

Butch Vig may be the greatest producer the world has seen in the past decade, but this doesn't mean he is not human. Having twiddled the knobs for generation altering epics such as Nirvana's *Nevermind*, the Smashing Pumpkins' *Gish* and *Siamese Dream*, L7's *Bricks are Heavy*, and Sonic Youth's *Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star* and *Dirty* does not make him less liable to be hit by life's little curve balls (or should that be high-balls?). Hence, on the day I have the good fortune to speak with the godfather of grunge, I find him suffering from a hangover — a by-product of his previous night's cruise on the River Thames with a boat load of journalists and photographers, all eager to get a piece of him and his new band Garbage, who have just released their self titled debut album. Nevertheless, he certainly doesn't let his sore head dampen his spirits.

"I'm just kind of brain dead right now, so you can pretty much ask whatever you want," he says amiably.

Discretion obviously dictates the expansiveness of these confines, as is proven when Butch relates the tale of a particularly tiresome Italian interviewer he encountered a day earlier.

"[He] kept saying [slips into a robo-take on what could be an Italian accent]: 'What was it like to work with Nirvana?' He would ask me a couple of questions about Garbage, and then he'd go [same accent]: 'Now, what was it like to

incredible enthusiasm for life and for music, but he needs to exorcise some demons and move on with his life. In a certain respect, I'm also doing that. When you make a record that is so critically and commercially successful as *Nevermind* was, I've realised, I will never make a record like that again. And you can't sit around and rest on your laurels, or say: 'Well, I'm gonna retire now,' and walk around and tell everybody how great this record was. I'm extremely proud of making that record, and also very lucky to have made that record and [been] able to work with Kurt and the band. But it's like, that was then and this is now. Anybody who's creative needs to move off and keep somehow challenging himself. So, I'm really enjoying this right now.

"I'm actually enjoying being in a band too, because I don't have to necessarily make all the decisions. I also like the kind of creative tension you get dynamically from working with people. To a certain extent, when you're a producer, you'll work on a record, and no matter how intimate and psychologically you get involved with the band, you walk away from it, and you go on to the next thing. When you're doing your own music and you're trying to express yourself, or working with in a band and writing stuff, there's more of you in it. Ultimately it's more satisfying."

With his wisdom coming from plenty of experience, it's not hard to see why the world wants a piece of this brand new band's drummer in par-

their range. A lot of the, I guess, pop bands in the States right now, the women have really high voices, for lack of a better term. We weren't interested in that at all. We wanted someone with a much more expressive range than that."

Shirley first visited Butch and the other Garbage members (Duke Erikson and Steve Marker) in Madison, Wisconsin, while she was on tour in the States with Angelfish. It must have been a daunting meeting for Shirley, despite the fact she was initially unaware who this Butch Vig guy even was. She was auditioning to a bunch of complete strangers who had worked together for years (Marker and Vig are partners in Smart Studios, where the N band recorded the demos for *Nevermind*, and Erikson and Vig were band-mates in Spooner, who became Firetown in the late 80s). It was a disaster.

"Well, we didn't necessarily know what we wanted to do. We'd never really auditioned somebody, and we didn't even really consider it an audition 'cause we really liked her voice when we saw her on MTV. Nonetheless, she came to the studio, and she was very nervous, and we were incredibly nervous, and it was terrible. She worked with us for an afternoon. At one point we were like: 'Well, I dunno, maybe we should just call it quits and go to the pub.' She kept working on the tracks and they didn't turn out very well, but a week later she called back and said: 'I think I get an idea where these songs could go.'

be the three of us kind of walking all over you.' Quite au contraire, Shirley actually did quite the opposite. I think she's walked all over us to a certain extent. We really needed someone to help define what we wanted to do, and Shirley's done that."

Although Garbage's pre-Shirley lyrics were intended to work from a woman's perspective, most of them got the flick when Shirley got her hands on them.

"We would think something like: 'Let's make a song like a film noir. It has to do with a woman who's a prostitute who's world weary and has seen it all, and she's trying to find salvation or something.' Shirley came in and said: 'I don't want to sing about anything where I am a victim. I want the women to be stronger. I want the characters to have more personality.' She was totally right. Everything eventually gets distilled through her, and it's true, you have to be able to feel it or relate to it in some manner."

This leads one to wonder who is responsible for the often dark and predacious nature of the lyrics. After all, the first words most people will have heard from Garbage (via their debut single 'Vow') are: 'I can't use what I can't abuse / And I can't stop when it comes to you...'

"It's a combination of all of us. I think we have a certain fascination with darkness and perversion. We knew that we wanted to make a pop record, and we didn't know it would be as dark as it is, but I think there [are] certain qualities the four of us had that we found a common ground [in] when it came to writing and trying to express ourselves. The songs aren't really about me, or Shirley, or Duke, or Steve, per se, but there are things in them we touch on that mean something to us.

"I personally have had a very rough year, just with things in my family and my relationships, and I know that Steve has and Shirley also has. But we're not the kind of band that's gonna say: 'Look how fucked up we are, look how angst-filled we are, look how depressed we are.' It's like some of those themes are touched on in the music, but we're not gonna sit there and wear our heart on our sleeve."

Don't get the impression that *Garbage* is solely a minefield of despair. It's also highly capable of being sinister, stalky, sensuous and even (on a song where the chorus line goes: 'Pour your misery down on me...') good and silly.

"We kid Shirley that she has this morose quality that all the Scots have. One day she walked in the studio and I was listening to something that was really sombre. She said: 'Y'know, I really only love sad songs,' and that's where 'Only Happy When It Rains' came from. We're obviously making fun of ourselves, or trying to have some self deprecation there. We're trying to also poke a little bit of fun at the current alterna-rock scene in the US, where all the bands feel like they need to tell everyone that they're fucked up and depressed, and they wear that on their sleeve, and: 'Look how bummed out I am, will you please join my club and pay attention to me?' So, there is a certain common ground that we find in darkness."

Whether that common ground will prove the right equation for a sum of legendary proportions is yet to be seen (this being a somewhat less than perfect world). Butch is unsure whether it's even possible for a bunch of the "late 30-something" guys he, Duke and Steve are to achieve such a status.

"We're somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of having to be pop stars. We're not young... a teeny bopper band, and we don't have these GQ faces the young girls are going to be drawn to."

Surely a band can become legendary without having "GQ faces" (not to mention the very real drawing power of the non 'late 30-something guy' in the band). Look at three quarters of U2 for Peter's sake!

"I would like to think that's possible, but it seems today, especially with MTV and how fast pop culture evolves and kind of takes [things] in and spits 'em out really fast, that, in a way, almost taking a name like Garbage makes us sound disposable. It's like we're here today, gone tomorrow. That we call ourselves a pop band is even more self deprecating."

"In a way, we wanted to make this record that was like the David Lynch film *Blue Velvet*, where there's this perfect pop veneer on top, but when you actually get a chance to live with it, the layers underneath are slightly wrong or slightly off. Ultimately we tried to make a record that we found enticing, but we hope people will relate to it somehow."

BRONWYN TRUDGEON



That was Then, This is Now

Butch Vig takes out his Garbage.

be inside Kurt Cobain's mind?' I kept saying: 'Man, just put *Nevermind* on and listen to the record. That says it all.' We're just trying to steer it off into the Garbage Zone and make people realise that it's a different thing, it has nothing to do with that."

This may well be the case, but it doesn't stop Butch finding himself the subject of the same skew-eyed attention Dave Grohl of the Foo Fighters has received: that is, they both have a hard time convincing the world they're capable of being in a band which doesn't consist solely of themselves...

"And that doesn't have N as the first letter of the word," Butch adds. "In a way, I think it's so great that Dave is doin' this, because he has an

ticular, but there is a lot more to Garbage than the fact a big name producer is swinging their sticks. Initially, the most striking case in point (to anyone who cares to take the band without the baggage) is the singer, Shirley Manson (formerly of Angelfish and Goodbye Mr MacKenzie), who hails from Edinburgh, Scotland. She's like the antithesis of the Tanya Donelly school of singers, with Curve's Toni Halliday being the most immediate reference point (a quality reinforced and built upon by the rest of the band's sound). Butch first spotted her with Angelfish on MTV.

"I liked it that she could sing low and kind of understated," he remembers. "[That] to me sounded more intense and subversive than someone who would be screaming at the top of

So, she came back maybe another week after that, and she sang 'Vow' and 'Stupid Girl' and 'Queer'. All of those ended up being the final vocal."

Butch does not discount the bravery it must have taken Shirley to return for another shot.

"It was a pretty ballsy thing to do. For whatever reason, she kinda figured what kind of persona [the songs] needed, and the kind of attitude and approach they needed. From that day on she was in the band."

Butch, Duke and Steve made it clear to Shirley that if she were to be a part of the band, they expected her to be involved in every aspect of the creative input.

"We said from day one: 'We don't want this to