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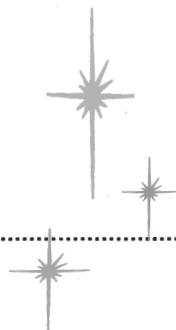
# Catp Whore

Chan Marshall has a pint of Guinness and a rash. The two are not related. We're sat in a West-End pub and, between scratches, Chan is playing the part of willing interviewee whilst I reluctantly delve into a set of questions that threaten to shatter the myth that is Moon Pix.



When, in one evening, Chris Colbourn of Buffalo Tom and Joel of New York's spinART records (home to Apples In Stereo) sang Moon Pix's praises (Chris placed it alongside Pernice Brothers' *Overcome By Happiness* as one of the two best albums of '98) it became apparent that here was an album to transcend genre and preconception. Hell, everyone loves it and if it's not in over half of this issue's Top Tens then I'll be amazed. Whatever, I'm happy to be sat here opposite its creator. I just wish we could talk about something else.

Does your role as producer of Moon Pix belie a new-found confidence? I quit playing music and I moved to the country. In South Carolina. And I had a dream that somebody was telling me to come into the field – 'cause I live behind a field – basically to die, or something. I realised that I didn't want to die so I woke up and didn't meet the voice in the field and then I went and wrote this record. And then two close friends of mine died the next day and ... I quit playing music. I never wanted to do it again. These things happen. My boyfriend at the time was going to Australia and I was like, 'I wanna go too', and I'd already asked Mick and Jim if they'd play on my record before – like a couple years earlier – but I never thought I'd ever make another record. Since I'd had the bad dreams, I dunno, it deals with a lot of like ... the reason I did it was because I had just blocked it out of my mind so much, like, I'm not gonna do another record. And then ... I dunno how to describe it. It's a much more personal record as a result. It's also a little more 'free'. Like, I got more mature as a person or something. I don't know if that's true or not. I don't know. How much of a contribution did Mick and Jim make, from your perspective. Maybe more confidence? Me, as a person, being kinda naïve and not really ... being kinda ignorant of everything. I hung out in Australia for two months and then Mick came in for about an hour and a half. Jim was with me four days straight. So, it was just kinda support. I don't know. The essence of ... they gave ... I don't know. They were all, like, one takes. They had no idea what they were supposed to do. That's



the same way my other records were recorded. This time there were a lot of things that didn't involve them like sampling and feedback and, like, piano, song structure, blah, blah, blah. But what they gave? They're just really good players and I don't think they needed to know what they were supposed to do because they blended so nicely with the song. They really built these songs. Like Metal Heart, for instance, I think ... I mean, all the songs really. I don't know. I feel like I'm saying things 'cause I don't really think about it much at all. I suppose all this analysis strips away the personal connection from both your perspective and the listener's. All this chat's killing the spontaneity. It's like spiritual. When music is talked about it gets intellectualised and the emotional content and value becomes intellectualised. It becomes an objective thing instead of an internal thing. He Turns Down has a particularly English feel. It's a little jazzy, folksy even. I just knew that I wanted flute on that. I didn't know how it would turn out. So, it's instinctive. It's all like if you had a bunch of paper and a lot of energy and a bunch of

time and a bunch of materials, you'd make something. I think if I do continue to make music I might be able to think more clearly and more structured about what I want. Bob Dylan's rendition of Moonshiner was the one that inspired your version, I heard. What are your thoughts on him? Bob Dylan said about Woody Guthrie that Woody Guthrie could go to a church of his choice or Brooklyn State Hospital. But he believed that at sundown in the Grand Canyon they would be there together. I think Bob Dylan reminds me of someone like ... I hate to make the analogy – but someone like Martin Luther King. I mean Bob Dylan played the guitar and did drugs, whatever. But as far as him needing to speak, I mean he always had this drive to say things all the time. I don't know how to describe it. I think he had a huge responsibility when he was younger. I mean, the sixties ... he was, like, twenty three or something and the world that he was being interviewed by was his father's world. Before Rolling Stone was really big it was all suit and tie interviewers. And middle aged men were interviewing Jimi Hendrix, whatever. And I think that's why Bob Dylan isn't that respected personally because of his attitude back then. Something that had always been there but he made people look at it for once. I think that's really important. And he had a good sense of humour, he's totally sarcastic. I guess he's got one of those tongues, like a knife. Really smart. I haven't been educated and my environment growing up wasn't really the most ... pretty common you know. So I



b:05

don't know much about things. So I don't have a sharp tongue. Are you mad at me for rambling? No, I like rambler. I'm a rambler. Compare your version of Moonshiner. I feel like that song shouldn't be anybody's favourite song. I'm not saying that it never would be but because it's such a die-hard blues song. 'It must be the colors and the kids 'cause the music is boring me to death.' Is that about New York? The whole conception of music is like Disneyland. Everybody shares the same human pulse or whatever and anybody can sing a song or write a song and be in a band and, I think, there's not a separation. Like with visual art the line between what's important and what's not important is just criss-crossed. MTV and commercial radio and everything ... we're not allowed to have a choice. I mean there's so much to look at but music is conceptualised into commercialism and visuals like video, like T-shirts, actual CDs ... I don't know ... music's awesome – we know that – but ... I'm not smart enough to pick out what I'm thinking. What were you thinking when you wrote that line? I can't describe it. That's the only way I can say it. I think I'm dyslexic or something. Music is nice, right? These days,

music is more of a tool ... I don't know. I don't want to offend anybody because everybody's the same. But I don't like a lot of music that I hear. I mean, I love old music that I hear because that's where all of today's music comes from. Like techno, the drum and bass thing really does have a bottom to it. I'm not real smart. I'm not an authority on music so, what I meant by that was that I get confused by the reason for music these days. Everybody loves music but it's something that should be free and relentless. Music should be more timeless and less disposable. There it is. Ha, ha, ha. I OK, I'm a friend calling from Georgia and I'm thinking about going to New York. Give me some advice. Move to the very back of The Bronx or Long Island city and get a job at a college library. Advice, advice ... Make sure you go ice-skating once a week in Central Park in the winter. Oh yeah, you can ask the phone company to get this exclusive underpaid thing and your phone bill can be \$10 a month. I just found out about it. I've been there six years. Haven't you left? Yeah, I've left four times. What brings you back? This business. I didn't finish high school. I didn't go to college. I don't have any type of trade. I can type pretty well. I've just realised I'm twenty six. I never thought I'd live to be twenty six. What do you think about when you're swimming? Not being born yet. Totally feels like a dream, asleep or something. Timeless like in space. I love going swimming. I love holding my breath. Being a baby, I think, or something. Breathing in, ha!



# FALKNER

**As the accompanying photographs will attest, Jason Falkner has dislocated his shoulder, reducing his strumming and picking skills to a fat, round zero. Why he's so damn chirpy I can only guess. Despite his multi-instrumental talents, Falkner is known as a supreme guitar player; his mastery clearly in evidence on an impeccable CV that includes Jellyfish's seminal *Bellybutton*, The Grays' monumental *Ro Sham Bo* and two exquisite solo albums that effortlessly scale the dizzy heights of perfection...**

This afternoon at London's GLR, with David Levitt providing stellar support on twelve-string, Jason reminds us that he possesses an equally stunning voice too. So the disappointment ebbs slowly away and is practically forgotten during the evening's live set. And then you feel bad that you cared in the first place. Christ, this guy's had to endure the dictatorial regime of Jellyfish (he wasn't allowed to contribute to the song-writing), the ego-maniacal clashes of The Grays and a glut of outside label interference (the Brendan Benson debacle, a genuine lack of support from the label in some quarters (no UK release for his debut! What's with that?) and now the much delayed sophomore project, *Can You Still Feel?* That's why he's smiling. By all accounts a dislocated shoulder is, to Falkner, an inconvenience. ¶ The gig over, the adulation tangible in the smoky London air of The Garage, we sit amid the dressing room clutter and despite a constant stream of well-wishers and label types we talk. Also present is Nigel (Radiohead, REM) Godrich, co-producer of *Can You Still Feel?* ¶ I'd like to start by quoting you from the song *Author Unknown*. "From thought to actions an eternity. I can't get this thing off the ground." The album's been a long time coming. Lots of rescheduled release dates, two title changes, re-sequencing etc. You must be relieved it's finally out. It would have been great if it had come out when expected, which was last August, but I had a lot of stuff I had to finish – a lot of getting my 'business' house in order. It turned out to be a perfect interim to fix all that stuff. It's a pleasure that it's out – believe me!

Everything happens for a

reason I guess. I'm trying to figure out the reason for my shoulder problem. After working titles 17A and *Amazing The Survivors*, how did you arrive at *Can You Still Feel?* I'm a classic procrastinator and it was the day before it was going to the printers. I was kinda unhappy with *Amazing The Survivors* because it's hard to say. It's derived from that song *See You Again*, but I also thought it could have been taken a little egotistically from my perspective and I didn't mean it like that. *Can You Still Feel?* kinda fits everything that I... the fact that we're so inundated with



information right now and access to information's so quick and it kinda cuts out the process of discovery, the process of searching. When you have to work for something you appreciate it ten times more than if you get it instantaneously. Information or anything you wanna buy is instantaneously available so you're kinda robbed of that whole process of trying to find. So it refers to that – can you really feel anything that you have... essentially it's 'stop and smell the roses.' And the symbolism of the aircraft cover

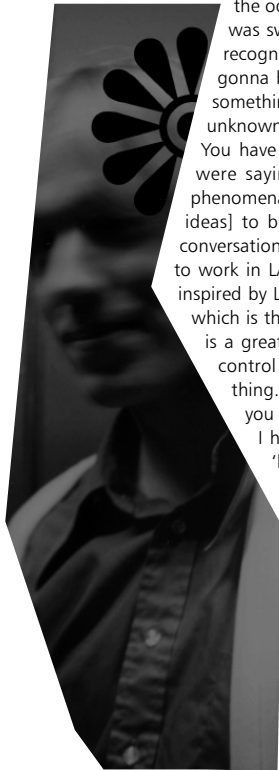
imagery? It's me turning my back on the States. No [laughs] I just like the 'plane. I'd never seen a 747 with an American flag on the rudder. The deal was it was number one of a fleet that was started by a bunch of disgruntled pilots and they lost their money after painting the first 'plane so the whole company went under! And this one 'plane is sitting in the Mojave Desert. We were actually driving en route to this graveyard right here [turns to back cover] with all these 'planes on stilts and I saw this in the corner with the American flag and said 'Holy shit! We've gotta take pictures over by that.' That's all it was and I've already had three people tonight say 'I don't like

your vibe here, what's going on with the glasses and the short hair?' You know? Other people are like 'Wow, is that a Prada suit?' and I'm like 'No, it's a Sassoon suit that I found for like twenty bucks.' I hate being styled. I want to put it on the record that it's not a styled photograph! Given the experiences you've been through - with The Three O'clock, Jellyfish and The Grays – where you're artistic input was quashed, and with your subsequent albums being self-produced and performed, do you still harbour a desire to play in a band context? Yeah, I bought

the whole fantasy just like everyone else when I was a little kid. Thinking bands like The Beatles all lived together. And I still think bands are a great thing when they work. Just in my particular situation the bands that I was in were a case of, maybe, too many generals and that thrust me into something I was doing during the course of all those bands – which is recording by myself. And it just really pushed me into taking that seriously and not thinking it was weird. My whole thing is trying to make myself sound like a group anyway. It's like I'm exercising all these different personalities. 'Cause I really am totally tweaked. So when I play the bass I approach it not like the guitar player in me or the drummer or the songwriter. It's fun that the whole thrill for me is to build the song up from the drums. I start with the drums and just sing along in my head and then put on the rest of the music. And that's just the most fun I can have on this planet. Despite the just-proven excellence of your touring band and the visible sense of on-stage fun, will your singular vision allow you to record with a band? I don't know if I'll always do records by myself. I can't say if the next one will be. I get excited about the idea of putting together a 'supergroup' of friends or people I'm a fan of and doing a record that way, but I don't know how soon that would happen. I built a studio in my house and about half the next record is already demoed really well – so I might do the next one by myself. But I'm still optimistic about a band. And I love my group. The role of a producer in your career seems at odds with your work ethic. The Jellyfish demos are really similar to their 'finished' counterparts... Albhy came in and was a good mediator... well actually, no he wasn't a good mediator 'cause he totally left me in the cold! But he appeased Andy [Sturmer] who needed appeasing. And with The Grays, Jack's a

# jason

interview **Matt**  
photography **Paul**



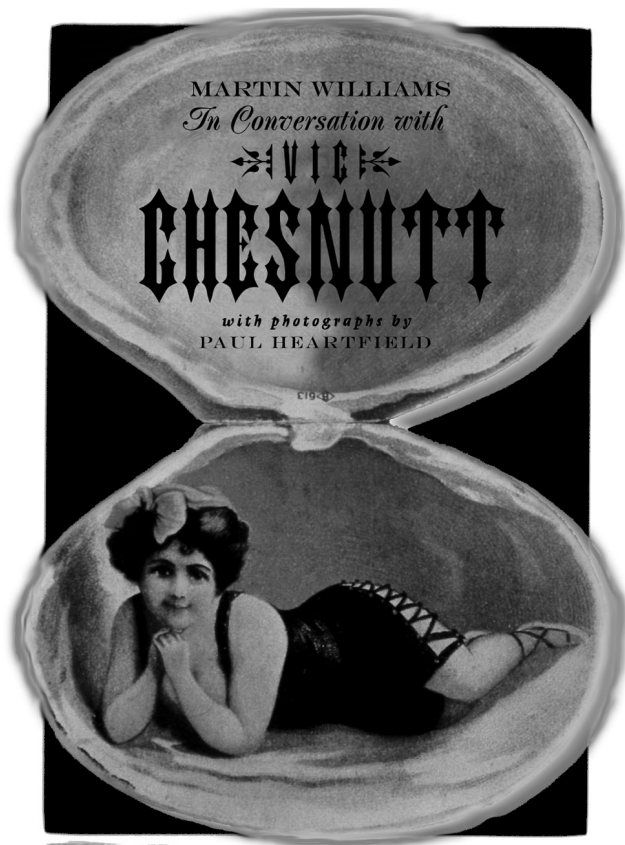
phenomenal engineer but he's not a musician. Tell me how you got together with Nigel. I can never listen to music anymore during the day because there's too many distractions. But, when I listened to [OK Computer], I got to the fifth song and literally jumped out of bed, turned on the light, ripped the headphones off and cracked the case open to get at the book! Because I liked the band but I didn't actually have The Bends – [to Nigel] I'm serious man! – and the sound of it, and the space and all

the odd panning things they freaked me out. They sounded like a lot of shit that was swimming around in my head at the time. So I saw his name and I didn't recognise it – he's like 'Oh fuck, I'm outta here!' – so I'm like 'oh great man, he's gonna be cheap!' [laughs]. Nigel} And, by the way, you still owe me. Can I say something about this? There's an element about this, which is just a complete unknown. When you get together with somebody it's all about a personal dynamic. You have no idea what you can bring to it. [To Jason] It's interesting what you were saying about Jack because he isn't a musician and you're obviously a phenomenal musician and so is Jon Whatsisface [er Brion?] And so I've got [my ideas] to bring to the party... that's it you know? We had four or five phone conversations and that was it. Jason} And it was like 'let's do it.' And Nigel wanted to work in LA because he'd never worked in America and I live in LA and I'm not inspired by Los Angeles anymore at all. So I was like 'No, let's go to New Orleans' - which is the weirdest city in America - and we went to Daniel Lanois' studio, which is a great weird studio – there's no isolation between the tracking room and the control room. It was just the two of us, we developed a brotherly competition thing. Were there any ground rules laid down? I hate to record when you have to reference things literally, like 'Hey, let's get that Revolver drum sound.' I hate that. With Nigel I'd say – [turning to Nigel] remember with Lucky Day? – 'let's go for a 1977 thing.' And when I came in from doing the drums they sounded exactly right. [To my left now sits Anne seeking shelter from the rain, now that the security staff have evicted the last of the die-hards] Anne} Do you mind if people tell you you sound like somebody else? No, I don't mind because I think it's right. Of course I'm influenced by a lot of previous things that have happened. It's impossible to completely move away from it at all times but it was an effort. I could just sit down and write a bunch of stuff that sounds like... You know, God bless him, Lenny Kravitz is – I'm sorry – you can pick out each song and go 'that's from Curtis Mayfield, that's from Led Zeppelin, Elvis Costello or whatever. And I'm not interested in being that referential. But there's obviously things that happen that are 'esque.' It's unavoidable. Matt} Your tastes are unusual for someone associated with the 'pop' thing. The British new wave and post-punk you love must all be in

there somewhere. It kinda dilutes the pop. And the pop stigma is always 'are you sure about that?' Have you really checked out the record?' I got a review just last week in Rolling Stone and it's a really nice review – except I think they forgot to put one of the stars on it! I got three stars which is 'good' which is fine. I'm not pissed 'Waah!' – but it said 'Badfinger' and 'Big Star' and I'm like 'Man, did you even listen to the album or are you just reading a Jellyfish bio?' 'I AS much fun as reading a Jellyfish bio would be, Jason Falkner's solo work should be on the 'required listening' list of anyone for whom originality, musicality and, let's say it, classic songwriting are still held in high regard. Music for those who can still feel.







**Great. That's fantastic. Fantastic.**

Someone's happy anyway. *Fantastic*. I just regaled Vic Chesnutt with a story about a fight breaking out at a recent Nina Simone show in London. *Fantastic*. He seems pleased by it. Fans, y'know, I always thought it's a good show if somebody gets beat up at my show, and it happens quite often, more than I'd like to admit. Well, no, I'd like to admit it. You know, with people talking and somebody says 'shut up'. They don't and then a fight breaks out. It happens all the time. I suggest to him that this stems from some kind of looney affection for the performer. Yeah, but to me it seems like some sort of arrogance in a way too. People feel empowered by this person to the point that it spills over into delusions or something. They think, 'oh I know what's good for you,' and the good of everybody else is completely irrelevant. I saw Patti Smith recently in Atlanta and these obnoxious people just kept screaming the whole time, 'we love you Patti!' Right in the middle of a quiet, beautiful song they would just start screaming, 'we love you Patti!' I know it's because they love her, they did love Patti. But you could tell that visibly, you know, Patti was getting pissed off. And it certainly pissed off the rest of the audience because we wanted to hear the songs, we didn't want to hear these assholes screaming. And neither did Patti. Patti knows that they love her. It was just these people, they had to yell and prove to everybody how much they loved Patti. You wouldn't pay twenty dollars to go see someone if you didn't love them. I was like, 'I'm gonna fucking kill you, you stupid fuck. Shut the fuck up. I know you love Patti and you're going to be dead in about five minutes if you don't shut the fuck up.' Nobody had the chutzpah to take a swipe at them? No, but there was someone standing right behind me that kept yelling and screaming and I just turned around and said, 'can you shut the fuck up!' And they were like,



'what?' I said, 'can you shut the fuck up?' And they were like, 'what?' And I said, 'go the fuck away from me! You're fucking drunk. Go the fuck away. Every time you yell your saliva is flying out of your mouth and landing on me. It's obnoxious. Go the fuck away, I'm trying to watch Patti!' And she actually did leave. She got so angry at me, I guess, that she left. I didn't care if she thought I was an asshole or not. ¶ My first contact with the man they call Vic Chesnutt had been a couple of months earlier. In a review of the film *Dreams With The Fishes* I had quoted his paradoxical aphorism from the sleevenotes of *About To Choke*: 'through death, life is nourished.' It seemed to encapsulate the film completely and I sheepishly mailed the review on to him in Athens. Do you get unsolicited crap like that a lot? I get stuff sent through the post, yeah. But that was quite nice though, I liked that. Thanks for the quote. Were you ever in a similar position of fandom yourself? I've always been a fan, but I'm always too scared to contact people, I don't know why. I started to write fan mail before. I just saw a play in New York and I got the guys to sign my playbill. The play was called *Hedwig And The Angry Inch* and Vic is positively evangelic: I'm sure you'll be hearing a great deal about it in the future. They'll make a major motion picture out of it. It'll just be huge. And you can sell your playbill for inflated dollars. Yesss. Yes yes yes yes! Yeah, but it was a great play. And I got Lucinda Williams, about eight years ago, to sign a bottle that I had, a water bottle. ¶ The Salesman and Bernadette is Chesnutt's sixth album and, from the man whose debut was recorded in a matter of hours, it's certainly his most varied and considered. Recorded over five weekends, with chamber Country collective Lambchop in their native Nashville, the

resulting 'song novella' is every inch a product of collaboration. Lambchop have fleshed out Chesnutt's garrulous songs with their massed strings, horns, and their stoney-faced soul, leaving Chesnutt free to fully en-un-ci-ate his florid words and deliver some of his best vocals. Were the songs written with Lambchop in mind? I wrote half of the songs on the record with them in mind, knowing their dynamic, knowing their make up, thinking, 'okay, here's where the horns can play,' that kind of thing. I also arranged a kind of storyline of the record in a way, with them in mind and we recorded it in order: first song first, last song last, in order. Just so it kinda fit together, so we'd know how it was fitting together from the beginning. Do you see your albums as a natural progression, from Little which was very much raw and solo to where you are now? Well, yeah, I mean Little was solo, completely, just me sitting around in an afternoon. And this [Salesman And Bernadette] was something I'd always wanted to do. Little would have been this way if I had thought about it, I guess. I didn't really think about Little, you know, it just kind of happened. If I'd have had the chance to bring friends in I would've. It was fun to have it in my head, 'ooh, Lambchop is going to play this,' and then to have them actually playing it, it was very interesting. ¶ Even though Chesnutt's own novel-writing makes slow progress - I'll go back in and open it up, write another word or add another couple of lines onto it - the eccentric, verbose snapshots contained in his songs flow at an enviable rate. Does he write more than gets released? I've got ten albums worth right now ready to go. That's why it's always hard to make a new record. [Adopts pained voice] 'What do I record now, which ones?' And that's why this record ended up being sort of a novella or something, in my mind, not in anybody else's but in my mind each song is







a chapter because that was my device for how to figure out which songs of all of the hundred songs that I had ready to go for this record. So I had to have a game. ¶ After his impromptu Stipe-cajoled debut album and the abortive Lambchop sessions that made up their contribution to 1996's *Is The Actor Happy*, as well as the unforeseen domestic discord that formed the backdrop to the hastily recorded *Drunk*, Chesnutt's career seems to be as much a confluence of circumstances and accidents as it is the product of drive or aspiration. I only started doing it because people were saying, 'your songs are great, you gotta go play shows,' he agrees. That's how I started playing music in Athens. Before that he had fulfilled horn duties in a school band. Was this a Led-Zeppelin-covers-at-the-prom kind of thing? Well, not Led Zeppelin, a little more mainstream. Bob Seger, '70's icons, rock'n'roll, y'know, soul songs of the 60's and 70's, Kool and the Gang things. Was that a reflection of your tastes at the time? Well, no, I didn't like it. I mean, I love to play, I was playing in bars and making great money at it, but Leonard Cohen and the Velvet Underground and the Beatles and Bob Dylan is what I listened to. It was with 'a bunch of my buddies from out in the country' that he would later form the La-Di-Das. We broke up after a couple of years because I wanted to go solo again, I thought my songs would have more impact or something. A lot of my friends would sit around and fantasise all the time about what they would do if they were talking to journalists. Ten years before I ever talked to a journalist my buddies in the La-Di-Das had their whole careers planned out. Never one to plan or overstate matters, did Chesnutt go along with these fantasies? Oh no, I always thought we sucked and I sucked, you know, I still do. I wish I was Nina Simone, she's fucking talented. She's talented.





**This was supposed to be** the beginning of something grander. A brief meeting with Neil Halstead before *Out Of Tune*, the second stunning album from our own Mojave 3, seduced the critics with its heady blend of country, folk, blues and gospel. Before they fell over themselves, fumbling for their thesauruses, looking to find the words to encapsulate this superlative, modern day successor to Bryter Layter, *Exile on Main Street*, *Harvest* and *The Gilded Palace of Sin*. But no, there was no follow-up meeting and, similarly, no swooning critics. Not that it was panned, mind you, more overlooked. ¶ We just picked the songs everyone in the band was into. Neil tells me over the pounding bass of the ULU Bar. We're talking about the decision to make a nine-track album when the b-sides of the singles would have graced any of the aforementioned 'classics'.

We sort of voted, so we ended up with nine tracks that got a 'yes' from everyone. The others were split votes. We didn't want a long album; I still think *After The Goldrush* is a perfect album and it's 38 minutes. Hmm, Neil Young. I remember, during Neil's 'beard period' (that's Halstead, not Young) at a gig with labelmates Tarnation, a batch of new songs had that certain 'Harvest-y' feel, tracks which don't seem to have made it on to *Out of Tune*. We've still got a lot of songs that we haven't finished or that didn't make it on the record, he tells me, matter-of-factly, but then given the democratic system that determined the final tracklisting, it's unsurprising. After admitting that, with hindsight, he's a little unsure about the inclusion of *Keep It All Hid* (I'm not sure if it fits with the vibe of the record) and nearly choking on his beer when I ask, out of the blue, if he has a foot fetish (he did after all

include *Yer Feet and Caught Beneath Your Heel*) we talk *Country*. I think we're all really influenced by Gram Parsons and the *Burritos* - where he integrates soul music and gospel. I remember when I was growing up *Country* music was dirt. If I hadn't got into *The Byrds* and heard about Gram Parsons then I'd have dismissed it too. But then you discover Hank Williams and Townes Van Zandt; you get a different take on it. It remains to be seen if *Out Of Tune* follows in the footsteps of great albums by *The Stones*, *Nick Drake*, *Gram Parsons* and others which weren't appreciated until long after their release. But Halstead's feet remain firmly on the ground when being grouped with such luminaries. You don't really know great records until years later. I don't think it's a great record but I think it's a good record. I just hope that because it's got a country influence it's not dismissed because it doesn't fit. ¶ *Out Of Tune*, out of time? It is, we are.

## mojave | 3

interview **Matt**  
photography **Paul**