

storm&stress

The television reporter asked: What's in a name? Why storm&stress?

1. Storm&Stress is of course an historical reference to the German literary movement, Sturm und Drang. Ours is more of a modern day version, where the characters still yearn for revolt, but unfortunately can't. We'd like to feel, but have no feelings left. It's about an impossible situation: the ridiculousness of another era in our new skin (the wigs hurt), the improperness of pop artifice mixed with legitimate attempts at being serious, and then all of the attendant problems, i.e. teenage aspirations tripped up by music that teenagers probably don't want to listen to, rock without a beat, etc.

As Storm&Stress is blank and hollow, intention becomes a pretty big problem. In the end, the name is left only meaning what the words are and no more. (Though it's completely pinned to the idea of what it can never be, and that most think it's a fluffy idea at best: in other words -- automatic failure, a hot concept in the late 90's) Storm&Stress is just a rocker's call to action. "Dude, storm! Dude, stress!" The impossible nature of the name is very tied into the music. It's failure leaves it only an overstatement of the obvious. Yes, the music storms and stresses. Overly-blunt things are pretty sexy.

There's sort an intentional forgetting of the songs that we play. That's tangentially related to the desire to be stoner-rock, but it has more to do with the same impulse found in jazz moving towards modality in the late 50's and early 60's: blur the melodies and bury the fucking traces of construction; and also European serialism, where everything is blown to the point where recognizable shards are *detrop*, et al. This impulse is always reemerging in people's feeble attempts to not seem corny. I can't figure out if that's cheating or not. I mean, Storm&Stress's planned aspect of forgetting. It's about being almost paralyzed by what's in front of you, in this case, the song we're trying to play. It just seems like that's the only honest way to play music right now, without being hokey. It's about completely doubling over, with an effect that can seem self-referencing. It's an experiment in stating your positions, which, by the way, I find no different than Jon Spencer saying, "I've got the blues!" But it's about how that statement of self somehow ruins any intention as well, making for a really unauthentic experience. It's that blinded-by-awareness thing that everybody seems to be into today in some way or another.

We know so much about the songs, and repeat the riffs so many times, that they sort have broken loose from their moorings. This has an effect that really sort of spoils intention as well. A riff not locked into a time signature loses the purpose it would have if repeated with the conviction of a tightly scripted pattern. Things are usually neatly lined up in a pattern for a reason. The melodies in this case are left without the snarl of conviction that pretends to know how things should be. Riffs give off a sense of understanding to the listener, whether it says, "I, the riff, believe in a lot of things," or, "I, the melody, am very wise and know a lot." These aren't dumb riffs; it's just a case of them knowing about themselves, doubling over, and then freezing...I think it has the effect of Shalom Harlowe or Amber Valetta in the [beauty]* magazines. The first step is the statement of self. The second step is total destruction. People will have an easy time relating to this nihilism because it segues nicely with the past 20 years or so of punk rock, something I think everybody is pretty down with. One minute you're just saying, "I feel...", or, "I like to dance...", and next you're splayed out all over the floor.

Wise melodies sound like they are considering many options at once. It's a knowing of all the options, and thus being paralyzed by the choice and being unable to pick one. Inaction of the melody, if you will. The melody holding it's cards close to its chest. That might just be a cheap technique to achieve mystery. I don't know. It's a very knowing quality, like it knows something you don't. Intention is wiped out and a blank feeling is left. I think the music is very innocent, because, well, it didn't *mean* to do that, or that either. Absolutely essential to understanding us: we are an innocent band. Sort of innocent the way robots are innocent. Or the way Claudia Schiffer is innocent in magazine pictures, or the way balloons are at a child's birthday party. Most frighteningly, innocent the way a lot of things exist without giving one shit about me or you. You know, like power lines in mid-western farm fields heading towards cities. They're imposing and buzzing, but you don't matter one bit. You know, that kind of innocence.

Despite this, the compositions are all very, ahh...composed. Though we decidedly call everything we do songs and not compositions. I think there are some really twee moments on our record. The vocals are mixed very high in a way that at least struck me as inappropriate. But we wanted that because it has a lot to do with distance between our disparate elements and their subsequent collision. You know, the disparity between wanting to be a pop band and not wanting to be a pop band.

2. Stuck in the present tense.
3. Only our immediate surroundings.
4. I really don't think there is anything too different between what we're doing right now and what the Ramones were about in the 70's, et cetera.

We are more surprised than anybody by this, Ian Williams 1997.

Storm&Stress includes Ian Williams singing and playing guitar. Ian also plays with Don Caballero. M Eric Topolsky plays bass and also plays with Golan Globus. Kevin Shea drums. Micah Gaugh, at times, plays piano and sings. Micah plays with Cecil Taylor, Marc Ribot, Miss Lady Kier, and DJ Spooky. This is their first recording. Steve Albini committed the sounds to tape in Chicago, early 1997. The record comes out the 8th of July, the hottest month of 1997, when everything is flat, white, wavy and has smells.

*Added for clarification [editors - Scott Giampino/Rob Sieracki]

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