

As good an introduction as any to the music of Flying Saucer Attack is their August 1993 45 for VHF Records of Virginia, USA entitled 'Soaring High'. That was my prelude to the band, and although they've subsequently released an album (self-titled, private press, unreleased when I started writing this article and sold out by the time I'd finished it three weeks later) it's still a splendid piece of vinyl. On the A-side, the aforementioned 'Soaring High', they set up a wall of feedback at the outset and layer jangly guitars over the top of it which are picked out by hushed vocals, the chorus running along the lines of "And I needed something new in my world, a dream to see me through" that serves to enhance the very otherworldliness of the composition. They continue in this vein, the sound rising and falling and the feedback sometimes poking through to the front of the mix and a booming bass guitar underpinning the whole thing until eventually the run-out groove beckons you to play the other side - which is entitled 'Standing Stone', and features suitably Neanderthal production values although the approach is basically the same. It's sonic, swirling space-rock with a touch of the Krauts thrown in for good measure - and I was hooked. Turns out the band are English and that the 45 had originally been self-released by the band back in January '93 in tiny quantities (already fetching upwards of thirty quid a copy, collectors take note). They had followed it up with a further single coupling 'Wish' with 'Oceans' which achieved a modicum of visible acclaim in the Weaklies and then lay fallow, until the guys at VHF picked up on them and broke them into the American market with the promise that an album was to follow in the not-too-distant future. Aside from the fact that the band featured two people by the name of Dave and Rachel, they knew nothing about

them - which only served to heighten my desire to pin 'em down for the Terrascope treatment. If there's one thing I enjoy, it's a challenge - and especially a challenge with obvious rewards at the end, specifically the chance to hear more by this fascinating little band.

So anyway, to cut a long story short a couple of evenings worth of basic detective work elicited the information that Dave FSA worked by day in a record shop in Bristol, coincidentally a city not too far from me down here in the West of England. This place was previously renowned in Terrascope circles for being the shop to come up with the best excuse so far for not stocking the Terrascope: "uh, well we'd like to but we can't carry magazines at all at the moment because we broke the thing the mags are displayed in..." (not bad, eh?) - but on the more positive side, Dave himself was a bit of a fan of the 'Scope and all of the music we write about and was more than willing to spill the beans about the mysterious Flying Saucer Attack, and what's more, treated me to a cassette of their (then) upcoming album which I have to say is a gem. Ten solid lengthy songs which twist and curl their way through various facets of space-rock, psychedelia and typically English pop experimentation, about which more later. Already hooked, I was now landed - the interview was confirmed, and the results are reproduced below, minus my questions which basically just took the form of "tell us about yourselves..." worded in several different ways. Dave:

"Flying Saucer Attack are me, Dave and my girlfriend Rachel. Between us we do drums/cymbals, bass, guitars, clarinet and feedback (no keyboards whatsoever) although we don't really exist as a 'band' - Rachel's at college most of the time, I works in the record shop most of the time and our patron Big Simon is the person who used to do the Heartbeat and Riot City labels a few years ago

and holds down a 'proper' job as well. So, none of us have 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to devote to making music, although we are all basically obsessive music fans - which is how we got to know one another."

Dave's earliest musical "history" consists of self-releasing a 4-song 7" EP back in 1985 called 'Up & Down' by HaHaHa - the band later turned into Cherry Red recording act Rosemary's Children, who I can recall writing about in faintly glowing terms when I was still on the staff of the Bucketfull of Brains back in a previous lifetime. A fine band who never fully realised any of their potential, Dave was "asked to leave" when he did a Syd ("I went nuts, basically. Hey kids, don't take drugs...") and wound up at art college instead, recording songs he'd written onto cassettes for the hell of it with a pal named Acoustic Jon and eventually playing with a few friends there in 1990 or so calling themselves The Secret Garden. Dave:

"The Secret Garden had a vague hope of getting signed to Creation, as one of the gang left college and did some sleeve designs for Alan McGhee. We did a gig supporting the House of Love - our only ever gig as it happened - and McGhee seemed to like it, but we weren't really a band and couldn't do anything about it even if we'd wanted to. This was however the first time 'Soaring High' got aired in public. The Secret Garden reformed recently (without me) and I'm still on good terms with the chaps".

Dave left college in 1990, ended

up in Bristol and found himself a job at the record shop. Eventually he met a few people who had a band, Lynda's Strange Vacation, which consisted of Rachel (now in Flying Saucer Attack), Kate (who still works with Rachel in a side-project, 'Movietone', which has an LP coming out on the Planet label around the time you read this) and Matt, a.k.a. 'The Third Eye Foundation' who has since been known to collaborate on a few Flying Saucer Attack tracks and now does his own stuff - plus Dave on drums, occasionally at least. Linda's Strange Vacation rehearsed a lot, recorded a few tapes for their own amusement and did no gigs at all and eventually broke up a few months after Dave joined. Then...

"One day in 1992 I was round at Rachel's house and her brother had just bought a 4-track portastudio. A couple of hours later the 'Soaring High' single was born, although we never expected it to be a single at the time. Flying Saucer Attack is all an accident really. I had a whole load of songs and a whole load of ideas but didn't know what to do with them, or even if I wanted to do anything. As Flying Saucer Attack has stumbled along, we've gradually dipped into the old songs and some of the old ideas,

but most of what we do - especially the LP - is totally



fresh. A lot of the tracks have been concocted by trying to work with the 4-track, ie putting things on separately, playing all 4 tracks back as a whole and seeing if there's anything interesting coming out - like a "pop" version of

the Faust Tapes really. Mixing the sound, rather than the 80s tendency towards separating everything. Basically, when we get a chance to record we try to do something that we weren't expecting and surprise

ourselves, although having said that we're also into good

songs, so sometimes we'll try for a song and let it brew slowly. The thing is, although we aim to achieve the best we can do, we don't feel confined by the boundaries of contemporary taste. We're not trying to be the new Nirvana or My Bloody Valentine - we're trying to work somewhere in the areas between Nick Drake and Can, Dinosaur Jr.'s 'Bug' and Popul Vuh. Listening to all these people and enjoying their music suggests that there must be something waiting to be found *between* their musics, whole new areas to explore. It may be wishful thinking - all I can say is we're not trying to copy any one thing".

Other influences and heroes that Dave claims for Flying Saucer Attack read like a collection of Terrascope favourites: Can, early Caravan, Pearls Before Swine, Group 1950, Nigel Mazlyn Jones, John Coltrane, COB, Comus, Nurse With Wound, the Trees - you get the picture. Although it isn't always easy to identify the diverse elements in their music, it's that general feel of unique ability and individualness which shines through everything that they do. It's a collective nuance that works particularly well on their album, where everything is thrown together in an apparently haphazard manner which nevertheless suggests that great thought has gone into it; the opening 'My Dreaming Hill' for

example picks up that Germanic beat so recently explored to great effect by Cul De Sac and weaves hallucinatory feedback throughout, adding vocals as almost an afterthought which all the same create an effective melody to listen out for. 'A Silent Tide', 'Make Me Dream' and the aforementioned 'Wish' all follow similar paths to equal if not greater effect, only 'Sax & Feedback' losing its way somewhat as the melody is discarded in favour of more atonal riffing. 'Popul Vuh I

and 'II' surround what for me is the centrepiece of the collection, a loosely-knit aggregation of thrums entitled 'Drowners/Oceans II' ('The Drowners' being a Suede cover version) that picks up on the 'Oceans' of their earlier single and extend its horizons disproportionately. Interestingly (vaguely...) the titles 'Popul Vuh I' and 'II' are a play on Nick Drake's titles 'Hazy Jane I' and 'II' - and it's also worth noting that the sleeve to Suede's original 'Drowners' consists of a photograph taken by an ex-member of Popul Vuh...

As I said at the outset, the LP was sold out almost as soon as it hit the streets so it's going to be difficult bugger to catch up on - but VHF are planning a CD release of it which should be more widely available, and although it's therefore too early to say just what the effect of a complete album will be on the wider listening public, the thought's an enticing one and FSA have the advantage of having almost the entire field to themselves, certainly in England at least. The album is also being re-issued on vinyl, this time with the same sleeve as the CD version (ie different to the original LP). If all goes according to plan, both releases should be in the shops by the time you read this article. FSA have most recently been rehearsing with 3rd Eye and others for a live line-up, and could well be playing their half-hour feedback exploration to apprecia-

tive audiences very soon. There's a new 7" planned for release in the early summer, and already talk of signing themselves to a "proper" label - maybe even a Peel session.

Dave: "What we are basically trying to achieve is to make some good records. If the first sells enough, we'll be able to afford to do the next; if that one sells, we can do the next one - and so-on. The quest for some form of musical beauty and ideal, an "other world", and our interests in strange phenomena such as UFOs is perhaps reiterating indirectly that maybe life is a bit of a crock of shit, just like you thought it was. So I suppose it's political in a way. And, well, flying saucers are just an aspect of that anyway, the myth, the "other", the hope for escape and salvation..."

So, there we have it - Flying Saucer Attack, beaming in from their hearts to your minds via the US of A. Wasn't it always that way?

Written, produced and directed by Phil - © Ptolemaic Terrascope, November 1993

