



Victor Delorenzo, Gordon Gano, Brian Ritchie.

Femmes Fatale

It was hard to believe the crowd at the Violent Femmes' Town Hall gig last year. Young people, teenagers even, going ga-ga over three nerdy 30 year olds from Milwaukee as if they were the most exciting band ever to grace these shores, the crowd so high on the Femmes' particular brand of acousto-folk punk angst that they even pushed the stage back a few feet. I mean, I've heard of the earth moving but *the stage*? At a Violent Femmes concert?

So I guess the arrival of a new VF LP will be greeted with hysteria by a good portion of this city's more youthful population. On *Why Do Birds Sing* Gordon Gano is still wailing about how he was baled up in the locker rooms at high school and jeered at but he's got the last laugh: "I'll make more money tonight than you ever dreamed of/you thought I was strange well just look at me now". Ten years down the line his uniquely wheedly voice insinuates that he's still getting wronged and he's dammed if he's always going to do good. His hormones are still on red alert too, giving rise to the occasional crude

line that sticks out like a sore thumb although Gordon points out that some songs like 'Girl Trouble' are among the first he ever wrote as a teenager. *Why Do Birds Sing* is an amalgam of old concert favourites and new songs which sound just like his old songs. The highlight of the album has to be his completely reworked cover of Culture Club's 'Do You Really Want To Hurt Me' in which Gordon surmises 'Yes, I really want to hurt you'. Sometimes the Femmes' particular brand of sarcasm tastes somewhat bilious.

Anyway, *RIU* is talking to head Femme Gordon Gano over the line in Bridgeport, Connecticut and he's

fielding questions with cool, courtly courtesy. Do the Violent Femmes see themselves following in the footsteps of REM being "alternative" but commanding a broad audience? ("I certainly don't think about that a whole lot. They've been very successful making the kind of music they want to make, I suppose there are parallels that could be drawn"). Is Gordon a terminal misfit — to what does he ascribe his emotional angularity? ("When we perform we still do songs from the first album and way back and I still relate to them. But I don't think of exactly the same things I did when I wrote the song, I don't plug into a nostalgic vein"). Is he really still smarting from those mean high school jibes as recounted in 'More Money Tonight'?

"Smarting? Not so much, but it's there. I don't feel that that was so traumatising, there were other people more persecuted — children can be so cruel, there must have been some studies done on that. I always was a little bit different. It starts with children and also adults, they hate people that are different. Maybe I was a little quieter, kept to myself, sometimes I felt like wearing clothes that no one else was wearing..."

Gordon Gano is one of the more polished and commercially successful practitioners of American nerd rock. Vocally, stylistically and content-wise, he's rubbing shoulders with the likes of Jonathon Richman, Tom Verlaine and the extraordinary, inimitable Jad Fair of Half Japanese. However, where Jad Fair's perennial awkwardness (musical and emotional) still rings resoundingly true after seventeen years and as many albums, the listener can't help but feel there's an element of conceit in the work of Gordon Gano, as if he's elected to wear the badge of "being different" (shy, sensitive, creative, unbutch) as a mark of moral superiority. *Option* magazine put it like this in a recent article on Jad Fair.

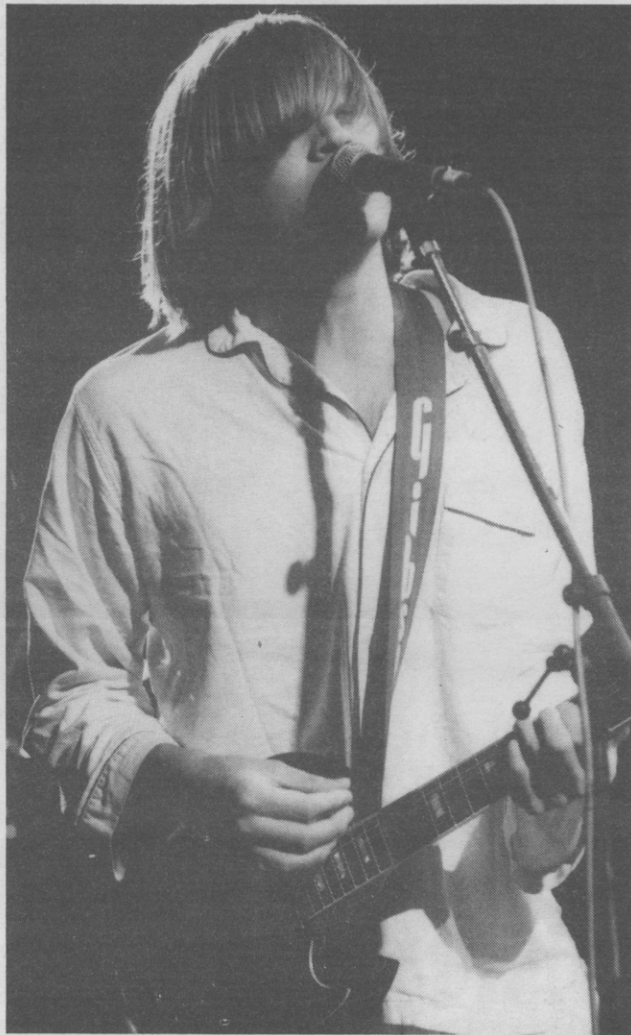
"Unlike other rockers in the whiny punk mode who tend to *affect* a callow persona in their songs — such as Gordon Gano of the Violent Femmes — Jad Fair is as painfully shy and awkward and childlike in person as the characters of his songs are."

After hearing this, Gordon sounded quite nonplussed (i.e. momentarily silent) and made some comment to the effect that journalists always have to have an angle and this one happens to be hung on him. But the quote was obviously bugging him because towards the end of the interview he interrupted a question to announce that he'd just looked up the word 'callow' in the dictionary — something about a baby bird learning to fly. However, the interview ended on a happy note when I told him that someone had suggested to me that the single from the album, 'American Music', could become the 'American Pie' of the 90s.

"Why thank you very much, that sounds great, I wish I could shake your hand! The funny thing about that sort of thing is if enough people wrote that then it will become that."

I believe the person who told me this was speaking in jest but Gordon Gano was plainly tickled pink. **DONNA YUZWALK**

FORTHCOMING RECORDINGS
INXS Live
SMITHEREENS Blow Up
MUDHONEY Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge
HAPPY MONDAYS Baby Big Head (official live bootleg)
SOUNDGARDEN Bad Motor Finger
LLOYD COLE Don't Get Weird on Me Babe
WARREN ZEVON Mr. Bad Example
JETHRO TULL Catfish Rising
TIN MACHINE Tin Machine 2
BLUE AEROPLANES Beatsongs
LOVE & MONEY Dogs in the Traffic
MICHELLE SHOCKED Arkansas Traveller
MIDGE URE Pure
SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER Homonally Yours
STEVE HOWE Turbulence
EARL SLICK In Your Face
CABARET VOLTAIRE Colours
JULIAN LENNON Help Yourself
JOHNNY WINTER Let Me In



I am a Lemonhead

Fresh from two and half weeks in Oz where he had "amazing fun", Evan Dando, the lanky, lissom, lead lead singer of the Lemonheads slouches in the Warners boardroom, having been preemptorily hauled out of his hotel room to meet the press.

Evan's the head singer/songwriter and guitar player of the Boston three-piece who have been kicking around since 1986, one of the lesser lights in the same scene that spawned the Pixies, with whom the Lemonheads played their second ever gig. Best known here for the fact that they covered Proud Scum's immortal 'I Am A Rabbit' on one of their five releases. How on earth did they getta hold of that song?

Evan: "In 1985 WHRV, Harvard Radio in Cambridge did a punk rock orgy, 150 straight hours of the history of punk, so when they were hitting New Zealand 1979 that came on and I was taping it and I was like 'Wow, what a song, amazing, that guy's really got a lot of joy and a lot of life in him'. It came through as such a funny and lively number that I had to cover that one."

Covers are a something of a house specialty for the Lemonheads, those they have clocked up include

Suzanne Vega's 'Luka' on the 1989 album *Lick*. Don't tell me you're a Suzanne Vega fan?

"Um... yeah, yeah," says Evan, "She has some really great songs, I guess, but catch me a couple of years back and she seemed a little bit too artsy and pretentious for me. But I met her in New York a little while ago and she was really sweet and I'd never say anything bad about her after meeting her, she seemed so nice."

One of the best moments on the Lemonheads latest album *Lovey* is their version of Gram Parson's 'Brass Buttons'. Is the ex-punker a Parsons fan?

"Of course," enthuses Evan, "I've been getting into country for about three years now and before I didn't know what it was but then I eased into it through listening to really cheesy contemporary stations and then I thought 'man, I've got to go back to the real thing'. So I did that, I

went back to Johnny Cash and George Jones and all these guys, Hank Williams, Gram Parsons, Kitty Kelly and the Louvin Brothers. Country music is so simple, I love the simplicity of it."

'The Year of the Cat', however, (also on *Lovey*), is *not* an Al Stewart cover.

"That song is about the clinical nature of life, about how sure you can feel great and stuff but all of a sudden you could fall down and crack your skull open and it's really a weird thing. Every title I came up with sounded way too corny or something and so I found out from my lawyer that you can't copyright titles. So I was like 'what's the cheesiest old song I can remember' and it was that song."

The other song to raise an eyebrow on the album is the pot protest song 'Li'l Seed'. Is this an issue the Lemonheads feel strongly about?

"Nah, it's a joke, although the song was written mainly by Corey and I just helped out with some of the arranging. He was just bored, he was working on his PhD dissertation for months and months and in his spare time he'd get out his guitar — he was listening to a lot of early '70s heavy rock in those days, and he wanted to write a song beginning with the word "society", you know, and it's a joke, it's a fun song. But I do feel that way about drugs and marijuana. Denying the problem and trying to go after all those *bad* people who are doing it and empowering a bunch of criminals seems like the wrong thing to do. I'd rather see it accepted and throw the money into health care for people with problems."

Are you part of the American underground — as defined by people who get written about in *Forced Exposure*?

"Oh well no, we don't get reviewed in *Forced Exposure*, 'cos we've always tried to veer away from the alternative underground scene. We're just trying to be entertainers, so they've never taken much heed but they know about us I'm sure, but too much disdain to ever review us, which is funny. I don't care about *Forced Exposure*, it used to be important in like '86 but it's not anymore. I love reading it, it's a great magazine, but it's no longer 'the word'. Like *Conflict*, Gerard Cosloy's magazine — those things can't last, people are gonna make up their own minds about stuff, they don't want some dictator making some amazing creativity with their reviews — it doesn't mean much in the end, but those magazines are great works of art."

If you saw the Lemonheads' one-off show at the Gluepot and liked what you heard, you might want to check out some of their earlier releases like their first album *Hate Your Friends*, 1988's *Creator LP* or 1989's *Lick*.

DONNA YUZWALK

The original

SMIRNOFF

A taste for the original