

Strange bedfellows sound off at BAC

By Jordan Bass

This past Wednesday, in what will hopefully be the first of many strange and wonderful departures from the norm, the Yale Center for British Art presented performances by experimental music titans JG Thirwell and Genesis P-orridge & Thee Majesty. The concert slipped in the door as the second installment of the three-part Parson's Nose series—last week's theme was movies; next week will feature performance art—whose curator, performance artist Jane Gang, has brought together an unconventional array of contemporary art under the nebulous rubric, "British Artists Working in New York."

The show attracted a handful of students, but the bulk of the audience was made up of older admirers, many of whom had come from New York and beyond. Several long-time fans had made conscientious attempts to arrive properly attired, off-setting thinning hair and thickening paunches with black trench coats, reflective sunglasses, and spider web-patterned pants. They were enough to nearly fill the auditorium, and many lined up eagerly long before the show started.

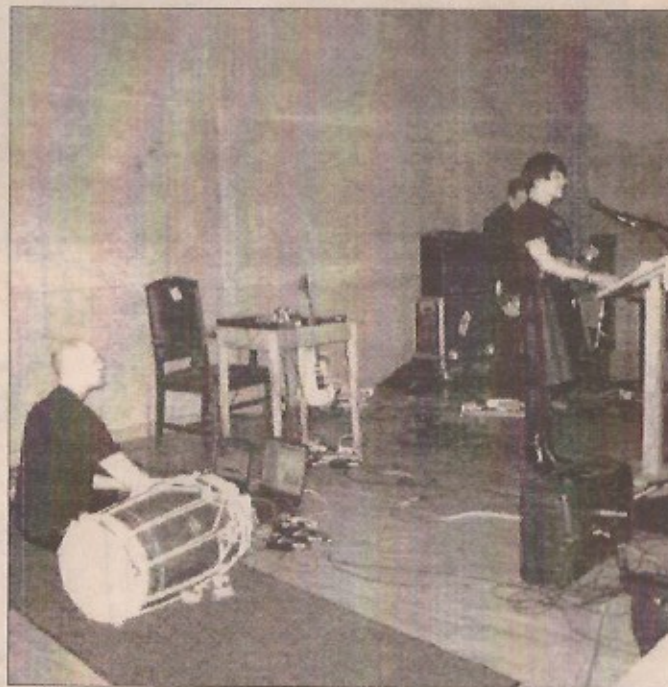
Thirwell and P-orridge certainly deserve to attract a crowd. Essentially the Orville and Wilbur Wright of industrial music, their influence and output has extended far beyond the genre since they both began performing in the late '70s. Thirwell, who has primarily worked under the name Foetus, is a musical polymath, able to nimbly blend styles that seem unblendable, throwing the experimental and undefinable in the same pot as funk, jazz and rock. He dabbles in the chaotic as well as the symphonic, ignoring trends and disdaining accalim. He also continues to produce at a furious rate; he put out several

albums in 2001, and more are coming later this year.

P-orridge is himself a living legend. At the end of the '70s, he helped found the seminal band/statement Throbbing Gristle in Manchester. Since then, he's branched out, finding time to become a master craftsman of erotic postcards and a vocal activist of the rave scene. Unlike Thirwell, he professes a preference for collaborative work. "I know what I think; I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in interaction. Life, sex, music, everything," he said. Thee Majesty, in which he performs with Bryin Dall and Larry Thrasher, is described on his website as "an exploratory synthetic manifestation distilling future possibilities of post-cyber 'folk musics' and tribal storytelling," which is accurate enough.

On Wednesday, Thirwell came on first, and sat performing with an iBook and a few boxes bristling with knobs, dwarfed by the projection screen that hung above him. The night before, he had patiently tried to explain to me the genesis of his piece, "Threnody Pour Une Sucette," relating the saga of a Serge Gainsbourg song called "Les Sucettes" recorded in the '60s by a young chanteuse named France Gall. A thinly-veiled erotic ode that was ostensibly about a girl who loved to suck lollipops, the song's true meaning somehow evaded Gall.

"When she found out about [my song] she was so mortified that she didn't leave her house for a couple of weeks," explained Thirwell. His piece, then, came out of "my



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Oh, so that's what a Throbbing Gristle looks like!

obsession with France Gall and Serge Gainsbourg...holding it up to the light, letting the light strike it, and what are you going to hear? It's the beams." Pressed for a more comprehensible description, he added, "Some people who might have attention deficit disorder might be a bit uncomfortable. People with epilepsy might have problems with it, too."

What transpired on Wednesday was a 35-minute feat of computer-manipulated sound and visuals that began with the Gainsbourg track under a film of France

Gall, but quickly veered away into new territory. The video derailed into sodden bursts of color, and low droning notes filled the auditorium. The vocal line persisted throughout the song, often spliced and looped into arhythmic incoherence, only to clarify itself once again as a clicking, skipping, serrated melody.

The screen showed a shifting assortment of ghostly, abstracted shadows and figures; below it, Thirwell gazed intently at his laptop, rocking back and forth or reaching over to tweak a knob and produce a wailing, wavering tone that would spike up only to drop back into the hum. After a final mesmeric crescendo of "sucettes," Thirwell stopped, standing up and walking out before most people had roused themselves enough to clap.

Without delay, Thee Majesty took the floor. P-orridge, sporting a "Free Winona" T-shirt, was dressed more or less as a woman from the waist down. He delivered a heartfelt dedication to Ms. Ryder before launching into a moaning lyric of despair and loneliness. To his right, Dall coaxed flares of noise out of a guitar, and then out of a

Franken-instrument with levers and pedals melded to a guitar body. On the left, Thrasher crouched behind a cornucopia of pedals and boxes. He scavenged the output of his band members, sampling scraps and then tossing them out as new noises. The song, an extended improvisation, skittered and thudded and keened for 10 minutes or so before dissolving into birdsong hovering over scraping metallic notes. They played one more number featuring hand-drumming and a machete drawn over guitar strings, and then it was over.