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WEEKLY

**THE DAILY 49ER
MUDDLES THE
FUDDLE AGAIN**
THEY WOULDN'T RUN IT
SO WE WILL

SHINE A LIGHT
SCORSESE BASICALLY,
JUST FILMS A ROLLING
STONES CONCERT

**FEAR AND
JUSTICE**
IN LAS VEGAS

A GONZO ACCOUNT OF
A NIGHT AT THE ALTAR





GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

HOW DAFT PUNK ARE CHANGING LIVE MUSIC

SEAN BOULGER

More than twenty years ago, two Frenchmen met at a finishing school in Paris. Before long, the two formed a surf-rock group named Darlin' (after the Beach Boys song), with Thomas Bangalter playing bass while hyphen-rich Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo manned the guitar. Darlin' enjoyed a modest amount of success opening for Stereolab on a few UK dates, but the music was not well-received by critics; British music publication *Melody Maker* went so far as to describe it as "a bunch of daft punk." Needless to say, Darlin' disbanded, but Bangalter and Homem-Christo remained close friends. The two experimented with drum machines, synthesizers, and sequencers, eventually adopting their favorite criticism as the name of their new band. Daft Punk was born.

Fast-forward to early 2006. Daft Punk have met an influential figure in the recording industry, gotten themselves signed to a record label, and released two widely successful and influential dance records. *Homework* showcased a bold and inventive take on Chicago house, while the group's sophomore effort *Discovery* represented a shift into playful, sample-based synthpop. Then, in March of 2005, Daft Punk released *Human After All*. Conceived, written, and recorded in a short six weeks, the album was clearly

not the best release in the band's catalogue thus far. Perhaps it was the lukewarm reaction from critics that prompted Daft Punk to hang out under the radar for a little while at this point. Who knows, and who cares? In April of 2006, Daft Punk showed up again, playing the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. It was their first appearance on US soil in nine years, and the show went down as one of the most legendary performances in Coachella history. The duo promised an entire tour in the following year. *Alive 2007* commenced, and Daft Punk effectively solidified themselves as one of the most brilliant acts in the history of electronic music.

As the *Alive 2007* tour swept through the United States, one couldn't avoid hearing or reading about Daft Punk's legendary live show. Everybody from *Pitchfork* to *Rolling Stone* sang emphatic praises about the French group whose most recent release was two years removed, and was mediocre at best. Daft Punk, in an impressive display of calculation and cunning, executed a perfect rebound by creating a show that is easily one of the most innovative experiences in live music. Sitting at the top of a large pyramid with LED screen walls, the band creates unique sets of remixed and overdubbed versions of their preexisting material, usually never playing fewer than two songs at once, and rarely playing songs as they appear on albums. But what is it exactly that makes the Daft Punk live show such an incredible experience? Is it the massive amounts of Ecstasy that their audience tends to be on? Is it the insane visuals? Is it the pump-you-up dance music? I say no. It's the robots.

When they reemerged on US soil at their 2006 Coachella appearance, Bangalter and Homem-Christo were famously clad in what appeared to be leather motorcycle jackets, pants, and very interesting helmets. For all intents and purposes, they looked like robots. Not an inch of flesh was visible underneath all that metal, plastic, and leather. The effect was exactly what

I would assume Daft Punk intended it to be—the audience, whether they realized it or not, didn't think of Daft Punk as actual human beings. The ingeniousness of Daft Punk's live show stems from the fact that they have actually created separate identities for themselves, removing themselves from the level of ordinary musicians or performers. Instead, the audience (and again, I think this is mostly done unconsciously) thinks of them as robots. When I was watching the band perform last October, I noticed myself getting extremely excited every time one of the members did something human-like. Every time a normal gesture was made (giving the audience the peace sign, blowing kisses, pumping fists in the air, etc), I found myself experiencing a burst of energy, and thinking "Ah! Holy shit, that's cool!" As I paid attention more and more, I noticed the people in the crowd having similar reactions, and I realized that this is because when Daft Punk do things that normal humans would do, it's crazy and exciting, because the audience actually thinks of them as robots.

So what does this tell us? Look at the facts: Daft Punk is very quickly becoming a household name. Where once they were known solely by an incredibly annoying single, now they're being sampled by Kanye West and playing at the Grammys. These guys are on top of the world, and (excepting the recently-released *Alive 2007*) they haven't put out a well-received CD of new material since 2001's *Discovery*. Rather than focusing their energy on producing another album of new material, however, Daft Punk have reached out and directly connected with their audience, albeit in a very strange and roundabout way. By maintaining their robot identities at all times, Daft Punk have established themselves as odd dance music deities. Regardless of the fact that *Human After All* was a bit of a flop, Daft Punk have shown us that all it takes to be one of the best bands in the world is a refreshing bit of creativity.

HAT TRICK

HOW ONE MAN WAS
ROCKED BY THREE
CONSECUTIVE BANDS AT
THE GLASS HOUSE

○ RYAN KOBANE

The line at the concession stand was ten people deep before We Barbarians took the stage on March 25th at the Glass House. People with their eyes fixed on a tray of nachos or a soda were certainly not prepared for what came out of the speakers next: rock. Rock so gritty and full of energy I even saw someone leave the line without the food they just paid for. One song in, and the second band of a four-band show had everyone in attendance by the jugular. This was not your common indie show, not by a long shot.

From the standpoint of a photographer, the Glass House offers up about as much ambiance as your local elementary school auditorium. Combo that with no booze, thirteen-year-old hipsters, and the fact that the Glass House is in the ghost town of Pomona, it still surprises me how many great bands play there. This night was no exception.

But my expectations before attending any indie rock show extend as far as being somewhat entertained. To say the least I was skeptical. Let's be realistic here, leaving a common indie show feeling anything more than appeased is rare. So when We Barbarians decided that heavy baselines, stage presence, and brooding vocals would be the medicine for what ailed me, I couldn't have been happier.

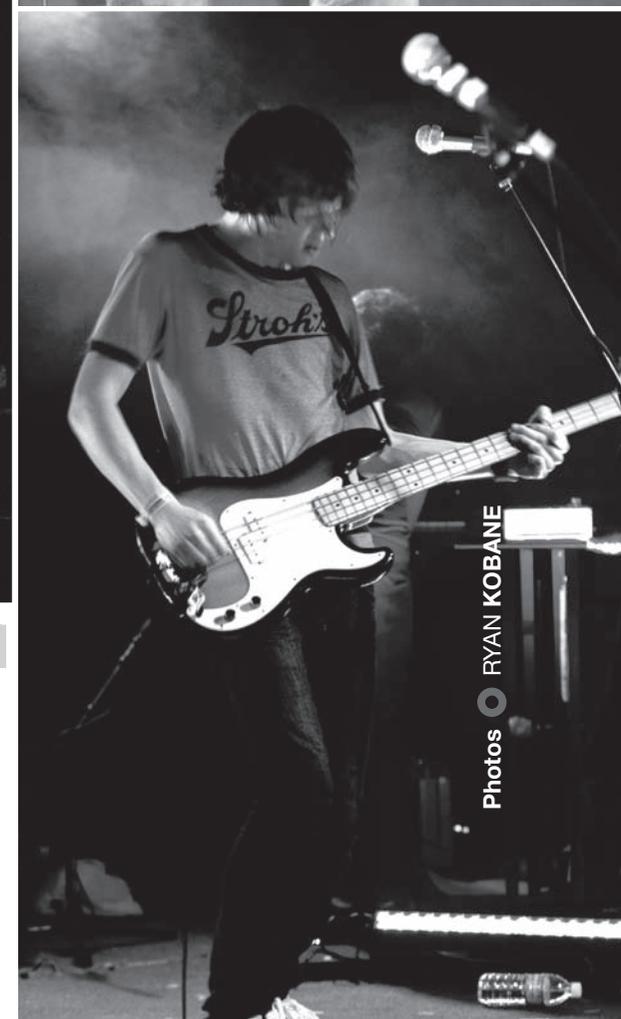
Front man David Quon is a born performer, and leaves one wondering why he didn't sing more while playing for The Colour. His bravado is effortless and unforced, much like the music We Barbarians produce. Derek Van Heule's taut bass playing matched perfectly with Nathan Warkentin's tension building percussions, and after hearing their entire new EP, I was thoroughly exhausted. I could have left then, more than fulfilled, but luckily I didn't.

When I think rock, I think movement and excitement; Eagle Seagull has this in spades.

It's obvious that they've listened to a few Arcade Fire albums, but it's also obvious that they interpreted the show that Arcade Fire is rather than completely ripping them off. Performing inches away from each other, the six piece band ripped through their set with reckless abandon. Carrie Butler pranced stoically with violin on chin and made me a believer that there is always room for at least one beautiful face in a rock band. And while lead singer Eli Mardock rocked red leather pants and belted away on synth, this was Austin Skiles' night to shine. This man was all over the place, but in a good way. Guitar in the air, knees on the ground, hair flying in all directions; Skiles belongs in an early 80's metal band. Eagle Seagull never gave the audience a chance to second guess their antics or torrid musical style and left the stage exactly how they came, with a unapologetic crash of sounds.

It isn't very often when the pressure to play a fantastic set falls on the shoulders of the headliner, but such was the case. Tokyo Police Club plays indie rock like the Ramones would have: unabridged. There isn't a wasted moment on stage with this Cana-

dian quartet. Halfway through their set, I put my camera down. I just wanted to enjoy what was unfolding. I just couldn't believe what I had witnessed in the last three hours. The show was so good that TPC even played an encore (something they never do). And even after that I saw the faces of so many who just couldn't believe the night was over. I almost shed a tear.



Clockwise. (top) David Quon of We Barbarians. Nathan Warkentin of We Barbarians. Dave Monks of Tokyo Police Club. Austin Skiles of Eagle Seagull.