

THE BRAVERY

Sam Endicott – Lead vocals, guitar, programming
John Conway—keyboards, programming
Michael Zakarin—lead guitar
Mike Hindert – Bass
Anthony Burulcich – Drums

By Sam Endicott

The Beginning

I grew up in DC and my life began with punk rock. I was all about the “harDCore” scene, Dischord records, DIY, and all that. Fugazi was my favorite band; I’ve seen them over 100 times.

John is from Santa Barbara. He surfs. He grew up on SoCal punk rock and 60’s reggae. He has an unsettlingly encyclopedic knowledge of early Jamaican reggae—Desmond Decker, The Wailers, The Skatalites, Baba Brooks, all of it.

John and I met at art school in upstate NY. We spent years just fucking around on whatever instruments we could find. We played everything from jazz to country to metal to rockabilly. We just loved being around music.

In early 00’s we moved to Chinatown, NYC. We started going out to the underground dance clubs, and it changed our lives. Eighties night at Don Hill’s in the West Village- it revolved around that. There was this new sound coming out of NY- very synthetic music made in a very organic way. It was computer sounds, but made at home in the basement. It reminded me of the DIY ethos I grew up on, but with these tremendous new sounds. The Electroclash stuff, Peaches, The Rapture, the DFA, The Faint, !!!, Out Hud, etc.

We thought, what if we took these new sounds and combined it with a real live rock n roll band? Something where the sounds are taken from the electronic world, but you still feel like you’re listening to humans with instruments playing it. That was the idea.

I started writing songs in my apartment above a bar called Magnetic Fields. I was either in the bar, or upstairs playing my guitar. I had never sung a note or really written a song before, but there was something about this sound that moved me. They would start as more straight-forward guitar songs, and then John and I would “remix” them; cut them

up, fuck up the sounds, rearrange, program, destroy. And then that “remix” would be the final song.

I didn't know what to write songs about, so I just wrote about the thoughts in my head. It turns out I seem to be looking for something. There is a lot of regret. It became very spiritual for me, a way of expressing my desire to transcend, to find something more. Face my fears, my demons, stand up to the negativity in my life, and find something greater. So we named the band The Bravery; we thought it was fitting. And it had a nice ring to it.

Michael and Mike were old friends, also from the DC area, who moved to NYC around the same time as John and I. Michael is half anglophile, half jazz cat. Gypsy Jazz, exclusively. He listens to The Kinks and Oasis, and learns Django Reinhardt solos note for note. Mike is all about rockabilly. He listens to Hank Williams III and Stray Cats all day. We were all looking for a band, and eventually we ran into each other. They liked the sound John and I were working on; strangely it seemed a very natural fit.

Anthony moved to NYC right around then too. Looking back, it seems like fate. He had lived in Boston, studying percussion at Berklee College of Music. In late 2003 his sister suddenly passed away, and he moved to New York to be with his family. He had the sense that he was giving up his dream of being a musician when he left Boston. But on the very day he arrived in NY he got a call from me; I had heard about him through a friend of mine who used to bartend with him. And on that day his dream of being a musician actually began. He was filled with a very real sense that his sister was watching over him.

The five of us kept recording an album up in the Chinatown apartment above a sweatshop. We started playing shows around NY. There would be 15 people there; somebody's brother, somebody's girlfriend, somebody's roommate. It was fucking awesome. We spent all night every night out at the clubs, listening to what was going on. We didn't see the daylight for a really, really long time. We burned CDs of our album and would hang outside the records stores giving them out to people. We taped up fliers on every inch of the Lower East Side. We used artwork by our friend C. Finley, a feminist artist from NY. Her “Phoenix” painting became our symbol.

The crowds got bigger. We'd be at a bar and suddenly our CD would come on. We did a residency at a small club called Arlene's Grocery—every Thursday night for a month. Our shows started selling out. People started giving us their cards. And then, suddenly, Zane Lowe at Radio One in England downloaded our song off Myspace and started playing it on the air. We thought... what the fuck?

So we figured, England is where it's at, man. We flew to London, rented a flat for a month, and did a residency at the Metro. Every Thursday night for a month. They all sold out. People started taking us to dinner. People started flying us places to play for people. In late 2004 we signed a record deals with Island/Def Jam in the states and Polydor in the UK.

They said, we want you to re-record your album in a real studio. We said, no, it sounds good the way it is. Just give us a little money and we'll mix it better. So we did, and the album was released as it was, as it should be. All told, it cost \$7,000 to make.

And then a bunch of stuff happened.

The Sun and the Moon

So there's about two years there that I can't remember. It was such a fucking whirlwind that our brains exploded. By 2006 we felt like completely different people. Like polar opposites in some ways. All we knew was that we wanted to try something different, something we'd never done before. The album was conceived as a two-album set; the same 11 songs, but recorded in two completely different ways. One side would be more positive, more organic than anything we'd ever done before. The other side, the most synthetic, raw, amateurish thing we'd ever done. The sunny sun side, and the dark moon side. And in this way we would represent how we had changed, how our world had flipped upside down.

My songs became more spiritual. I simultaneously felt more optimistic and more lost than ever before. I wrote songs about death and what waits for us afterward ("This is Not the End," "Above and Below," for example.) Everything was a question, a period of waiting-for something? For nothing? I thought back to my year of basically living on a barstool in Magnetic Field—I felt like the setting had changed but the feeling was the same. So I wrote the song "Believe" about it.

For the recording of the *Sun* we somewhat abandoned synths and discovered organic instruments. We had been so synthed-out that suddenly the sound of a piano or a cello or an acoustic guitar was really exciting. We learned how to sing together in harmony, like a choir. We figured out ways to transfer what we would normally do through keyboards and programming, into strings, vintage organs and vocal effects. To help us in our new endeavors we enlisted Brendan O'Brien, the producer behind many of the classic albums from when we were growing up. We moved out to Atlanta, cut off all ties to NY for four months, and recorded at Brendan's studio.

Then things got really confusing. Polydor refused to release a two-album set, on the grounds that it was too unusual. This was not the first time we had disagreed with them, and it was getting to the point of being unbearable. Suddenly, no label was willing to pay for the second half of our album. So we thought, fuck it, we'll just record it ourselves again. After completing the *Sun* side with Brendan, we began touring again, and simultaneously recording the *Moon* side as we traveled. We'd do it in the back of a bus, in a hotel room, on a plane, anywhere.

But tensions only worsened with Polydor. We felt them beginning to put us through the same bullshit they did on the first album. And this time we refused. When we finished the *Moon* side of the album, Island/Def Jam was surprised and excited and agreed to release it. But we just couldn't find agreement with Polydor anymore. In the states, the *Sun* and the *Moon* were released, though some months apart from each other. In the UK our sophomore album – after the debut reaching top five and selling gold, and us being touted as the best band of the year by the BBC – was never even released.

...And then a whole bunch of stuff happened.

Stir The Blood

We finished touring last summer and immediately returned to the world of writing and recording. There was a new sense of vigor and excitement. We'd never felt more excited to be making music. I wrote songs frantically, all the time. I would go out and come home in the morning with my pockets full of napkins that I'd written lyrics on. The songs were darker, stranger. I have often written about rage and violence, but I never put these things into the music before, like it was something I preferred to pretend didn't exist. But more and more it was bubbling to the surface. I came home one day to find that my long-time girlfriend had attempted to kill herself. The ambulance came and she lived, though she was confined to a mental hospital for a while. This had a profound effect on me. It left me very angry. The songs got darker, some of them even violent (like "Hatefuck" and "Jack-O'-Lantern Man," for example.) Other songs became incredibly intimate, more than I'd been able to write in the past ("I Am Your Skin" is a good example.)

We began working with John Hill. He and I had been friends for a few years, and we would make beats and shit on the side. We had always talked about working together on the next Bravery record and eventually it came true; he and I co-produced the album. The band moved into an abandoned church in the woods of Woodstock, NY. We lived there for a while and just recorded as much as we possibly could. Tracks upon tracks upon tracks; songs became buried under mountains of sonic randomness. Everything under the sun. John brought new textures to the sound, effecting keyboards and guitars and new ways that we'd never thought of. The music became dreamier, more ambient.

Then we returned home and began the "remix" portion of our recording. We dug and dug through the mountains of sound, found the Easter eggs, cut them up, rearranged, manipulated. There are some tracks where no one knows who recorded them. For example, the main Wurlitzer riff in "Sugar Pill"- no one remembers doing that. I just found it in the tracks one day. Songs began to immerge. It felt like getting back to our roots, in a sense. Working in a very haphazard, homemade way. Electronic, but in the basement. There was a great sense of energy, like the first album. But like the second album there is a wider range of style. (For example, slow songs like "Sugar Pill" and "She's So Bendable." "Bendable" was written by Mike [bassist] by the way, and features him on lead vocal.)

During this period we all started to branch out creatively, as well. John Hill and I wrote the song "She Wolf" with Shakira, which became a big international hit. We wrote several other songs for her upcoming album as well, and worked on songs for a number of other artists (none of which have come out yet, so I'm hesitant to name names as of now.) Mike started like ten other bands, all of which he writes and sings for. It ranges from super lo-fi garage to rockabilly to R&B to Hawaiian music. He started a record label, Merrifield Records. Also, he became really involved in film, and made the video for our song "Hatefuck." It's pretty disturbing. I too caught the film bug, having directed the video for "Believe" from our second album. I've started writing for film, and have begun acting in some cameo roles. John Conway built a studio in the Central Coast Wine Country of California, and he and Michael (guitarist) moved there for a while to write and record Michael's solo album. His sound is like a modernized version of the Zombies or the Kinks. Michael and Mike have started a clothing line, making high-end suits.

There is a real sense of renewed energy, of creativity flowing like never before. So we named the album *Stir the Blood*, a line from the song "Jack-O'-Lantern Man;" it's an expression which means to awake passions, get the blood moving. Also, the name reflects the dark, even violent undercurrent to many of the songs. We used artwork by Polly Morgan, who creates art out of taxidermy animals. A nice return to the bird theme from the first record. The album was mixed by Michael Brauer (My Morning Jacket, Doves, a million other things) and was mastered a few days ago.