

## THE DIALS GYRATE DESPITE BRUTAL FATE

In the late '90s, up and coming Florida band, For Squirrels, were about to shake up the underground when a horrifying overturned van accident killed singer Jack Vigliatori and bassist Bill White. Suffering through similarly grim circumstances, The Dials lost their energetic drummer, Doug Meis (as well as singer/bassist/guitarist Rebecca Crawford's husband, John Glick, and Silkworm percussionist Michael

of several previous drummers and keyboardists.

But just as the foursome began to really click, tragedy struck on July 14 after the recording of breakthrough '05 full-length showcase, *Flex Time* (Latest Flame Records), was finished. An earlier EP, *Sick Times*, done with a former drummer, featured six songs that grew into fruition and got redone for their sterling debut.

Crawford explains, "We wanted a chance to re-record those demo-like tracks and rescue them as we came into our own. They sport a few different

## the dials



Dahlquist), in a grievous crash caused by a suicidal motorist. Despite that terrible episode, The Dials chose to carry on with several local friends picking up drum chores part-time.

"We're gonna continue to play shows because that's what Doug would've wanted us to do," the prematurely widowed Crawford avows.

Obsessed with music while growing up in rural Illinois, Crawford was a vinyl junkie who'd lock her bedroom door and go wild listening to new wave and kitsch-y '60s girl groups, two stylistic influences now informing her femme-fronted band.

"I like catchy music ranging from The Go-Go's to Joy Division. I was a teenager in the '80s and worked at a record store during college, when all that post-punk and power pop was around," she declares.

Now residing in the Logan Square section of Chicago, west of the Wicker Park scene that produced '90s lynchpins Liz Phair, Smashing Pumpkins, and Urge Overkill, where "there's cheaper rent," Crawford met Miami-bred guitarist Patti Gran through a *Chicago Reader* ad. The duo settled on a lineup rounded out by Meis and Emily Dennison following the departure

lyrics and had minor structural changes. Greg Norman worked at (famed grunge producer) Steve Albini's studio and now has his own basement studio that had a handy laid-back atmosphere and was less expensive. He's a friend of Patti's as well. It was just good timing."

Capturing the attention of fresh fans with exciting gigs cross-country, The Dials feed off each other's charismatic energy, building to a frothy head of steam by keeping the bustling rhythm strong and the zesty melodies intense. But the impulse to rock out in front of an eager audience has been there for Crawford since she was in an unheralded, but respectable, Wisconsin band. Starting her career with Meis in Madison, Wisconsin band, the puta-pons, "a more eclectic unit with lots of punk-ish Slits staccatos and artsy Devo mannerisms," Crawford soon became very confident in the role of front person.

On *Flex Time*, The Dials create fast, efficient, multi-harmonized adolescent punk that vivaciously veers towards enthusiastically sleazy teenybopper pop. Rubbery bass threads through bouncy organ shuffles undercoating the fidgety "Stuck Inside," meshing alarming Sleater-Kinney-like high-pitched vocal

yelps with the same teen dream alacrity new wave drama queens Josie Cotton, Missing Persons, and The Waitresses once brought forth. Dennison's frolicsome Farfisa drives the electronic space age whirl "Do You Want Me" as well as the snazzy Ramones-fashioned ditty "Bye Bye Bye Baby." Jittery jingle, "Phone Line," may be the best phone-related tune since Blondie's urgent "Hangin' On The Telephone." Lamentably ironic, the hyperactive organ-shuttered opener bears the title, "Dead Beat." Though wholly insouciant, its lyrics eerily ponder, "Where do we go from here?" In defiance, the only thing the remaining Dials knew how to do was to keep on *keepin' on* in the best tradition of fatality-stung rockers.

"We've got a few songs ready for the next album. One's a herky-jerky thing. Another's more melodic yet steeped in the '80s groove—our own brand of that." Crawford continues, "Patti's more metal influenced, but brings a surf-y guitar sound forward since one of her favorite bands is The Beach Boys. Emily is a Classically-trained pianist whose interests are all over the board. She likes (Chi-town pop eccentric) Bobby Conn. We've discovered our sound, but some of it may depend on who our next drummer becomes. The songwriting remains collaborative. We wanna continue to make catchy, fun rock and roll songs. I love the *Valley Girl* soundtrack."

the shrilling screamed heights other less artfully diligent artists implement, but rather stays barely above conversational levels.

A stammering organ that could have emulated from Steve Winwood's pre-Traffic daze with Spencer Davis Group ("I'm A Man"/"Gimme Some Lovin'") glides across the superstitiously cryptic tape-looped mantra "C-C ("You Set The Fire In Me"), burning a hole through your soul like only the best white-bred R&B can. A clanging percussive beat gets inside the liquid-y echoes and chain-like guitar figure supporting the frolicking delirium, "I Ain't Saying My Goodbyes." And the elastic bass groove grounding the ticking techno-shellacked "If You Want" brings back memories of primal faux-disco '80s industrialists like PiL, The Cure, or Depeche Mode.

Incredibly, Vek's prudently versatile pastiche doesn't stop there. His aching protracted moan, which inundates the alien dreamscape, "A Little Word In Your Ear," caresses the ear in a soothingly soft jazzy manner genuflecting back to laid-back '70s crooners such as Andy Fairweather-Low, JJ Cale, or Phil Manzanera. And the punctual reggae riddim utilized within helps matters also. Even more noteworthy is the advanced rhythmic design catapulting the thoroughly probing "If I Had Changed My Mind." Its musty swamp beat recalls Captain

## tom vek

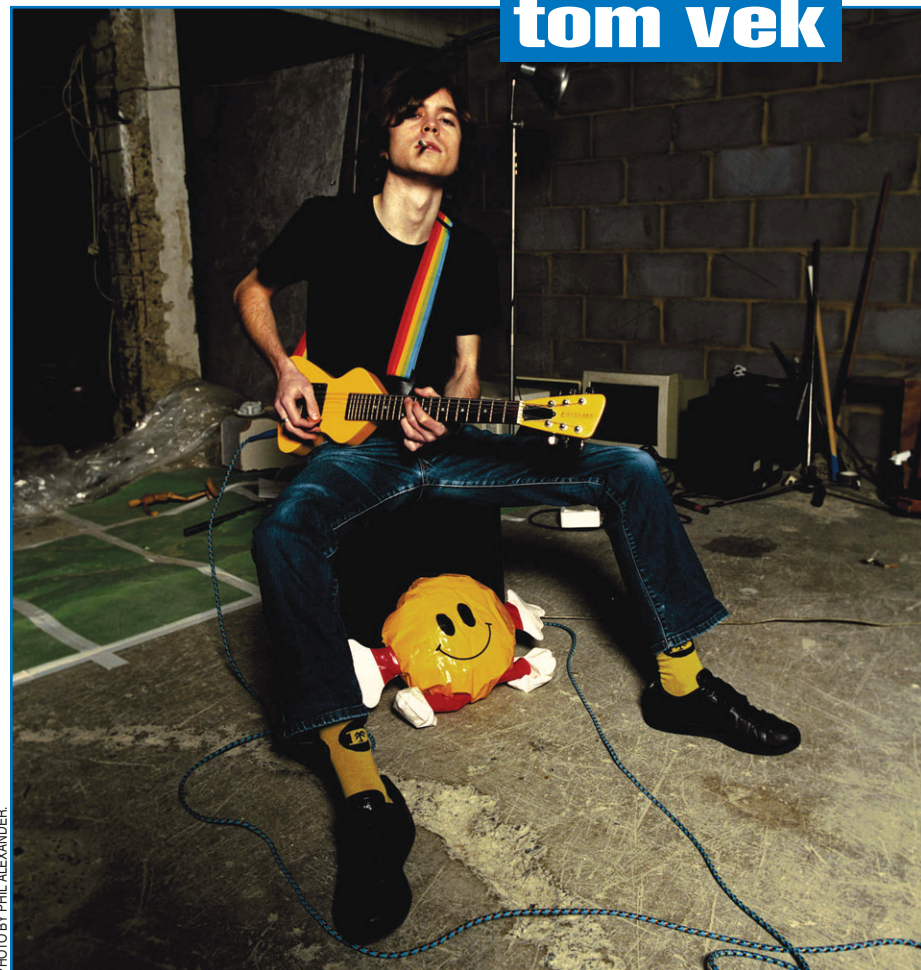


PHOTO BY PHIL ALEXANDER

## POST-TECHNO LONDONER'S GOT 'SOUND'

Not unlike deranged late '70s home recorder, Gary Wilson, London-based multi-instrumentalist Tom Vek's superannuated lo-fi approach to music in no way detracts from the simple melodious beauty his sometimes obtuse songs retain. On ghostly full-length debut, *We Have Sound*, Vek shows great eclectic sensibility constructing solid hook lines and accessible, simple rhythms.

Comin' on like some cool garage relic lost in the cellar from '65 to '74, he recalls many different long-lost artists without duping anyone specific. His temperate near-monotone baritone never reaches

Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*. And that's truly sayin' somethin'.

Though the second half of *We Have Sound* can't match the fertile ideas hatched on the initial above-mentioned tracks, there are stellar moments to be had. The dusky autumnal whir "The Lower The Sun" makes good use of sampled chimes, fuzz, and pre-programmed syncopated cadences while bleating closer "That Can Be Arranged" magnifies the sorrowful tone Vek always seems to furnish, whether intentional or not. That cloudy atmospheric portending digs deeply beneath the skin, creating an ever-shifting array of moody nuances, both subliminal and cognizant.

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