

1-42

fueling stimulus

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music :: Interview with The Black Keys

by Dan Marek

With blues seeing such a resurgence of interest in the past few years, it's not surprising that labels like Fat Possum Records (an Epitaph blues sister label) have been scooping up new talent to replace their fleeting older repertoire.

Oddly enough, their latest endeavor stems out of the suburban town of Akron, Ohio with a band that not only use traditional elements of the blues, but also recreates them to sound pressing and new.

This month The Black Keys, a guitar/drums duo with a raw Cream-esque 70s sound, releases their sophomore effort *Thickfreakness* on Fat Possum. The critical acclaim has already begun to boil over.



1-42 had the opportunity to talk with drummer Patrick Carney over coffee in Austin while the band took a break from playing South by Southwest earlier in the week. Freshly off a stint with alt-rockers Sleater-Kenny, the members let their hair down a bit and played to more open audiences including a performance with Carney's uncle (who played with Tom Waits).

1-42 :: How did the tour go with Sleater-Kenny?

Carney: It went really well. It was a completely different audience for us. It was weird for me, because I haven't been to a big concert before. Our show at [NYC's] Roseland was the biggest concert I've ever been to. That was really mind boggling to me. It was a little weird being the opening band with such a different act too.

1-42 :: You recorded *Thickfreakness* in one day in your basement right?

Carney: Yeah, basically one day of recording and a couple days of overdubs. We were talking to Sire and Warner and all these major labels, but we had talked to Fat Possum before all of them and we just wanted to see our options. But the major labels are so fucked up; it took forever to get anything done. So we were just sitting around waiting and Sony wanted to sign us, and the guy from the label kept saying, 'oh, just give me two more weeks and we'll get it all set up.' We basically told him we didn't want to wait anymore and we were signing to Fat Possum. He was begging us not to go and said it was a major mistake, but we thought Fat Possum could do exactly what we wanted. So the

next day we called Fat Possum and told them we wanted to sign the contracts that weekend. When we got back from signing, we set up the studio with microphones and everything, then the next morning we went in and recorded the album and that was it.

1-42 :: So the album was pretty cheap to make?

Carney: To be honest, I bought the recorder and the tape a month or so before hand. So it basically cost us about 30 cents for the electricity. I think Chris Butler's new record must be the cheapest to make now, because he recorded it all on wax cylinder - so it was all hand cranked.

1-42 :: When did you and begin playing music?

Carney: I grew up around it, my uncle was a musician and my dad was too. I first got the bug, really in seventh grade. I begged my dad for a guitar and he got me one. I never really spent much time with it as I should have, but I loved it. I was underage and I got a job washing dishes so I could buy music equipment. The summer between eighth and ninth grade I had like a four track, a drum set, a bass - all this stuff that I really never learned how to use, but my friends would come over and fuck around. I got the point where we were fucking around all the time and I've been addicted to the music since then.

1-42 :: And you grew up in the same neighborhood as Dan, right?

Carney: Yeah, my parents got divorced and my dad ended up moving around the corner from his family and that's when we met. Then Dan started playing music in High School around his sophomore year. He started playing guitar and he got really good, pretty quick. Dan has a really good ear. We started playing off and on shortly after he started playing guitar. We didn't hang out in High School except to play music. Then in College, we both went to school and dropped out. We were both living at our parents and we started playing again while we were going to school in Akron.

1-42 :: Did you ever consider having a bass player?

Carney: Yeah we did. We went through a couple people, but they never had time or were that into it. There was one guy that was a friend of mine that played a Moog for awhile, but things just didn't work out. At that point we realized that things sounded fine the way they were. We just kept it like it was. The Moog is on the first album kind of hidden in one track.

1-42 :: When did you start listening to bands like Richard Berry and T Model Ford?

Carney: Dan had a love of the blues, which I don't share completely, growing up. I try to get into it, but I can't. When I was 15 I got into like John Spenser, R.L. Burnside and then Dan got me into T Model - kind of the whole Fat Possum catalog.

1-42 :: I've read in a of couple places that Dan had actually traveled to meet T Model Ford a couple years ago. How did that inspire him?

Carney: Yeah, he basically drove down, hunted him down and they played together for a few days. I don't think he learned as much from T Model as much as he gained in the experience of seeing and feeling how real his lifestyle is. He definitely got the vibe if you know what I mean. He went down for a day, then kept going back.

1-42 :: But you don't really consider yourself a blues band, do you?

Carney: I don't and Dan doesn't either. I think in a way it uses different elements of the blues and Dan uses those more than I do. I guess I am more of a T-Rex guy and he's more of a Son House guy. I don't know, I mean there is a huge blues influence, but there is a huge punk influence and everything else.

1-42 :: *Are you sick of being compared to The White Stripes?*

Carney: Yeah we get that a lot, it gets annoying. I mean they're a good band and everything, I've listened to their records and it was good, but...I mean I can see the vague similarities in line-ups, some blues riffs, and some people are like, 'oh, you both have colors in your name' – but it's completely unrelated. I mean if you sit down and seriously look at it, I guess you could do that with any band.

1-42 :: *So are you and Dan brother and sister or...*

Carney: No, we're married - in Rhode Island. (laughs) I mean, next week it may be something different, but for now, we're married. No, seriously, it's just getting a little old and leads to a little bit of resentment. I mean any band doesn't want to be compared to someone else like, 'oh, you like the Black Keys, they sound like The White Stripes right?' There really isn't a lot of similarity there.

For more info, check out:

<http://theblackkeys.com/>

<http://www.fatpossum.com/>

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