

Lovebugs

Adrian Sieber is not a man to bear a grudge. But he does have a memory like an elephant, a fact the Lovebugs' vocalist ably demonstrates right at the beginning of our interview when we sit down with Thomas Rechberger (guitar) and Simon Ramseier (drums) to talk about the highs and lows that led to the latest Lovebugs album *Land Ho!* 'I called you once, 23 years ago,' he says with a smile. He tells me that he sent me the band's debut album and expected great praise from the Britpop capital, London, to flow in. 'When nothing came, I reached for the phone. And you said, without mincing your words, that it didn't really live up to your expectations.' He laughs (...)

Since then, a lot of water has passed under the bridge. The quintet has released 12 albums, six of which placed high on the Swiss charts. After the last offering, *Life is Today*, however, the atmosphere in the band was strained. By this time, all of the band members had families. 'We noticed that it was no longer possible to give 500% all the time,' says Adrian. 'This caused a lot of frustration. I said "guys, that's it. It's over. I'm out." After not talking to each other for two weeks, Thomas called us up and said: "Look, we can't let things end in this lousy way. Let's empty our accounts, book a studio, and just see what happens.'" His timing was perfect. The band's contract had run its course; no one could tell them what to do any more. 'We said to ourselves: "fuck it, let's just make music".'

Prior to this, the Lovebugs used to plan everything meticulously before going into the studio. This time, spontaneity was everything. The band took a batch of raw songs and set up shop in the magnificently museum-like surroundings of the Funkhaus studio in Berlin and just did what they have always done best: they played live. No idea was too crazy, no effect machine too dust-encrusted, no echo chamber too hollow-sounding to be tried out. After such a creative high, it was sobering to discover that no one in the band was really happy with the results. Says Adrian: 'So there we were three months later: the masters were finished; our bank accounts empty. And we had to admit: no, this wasn't it! Everything was just too smooth. The earthiness we were looking for was just not there.'

Luckily, a camera team had captured the recording sessions for a documentary. 'When we sat down to talk about where to go from there, we noticed that hey, when we started out, these songs sounded fantastic.' And so they decided to go back to the drawing board and see what could be done. They sent these songs and four newly recorded ones to master mixer Peter Schmidt (Depeche Mode, Jeremy Days, Diamanda Galas, and many more), who artfully rediscovered the earthy magic they thought they had lost.

Land Ho! is Lovebugs' most diverse and humorous album to date. It kicks off with the pure earworm pop of 'Land Ho!', moves on to the big guitars of 'Juxtapose', and continues with the sunny quasi-rumba of 'Sunshine for Breakfast'. From here, things take a different turn with the loose, laid-back reggae beat of 'Lazy Swazy' and the ballad 'Too Close to Touch'. The album closes with a real treat: the subtle mix of genres in 'Shylight'. Simon Ramseier sums up the Lovebugs' new attitude: 'We brooded over it for a long time: do people still appreciate music or is it just something that plays in the background, something nice to have? And then we realised that the only reason to make music is because we love doing it.'

Text by Hanspeter Künzler