

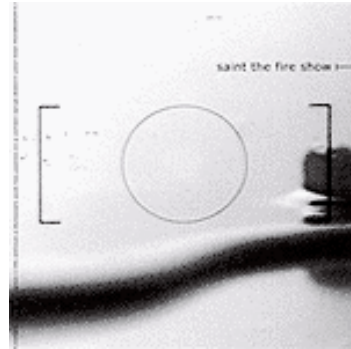
Fast 'n' Bulbous Review

http://www.fastnbulbous.com/fireshow_saint.htm

The Fire Show, *Saint The Fire Show* (Perishable) 9+

True to its pyrotechnic name, The Fire Show burned brightly and disappeared before hardly anyone noticed. Like This Heat, The Birthday Party, Mission Of Burma and The Pop Group, The Fire Show had their say within three albums or less, destined to be largely ignored at the time only to be deservedly revered later on. They are romantics, believing passionately that art should be expressed in everyday life, not cheapened by commerce and lifestyle marketing. On their website they pay homage to Guy Debord, founder of the Situationist International, and the post-punk "Spirit of '79." Yet they were not part of the recent post-punk revival that includes The Liars, The Rapture, Radio 4, Erase Errata, The Seconds, Ex Models and Life Without Buildings. Rather than mimicking the form, The Fire Show were inspired by the spirit. Sure, there's the occasional hint of Rowland S. Howard (Birthday Party) and Keith Levene's (PiL) buzzsaw guitars, but other than isolated bits, The Fire Show sounds like no one. While the Fire Show existed for only just over two years, the band is actually a culmination of a decade-long creative partnership between Olias Nil and M. Resplendent, who formed the more straightforward indie rock of Number One Cup. Their last album, the taut, stripped-down *People, People, Why Are We Fighting?* (1999) showed hints at the duo's future with its Wire and Gang Of Four influences. For The Fire Show, drummer Michael Lenzi stepped out from behind the drumkit to become M. Resplendent, a volatile and electrifying front man. *The Fire Show* (2000) was a superb debut, summarizing the band's dark, savage live set. Number One Cup quickly seemed like a lifetime away. *Above The Volcano Of Flowers* (2001), with its blank cardboard sleeve (do-it-yourself cover art was provided via the website) suggested a work in progress, with five long tracks that sound like they were created by improvisation. Called release 1.5, it held up on its own as a satisfying album, with increased use of electronics and sampling. It showed the band was unafraid to experiment, risking failure and delving into ugly sounds along with the beautiful to get their message across.

Saint The Fire Show is even more boldly uncompromising. It starts out a-capella, with "The Making Of Dead Hollow," with Resplendent



reciting his poetry, eventually joined by atonal violins and various percussive sounds. The cadence of his delivery and the occasional pan crashes recall Captain Beefheart's "The Dust Blows Forward" and "Well" from *Trout Mask Replica*. The effect can be disconcerting and uncomfortable, with some relief and release offered in the last couple minutes when the band kicks in and the guitar teases with just a shade of lyrical beauty. "The Rabbit Of My Soul Is The King Of His Ghost" is more beat-driven, with slashing guitar that draws inspiration from the same dark corners as Duane Denison (The Jesus Lizard), with multiple vocal tracks that criss-cross in various states of dissonance. "Brittlebones" is an inspired underwater dub fever dream. "Deviator Feel Like Crook" turns the clichéd build-and-release dynamic backwards by exploding out of the gate with jagged, crunching aggression and slowly cools like molten lava into a throbbing bass and finally a startlingly lovely acoustic outro. "Dollar And Cent Suppliants" continues the chilly beauty, with gentle, falsetto vocals, subdued instrumentation and piano, while a warped sample of what sounds like an opera singer send shivers shooting up your spine for strikingly original, eerie effect. "The Godforsaken Angels Of Epistemology" and the next three tracks offer a myriad of rewarding surprises that I could fill pages describing. "Magellan Was A Felon" is the most riveting highlight among many, expanding into a wonderful space odyssey that would have Hendrix looking down, smoking his celestial spliff and smiling --finally someone understood where "Third Stone From The Sun" was getting at. Yet the band is economical in the tools they use, with an extremely modest recording budget with which Radiohead would only be able to complete a single bass track. Another surprise is the subdued, brooding cover of "You Are My Sunshine." It's a shock that album is over already, because while some albums make you think everything's already been done, The Fire Show demonstrate there are still infinite possibilities from guitar, bass, drums and sampler, just as there are with say, a paintbrush or word processor. Those lucky enough to see The Fire Show's final tour witnessed the band, stripped down to the core duo, accomplish the most amazing things, starting on the rhythm instruments, sampling and looping, and following their muse. Too difficult and prickly to be absorbed and spit out by any trend, The Fire Show's legacy is destined to be discovered in its ashes by future artists, it's spirit an inspiration for continued creativity and artistic bravery rather than mimicry.

-- A.S. Van Dorston