

Pain Morphine Killers

With 1993's *Cure For Pain*, Boston's Morphine became the name to drop in sidewalk cafes and bars. Here was a novel and accessible antidote to grunge/alternative, with a guitar-less sound resting on Dana Colley's saxes and Mark Sandman's rootsy, bloozy vocals.

"It was experimental and interesting, yet it seemed the normal thing to do at the time," explains a very laconic, laid-back Sandman in reference to the band's sans guitar approach. "It wasn't an anti-grunge or anti-Boston statement at all. What appealed to us was what Dana does with his baritone sax covers [was] what a guitar would cover. It sounds good in this formation and it's perfect for the style of this band. We complement each other by listening to each other while we're playing and by leaving a lot of space."

Morphine have even coined the term 'low rock', to describe their wind driven sound.

"That's just what we call it because people kept asking what our sound was. To us it's rock music, but the low part is what happens if you combine certain kinds of frequencies in certain ways, then you can have an almost physical effect on some people. It's theoretical but it's meant to hit you in the stomach. I haven't experienced it first hand," Sandman adds in his indifferent drawl.

So the band's name isn't a reflection on the desired effects on an audience?

"It might share certain qualities. What we noticed was that even though the music was low, it still penetrated. Morpheus was the god of dreams — that's where the word comes from — so we try not to be too self-conscious

about what we're doing when we put the songs together.

"At first we thought our name might be a little strong for commercial acceptance, but in the end it didn't matter as we just needed a name as we'd booked a show."

The new album, *Yes*, should prove to be a more difficult proposition than the cool, catchy rock and blooze of *Cure For Pain*. The first side is their customary burping, honking and blaring sax led hybrids, but the second half of the album is dominated by a couple of beatnik styled narratives and the extra heavy flatulence of 'Free Love'.

"I don't think this record will get played in as many restaurants as the last one because it does have more intense moments like that," Sandman observes dryly. "It really reflects how we've been playing the songs live. We kept recording it throughout the year, as we'd come off the road for a little while and record a few songs and go back out and try the new songs on the road. It's good to record them when they're fresh and haven't sat around too long."

Sales of *Cure For Pain* topped 300,000 and *Rolling Stone* described Morphine as the best 'underground' band of last year, and yeah, their best music does have a timeless organic quality.

"We try to record songs that won't be embarrassing for us to listen to in 10 years time, but that's in the back of our minds. We don't want to sound as though we belong too much to a particular time."

So, you've done enough to give up your day jobs?

"Yeah, we don't have day jobs anymore."

GEORGE KAY



Trevor Reekie of Cosa Nostra. Photo by Ian McRae.

Trevor Reekie's not the type to lay a horse's severed head by your pillow, but he's still got plenty of notches in his belt. His days and nights are spent juggling his involvement in the Greg Johnson Set, the co-ownership of indie label Pagan, several bottles of red wine, and his new project Cosa Nostra.

'Cosa Nostra' is the true name for the Mafia, and literally translated means 'This Thing Of Ours', a phrase the Mafia use to guard their identity, and a concept Reekie found fascinating.

"When Mob members are out in public, if they want to introduce someone else from the mob to another mob member they say: 'This is a friend of ours,' but if it's a non-mob member they say: 'This is a friend of mine.' It's such a cool concept for such a vicious organisation."

So, when the time came to give a name to the loose collection of seven songs spewed out and seized upon by Cosa Nostra, *This Thing Of Ours* it became.

The digital duo of Reekie and producer Daniel Barnes formed by accident, when Barnes stored a sampler, a keyboard, a computer and various effects at Pagan's Parnell HQ. According to Reekie: "It seemed ridiculous to have all this gear and not have a play with it."

The experimenting began as directionless, informal jam sessions, with Reekie and Barnes

constructing loops and drum patterns, wrapping them round riffs or bass lines, and then discovering what they'd done. As the jamming became more frequent and songs began to form out of the mess, the twosome plopped their collection of ideas on the desk at Incubator Studios, and asked engineer Angus McNaughton to add some noise.

"We had no preconceptions, no ideas and no real tempos. Everything came from experimenting. Most of stuff on there is first-take material and I wouldn't remember how to do it again. There was no pressure to come out of the studio with a result, it was just seeing what creative people could come up with."

This Thing Of Ours is a difficult one to describe. It expertly blurs the line between smooth ragga ('Still Water') dub, trance, psychotic techno ('Yo Scuzzball') and the trippy, atmospheric of a tune like 'Close To The Edge'. The mini-album is released on the new Antenna label, an off-shoot of Pagan, and while Reekie plans more white-noise releases from the duo, they'll arrive all in good time.

"It's not a one-off, but there's no determined deadline either. The next one might be a year away, it might be three years away, and the next one will assume a different shape again. What it represents to me is a whole variety of things I have enjoyed playing around with, and now that I've got that out of my system I can see where it can go next."

JOHN RUSSELL

KNIGHTSHADE TELEVISION EYES

