-songwriter with the Pixies, Breeders and Amps.

JOEY SANTIAGO, Pixies and Martinis guitarist.

DAVID LOVERING, Pixies drummer, magician and "scientific experimentalist".

GARY SMITH, owner/manager of Fort Apache studios, producer of *Come On Pilgrim*.

GIL NORTON, producer of "Gigantic", *Doolittle*, *Bossanova*, *Trompe Le Monde*.

VAUGHN OLIVER, designer of every Pixies sleeve.

JEFF CRAFT, international booking agent for the Pixies, Frank Black and The Breeders.

COLIN WALLACE, 4AD warehouse manager and the Pixies' driver, now an executive at Rough Trade.

"THE PIXIES ARE LIKE A VOLCANO, WITH A TOUGH CRUST OVER IT. BUT IT COULD GO OFF ANY DAY"

they allowed it to come out, then they couldn't possibly exist. They avoid confrontation all the time. Just in case the confrontation tapped into that thing beneath. They are all strange characters. None of them are normal. They've all got their own personal anxieties, but they all have to keep the lid on them. The Pixies are like a volcano, with a tough crust over it. But it could go off any day."

CHAPTER 1 "WE WEREN'T FOUR PEAS IN A POD"

CHARLES MICHAEL KITTRIDGE THOMPSON IV was born on April 4, 1965 to a family who criss-crossed the USA, switching between California and Massachusetts a half-dozen times. His early life mixed the conventional with the utterly bizarre. Raised by hippie-ish middle-class parents, he heard '60s folk and pop round the home, and his dad was an acquaintance of Captain Beefheart. The first weird

'RRRRREPENT!' and 'GOD!' I was 12 and religion came over my entire family. But it began to fade when I was about 17. It left me fucked up, that's for sure."

"I think that religious phase translated into his rock'n'roll phase," the Pixies' first producer, Gary Smith, considers. "The speaking in tongues that he did as a Jesus freak is exactly the sort of music he did later. It seemed like a period that had been disregarded and shed when I met him. But no one who touches that spiritual space comes back the same."

When he arrived at the University of Massachusetts in 1984 to study anthropology, Thompson seemed ordinary enough. "He was a cheerful guy," Santiago remembers. "Happy-go-lucky. Glad to be in school." Santiago was in the dorm room opposite, a Filipino who'd moved to the US aged seven, ending up in a Massachusetts suburb, where Iggy Pop records helped ease his outsider status. Both men had arrived in college hoping to form bands, and bonded over music, Santiago introducing his friend to rock's wilder fringes.

Soon, The Violent Femmes, Talking Heads, Hüsker Dü, The Jesus & Mary Chain and copious dope-smoking filled Thompson's time. Dinosaur Jr's →

ANDREW GATLIN

Where is my mind? – Black Francis and his singular vision

J Mascis, also at the college then, remembered him talking about the Bible and being a rock star. An exchange trip to Puerto Rico added a layer of Latin life and Spanish language to Thompson's experiences. But it was while there that he wrote to Santiago, declaring their education at an end.

"I was all for it," Santiago tells *Uncut*. "I got sick of the same routine. I wasn't going to drop out of school if Charles had been some sort of joker. But I'd heard his songs, and they weren't like anything else. I knew we had a good shot at being successful."

Kim Deal answered their ad for a female bass player into "Peter, Paul & Mary and Hüsker Dü". She worked in a doctor's office in Boston, but had a past back home in Ohio playing music at truck stops with her twin sister Kelley. They called themselves The Breeders. Rock 'n' roll had entered Kim's life when Kelley returned from seeing Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains The Same* as a young teen, the sisters dropping acid and smoking as they discussed it in their backyard. Thompson offered Kelley the \$50 fare from Ohio to be their drummer, but she declined. Kim remembered a drumming friend of her husband, David Lovering, who became the band's only Boston native. Santiago named them Pixies In Panoply: swiftly shortened to the Pixies.

"We're not four peas in a pod, we're four completely different people," Thompson advises today. "We were brought together completely by accident, not by design." Their distinctness made them fascinating; it guaranteed future conflict, too.



The embryonic Pixies: "We were an arthouse band"

"YOU GUYS ARE LAMPOONING ME 'COS I DON'T LOOK LIKE SOME FUCKING HEROIN ADDICT. FUCK YOU!"

Santiago's optimism for the band at their start, though, was well placed. American mainstream rock was comatose, ruled by airbrushed metal and AOR without ideas or threat (even Guns N' Roses and Metallica had yet to impact). The underground, meanwhile, was another world in the early '80s, a self-sufficient parallel universe with no interest in pop and no avenue to the surface. Black Flag had split up mere months earlier, and the austere, alienated, thrashing aggression of their hardcore punk scene still dominated. Hüsker Dü's reintroduction of melody and older rock values to still furious noise had been noted by Thompson, but their attempt to reach a wider America by signing to a major label was sputtering out in 1986. Even R.E.M. had only made minor headway, while older avatars like Talking Heads were splitting up. Rock was in flux, ripe for

the taking. In Dave Lovering's parents' garage, with rigorous discipline, the Pixies honed their assault.

"We never thought, 'What are our chances of succeeding?'" says Santiago. "Just kept practising. We had a really good work ethic. We had a schedule. We met after work, we'd bash it out for three or four hours." Santiago's unique guitar sound was forged in these sessions – brief, violent flashes, more fluent than hardcore, without metal's excess, but aggressive in a way inexplicable when you saw the still, introverted man playing. They discussed scalpelling out anything they'd heard before.

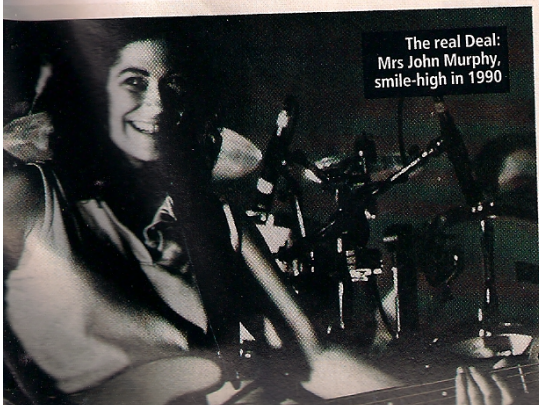
"I wasn't searching to sound like anything," he says. "I just knew what not to sound like – no way am I going to sound like that, or that, or that. It found its way to something."

Thompson's lyrics, meanwhile, had few precedents. Surrealist films, and their contemporary offspring David Lynch, with their subconscious-plunging disjunctions, had impressed him when studying film, and he led the Pixies on regular cinema trips, seeing *Eraserhead* eight times. The Bible and stray, transfigured fragments of his own life provided the content, throwing up images of shattered bones, reincarnated spirits and filthy, incestuous sex.

The communal ideals of the indie scene were not part of his thinking. "He wasn't a lefty," recalls Gary Smith. "He didn't seem to have the same sense of social responsibility as everyone else I knew. He didn't want to change how things were."

"I just didn't question anything," Thompson affirms. "I didn't question the lyrics or the sound. I didn't try to present any particular angle or philosophy; it wasn't about trying to represent our generation. It was more escapist and art-gallery. Making pretty pictures, or ugly pictures, and framing them. It was high art. We were an arthouse band."

Soon they were gigging around Boston. During a sound-check in the dingy basement of the Rathskeller club, supporting fellow Boston mavericks the Throwing Muses, with whom they'd be briefly entwined, Gary Smith saw them for the first time, and witnessed the Pixies' other devastating weapon: Thompson's scream. "I was like, 'Holy Jesus, look at this guy!'" Smith says, the memory still alive. "He looks like a regular college guy, and that was coming out of his mouth, and bits and pieces in Spanish, like *The Exorcist*. How could he seem so possessed, and then so normal? I have no idea what allows the human psyche to compartmentalise those types of things. There was something extraordinary coming out of seemingly ordinary people, like they were channelling something. They had this insanity to what they were doing, which came out like from the nozzle of a hose, and then managed to rein it back in during the verse. No one then lost it the way they lost it. It's hard for kids hearing them now to understand the amount of control in the world before the Pixies. Even The Clash →



The real Deal: Mrs John Murphy, smile-high in 1990

LA LA LOVE YOU
DAVID BOWIE

"I found it just about the most compelling music of the whole 1980s. They changed the format for delivering harder rock."

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW COOPER FOR UNCLE MICK

THE PIXIES

were controlled. Charles seemed to have a shaman's ability to find that place where loss of control could happen. These guys went to a different realm."

Smith was in a successful local band of his own, *Lifeboat*, had just started working at Boston's Fort Apache studios, and had made demos that had helped the Muses get signed by Britain's 4AD. He was desperate to record what he'd seen, and the Pixies were delighted at the chance. As was Smith's custom then, he got Thompson to visit his house and record rough demos with a guitar while he cooked pasta. Finally released this month on CD (see album review, p140), Thompson sounds giddily thrilled at the memory of these early makeshift recordings. "It's this excitement when you're part-man, part-boy," he gushes. "It was a dream that I was going to do when I grew up. So it was like, 'I'm not just a kid any more. I've got a band. And I've gotta sing. And here we go.'"

A day after these recordings, the band arrived at Fort Apache studios. It was a cavernous, abandoned warehouse with minimal heat. They dressed in parkas and wore gloves to play; steam came out of their mouths as they sang. They worked for three days and nights, taking turns to sleep on the floor, Smith yanking them awake when they were needed. "There were no amphetamines, coke, not even pot," he recalls. "But we ended up getting into odd states in that room, deprived of sleep and full of adrenaline. It's evident in the tracks."

"THERE'S A GREAT INTELLIGENCE [IN THEIR MUSIC], A SENSE OF DARKNESS, VIOLENCE AND A SEXUAL DRIVE"

What became known as the Purple Tape was the Pixies' tablet of stone, a bare, brutal work they would mine for years. There was a jerky playfulness to it, and something truly unearthly in Thompson's echoing, girlish singing on "Caribou". Violent and melodic, its recording laid the seed for the US punk underground's re-entry into pop's mainstream. The day it was finished, Thompson changed his stage name to Black Francis. Kim Deal became Mrs John Murphy (Murphy was her husband).

"That 17-song tape was earth-shattering," Smith states. "It made you realise that the world was not the place you thought it was. It seemed to me to be some



Chain gang: the Pixies do some much-needed bonding

new invention, like electricity. It seemed like it came from a place that was not about craft; that was about inspiration. I had every intention to make sure the world was changed by the Pixies in exactly the way they were offering. I sent the Purple Tape to everyone I'd met on tour, even people I thought would detest it."

films: we both loved David Lynch then. It felt like a personal project. For Simon [Larbalestier, Oliver's photographic collaborator on all the Pixies sleeves], too. We didn't have to struggle for ideas. You put it on now and it's amazingly sexual music. It does what rock music should do. There's great intelligence, and a sensitivity and a sense of humour and darkness and violence and a sexual drive. Everything you want, isn't it? I became so submerged in the Pixies, I dreamed about the fuckers, over the years. They were a huge part of my life."

Oliver's tendency to conjure atmospheres more than explicit rock poses suited the Pixies, who were always so unhappy explaining themselves. *Come On Pilgrim's* sleeve, suggested by Thompson's desire for "nudity" and Lynch's dark freakshow ambience, was the back of a bald man covered in hair. The album was a minor sensation, pushed heavily by early converts like *Uncut's* Chris Roberts (then of *Melody Maker*) and *Sounds's* Roy Wilkinson. But it was just a taster for the first full dose: *Surfer Rosa*.

Produced by Steve Albini in Boston, at the suggestion of 4AD's then-warehouse manager Colin Wallace, a fan of Albini's band Big Black, the recording was barely more sophisticated than Smith's demos. It took two weeks to make, with Albini focusing as always on ambience and precise recording, placing mics with care, finding the sound in the room, even taping fragments of conversation. Thompson was left down in the mix, making his jerky squeaks and shrieks still stranger, as if coming from an unseen creature in a nearby room, while Lovering's drums hit heavier and Santiago switched personalities by the riff, grinding or smearing the guitar seemingly by instinct. Everything was urgent, physical and alive on a skeleton of addictive melodies.

Oliver's sleeve, a proudly topless, full-breasted flamenco dancer with a crucifix behind her (suggested by Thompson's Puerto Rico experiences, the music's sexuality and Oliver's Pixies-like desire to debase a pure image), struck against the prissy grain of '80s indie, making it all the more indelible.

Released in March 1988, reviews were unanimously ecstatic, and it would be the →

The Throwing Muses, meanwhile, were equally impressed. Their singer, Kristin Hersh, begged their manager Ken Goes to take them on. Goes passed the tape to 4AD boss Ivo Watts-Russell in London. He liked it but was sniffy about putting rock on a label defined by the ethereal Cocteau Twins. Persuaded by the label's publicist Deborah Edgeley, he signed them.

CHAPTER 2 "GIGANTIC? CHARLES HATED THAT"

WATTS-RUSSELL USED eight unchanged songs from the demos for an introductory mini album, *Come On Pilgrim*, in October 1987. Vaughn Oliver, 4AD's label-defining designer, discussed the sleeve with Thompson, beginning a relationship that would be crucial to both men. "We were creating an image for a band that didn't have one, that nobody had seen yet," Oliver tells *Uncut*. "My subconscious and Charles' met quite easily, I think. We talked about

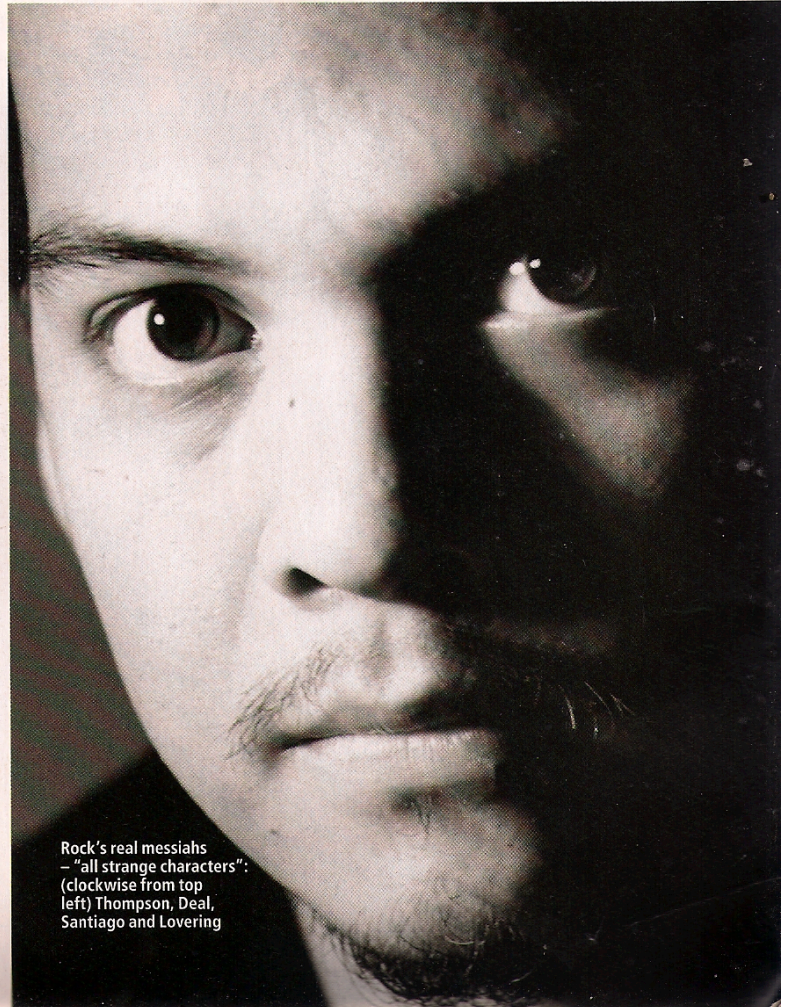
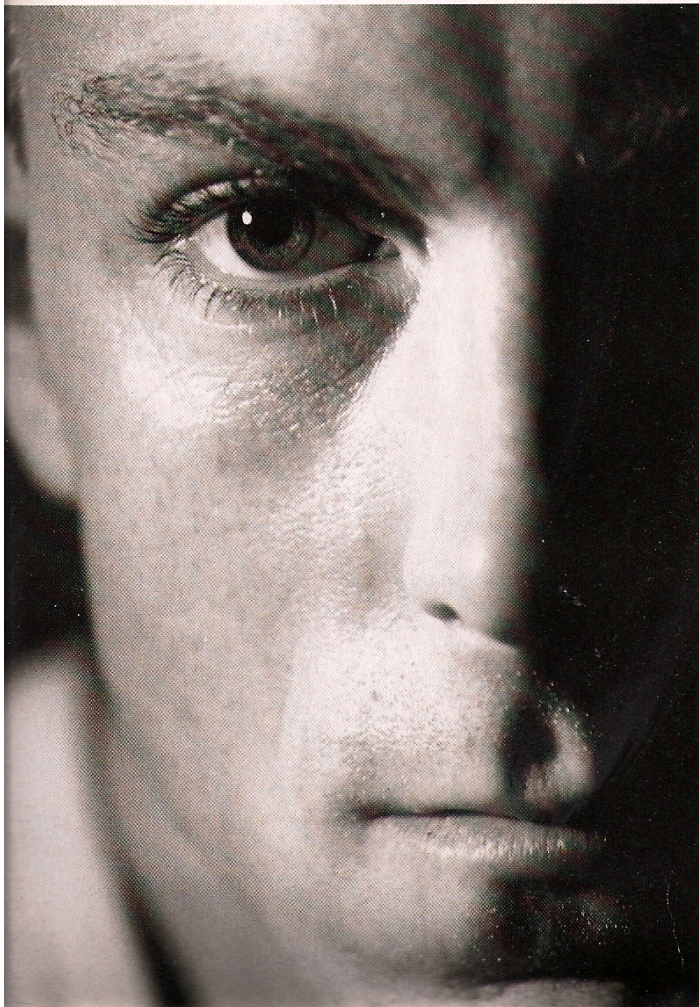


Throwing Muses: "It was painful for the Muses 'cos they knew everyone was there to see the Pixies"



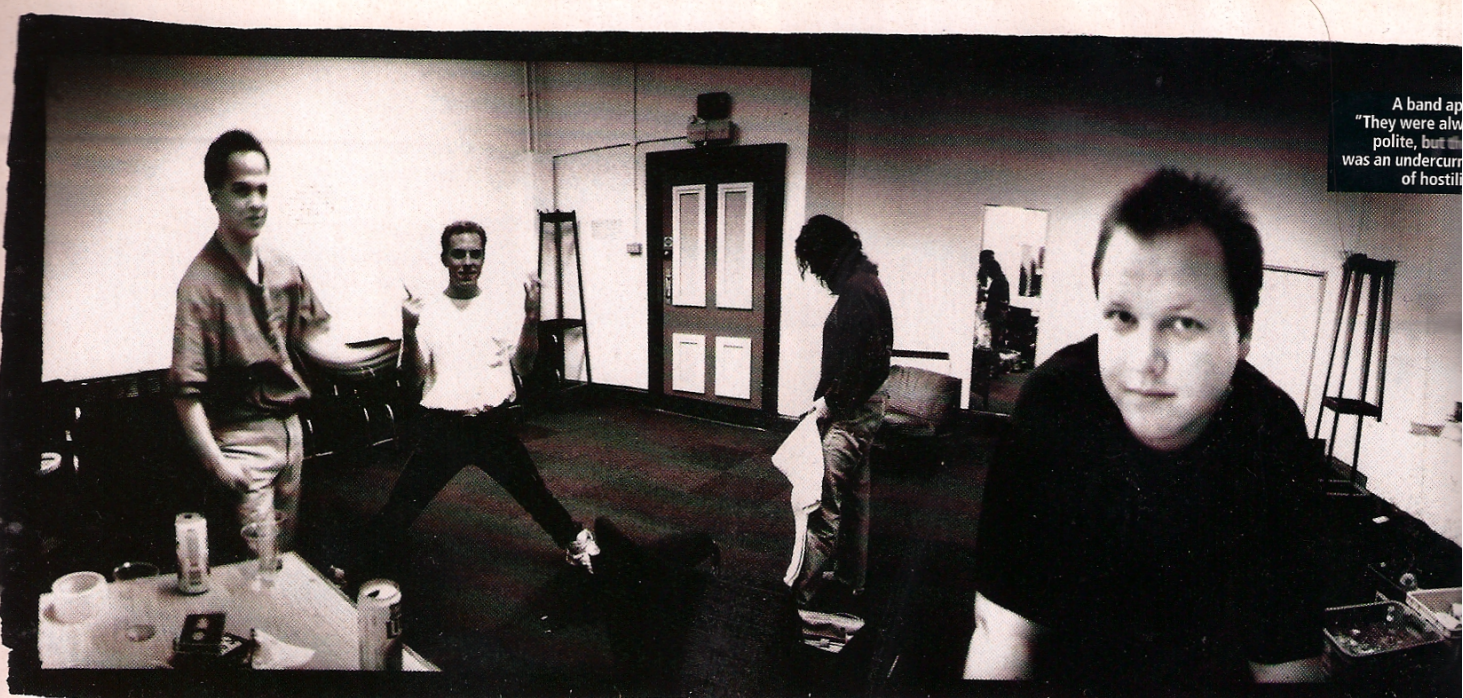
LA LA LOVE YOU BONO

"This is one of America's greatest ever songwriters, and this is one of America's greatest ever bands."



Rock's real messiahs
- "all strange characters":
(clockwise from top
left) Thompson, Deal,
Santiago and Lovering

A band ap
"They were alw
polite, but th
was an undercurr
of hostil



Maker's Album of the Year. When its mysterious creators were booked straight afterwards for a UK tour supporting the Throwing Muses, no one realised just how fervently adored they had become.

"I think reviews started running a quarter-way through the tour," recalls Colin Wallace, by now the Pixies' driver. "And by the end, it was really painful for the Muses, because they knew everyone was there to see the Pixies. But they were such good friends. Tanya and Kristin really looked after them. The Pixies were shocked by the reaction. Totally shocked. At that time, pre-Internet, it was unbelievably quick. They went straight through the roof. It was very, very exciting. By the time they got to London's Town & Country Club [on May 1], there was a big expectation. But I don't remember them being nervous. I don't ever remember them being nervous." Dave Lovering has talked of people pissing over the balcony that now-legendary night, and others remember leaving

covered in blood. "Pissing?" Wallace smirks. "I don't remember that. That sounds like a myth to me. It was very, very exciting. But I don't remember chaos."

Footage of the show, on the *Pixies* DVD, shows a band tense with visceral energy, pouring it out through music: Deal smiling delightedly, Thompson twitching unknowably, Santiago withdrawn but reeling out slashing solos as waves of the crowd surge at the stage. What were they like afterwards? "The same," Wallace smiles. "They just shrugged."

"Shithouse," is Santiago's memory of the night. "They just went ballistic. But I had no other experience to draw from. We are kind of spoiled in that respect: 'OK, this is what's supposed to happen. You practise hard every day, you work at your craft, and then, of course, they're gonna like it.'"

This relentless work-rate saw the Pixies keep touring through 1988, breaking only to record. August's single "Gigantic", reworked by English producer Gil Norton from *Surfer Rosa*, began a relationship that would last till they split. But the song, sung and co-written by Deal, also sowed less happy seeds. The DVD shows her easy, sensual charisma performing it, and it was the crowd favourite every night. Not everyone was pleased.

"'Gigantic'? Fucking hell, Charles hated that," Wallace laughs. "Because it was the one everyone used to shout for. Even though he co-wrote it, he was still seething, because everyone loved Kim. You could see when she was singing it, he'd just turn away."

In the last six weeks of the year, though, the band returned to America to hammer out their third LP, *Doolittle*. Norton, known then for his work with artful, popular English rock bands like Echo & The Bunnymen, was the catalyst for the band's biggest hit. With Thompson's full involvement, he refined the →

SCENTLESS APPRENTICES

JUST HOW MUCH DID NIRVANA OWE THE PIXIES?

WHEN "SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT" took longer taking off in the UK than the States, it was surely because British fans recognised a Pixies song when they heard one. Cobain freely admitted ripping their sound off wholesale – the quiet verses, screaming choruses, strong melodies and smooth production of *Nevermind* was *Doolittle* in Seattle. No Pixies, no Nirvana.

The differences between the bands, though – one taken to US teen hearts as the other expired in half-empty halls supporting U2 – are just as telling.

Cobain insisted that his ragged scream and tortured lyrics were torn from pain that he shamelessly lived out in public, and agonised over his punk "authenticity". Black Francis resolutely denied his lyrics meant anything, or that his scream was more than, as he tells *Uncut*, "a move, like a drum-fill". More a right-wing libertarian than a punk, authenticity and self-pity were never his game.

The Pixies weren't adolescent enough to be teen idols. Cobain's scream did hit real nerves of anguish towards the end; but Francis', feminine and weird, is the more fascinating now.

One more difference: punk Cobain was secretly desperate to sell records, and did what it took. The Pixies, more quietly proud, wouldn't.



Here comes your man: Black Francis Strats his stuff

LA LA LOVE YOU
KURT COBAIN

"When I heard the Pixies for the first time, I connected with them so heavily. I should have been in that band – or at least a Pixies covers band."



ANDREW COOPER/RETNA (4)

formula already inherent in their work until it was gleamingly visible: the “quiet verse/loud chorus” cliché that Nirvana, Radiohead and the rest of rock would happily crib, right down the evolutionary scale to Coldplay and Keane, was all but minted here.

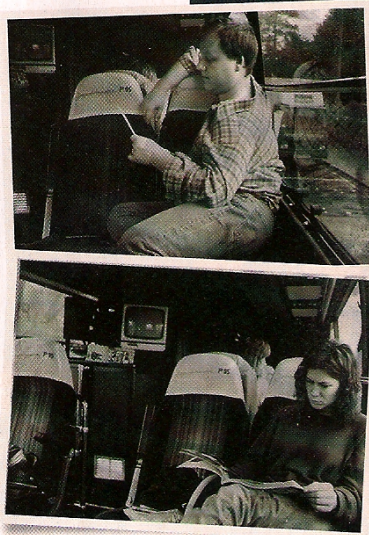
“I was trying to clarify stylistically what that was all about,” Norton recalls. “We were working on that [quiet-loud] dynamic. He’s a very expressive singer; you didn’t need to hang much on it. I wanted to bring that out. I like strong songs, and I like things that make sense. I’m thinking of the listener, I don’t want to confuse people – I’d ask Charles, ‘Why are you doing that?’ It was never consciously: ‘We’re going to make a pop song today. You wouldn’t ever come at them with that mentality. Just clarifying the idea. Even if something didn’t have to make sense, we had to understand its nonsensicality.’”

Thompson had assembled arguably his strongest set of songs, including a half-dozen candidates for the Pixies’ pop peak: “Here Comes Your Man”, “Monkey Gone To Heaven”, “Debaser”, “Gouge Away”, “Wave Of Mutilation” and “Hey”. They would not be wasted. After the previous rapid recordings, Thompson and Norton spent two days working on the songs

before a further two weeks pre-production with the band in a tiny rehearsal room. Only then did they enter their Connecticut studio.

“We went in there with a purpose,” Norton says. “Everyone knew what we were trying to achieve. We tried to do a song a day, pretty live. There was no dead wood there. That was the point. When we’d finished, it was snowing. It was just before Christmas and everyone had left. And I remember thinking, ‘That’s a classic.’ It had a confidence to it, a wholeness. We’d gone in with a purpose and we’d done it.”

“I remember thinking it would make us a stepping stone band, like The Velvet Underground,” says Santiago. “I couldn’t hear it getting on the radio.



The Pixies live, 1988, and, below inset, communication breakdown on the tour bus



But we kept playing it. We thought it was really good.”

If the UK music press were disappointed at *Doolittle*’s approachable version of their raw darlings, they hid it well in a flurry of gushing reviews. It reached No 8 in the UK charts in April 1989, and cracked the US Top 100. Compared to anything in the world then but the Pixies themselves, it still sounded savage and strange.

When they went on tour with The Cure in the US soon afterwards, they took to playing sets backwards, or in alphabetical order, treating whole gigs as art-objects, as if capable of anything. They did not know it, but the long slide down was just beginning.

something. Joey, too – the contrast between his electric contribution on stage, like Wilko Johnson and the way he is, just so ready to go along with everything. I thought he was mad, but concealing it. He used to get scared of me, because I’d try to provoke the person that I thought was in there. And I never got there.”

On the Pixies’ headlining, relentless Sex And Death tour to promote *Doolittle*, the first cracks in the facade started to show. Thompson’s simmering discontent with Deal was starting to boil over as their radically different interpretations of a rock’n’roll lifestyle, in the midst of such rocketing success, became unbridgeable.

Deal had been demure when they first began, as Gary Smith recalls: “Kim used to arrive for rehearsals with her secretary’s outfit, with her sneakers on and her shoes in her hand, that thing working women used to do back then. She seemed more normal. She seemed to be resigned to her working life, even though she had this other life as a musician.”

By 1989, though, all her teenage dreams of Led Zeppelin were coming true. “Kim, God bless her, had started to lose it,” Colin Wallace remembers. “Her drug intake was getting worse and worse. Charles liked to smoke pot through his Coke cans, but I don’t remember him doing cocaine or any of that, and there was loads of that around them. Kim, on the other hand, she just took whatever we had. She was a great laugh, and the London scene as it was, Pete Dinklage and all those people, loved having her around. People were so pleased to see her. And I think that




Close encounter: Black Francis and Kim – there were rumours of a relationship

CHAPTER 3

“IT WAS LIKE, ‘OH, I’M FIRED’”

BY NOW, JOURNALISTS were asking questions about lyrics, and what their new heroes were really like. Astonishingly, Thompson was able to leave them almost entirely in the dark. “They’re just ditties,” he blithely explained. In an interview about his own heroes, he indicated the model for this ruse: “They’ve always asked Samuel Beckett what his plays mean, and he always answers, ‘It means absolutely nothing.’ Of course it means something; they all mean something. But I like him for that comment.”

“You dismiss the content of lyrics because you don’t want to go into them,” says Oliver. “It’s false modesty, humility – or you’re hiding



LA LA LOVE YOU
THOM YORKE

“They were the first gig I went to where I came out afterwards and thought, ‘What’s the point?’ ”

was a problem for Charles. I think that got right up Charles’ nose. Because she loved to party. I guess someone from 4AD should’ve said, ‘Now, Kim, you’ve gotta go home.’ But when you’re →

THE PIXIES

off your nut yourself, you don't think of that, do you?" "She's no different to 95 per cent of touring bands," says Jeff Craft. "It's just that *he* is."

"I don't wanna make too big a deal out of Kim enjoying a drink," says Thompson. "Because that's not the only factor. But certainly it didn't help – that I wanted to have this workaholic taste, and other people in the band wanted to be playerholic. It didn't mesh well. I always regretted that I kicked a guitar at Kim on stage, in Germany somewhere. She'd showed up really late for the gig, and of course that made me tense. I felt terrible about it, as I'm not very physically aggressive. I don't know what set me off – I guess I was just pissed off. Nowadays, with something like that, I wouldn't be like, 'WHERE THE HELL'S JOEY? JE-SUS CHRIST! We're supposed to be on a half-hour ago and what the fuck?' But obviously, when you're drunk, or you're smoking joints all day like I was, it affects your judgement. Aggression and paranoia take hold, in the whole crew. Everyone was as high as a kite."

The year 1989 also saw Deal form a side-project with another frustrated songwriter, the Throwing Muses' Tanya Donelly, alongside British bassist Josephine Wiggs (from Perfect Disaster) and Slint drummer Shannon Doughton (aka Britt Walford). Named The Breeders after Deal's teenage band with her sister (the name was gay slang for straights), their debut LP, *Pod*, produced by Steve Albini, was released in May 1990. Albini much preferred it to the Pixies (who he would call "blandly entertaining college rock"

in a typically perverse 1991 fanzine assault on *Surfer Rosa*, which he later retracted). The then-unknown Kurt Cobain was a fan, too. But to Thompson, the album's very existence was galling, a distraction from his band: one more strike against its bassist.

"AGGRESSION AND PARANOIA TOOK HOLD... IN THE WHOLE CREW. EVERYONE WAS HIGH AS A KITE"

By now, Thompson had moved to LA, and Norton and the band convened there for a fourth, radically different record. Thompson showed Norton his intentions by driving him around the Hollywood Hills in the yellow Cadillac he'd recently purchased, playing him surf tunes, the template for a softer, more spacious direction. Norton loved The Ventures and The Beach Boys, too, and *Bossanova*, though a decisive step away from the sound set down on the Purple Tape, was melodic and inventive. It also introduced Thompson's lyrical obsession with UFOs, Roswell and outer space. Surf and space wasn't what fans expected, but the old formula was almost played out, and the album, perhaps based on previous momentum, entered the UK charts at No 3 in August. The Pixies headlined Reading the same month, a gig so big they spent a week rehearsing with Norton, determined to get it right. "Tomorrow's a big day for them," Norton told *Rolling Stone* on its eve. "If that

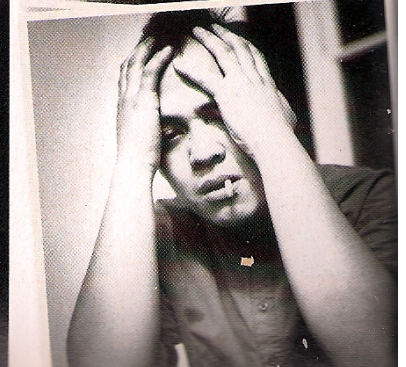
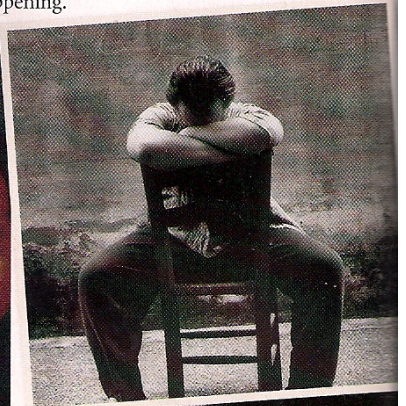
goes well, they'll be with us a long time." It went perfectly, of course. But their time was almost up.

Deal and Thompson's relationship, now reaching meltdown, was the major factor. "I remember she missed a plane once that year," says Colin Wallace,

"and Charles went absolutely ballistic. I think that was the beginning of the end. Because they flew without her, and I heard from Chas [Banks, the Pixies' tour manager] that Charles wanted her out of the band there and then. So that's when it suddenly dawned on me that there's something more to this. You don't sack somebody out of a band because they missed their fucking aeroplane. There's another in an hour. So I knew there was something underlying it."

Before the recording of what would become their final album, *Trompe Le Monde*, in 1991, the explosion that had been building so long blasted the band apart. Thompson, Santiago and Lovering went to LA to start work on it. Deal was not told they had gone, as Thompson prepared to sack her. When Deal found out by accident her band had abandoned her, she rang 4AD in London. Deborah Edgeley advised her to fly to LA, to find out for herself what was happening.

Taking the strain: the Pixies in 1992



"It was confusing," says Santiago of turning up to find his band a member short. "It's like, 'Wow, I guess he's not happy with that, huh?' I guess I'll just go along with it. I kind of lazily did it. It was out of my hands. I couldn't understand anything. We were never really a band who hashed things out."

"I just remember it was really stressful in the office at that time," says Wallace. "Everyone was confused and stressed out, and the record company was saying, 'That's it, it's over.' It was so sad. But then the manager should have managed that a bit better. Be totally straight with Kim, that's it, you're not in the band – but don't just leave the girl hanging. That's nasty."

The morning after Deal arrived in LA, the band's manager, Ken Goes, called her into a lawyer's office, where the other members waited. "And I walk in," Deal recalled to *Spin*, "and it's like – 'Ohhh, I'm fired.' It was so hurtful, it was awkward, it was odd. Then I think Joe and David pussed out and decided they hadn't given me a warning and this would be my warning. I don't know what about."

So did something happen to cause such a crisis? Something that meant, a year later, the band would split?

"Yeah," Wallace states. "Which I can't comment on, because I hope I can still count on them as friends. But there's a specific reason why they split."

There have been rumours of some sort of attempted relationship between Thompson and Deal that didn't work out.

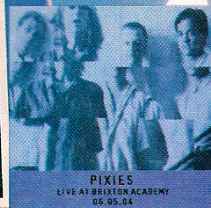
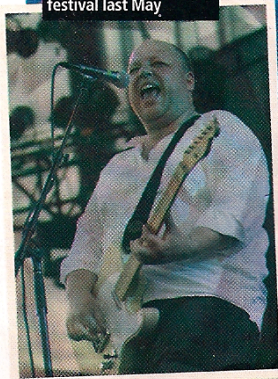
"Yeah," he smiles. "That's what I heard as well. I'd love to tell you the whole story. But it's up to Charles or Kim to tell you yourselves. And they never will."

"I think we've covered most of it," he says when *Uncut* presses him. "Without going into personal stuff. I mean, there are some mysterious workings within the band, which only the band will be privy to. And even at our most estranged, the Pixies have always been loyal to their outfit. We're not going to tell you everything. We already feel naked enough."

With these raw wounds plastered over, *Trompe Le Monde* limped on. The recording was unsurprisingly fraught. "We tracked separately," Santiago recalls dryly. "For 90 per cent of the time, when I was doing my part, I'd be the only one in there, apart from Gil."

"There was animosity," Norton recalls. "Kim had got drunk and said something in a press release off the record, and it hurt Charles. Then it gets blown out of proportion, when everyone's nerve-ends are out. They were always polite, but there was an undercurrent of hostility. People were hurt. It was frustrations over a period of years. Where you just get sick of someone. It wasn't easy. I was pushing Charles about lyrics on that album. He got quite angry about that. I didn't know what the songs were about half the

The 2004 Pixies live at the Brixton Academy in June and (inset) at California's Coachella festival last May



time. I was just doing landscapes, collages of sound."

Trompe Le Monde sounds fascinating today, an experimental surf-noir bridge to another album that never came. But its *NME* review in September 1991 shared its pages with reviews for *Screamadelica* and *Nevermind* – notice that the times were at last overtaking them. Nirvana asked to support them that year, but Lovering vetoed it, knowing that this time they would be in the position the Muses had been in back when the Pixies were young and hot. Instead, they made a blunder in the opposite direction, supporting U2 on a catastrophic trek across America.

"They might have lasted a little longer if they hadn't done that tour," says Craft. "If you ever wanted it to be made clear that you weren't that important – most people there didn't even know who they were. That brought home to all of them that if you've got to do that stuff to be an international artist – they didn't want to. On the last UK tour, they didn't speak at all."

The plug was pulled in January 1993. Their fans found out during an interview supporting his first solo album, *Frank Black*, on Mark Radcliffe's Radio 5 show *Hit The North*. Of the band, only Santiago was notified in person. "It was pretty short," he recalls. "He just said, 'Oh, yeah, I split up the Pixies. I felt a little bit numb. I didn't know what to think. I just thought, OK, it's the time, I guess.'"

"There's been a lot of criticism of Charles for the way he split them up," Craft admits. "But he made the right decision... he realised they weren't going to get any better. And he should have been thanked for that."

Thompson has his regrets. "I wish we could have had some cool guru in our midst who would have said, 'Hey, you guys, why don't you take six months off?' It's like you're always in a bus together, or in a studio, and there's no outlet for the tension between people, so eventually you go, 'Fuck this.' If there had been an outlet for everyone's egos, maybe we wouldn't have broken up at all."

EPILOGUE

"THERE WAS SOME APOLOGISING, SOME HUGS"

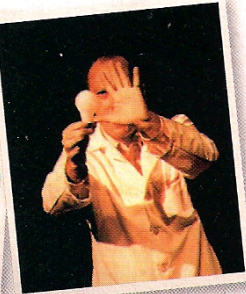
JUNE 2004. Maybe it was all a bad dream. The Pixies are on stage at Brixton Academy. Black Francis is screaming out "Monkey Gone To Heaven", the crowd are screaming back "God is seven!" and in the streets outside the touts have been in ecstasy for a full day as fans begged to get inside. The band entered to the most full-throated, sustained roar this writer has ever heard: a moment of mass catharsis and relief that makes the crowd collectively shiver.

They look good. Black Francis now has the bald head and black fatigues of Brando's Colonel Kurtz. Deal and Joey Santiago flank him, impassive and barely altered, while whiskery David Lovering has kindly taken time off from his day-job as a magic act.

They start quietly, in the byways of their back catalogue, deliberately anti-climactic. Only when Francis milks the suddenly pertinent lyric in "Here Comes Your Man" – "He's been away so long!" – do the past 12 years come flooding back. →



The Breeders, The Catholics, The Martinis and Dave Lovering's Science Project



PHIL WATKIN, LAURENCE MARGERITENA, HEFFERNS



The Pixies now: "There's an unspoken dynamic with the band that we're barely aware of"

WAVES OF MUTILATION

THE PIXIES ON CD



COME ON PILGRIM

1987 ★★★★★

CHART POSITION: UK N/A, US N/A

Weirdly reverberating demos, screamed by a Bible-reading alien; in 1987, inexplicable.



SURFER ROSA

1988 ★★★★★

CHART POSITION UK N/A, US N/A

First full, Albini-produced album. Brutal and sprightly; rock reborn.



DOOLITTLE

1989 ★★★★★

CHART POSITION UK 8, US 98

The '80s' nastiest dose of perfect pop: mutilation in the mainstream.



BOSSANOVA

1990 ★★★

CHART POSITION UK 3, US 70

Theremin-haunted surf-space experiments; their gentlest, most optimistic album.



TROMPE LE MONDE

1991 ★★★★★

CHART POSITION UK 7, US 92

Underestimated finale, leaving the old formula behind for widescreen vistas.

Those years have been difficult for everyone. Santiago entered a period of depression after they split, before forming a band with his wife, The Martinis. Lovering worked as a magician and suffered a brutal marriage break-up. Deal had a massive hit, "Cannonball", with The Breeders in 1993, but saw her life falter afterwards. "She started doing the brown, and got flakier and flakier," recalls Wallace.

Thompson, too, had to face failure. Sound-checking in a small Californian town one afternoon in the early '90s, a waitress screamed at him to keep it down. Customers were trying to eat. "It felt good in a way," he says now. "I felt like I was a real musician, finally. I wasn't just riding some wave of hype. I'm in some shit town, playing in a shit gig, and there's people eating fish and chips, and a waitress is yelling at me for making too much noise. I felt like I'd really earned something. It felt good to get kicked in the gut. That's right, I'm not a big fucking deal. I'm nobody now."

Thompson slowly reinvented himself over nine Frank Black albums, becoming an increasingly personal roots-rock songwriter, leaving the Pixies' once-shocking sound behind, even mothballing his scream. But the past kept struggling to the surface.

"I made sure Breeders and Frank Black tours were kept apart," says Craft, who booked both. "It was an unwritten understanding that their career paths must never cross. We could never say 'Pixies' around him, we called it 'the P word'. I think he didn't think the Pixies were that good. He was disappointed with a lot of it. He felt it could have been better."

Thompson went to lengths to keep the old days at bay. "Once Kim asked to see Frank Black," Wallace recalls, "and Charles went through the guest-list and



LA LA LOVE YOU GRAHAM COXON

"They had such melancholy and self-loathing and confusion. I'd never heard the word 'penis' in a song before."

scribbled her name off. It was so pathetic. The girl just wanted to see him play because she thinks he's the greatest songwriter alive. It was so nasty."

Then, in 2000, Thompson started playing Pixies songs again. A recent divorce and therapy sessions had broken old barriers. "His personal life has changed dramatically," Craft agrees. "You start to re-evaluate."

Deal, too, had sorted out her drug problems, and in August 2000 the calls were made. Typically, they dealt with the old eruptions by not dealing with them. "There was some apologising, some hugs – no one made a big deal," Thompson recalls. "If they'd dragged up the past, they may have realised they couldn't work together," says Craft. "They just had to forget it."

The gigs helped them do that. In America, especially, young crowds barely born when they split treated them like legendary beasts. "It's not like it was in the beginning," Thompson agrees, "when people were going mental and freaking out in drunken mayhem. That was our moment in time. Nowadays, people just stand there watching. It's definitely quieter, almost respectful."

All the comeback lacks, of course, is a new record. "We're so enjoying the donations to our bank accounts right now that it almost seems unholy to think about being creative," Thompson counters. "It seems like it would be tainted by all of our money-making. It'd be cooler to go and make a record later, when we're not being offered a chunk of dough."

What Thompson finds more interesting is something he'd almost forgotten: the bond he has with his fellow Pixies. "There's an unspoken dynamic with the band that we're barely aware of, at the edge of our minds," he considers. "I notice it when we're in a room together, this little impenetrable bond. Documentary film-makers hang out with us and expect to see fascinating backstage dramas. And there is something going on, but it's too subtle for them to see. I could totally feel it when we got back together. Oh, yeah. These people. They even cause me to sing a certain way. I'm very happy to be with them again. I forgot how much I liked this."

Black Francis Demo/Frank Black Francis is reviewed on p140. The Pixies DVD is out on 4AD. Thanks to Heidi Robinson and Colleen Maloney

WIN A VIP TRIP TO SEE THE PIXIES IN NEW YORK

It was one of the most acrimonious splits in recent rock history, and you wouldn't have put money on them ever reforming. But 2004 has been a triumph for the Pixies. Back together for the first time in over a decade, they have cut an all-conquering swathe across Europe and North America, playing to ecstatic audiences everywhere they've appeared. A year of great shows ends next month, when the band play New York – and YOU could be there to see them sign off their world tour in style.

■ **Uncut** can offer one lucky reader the chance to win a VIP trip to New York to see the Pixies in a package that includes return flights for two, accommodation in

a five-star New York hotel and a pair of tickets for the Pixies concert at the Hammerstein Ballroom. The winner will fly out from London on Friday December 10, watch the band play live on Saturday December 11 and return to London on Sunday December 12.

■ **What do you have to do to win this fantastic prize?** Simple. Just write your answer to the following question on a postcard or sealed envelope, along with your name and address, a daytime telephone number or email address, and send it to:

Uncut Pixies Competition, Uncut Editorial, 25th Floor, King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS. Or you can enter online at www.uncut.co.uk/comps

■ **The question you need to answer is:**

What Pixies track is used over the closing credits of *Fight Club*?

Closing date for entries is Monday November 29 2004. The first correct entry, drawn at random, will win the competition. The editor's decision is final.

IPC Media Ltd, publisher of Uncut and IPC Electric Limited ("IPC") will collect your personal information to process your entry. IPC may send you details on their products and services. Please write "No IPC" on your entry if you prefer not to hear from IPC. We may pass your details to other reputable companies whose products and services may be of interest to you. Please write "No other companies" if you prefer not to receive such offers.

NEW ALBUMS

Black gold

Blasphemy or reverence? Startling new interpretations of Pixies classics paired with earliest recordings

Frank Black Francis

BLACK FRANCIS DEMO/FRANK BLACK FRANCIS

COOKING VINYL

★★★★★

FRANK BLACK FRANCIS: the beginning and the end. One could treat these two dramatically different discs as bookends to Pixies history if the band hadn't just completed a triumphant reunion tour, while talk of a new album continues. But the release of the first tapings of songs that ended up on *Come On Pilgrim* and *Surfer Rosa*, paired here with fundamentally new arrangements of familiar material, seems to represent both the first and final chapters of Volume One.

It's *Black Francis Demo*, recorded by producer Gary Smith three days before the band went into Fort Apache studios, to which Pixies obsessives will be most drawn.

Despite their existence as preparatory run-throughs, these acoustic readings of songs like "Isla De Encanta" and "Break My Body" are passionate, far from cursory performances that, stripped of complex arrangements, highlight the peculiar melodies at their heart.

But it's the inclusion of *Frank Black Francis* that makes this essential.

Recorded in Hackney last year with Andy Diagram and Keith Moliné (currently David Thomas' Two Pale Boys), it sees Black take hold of some of the finest Pixies work and variously turn it inside out, strip it bare, dub it out or reduce it to brass



Frank outsider: widening his vision

rubblings, revealing how these bizarre tunes are capable of adapting to extreme surgery. The sweet but ghostly shell of "Caribou", the eerie horns of "Nimrod's Son", the Colliery Brass Band take on "The Holiday Song": it's all as exciting as hearing *Come On Pilgrim* for the first time. If Black's decision to experiment with his earliest work highlights the comparative banality of his recent solo material, one can only hope that the experience reinvigorates him in the future as much as it has here.

Alone, perhaps, each of these CDs might appear to be somewhat scraping the Pixies barrel. But to pair them is, frankly, an inspired piece of marketing. Beginning with the very genesis of The Pixies, and ending with nothing short of a revelation, Frank Black Francis may be, as he himself calls it, "messing with the gospel". But somehow, this revisiting of his roots seems paradoxically to have expanded his horizons.

EDEN PARKE

Q&A



Frank Black on remaking Pixies and stealing Pere Ubu

UNCUT: Why re-record these Pixies classics now?

BLACK: It seems like I've timed it to coincide with this reunion tour, but in actuality we've been working on it irregularly for three years, chipping away at it. It was a coincidence that suddenly we were getting back together. I had done these new sessions last summer.

The new sessions remind me of Pere Ubu's David Thomas — they've got that wooziness about them that some of his records have.

Yeah, I sort of stole his band. I think it's the third time I've stolen musicians from Dave Thomas in my life. He doesn't seem to be mad at me. About a year ago, I was riding my bicycle along the boardwalk in Brighton, and I'd been going four or five miles, and suddenly saw this very large man with a very small dog. I was like, "Oh, hello David." He was like, "Hello, Charles." He didn't pummel me.

INTERVIEW: NICK HASTED

Black takes hold of some of the finest Pixies work and turns it inside out

Mavis Staples

HAVE A LITTLE FAITH ALLIGATOR

★★★★★

First solo album from gospel legend in more than a decade

Throughout a disappointing solo career, Mavis Staples has never matched the stirring atmospheric of the family's early gospel sides or the power of their '70s funk albums on Stax. Against the odds, *Have A Little Faith*, her first album since the Prince-produced *The Voice* in 1993, is a

minor gem. A good band and decent songs bring out the best in her still-smouldering voice. Best of all is the spooky acoustic blues "Dying Man's Plea", but the slow-burn funk of "Ain't No Better Than You" and the moving tribute to her father, "Pop's Recipe", aren't far behind. NIGEL WILLIAMSON

The Crickets

THE CRICKETS AND THEIR BUDDIES

COOKING VINYL

★★★★★

JJ, Sonny and Joe enlist some top pals for a nostalgic yomp

Groansome pun title aside, this is a lot better than anyone might surmise. The venerable Crickets retain some fabulous chops and their chums are pretty tasty — try Eric Clapton, Rodney Crowell, Phil Everly, JD Souther, Johnny Rivers, Bobby Vee and Waylon Jennings (the latter's take on

"Well... All Right" was one of his final recordings). Bossed by Albert Lee and Glen D Hardin, The Crickets roll back their years to fine effect. Only thing is, where's Macca? MAX BELL

Pinback

SUMMER IN ABADDON TOUCH AND GO

★★★★★

Off-kilter art rock from San Diego duo Talking Heads' quirky angularity has become a touchstone for US college bands like Modest Mouse and Death Cab For Cutie, and this third album from Armistead Smith and Rob Crow follows a similar route. At their best ("Non Photo-Blue", "Fortress") Pinback unite complexity with conventional AM radio guitar pop to lilting effect. But for all their deft intricacies, they're somewhat characterless — this doesn't exactly get the blood pumping. Yelping choruses attempt to compensate, but it only sounds forced and overstrained. Too much maths, not enough magic. NEIL DAVENPORT

Martin Carthy

WAITING FOR ANGELS

TOPIC

★★★★★

Inspired, quietly confident mix of traditional folk with modern trappings

Forty years on, Martin Carthy is showing signs of mellowing. His commitment to the revivalist cause is undiminished. But here his singing is quietly passionate, beautifully offset by sparse modern arrangements with subtle production overseen by daughter Eliza. Acknowledging old-fashioned singers, he takes inspiration from mentors like Harry Cox, the Copper Family and Walter Pardon, the latter's "A Ship To Old England Came" a chilling, compelling tale.

A trio of instrumentals showcase Carthy's deft playing, highlighted by Martin Simpson's slide guitar. Exquisite, relaxed, and belying Carthy's virtuosity. MICK HOUGHTON

Jimmy Eat World

FUTURES

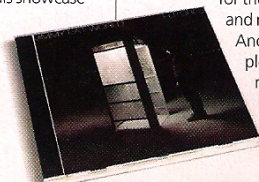
INTERSCOPE

★★★★★

Emo front-runners' sell out in style

To qualify for approval on the American emo punk scene, you had to be gnarly, melodically 'challenging' and denounce the very concept of a hit forever. So when Arizona's Jimmy Eat World broke for the Billboard border with their eponymous album in 2002, the 'sell-out' brickbats inevitably flew.

Now their fourth album, stuffed with Fountains Of Wayne-but-shoutier chug-poppers like "Pain", arrives as a kind of *Joshua Tree* for the heavily pierced and mildly upset. And thoroughly pleasant it is, too: more Foo Fighters than Fugazi, and all the sparklier for it. MARK BEAUMONT



Mavis Staples: smouldering on