

Cultural Daily

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Hiatus Kaiyote: "Future Soul" from Down Under

Tod Hardin · Wednesday, November 20th, 2013

Australian Band Living Up to Praise

"Okay. I'm Done. In Love." – Erykah Badu

For the past year, there's been a loud buzz swirling around an Australian band with a pretty nifty name ... and an even niftier sound to match.

They're [Hiatus Kaiyote](#) and praise has come in from the likes of Prince, Stevie Wonder, Questlove, Animal Collective and Erykah Badu, with rave reviews courtesy of such prominent publications as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. That's a great deal of hype and an immense amount of pressure, but this quartet from Melbourne has lived up to it, and in many ways exceeded it.



Hiatus Kaiyote. Photo: Luke David Kellett

The band's debut album, *Tawk Tomahawk*, was released in Australia in 2012 and in the US earlier this year as the first project under super producer Salaam Remi's Flying Buddha label (a division of Sony Records). Members include Nai Palm (vocals, guitar), Simon Mavin (keyboards), Paul Bender (bass), and Perrin Moss (drums). They call their sound "future soul" – which really is a nice blend of jazz, hip hop, electronica, world beat, prog and indie rock. Hell, all these genre labels are a bit silly, but you can be certain that the music cannot be pegged as having any single identity.

It's truly a smorgasborg of audio enlightenment. Think J Dilla, Flying Lotus, or [Thundercat](#) – but make no mistake, however. These are no copycats just going through the motions.

Led by the voice and songwriting skills of Palm, Hiatus Kaiyote is producing a new twist on old, yet proven grooves and themes. Listen to *Tawk Tomahawk* one time, and/or immerse yourself in their live show just once, and it's not hard to see why so much positive attention is being bestowed upon them.

As I write this, an audience in Manchester, England, is witnessing first-hand what all the fuss is about. Let's just say I'm envious and left salivating over the thought of the band's return to the US next year. I'm also thankful that bassist Paul Bender was kind enough to answer some questions prior to taking the stage tonight. Enjoy his feedback, as well as videos for their songs "Nakamarra," filmed by Dan Ogilvie, and "Jekyl," filmed by Ash Koek.

TOD HARDIN: How would you describe your sound to Don Draper, if you were asking him to develop an ad campaign for you?

PAUL BENDER: "I guess you guys aren't ready for that yet. But your kids are gonna love it."

TH: You are one of a new breed of acts that really blur the boundaries between genres. Why

such an eclectic sound, and what acts have influenced you?

PB: Why not an eclectic sound? The floodgates are wide open now. I could go on youtube right now and find music by a wild percussion group from Mali, cosmic throat-singing goat herders from Tuva, German industrialists screaming into burning megaphones or Japanese hyper glitch pop. Why so many people are so satisfied with the low quality vanilla they are being drip fed by commercial radio and the talentless shmucks pushing some over glorified materialism worship under the guise of “music” I don’t know. The history and breadth of human creativity is so vast and totally available to us now, so why not celebrate that? This band is a homage to all that we love, what’s come before, is happening now, what’s yet to be.

TH: You’ve been praised by a pretty impressive list of major acts – such as Prince and Erykah Badu. How does that make you feel as an artist when such amazingly creative talent throw such praise at you?

PB: It’s lovely, really. More than anything it’s very encouraging, especially when we never knew it would go like this. The hardest people to please musically are each other, and that’s always the goal. If we all love it, then it’s done. It’s nice to know other people feel it too, especially the people who inspire us.

[embedvideo id=“Ozr4KsZBTvQ” website=“youtube”]

TH: If you could fully re-make any album from the 60s or 70s, which one and why?

PB: To be honest, I’d be more keen to redo some albums from the 80’s...only because I hate the way most albums sound at that point in time. Everything sounded like it was trapped in a tiny plastic box, which when you think about it, it was. It would be pretty fun to do a Hendrix record though, but most likely it would not be anywhere nearly as cool as the original.

TH: Tell us something about each band member that we won’t find on Google.

PB: Nai has a wooden leg that she keeps Absinthe in. Perrin used to train ferrets to do tricks, like ride tiny ferret bicycles. Simon has a recurring dream every night that he is Wolverine, and he’s trying to kill Hugh Jackman for stealing his identity. If I ever drink milk my hands swell up to the size of pineapples and my tear ducts close up.

TH: Is there an element to your sound that is distinctly Australian?

PB: Oh yeah, well I reckon it’s pretty fucken sick aye? Yeah nah though. We actually sampled Alf Stewart from Home and Away saying “stone the flamin’ crows” and slowed it down 800% to use as an ambient keyboard drone.

TH: You’ve toured now all over the globe ... do you find anything different between let’s say a US crowd, versus a Euro crowd, versus an Australian crowd?

PB: You’re all our favourite...just different. I won’t say how, because someone will get offended. You’re all Mummy’s favourite xoxo

[embedvideo id=“2L-UbZJSfW8? website=“youtube”]

TH: Vegemite or peanut butter?

PB: You know what, not a huge fan of either. But I’m gonna say vegemite, not out of patriotism, but just because it’s a bit more hardcore. I mean, it’s made out of *beer sludge*, for fucks sake. It’s like pirates breakfast. I reckon Lemmy would eat it for breakfast while chain smoking.

TH: *Tawk Tomohawk* obviously goes back a bit now. Is there something new in the works that we can look forward to in 2014?

PB: We are working on a new record right now, lot's of old tunes, new tunes, unwritten as yet tunes. It'll be late next year for release, so hold on to your horses...

Much gratitude to Paul for taking time out to answer these questions just prior to a big gig. We also thank photographer [Luke David Kellet](#) for his beautiful image above.

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