



Lux Interior Sick With the Cramps

Each one of us, in his timidity, has a limit beyond which he is outraged. It is inevitable that he who by concentrated application has extended this limit for himself, should arouse the resentment of those who have accepted conventions which, since accepted by all, require no initiative of application... But this apparent violation is preferable to the monstrous habits condoned by etiquette and estheticism.'

So said Man Ray, in 1934. Sixty years later, these words appeared on the sleeve of the Cramps most recent album, *Flamejob*. A more fitting home they could not have found. I don't know of the limit beyond which the Cramps are outraged, but I do know some of the things which fill its expansive confines. The Cramps are fuelled by what some might call an unhealthy interest in lurid horror flicks and comics, souped up hot rods and 'sicles, outer space theories and science fiction movies, 60s drug culture, 70s glam rock and punk, and a legendary obsession with rare rockabilly.

Cramps co-founder Lux Interior can't remember the first time he was switched on to rockabilly — it was that long ago.

"It was when I was like three years old or something," he says. "My older brother was really into it. He was playing it all the time, so the first thing I can remember was hearing Elvis playing."

Lux says he forgot about rockabilly for a long time. It wasn't until the 70s, after he met soul mate and Cramps co-founder Poison Ivy Rorschach, that he rediscovered the genre of music in which he would go on to make a living.

"We would be going to junk stores all the time. There wasn't very many good records coming out we liked, so we started buying 45s out of junk stores for like a nickel a piece, five cents a piece. That's when we really discovered how exciting the stuff was."

Today it takes every room of the house Lux and Ivy share with their cats Opal, Torchy and Cleopatra to contain their extensive collection of 45s.

"We've got some really rare ones, especially [from] when we lived in Ohio. All the hillbillies in the South moved up to Ohio to work in the rubber companies during the 50s, and they brought their records with 'em. So a lot of 'em ended up there," explains Lux. "We have the Teen Kings' first record, which was Roy Orbison's record before he even went to Sun Records. They recorded that in some little town

in Texas somewhere. There was only like 200 of those pressed, so we were really thrilled to find that. There's quite a few like that."

The last current album the pair purchased was by a band called Doo Rag, who opened for the Cramps on their last American tour.

"They're these two crazy guys that play real amphetamine blues, real fast slide guitar and drums. It's just a guitar player and drums, but it's like real, real fast. It's kind of like if there was a blues band that sounded like the Ramones or something. They're really great. Their records are really fun."

Lux goes on to recommend the Five, Six, Seven, Eights and the Go Nuts. He and Ivy recently caught both bands live in Los Angeles.

"The Five, Six, Seven, Eights are four girls from Japan, and it looks like you're seeing if the Ronettes were still around, but they actually played all their instruments. [They're] four girls that wear skin tight, gold sequined dresses, with four-inch long rhinestone earrings. They play just really great, tough rock 'n' roll."

With his musical preferences so firmly rooted in the past, there are a few artists Lux has missed live who he will never get the chance to see.

"I wish I could have seen the Pretty Things in the 60s," he says. "I've seen some video tapes of them and they seemed like a really exciting band to see live. I've always loved the way they sound. And there's about, I don't know, 500 rockabilly artists I wish I'd seen. We do a song, 'Love Me', by a guy called the Phantom, and he was supposed to be really amazing live. He wore a mask, and he'd get down on his knees on stage and start crying on the stage. There'd be a little pool of tears in front of him and all the girls would swoon. He must have been really great to see."

While Lux is in a recommending mood, I figure we better start talking movies.

"We have quite an extensive movie collection too," he says. "The ones I like lately a whole lot are the West German films from the early 60s — they went from like 1959 to like 1965. They're all these Edgar Wallace pictures. They're really strange. They have really odd camera angles, really wild photography. They all take place in strip clubs, and they usually have one villain, who wears some kind of monster outfit or something. One of my favourite ones is called *Phantom of Soho*, and that's really great. This guy wears like a skull mask and kills people. Another one that's really great

is called *The Head*. If you have a chance to see either one of those, that would be really great, or any of the ones Edgar Wallace wrote. Those are really great."

Flamejob's 'Nest of the Cuckoo Bird' was named for the title of a movie Lux and Ivy have yet to get their hands on. Nevertheless, Lux is confident enough to vouch for its quality.

"Yeah, now that's a really great movie. *Nest of the Cuckoo Bird* was a movie that came out in the mid 60s. So far no one has seen it. I mean, maybe people saw it back then, but no one can find a copy now. There's a newspaper advertisement for it that's really amazing looking. Everybody wants to see it real bad. Just from looking at the newspaper ad, we were inspired to write that song about it."

The song describes a girl with 'a look on her puss like she was weaned on a pickle... a huntress with the hoodoo word'. From the scant clues on offer, it's pretty fair to guess *Nest of the Cuckoo Bird* the movie does indeed feature a huntress of some description. Lux also knows it is set in the Everglades.

He further explains: "The newspaper ad has this really kind of German expressionist looking ad, with a naked girl with her arm up, with a knife in it, dripping blood. Underneath that it says [affects announcer tone]: 'Love... Gators... Snakes...' [Laughs] That's all we know about it."

With such traditionally distasteful passions, and a body of work which flaunts them so unashamedly, the Cramps should be turning the moral majority puce.

"Well, I don't think they even know about us," says Lux. "I'm sure we would get a lot of criticism if they knew about us. I think they were too afraid to go in some of the stores where the people that sell our records are. I think something in our lyrics and what we do is a little bit too intelligent for them to grasp. We haven't really had too much trouble. I think you have to say 'Satan' or 'kill a cop'. You have to be really obvious for them to get it. I think maybe our lyrics take too much brains for them to decipher."

They obviously had a little less trouble deciphering them in New Zealand. Our copies of *Flamejob* copped those ridiculous 'Explicit Lyrics' stickers that are supposed to stop delicate ears being singed and the kids turning into foul mouthed maniacs.

"Oh, I didn't know that was happening," says Lux. "That's good to know. They hadn't done

that in Europe or in America. It's like they're just doing that there. I don't know — that's part of the tradition of rock 'n' roll, so, I think it's stoopid, but I don't know that I care if they do that. Although, I think they should put a sticker on it saying: 'Warning: this album contains lyrics that are intelligent and require a brain to understand them.' They should give you a sticker for doing something good too."

Either that, or they could witlessly use your music, and allow you to infiltrate the mainstream that way. Lux describes such an incident when I ask him the strangest place he has ever heard the Cramps being played.

"One time, we were driving in the car, and there was a programme on a news show on some kind of flies that were carrying some kind of dread disease. They started playing 'Human Fly' in the background while they were talking about this disease. This was in the Washington DC area. It was very strange, because they were talking about a serious subject, and then this song came on in the background that made us crack up and start laughing. It was also one of the first times we ever heard our record on the radio, so it was exciting and confusing at the same time."

New Zealand's chance to hear the Cramps in a more fitting atmosphere comes when they play one show only on June 4, at the Auckland Town Hall. Live performance is one of Lux's biggest inspirations.

"When you get out on that stage, the people that stand there looking at you, it's just so much more fun than ever playing when we're practising or something. It's just looking at their faces and stuff, and everything that goes on. Our fans are totally crazy anyhow, so it's always really fun. It's very inspiring."

"There's usually anything from [people] taking off their clothes to wearing completely insane, wild costumes and outfits, and sexy clothes and stuff. Usually, everywhere we go, I'm really proud to say our audience is very stylish and a fun audience, where some bands have really dreary audiences."

Auckland's proved a hot spot for the Cramps in the past. They even released a live album of their 1986 show there (*Rockinnreelininaucklandnewzealand*). Lux is looking forward to returning, after which the Cramps are off to Fiji to lie on the beaches and that kind of stuff. Now that would be a sight to see! 'Bikini Girls With Machine Guns', anyone?

BRONWYN TRUDGEON