Thursday, February 4, 2010

Crackerjack

## Music

STEVE HARNELL catches up with Massive Attack's Robert Del Naja at the band's Bristol studios to get the lowdown on their much-anticipated new album Heligoland

assive Attack have never done things the easy way, and after 20 years together, they're not about to start now. The labyrinthine story behind the

The labyrinthine story behind the making of their fifth album Heligoland is one of reinvention, false starts and the reconnection of two founding members.

founding members. Their last full-length studio effort, 100th Window, was effectively a solo project for Robert "3D" Del Naja (with help from co-producer and co-writer Neil Davidge) as Grant "Daddy G" Marshall took a sabbatical citing the odd creative difference and a new arrival in the family

a new arrival in the family. But the pair reunited for the ensuing world tour and G is now fully plugged into the Massive set-up once again.

It's been seven years since the release of 100th Window, but as D points out, they've not exactly been twiddling their thumbs in the meantime. They've mounted two world tours, released career retrospective Collected, curated a Meltdown festival as well as D and Davidge contributing to numerous film scores under their 100 Suns alias. So how long did it actually take to complete Heligoland?

"It was recorded from October 2008 through to June 2009," Del Naja explains. "About nine months in total. But you've got to take into account that we dragged a few tracks from before that into the equation.

"Historically, we never take that long to make a record. The time in between is taken up with doing other stuff like touring.

"We go to every continent – we did 50 shows in Europe pre-Christmas before launching the new album. This year, we'll go to eastern Europe,

# Back on the Attack

Asia, Australia and New Zealand, the States and Canada. South America, too. We're even talking about going back to the Middle Fret and Africa."

back to the Middle East and Africa." The new album sees Massive working with more collaborators than ever before. It's something of a dream team of acclaimed vocalists which takes in Damon Albarn, Elbow's Guy Garvey, former Mazzy Star frontwoman Hope Sandoval, TV On The Radio's Tunde Adebimpe, former Tricky muse Martina Topley-Bird and the ever-present regae veteran Horace Andy.

"Type been banging on about making a Gothic soul album for years now but it just hasn't happened. Heligoland isn't it, so that idea has become very elusive," says D about the birth of the new record. "We discarded a whole album's

"We discarded a whole album's worth of material in 2008 after the Meltdown festival and decided that we needed to start all over again.

"We went to work with Damon Albarn and then Tim Goldsworthy in New York. It was a new start. All the tracks we took with us were redeveloped – new rhythms, rearranged songs, new vocals whatever..."

There's a more human and organic feel to Heligoland – 100th Window was quite a tough listening experience...

experience... "I actually think 100th Window is quite warm and light," D counters. "You can take it in different ways. It's one of those records which you put on and it will just take you somewhere else. It's funny, we got a lot of criticism at the time, now loads of people come up to me and say 'we love 100th Window, we think it's your best album'.

"When Mezzanine came out I remember reading The Face magazine where they called it my first punk album. They said I'd lost all the soul music sensibilities of Massive Attack and destroyed them in one moment. Protection got tons of stick after Blue Lines. We're not new to that sort of criticism.

"On the last album I felt like I'd become this horrific cyborg – the terrible result of a marriage between a Bristolian prostitute and a Pro Tools rig. I was the offspring, and 100th Window was the album that I regurgitated.

"It had to be the opposite of Mezzanine because I was sick of it by that point – all those big loops and guitars, big statements etc. We toured



it extensively and there was the inevitable fall-out between us all. I just wanted to do something different and get into a new headspace from Mezzanine really. "The criticism versus praise was

"The criticism versus praise was 50/50 overall. It divided people, but then all of our records have done the same."

One of the new album's stand-out tracks is Paradise Circus (formerly known as Harpsichord for all those who saw the band's last tour) which features the reclusive Hope Sandoval.

"The first person who suggested we should work with Hope was Geoff Barrow a few years back. We never followed it up. Then some of the guys from [Bristol band] Robot Club reminded G about it. G, being an absolute muppet, had never heard Mazzy Star and only knew she'd done something with the Chemical Brothers – and you can quote me on that!" – he laughs.

"But he sent over a great backing track for her to work on and we went from there. We never got to meet her, it was all done long distance. But she's up for doing a show with us in

London. Hopefully, that'll work out. Hooking up with Damon Albarn must have been on the cards for a while now..

"It was fun recording in Damon's studios. He works in a completely different way to us. He's very impulsive and spontaneous. He's definitely not up for this Bristolian attitude of gazing at a snare drum for two days to get it right. "He catches the moment then moves on to the next thing. It's a really good way of channelling energy. The problem with what we do most of the time – and G will tell you the same – is that particularly with me, I'll over-consider it, analyse and dismantle it, then finally get bored. There's a definite bit of male OCD about it all."

Were you wary about working with Martina Topley-Bird because of her strong links with Tricky's early records?

"The only thing I was worried about was failure," explains D. "I've

always wanted to work with Martina. "From the moment Tricky first played me one of his demos, I thought she was amazing. She seemed to somehow merge soul and punk together in one personality. That was perfect for where my head was coming from.

"She's a one-off. The trip-hop thing never came into it for me." Unfortunately, there's tragedy, too, attached to Heligoland through the accidental death of session drummer

Jerry Fuchs who played on half of the albums 10 tracks. After attending a New York charity event to raise education funds for

event to raise education funds for underprivileged Indian children on November 8 of last year, Fuchs was caught in a broken elevator. When he attempted to jump out, he fell to his death down the elevator shaft. He was just 34.

"It was awful news," says D. "We heard while we were still on tour. It was atrocious. He was the sort of person who lit up a room when they came in. He was a really lovely, warm guy and a brilliant drummer."

The band's last major gig in the West was headlining The Other Stage at Glastonbury back in 2008. Among the setlist was a bunch of still unreleased songs. They've been dropped from the new album or at best radically reworked. What exactly happened?

"I think it was a case of us not having the enthusiasm to follow through and mix that stuff.

"I don't know if it's about faith or boredom or a bit of both. Whether it came from a sense of dissatisfaction or fatigue I'm not sure."

or fatigue I'm not sure." Apparently, a new EP will appear in the next few months to mop up some of the unreleased material.

some of the unreleased material. "Yes, there will definitely be an EP. We've got three tracks with Mike Patton from Faith No More that hopefully will see the light of day. He's like the equivalent of Damon Albarn on the other side of the Atlantic. An absolute genius. "We'll be trying to release as many

"We'll be trying to release as many different things as we can over the year – digital-only and download tracks, demos and lots of different artwork ideas for the album.

"Hopefully, by the time the album finishes its natural cycle – or gets flogged to death – however you want to look at it, it will be a very different shape than it is on February 8. "You don't have to capture everything in one moment. It's like

everything in one moment. It's like buying an iPhone and adding apps to

Continued on next page



Massive Attack on stage at Queen Square in August 2003

Thursday, February 4, 2010

### Music Crackerjack

#### Lacuna Coil

Five albums into their career, this Milanese fivepiece have added Arabic flavours to their trademark Gothic rock sound.

3

The band's latest European tour will plug latest album Shallow Life, their first full-length studio effort since 2006's Karmacod

Lacuna Coil play the O2 Academy tonight (Thurs). Tickets are priced £15 and available by ringing 0844 477 2000.

#### **Fairport Convention**

Still led by original member Simon Nicol, the most famous folk band in the country return for another run through their back catalogue.

Joining Nicol in the rarefied atmosphere of St George's will Fairport regulars Dave Pegg, Ric Sanders, Gerry Conway and Chris Leslie. Fairport Convention play St George's

tonight (Thurs). Tickets are priced £9-£23 and available by ringing 0845 40

#### The Eden House

A little gothic/psychedelic/roots music anyone? The debut tour from collaborative outfit The Eden House features a core membership of former This Burning Effigy's Stephen Carey and Fields of the Nephilim's Tony Pettitt.

Contributors to their album were Julianne Regan from All About Eve along with the likes of Evi Vine. Amandine Ferrari and

Monica Ŕichards. The Eden House play the Thekla on Saturday, February 6. Tickets are

priced £7 and available by ringing 08713 100 000.

#### Fanfarlo



London-based indie popsters Fanfarlo were formed back in 2006 by Swede Simon Balthazar. Their debut album Reservoir was released in February 2009 and a promo video for the single The Walls Are Coming Down saw Roslyn Walker recreate Harry Houdini's Hanging Straitjacket Escape Fanfarlo play the Thekla on Tuesday, February 9. Tickets are priced £8 and

available by ringing 08713 100 000.

#### lalu & Hartív

You know you've made it when one of your song is chosen to soundtrack the Goal of the Month round-up on Match of the Day. And that particular honour was accorded to this LA five-piece pop rock outfit. Their album & Then Boom has divided the tastemakers having drawn glowing reviews and venemous criticism. Decide for yourself when they visit the Thekla next week.

Iglu & Hartly play the Thekla on Wednesday, February 10. Tickets are priced £8 and available by ringing 08713 100 000

#### Continued from previous page

it. It's something you can completely alter as you go along to suit yourself." So you're not one of those

musicians who only wants their album to be listened to in its entirety? "There are no rules. The old

model is no longer relevant. As a soundsystem we used to rip apart people's songs for fun. People can do

with this record what they see fit. "There's a part of me that wants the album to work as a complete piece over 50 minutes and another hat just says screw it, tear it apart and do what you like with it. This is all there to be stolen from and

abused. Music isn't a precious commodity. We move into a grey area though when talking about the mooted

Heligoland remix album from lubstep producer Burial. "We hope it'll happen! There's no deadline – we've been verv loose

with it. The vibe will be the same as ur No Protection album." Although Heligoland is

unmistakably Massive Attack, each album seems to present a new twist in the band's style. Is it important hat they don't repeat themselves?

"If you're doing something you've done before, there's an overwhelming sense of repetition

which eventually kills you. The human mind is always hungry for new experiences. "I think it's instinctive with us.

The thing I've always found exciting is disassembling an idea and pulling t apart. It's that anarchy that I've always loved. I was a bit young for the punk thing, but it informed me dramatically. The collage of things when people turned ideas on their head and forced them into places

they shouldn't have been, whether it was storytelling, painting or music, "ve always dug that." What did you all bring to the

band in the early days? For people outside of Bristol, Blue Lines eemed to come out of nowhere "Grant's more into the DJ and

ub element, Mushroom lived and eathed hip-hop. "I think I was always just up for nming things together – forcing

hem into the same box and seeing what leaked out.' Is it a bit simplistic just to think hat Grant brings the reggae and

soul vibe while you provide the electronica and punk? "It is really, because the most oulful thing we've done for years

was Live With Me with Terry Callier and that was just me and Neil Davidge. That shows there's no direct criteria that we all stick to. G's also got quite a punk

background with The Pop Group. He loves his new wave and punk. "Massive Attack, like the Wild Bunch before it, has always been about throwing different cultural reference points together which don't fit. We're all very different

people personality-wise, and storically our families come from different parts of the city and the world. The alchemy of all that was what made it so interesting. That's

not so much the driving force, it's the natural energy that I'm looking for. If it ain't there then I'm bored. "But I'm also very mindful of

tempering the drive to do somethin new and original or extreme. We've oot lots of extreme instrumentals. but they don't often make it into songs. Extremes don't always work when you're writing songs.

"This is the weird thing about us even though we came from the soundsystem idea and were all

about ripping things off, stealing ideas and sampling stuff – that was



the anarchy of making music back then. Even now when we're doing more extreme things, I always like to temper it with the storytelling aspect. We're working with so many different vocalists and

telling so many different stories, it's important that there's coherency. Sometimes I've compromised the extremities of the music to make the songs work. For example instrumentally Flat of the Blade [Heligoland's Guy Garvey collaboration] was mad – it was like the opening scene from Saving Private Ryan with these machine gun drums going off all around your head. They were like ricochets from

"When you think about things we've done in the past, putting Angel together was experimental

nell – it was beautiful.

"We placed Horace Andy into that strange space and did it again on 100th Window with him on Everywhen - taking this classic reggae singer and putting him in this bizarre operatic, electrical space. It was great fun." Has Horace ever balked at some

of your more 'out there' iggestions?

"Oh yeah, we tried to get him to sing Straight To Hell by The Clash, laughs. "But he wouldn't sing it because he didn't like the words. I even tried to adapt the lyrics from

Caribbean one and he still didn't want to do it. The other one was Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos with him singing before Tricky did it with Martina. We talked about doing that way back.

"I think Horace will always look at me every now again at gigs and say 'I just wanna do some good old-fashioned lovers' rock'. I'm like 'shut up, you're doing something that's really weird and experimental and you're going to hate every minute of it!

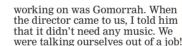
"The thing about Horace is that when he goes back to Jamaica they look at the stuff he does with us and his mates are asking him 'what the hell is all that weird white man's music you've been doing?' It's so far from his roots reggae background.

Since 100th Window, Del Naja and Neil Davidge have had their hands full with a raft of movie scores. Has their work as 100 Suns informed the way the new album sounds?

"Well, working on the film stuff has provided me with a useful set of parameters that I don't want to adhere to anymore. I find it can become predictable.

"After Gomorrah and 44 Inch Chest, that's about all the film score work we'll be doing for a while. I find the whole procedure a bit depressing to tell the truth.

'The movie I've most enjoyed



"In the end, we wrote something just for the end and it worked really well. People have forgotten just how important silence is in films and usic. With this album, I was very keen to restore that sense of 'space that was there in Blue Lines and that may have got lost over the years. 100th Window was full of eaving and intricacy.

"We live in an age where subtlety has been sadly lost, ignored or discarded. Everything is quite ulgar and full-on. You're sitting there watching the news and, while pictures of Haiti are being shown, nere's subtitles about Brad and Angelina breaking up being run underneath

As a band, Massive Attack have been behind some of the most innovative and impressive promo videos of all time. The classic clip of Shara Nelson walking through the downtown streets of Los Angeles and the baby of Teardrop are just two examples. This time, the band commissioned videos for Splitting The Atom and Paradise Circus.

The former is a disturbing look from start to finish of a bullfight including the kill, while the latter intersperses an interview with a former porn star interspersed with one of her old hardcore films. Is it important for videos to be

talking points? "The point can be made in many ways. If it's arresting visually and it's making an aesthetic point that's one thing, but if it can do something to provoke a response in a social or olitical situation then that's good as well.

"The binge-drinking storyline of our video for Live With Me was provocative because of how tragic the situation was. People drink

themselves into and out of despair. "Our videos live online now. The Splitting The Atom video with the ootage of the bullfighter is very disturbing - it's hard to watch.

"I've only really seen it once. I almost felt that watching it more han once was slightly gratuitous



Massive Attack's Mezzanine-era line-up; from left, Daddy G, 3D and Mushroom and I wanted to preserve the

#### www.crackerjack.co.uk

people through acknowledging

"Without naming names, I

shaker who was connected to the

the first was that the motorway

vith its slavery past. Whether

that's the truth or whether it is part of a rumour mill that has

it made a lot of sense to me. "You'd see more people from St

moment, it just represents

something totally un-African.

"One idea which I've been

throwing around the pubs of the

West Country would be to build a

replica slaveship in Bristol docks

nowhere to be seen apart from the

Breaking The Chains exhibition.

If vou're an American schoolkid.

for example, and you come over to

visit Bristol and Bath there's an

interest – particularly at that age

n history. "The slave trade was one of the

biggest disasters in human

history but there's no museum anywhere that I know of which

Γippex a bit of our history out."

Centre on Monday, February 8.

on 01633 656757. Heligoland is

released on February 8 on Virgin

Tickets are priced £28.50 and

Massive Attack play the Newport

available by ringing the box office

leals with it. You shouldn't

in the macabre and bizarre things

for our history and it has been

People come to Bristol looking

een exaggerated I don't know, but

Paul's and Easton etc in Colston

Hall if there was a visible African

connection to the building. At the

divided the city into two but also it was Bristol's refusal to deal

Capital of Culture competition. He

spoke to a national mover and

told me that there were two reasons that Bristol didn't win -

what has gone on.

• We're all very different people

personality-wise, and historically our

city and the world. The alchemy of all

that was what made it so interesting.

families come from different parts of the



memory of the feeling of how I felt when I saw it the first time." As ever, there's a concept behind Del Naja's striking artwork for the new album, too.

"It's based on the idea of the minstrel. Not so long ago, a black man singing black music in a white club was unacceptable so we dressed white men up as black men instead. And that tradition was carried on to television. "That artificial nature of how culture is distorted I still find astounding. Today's reality television is similar in that it's so

distorted you can't actually see the 'reality' at all underneath. And talking about your painting there's loads of it around the walls

of the studio.. "You know, I got bored of painting after a while. It was a ombination of Banksy and James Lavelle who got me back into the

studio to paint. "I'd lost a bit of interest. 100th Window was the most expensive cover EMI had ever put out. This one I did in my back garden for

THE BIG CD

songs back to their very essence.

If 100th Window was all about dense, multi-layered electronica then Massive Attack's

fifth album gets back to basics and strips the

The impressive roll call of guest vocalists

looks great on paper and more than delivers in

Heligoland than any of Massive's previous four

outings but it's a testament to the band's skill

that the album retains its coherency and feels

Tunde Adebimpe – he of current critical

with the nigh-on seven-minute epic Pray For

enigmatic lyrics and can stand shoulder to

While electronic textures still lurk behind

100th Window and manages to reveal more

Former Tricky co-vocalist Martina

much of Heligoland, it's more welcoming than

Topley-Bird makes her Massive Attack debut

on Babel – a feisty stew of brittle, hyperactive

shoulder with the best of Massive's back

lings TV On The Radio – gets us under w

Rain. It's graceful and unhurried, packed with

the studio. There are more collaborators on

**Massive Attack** 

(Virgin Records)

totally rounded.

cataloque.

and more with each listen.

Heligoland

a fiver! My strategy was to get out of the art scene as the art scene boomed, and as we went into a recession. I got back into painting when no one could afford to buy them anymore." he deadpans.

"The graffiti I was doing initially was done out of my absolute admiration for New York artists. Then, with a typically Bristolian attitude, I thought 'I'm too cool for this, I want to do something more exclusive' and got into stencilling just to be

Although the album's vet to be released, I had to ask 3D if there's any singer he's got on his wishlist for album six. Tom Waits has been talked about before, after all.. "A phone conversation with him didn't quite happen. But Aaron Neville would be great, and Polly

Harvev. too…' The upcoming UK tour for Heligoland takes in the glamorous environs of Newport Centre. Hopefully, the Welsh show will go more smoothly than one of their previous visits.

"We played Cardiff on the Mezzanine tour and I told the crowd that they should have built a wall between the two countries not a bridge. All these Welsh guys lined up in the front and took their tops off and wanted to kick the sh\*t out of me!"

As ever, we can't interview Del Naja without bringing up the old chestnut of the Colston Hall.

'When Elbow played there recently, I waited outside in their tour bus because I wouldn't go inside. I went to Colston Hall as a kid and saw loads of great bands there. But my thinking is that if they were going to spend all that money on the foyer they should have made a positive reference to the African heritage in the city that it's intertwined with.

"It could be named the Colston Hall and the Freetown Centre, for instance. It's not a matter of shame, it's about a celebration by bringing the two cultures together

"It's not about a collective sense of guilt that people should feel, it ould be positive and educate

and melodic track with warm acoustic

Records.

guitar textures. The record's most experimental moment arrives courtesy of a hook-up with Elbow's Guy Garvey. Not a song in the traditional sense of the word, Garvey's disembodied vocals are stretched, warped and processed over other-worldly electronica textures.

Paradise Circus is another down-tempo gem that could punch its weight with the likes of Protection and Teardrop. Former Mazzy Star frontwoman Hope Sandoval purrs seductively over the delicate keyboard refrain, handclaps and ticking percussion. Rush Minute is quintessential latter-period

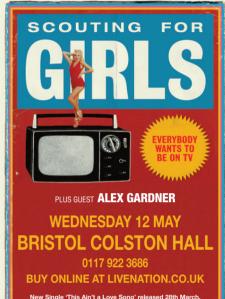
Massive Attack with Del Naja weighing in with another claustrophobic vocal turn set against military rhythms and a moody two-note melody.

And there's still time for the victory lap of he Slow and Atlas Air. The form features a cracked and tender contribution from Damon Albarn on a warm bearhug of a track reminiscent of his superb recent side project The Good The Bad And The Queen while close Atlas Air is another of Del Naia's slow-building epics - there's even a hands-in-the-air peak on the five-minute mark would you believe.

As with most things from Massive Attack, good things come to those who wait.

Released: February 8

**STEVE HARNELL** 



**Massive Attack's Robert Del Naia** 

## 0,academi

acuna Coil

5th Feb • £15 adv 6am • over 18s only **Glamour Of The Kill** Valve Sound Fri 19th Mar • £12 adv • 6.30pm doo 11th Feb + £17.5 Frank Turne mogen Heap NME Awards Tour Ninger Wed 24th Mar • £16.50 ad Musiq Soulchild Trivium i 26th Ma lastodor Dan Le Sac Vs izzare Ft Chip Scroobius Pip Sat 3rd Apr • £30 ad inchy Stryde opm doors • over 18s o aster Lovers Rod **Hot Chip** Ved 24th Feb • £17 ad Europe Bowling For Soup e 20th Apr • £14 Shakespears Sister Rose Rovce ft. Wed 21st Apr • £17.50 adv Karma To Burn leavens Bas **Parkway Drive** Passion Pit isettes eres Hammond, aacs & THe Hept Mon 8th Mar • £23 adv The Stranglers The Courteener LCD Sound **Stiff Little Fingers** La Row Fun Lovin' Crimina Pennywise he Damned The Smiths Indeed FSat 29th Ma sh Pyke & Emma Pollock Dot To Dot Festiv

o2academybristol.co.u



percussion and whoozy vocals. And Daddy G The Atom, it's all lurching dubbiness propelled by G's subterranean baritone and D's menacing whispers. Long-time collaborator

Horace Andy also weighs in with a chorus. But Andv's main contribution on Heligoland comes with Girl I Love You - a reworked version of 16 Seeter from the band's last tour. Andy's sweet vocals cut through the eerie backing track which builds to a quite gorgeous

off-kilter brass section crescendo. And then, a little palette cleanser, Toplev-Bird returns with the pastoral Psyche, a featherlight



om McRa