



In the 1980s there was a New York band called Pussy Galore. They were all cardboard guitars and saucepan drums, no rhythm, all noise and, depending on how you looked at it, either shit on the ears or ear lolly.

Luckily, Pussy Galore disbanded into a series of glorious projects for us to listen to when we grew up.

Guitarist Jon Spencer formed Boss Hog with his future wife and fellow 'Puss' Cristina. He then formed the 'currently popular' Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Julie Cafritz went on to be in the Action Swingers and Free Kitten (with Kim Gordon). Other 'Puss' guitarist Neil Hagerty and his musical (and otherwise) partner Jennifer Herrema formed Royal Trux around about 1985.

Their first album, *Royal Trux*, was released in 1988, followed by the description defying *Twin Infinitives* in 1989. The second album had the critics a yabberin' — mostly about how strung out Neil and Jennifer were when they recorded it. A hazy two year period passed (Neil and Jennifer spent their record advance on personal medicine) before their third LP, also titled *Royal Trux* (which took 12 hours of studio time and \$150 to make), came out.

Neil and Jennifer then decided on a change of tack. They rented a country house in Virginia in 1993 and recorded their fourth LP, *Cats and Dogs*, which was considerably more together (lotsa country air and less medicine!) than the others.

1994 saw three new full time members recruited into the Royal Trux family, with Jennifer and Neil still holding firmly onto 'Mum' and 'Dad' titles. The Trux family signed to Virgin Records and made a superb, rockin' and bluesy fucked up piece of work called *Thank You*.

It's midnight on a Friday evening for me, and 11am on a London morning for Neil. As expected, Neil drawls away in a nonchalant, but nonetheless appealing fashion. He says "eeeaarr", long and slow, as opposed to "yeah", and there are nice, long silences as he pulls on his cigarette.

How have the fickle British press been treating you? Have they been pawing you?

"Ahhhhhhh, it's been okay... overdone. Y'know good, but it's been pretty mellow... like mild, y'know."

Do you now feel like you have to do a lot of unnecessary interviews, when before there was practically no press to be done?

"Ahh no, no, it's not that bad. There's nothing to do here anyway. It is weird to have to talk about yourself though."

Do you feel more connected to your audiences as they grow, or alienated?

"Alienated... I dunno. We're busy during the day, then we take a car over to the show, get out, play, do the show and get in the car and come back... it's like the shows we're doing now are set up by the record company, for their own purposes, y'know?

Is that a bother?

"It's just a minor one, 'cause I think it'll change if we get a little bigger. This is all just like, promotion... early days. The audience mainly consists of record company people... press... the in crowd or whatever. It's just once... it should only happen once — hopefully."

Is audience quality control a concern?

"I just wanna be open to the public a little more. Anybody who can get the tickets should go."

Does *Thank You* feel more lucid to you?

"Musically, I think it is because we had a producer this time to work with and he kinda intervened in the mixing process. Like, usually we would go in ourselves and mix everything and really alter the sound. But he wouldn't let us do it. He just recorded it live and then just left it, and we were like: 'Oh no.' We wanted to go back in and mess with it. But the end result was a little more familiar and acceptable I think."

How are you coping being on Virgin?

"It's better. We were running our own show and after a while, especially since we moved out to Virginia, which is way out in the country, y'know, we probably would have gone a little astray if we hadn't signed to a major label. It's pretty isolated. But being on the label makes us stay in contact with a major city... a banking centre. It was good timing really, 'cause we'd been pushing towards that I think. People had been sniffin' around for the last three years. I'm glad 'cause it's one of the last things we have to do."

How do you deal with the company side of things at Virgin?

"We hired a manager, which is another first for us. He takes care of that kind of crap. He lives in Los Angeles, and he goes into their offices every day and calls us on the phone and tells us. We needed to do it."

Do Virgin still have the planes?

"Oh yeah, yeah. We flew on that once. [Virgin boss] Richard [Branson] wasn't on it. I heard that if you were on Virgin you get free airfares... I guess it's not true."

Are you afraid of flying?

"I am. I totally hate it. I cry every time the plane takes off. I'm just gonna have to get used to it or like, y'know... sail. We're meant to be coming down to New Zealand and Australia so... [the planes again] owh, the claustrophobia."

When are you coming to New Zealand?

"In September. In the monsoon."

Ahh, we don't have a monsoon.

"Owh, that's right, it's the reverse... temperate."

You obviously enjoy the lifestyle of being in a band.

"Yeah, I do. I like the stress, and then the release, y'know. I mean like, it's over and then you relax, and then all of a sudden there's a call and you gotta go... it's kinda like ah... I imagine like the CIA... FBI."

What's the worst thing about being away from home for long periods?

"Umm, it's just that I have these cats, at my house, and I don't get to see them as much now, and I have to leave them."

Are those your cats on the inside cover?

"[Mild excitement] Oh Yeah! [Calmer] Yeaah."

I decide to pursue the cat situation since he brought it up. He seems happy to talk about cats rather than anything else. It's fine with me to talk of cats.

"You don't have any indigenous mammals there do you?"

After all the red drinks I have had, that I don't usually have, I cannot think on the spot if we have an indigenous mammal.

"We have Kiwis," I offer.

"Oh, the no-flying birds... cool... and also, I think they forget who you are [he's talking about the cats again]."

Who looks after them when you go away?

"We leave them with ahh... Jennifer's mother. We call her their grandmother. We say like [puts on an even cooler, sinister tone]: 'You're gonna go to Granny's house.' She's real lenient with 'em. She lets 'em climb all over the place... eat off the table. They get spoilt."

Are they pleased to see you when you return home?

"Yeah, a little scared. They're like: 'Who the hell are these people?'"

Tell me about them.

"Oh... the two on the record are... like, the one that's lookin' at the camera is named Rudy, and the one on the right that's scowling is Samantha. And then we've got another little black cat; he's named Leon. He's not pictured on the album. He's too shy to take a picture. The lights kept scarin' him away."

Well, we could talk of cats all night, but we won't, because we should assume not everybody is into cats. So, let's finish with a pressing question, eh?

Inevitably there are going to be some alternative purists who will dismay over your major label signing and say you're 'not as good' and they 'liked the first album better'...

"Yeah, I mean, like, if we have any real fans... and I'm not sure that we do... if anybody has all the records, then they'll understand and it'll make sense. But if somebody got into us from like, one record, and thought we were like some insane, hermit, pathetic, flaky band... that's not what we're about."

"So, it's fine. they can keep their little fantasy, that's good. If people just reject major labels, that's good too. But for us personally, as far as making the band go forward, we really had to do this. But I wouldn't begrudge anybody for hating a major label... it's perfectly natural."

SHIRLEY CHARLES

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