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WHAT GOES ON!



Unholy Cow! CULT HEROES

UR-PUNK LEGENDS THE MONKS PLAY THEIR FIRST UK DATE THIS MONTH. IAN HARRISON GENUFLECTS.

ONE OF the things I learned was that if everyone likes it, you're a failure," muses Monks bassist Eddie Shaw down the line from his Nevada home. "It means what you're doing is simple and has no value."

Harsh sentiments perhaps, but The Monks were never about the easy sell. A gang of five ex-US army GIs who played the West German dancehall circuit, their sole album, 1966's *Black Monk Time*, is a proto-punk classic that was ignored on release but which just gets more fêted with time. A wired, irreligious blast of vitriol with such gut-wrenching statements as *I Hate You, Shut Up* and the gleefully accusing *Complication*, it's comical to think that its creators started out as beat outfit The Torquays.

The forces that caused the change include the group's differing tastes (jazz, Elvis and country were just three influences), the Anglo/German language barrier and the provocative encouragement of managers Karl Remy and Walther Niemann. "We reduced the songs down to their most simple messages," remembers Shaw.

"It felt like we were at war with people who hated us."

"In my mind we were the first minimalist rock'n'roll band, playing repetitious phrases over and over until it created... tension!" And what tension. With bug-eyed vocalist Gary Burger's guitar scorched with feedback, Dave Day's percussive rhythm banjo, the stone-age "over-beat" swing of drummer Roger Johnston, Shaw's abyssal bass and Larry Clark's black mass organ playing, it's hard to believe The Monks existed

on the cusp of the Summer Of Love. Their image was similarly defiant: hair cut in a monk's tonsure, black suit and a hangman's noose around the neck. "People didn't know what to make of us," laughs Shaw. "We'd cover *I Want To Hold Your Hand* and our audience would sing, 'I wanna fuck your hand!'" Life for a Monk was no easy ride. They toured hard, sometimes playing for up to eight hours a night, and Shaw recalls just three days off in 18 months.



Oh BROTHER!

MARK E. SMITH ON HIS SPIRITUAL KIN.

"I'M REALLY excited about their return. It's about time they got the recognition they deserved. Back in the early '80s a friend gave me a tape with The Monks written on the spine, no tracklisting, I hadn't a clue who they were but it straight away appealed. It's got that US garage feel, but they are totally unique, the lyrics are mad, they are clearly insane. The music's very complicated, all their voices coming in together, the electric banjo...totally mad. I've got some footage of them on The Beat Club, from the '60s, sharing the bill with Dave Berry and The Searchers. It's clear they are so ahead of their time. America ignored



them totally. The Fall covered some of their songs - *Shut Up, I Hate You* - we didn't know they were the titles, we just took them from the lyrics so it's lucky we got them right! After that I got a letter from Gary, the singer. He said he'd turned his back on music for 20 years, now everyone's coming out of the woodwork and claiming they're fans." LW

Military Dexterity speed was sometimes used to keep going. "It was the stuff issued to the troops to make 'em fight!" Shaw says. "It would drive you crazy though. Four or five hours after taking one I'd go, Stop the car, I wanna fight somebody! It felt inhuman, like you're totally on the run and you're at war with people who hate you who want to attack you." After *Black Monk Time* and two singles didn't sell, The Monks

dissolved on the verge of a tour... of Vietnam. In 1967 they returned to the US and the world - apart from such admirers as The Fall's Mark E. Smith and Henry Rollins - forgot them. In 1999 the impossible happened and The Monks reformed, for the Cavestomp garage bash in New York. Since then they have played a handful of shows, and make their UK debut on October 19. The gig will be accompanied by a screening of Monks-doc *The*

Transatlantic Feedback and the release of tribute album *Silver Monk Time*, which features covers by The Fall, Faust and Mouse On Mars. "All this interest is strange," says Shaw: "It's an honour though. Hey, I thought I was a fucking failure! But maybe I wasn't."

A distant tonsure: (from left) Gary Burger, Dave Day, Larry Clark, Herr Barber, the late Roger Johnston and Eddie Shaw in 1966; (far left) in 2004, with a vestal virgin.

The Monks play *The Dirty Water Club* at The Dome in Tufnell Park, London, on October 19. See www.dirtywaterclub.co.uk and www.the-monks.com for full illumination.