

# The Phantom Band

chemikal underground records

Checkmate Savage

Debut album released **26<sup>th</sup> January 2009** on Chemikal Underground

*“Over-population, dwindling natural resources and the yawning void within every one of us caused by society's unnatural social contracts and mass sexual repression means one thing: its checkmate for the human animal.”*

So say The Phantom Band, with an invisible tongue firmly in an invisible cheek and if the sibylline verdict delivered by this mysterious Pan-Scottish sextet leans towards the dark side, then at least they've had the good grace to supply us with a fitting soundtrack for our spiral into the void. All universal matter can converge in a black hole – Checkmate Savage is where Beefheart meets Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, where Neu! meets Nick Cave, and we reckon it's a very early contender for album of the year.

The album was recorded in the band's adopted home city of Glasgow, beginning at Chemikal Underground's Chem 19 and finishing at Franz Ferdinand's own facility at an old Town Hall in Govan. Paul Savage of cult Glasgow band The Delgados served as producer, engineer and guiding force. The recording sessions were like their early jams: long, meandering and experimental; the band beating out rhythms on broken wood blocks and organist Andy's 'shelvaphones', a home-made instrument created from metal shelf brackets.

*“When you have been playing together for a good while you'd be amazed at the breadth of music you come up with. We ended up playing stuff that was folk, pop, techno with guitars, classic rock, metal, noise terrorism, gospel, soundscapes and parodied every band that we hated as well - it was great fun,”* says bassist Gerry of their prolonged sessions. The Phantom Band is a dionysiac of six people trying with all their might to pull in six very different directions; studio arguments were heated and personal.

The end result however is truly special, bringing to mind the beat savvy of The Beta Band, the other-worldliness of Super Furry Animals and the mood of Hallowed Ground-era Violent Femmes.

If it sounds like they're hard to pin down in words, then that's the idea. They took to calling themselves The Phantom Band after a period of switching their identity with each successive gig, performing as Wooden Trees, Robert Redford and more. Early photos of the band pictured them with bags over their heads. It's all part of their mystery and sense of the bizarre: some shows have seen them play with a giant, smoke breathing wolf head, others, with a Stairmaster onstage so audience members can work-out during their set.

In addition to The Phantom Band, the individual members each make music in other projects and guises, some better known than others. A few of them have an offshoot band called Omnivore Demon, a costumed improv group that play mostly at exhibitions and art events while Rick does solo folk stuff under the name of Rick Redbeard. Each Phantom brings a strong sense of identity to the project, counting artists, social workers, librarians and lawyers in their ranks. Never short of ideas and opinions, the entire band take a key interest in the album artwork, posters and onstage visuals that all add to this extraordinary band's immersive world.

It's this hybrid of different personalities, occupations, backgrounds and musical tastes that doesn't always make for a smooth existence. *“The Phantom Band are the most self-destructive, directionless, negative collection of argumentative individuals I know, who go out of their way to mess up anything that might be working in their favour. As Walt Disney once said, “we have met the enemy and he is us.”*” concurs Andy.

Despite the band's own strong visual aesthetic, the artwork for the album's 7” “The Howling” comes from a different field: comics. Celebrated Glasgow-based and world famous comic artist Frank Quitely (All Star Superman) has created a bespoke piece for the single cover. Why? Because he heard the album and thought it was the best thing he'd heard in ages. And we think you'll feel much the same way.

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