

# shinkansen

newsletter no.2  
december 1997

Hullo, hope you're all well and eating properly, and welcome, at last, to *Issue 2* of the Shinkansen Newsletter - yes, all of you who've been wondering whether the long silence since *Issue 1* meant you'd fallen off the edge of the mailing-list and ended up plunging helplessly into a chill, bottomless void, an interminable darkness ringing with the wild inhuman shriekings of a million tiny malevolent demons, can stop your fretting, because you almost certainly haven't - if you're in a bottomless void full of demons, it's your own bloody fault, Sunshine, so don't go blaming our mailing-list.

As for *why* the big silence... well, those who've discovered our new web-site\* will know the answer, but I'll run through it all again here for the benefit of the old-fogies, mostly by cobbling together stuff that's already been on the Net - apologies if you think this a cop out, but I need to get it in the post.

OK, here's what happened.

\*still a tad embryonic, I'm afraid, but that's because there's only 24 hours in a day and only 60 minutes in an hour. The latter is down to the ancient Babylonians, I believe, on account of them all having six toes, while the former has something to do with astronomy. Either way, neither are my fault, so I'm not going to feel guilty. However hard you stare at me.

**The sun has got his hat on, hip hip hip hoo...  
oh, no, actually, it's not the sun - sorry.  
I got confused by the hat.**

In October '96 I left Bristol in order to set up a new Shinkansen HQ in London; sadly, this took rather longer than, morally speaking, it should. For a while, I tried running the label from a gloomy basement in Fulham, my time there made even gloomier by having to share said cellar with an extremely annoying kitten called Paris who, as well as sitting on my head while I tried to make important phone-calls, used to have a particular fascination with the various beeps the fax-machine made as she walked over the buttons. One day, I came in to find her midway through fast-dialling

Hong Kong, peak-rate. And it's not like she even *knows* anyone in Hong Kong. That was when I realised one of us had to go.

And that's why, after several more wearisome weeks out traipsing the streets while shiftily-eyed no-goods tried to fool me into taking flats that were falling down, or had no windows, or that they didn't actually own - and after very nearly ending up in a converted corner-shop in Kentish Town, which would've been lovely, even if I was restricted to two schoolchildren at a time (is it just me who thinks the Cornershop album sounds like Paul Simon, by the way?) - I found myself rather unexpectedly sitting just a whistle's toot from Waterloo station, on the top floor of a house still part-owned by Lambeth Council (no great problem, just means that each Lady Day I have to pay £10 ground-rent to Brixton Town Hall and swear fealty to the Mayor in case war should ever break out with the Borough of Wandsworth), gazing wistfully out over the Lambeth Walk Estate, and wondering why there seemed to be so many helicopters about these days.

## Carborundum seems to be the hardest word

This would be a good point to apologise to anyone who wrote to us back then, and got a sluggish, or oddly distracted reply - or one that it looked like a kitten had walked over and then tried to eat. Also, although there was a redirection on the old Bristol PO Box, this ran out after 3 months, as the Royal Mail have a strict 3 month limit on redirections from PO Boxes. This, they say, is because people use them for immoral purposes. I still maintain that they're getting PO Boxes muddled with those automatic toilets but, no matter: the Royal Mail are clearly convinced, have done some research to prove that nobody can be *that* immoral if you give them only 3 months to do it in, and that's that. (You're allowed to be immoral in your own home for a *whole year* before they send round The Man With The Big Sack to put a stop to it.) So, if you never had a reply *at all*, that'll be why. Maybe you can write again to our new address, and perhaps also send a small, clearly annotated sample of your bile to the Royal Mail Redirection Centre in Southampton in an unstamped (and ideally poly-lined) jiffy-bag.

## Don't count your chickens before they've crossed the road

The following months passed fairly uneventfully - a new Residents' Parking Scheme was introduced, one of the tower-blocks on Kennington Road exploded, and Lambeth North station finally reopened (bit of an anticlimax, that, to tell you the truth... no balloons, or indoor fireworks, or silly games... and after I'd queued overnight, too...) - but nothing of any great moment... until, that is, a couple of weeks ago, when I suddenly found myself at the centre of what, for a while, seemed to be the initial stages of Global Youth Revolution, as reports

started coming in of widespread rioting throughout the industrialised world due, it transpired, to the non-appearance in record shops the previous Monday of a new single by **Trembling Blue Stars**. Here in the U.K., millions of viewers watched in stunned silence as, in a scene surely destined to rank alongside TV journalism's greatest moments - the lone protester confronting the tank in Tiananmen Square, Kennedy collapsed in the back of his car that afternoon in Dallas, or the dancers on the Berlin Wall as it crumbled before our eyes eight winters ago - a kid of no more than 30, or 35 at the outside, was dragged screaming from the Covent Garden Rough Trade shop by a fresh-faced, obviously terrified young policeman. "But they *promised*... they bloody *promised*..." he was clearly heard sobbing, before suddenly lunging at the arresting officer's waist, grabbing hold of his truncheon, and using it to destroy a nearby rack of Smog CDs. For this impromptu demonstration of previously unrealised good character, he was let off with a caution, while his now (thanks to the power of TV) equally famous captor was severely disciplined for having lost control. "I thought he was just pleased to see me," sighed a plainly disillusioned P.C. Balloons when he spoke to us yesterday, from in front of a burst water-main in Streatham High Road.

But how did all this happen? you must be asking, if you've not yet encountered the awesome capacity of the Internet for mongering rumour, and were happily oblivious even to the *possibility* of a new **Trembling Blue Stars** single. Well, for your benefit, this is what's been going on in the world of The Stars since last you climbed upon my knee.

## I'm just a girl who can't say Pwllheli

OK: *Abba On The Jukebox* and *Her Handwriting* both appeared on schedule to general loud cheering, a Mark Radcliffe session followed, and then a short series of gigs: Upstairs at The Garage, the Steam Inn in Brighton, two with Low, two as special guests of Baby Bird at the 100 Club, where I accidentally trod on Neil Hannon, and one at the Wag Club, supported by Arab Strap.

For these performances they consisted initially of Bob (guitar/vocals), Harvey (guitar/keyboards) and Gemma (bass/cello). After the 100 Club gigs, however, Gemma decided it wasn't that much fun, so producer Ian Catt stepped in to replace her on bass though not, sadly, on the cello or off-the-shoulder T-shirts. And then, after the Wag Club, it occurred to Bob that Gemma was probably right, it really *wasn't* much fun, especially when most of your audience has left to catch the last tube... and that, basically, was the end of **Trembling Blue Stars** as a live experience. Shame, really, as I've always enjoyed that sort of thing.

The Brighton gig was significant for another reason, however, for it was there that we found ourselves humbled by the presence of Warner Brothers' Head of A&R who, having fallen in love with the band's CD, flew in specially from New York to see them play. (He later specially caught the last train back to Lewes instead of London, because they both begin with "L", and then had to spend the night in **Brighter's** spare room, but that's another story, mentioned merely so all those who keep asking what became of **Brighter** will shut up.) Sadly, our hopes of TBS becoming label-mates with Bugs Bunny were soon dashed - I won't bore you with details but, basically, it all fell through after it turned out nobody actually *liked* the new REM album, despite all the money Warners had spent on it, meaning that budgies had to be slashed and rosters pruned. Budgets. To cut a

long story short, it all came down to a simple choice: should Warners sign fey English popsters Trembling Blue Stars, or effortlessly effervescent antipodean, Gina G?

Here's where it gets interesting. Unable to pick between the two outfits on purely musical grounds, Warners decided to stage a one-on-one

## current shinkansen catalogue

3CD	TREMBLING BLUE STARS	Her Handwriting	CD album
4	BLUEBOY	Love Yourself/Melancholia	7" single
5CD	TOMPOT BLENNY	Green Is The Best Colour	CD single
7CD	EAST RIVER PIPE	Mel	CD album
8/8CD	TREMBLING BLUE STARS	The Rainbow	7"/CD single
10CD*	TREMBLING BLUE STARS	Lips That Taste Of Tears	CD album
[* out January 19th]			

encounter in front of a small invited audience of top music-biz insiders - which is why, one cold December night, in a filthy dive in the savage, squalid heart of New York City, we found ourselves watching with barely bated breath as Bob and Gina took their places on adjacent podiums, or possibly podia, eyed each other sullenly, and signalled to the judges that battle might commence.

And - you know what? - right up to that final, heartbreaking, kick-in-the-stomach round, the Navel-Gyrating Contest, things were absolutely neck-and-neck. Sadly, though, when it comes to uninhibited freestyle use of the bellybutton, Gina can wipe the floor with almost anyone, and poor Bobby quickly wilted under the unstoppable abdominal onslaught. Backstage, we were in tears. In our hearts, our achey-breaky hearts, I think we all knew that, if only we could've persuaded Bob to let Harvey take over, we might've just sneaked it - the band would've been off supporting U2 within a month, and I'd now be sitting in a plush Mayfair office with ensuite secretary instead of a small upstairs room just



off Lambeth Walk. But such is the cruel and fickle world of pop; while Gina cavorts her way merrily across the Midwest in sparkly hot-pants, Bob's back in his bedroom bashing out B-sides for a TBS version of *Ooh Ah, Just A Little Bit*, meantime getting increasingly depressed by the laughter that rings out every time he takes the dog for a walk. I don't know why, I still think he's got the legs for it.

Another **Trembling Blue Stars** curiosity: if you've been to the cinema recently, you might have witnessed a Campaign For Racial Equality promo making use of *The Far Too Simple Beauty* - it supposedly also went out on Channel 4 (though nobody I've spoken to has seen it) and MTV (which nobody I speak to has seen). I'd like also to point out an important distinction between this and Arab Strap's Guinness ads, namely that *TFTSB* was donated free of charge, because loving everyone equally regardless of race or creed is a good thing, whereas Guinness is horrid. Well, I don't like it.

#### **A darkly erotic thriller with an improbable outcome**

At the start of this year, Bob returned to the studio to begin work on a new set of **Trembling Blue Stars** songs, again under the kindly nurturing gaze of Ian Catt, with Gemma adding a bit of cello and, more significantly perhaps for older readers, Michael ex-**Field Mouse** taking a break from married bliss in France to guest on bass, and Annemari (ex-**Field Mice/Northern Picture Library**) hopping on the 109 from Kennington to *ooh* and *ah* just a little bit (oops, sorry Bob) and even take lead vocal on a couple of songs, including new single *The Rainbow...* which should've been out ages ago... but wasn't because, much as one would think that those employed to cut and press records would know a bit about how to do it, rather than just having a passing interest, this is rarely the case... which is why, although I've been sitting on finished CDs since September, the 7"s remained, until last week, nothing more than a foolish, pretty dream, like sparkly kittens. And now it's coming out on December 1st, the same day as the Teletubbies' single... sigh...

OK. Two formats. The 7" has a short remixed version of *The Rainbow* b/w *Though I Still Want To Fall Into Your Arms*, while the CD has both those two plus a longer version of *The Rainbow* together with *She's Always There*, the B-side of their first single, which has been unavailable ever since it sold out, due to The Law of Conservation of Matter.

#### **I say I say I say, my wife's got no nose, Jamaica, no, Barbados**

And a new **Trembling Blue Stars** album, *Lips That Taste Of Tears*, will be out on January 19th, featuring 14 songs and a picture of Annemari, which is something we've always tried to avoid, putting women on record-sleeves, because it's crap and pathetic and politically irresponsible, but - well, the dress just kept slipping off Bob's shoulders. And the music? Is unutterably gorgeous, as you'd expect. Three songs have Annemari on vocal, the rest are Bob, and I reckon *Farewell to Forever* (with Michael on bass) and *Never Loved You More* are the two best things he's written - frankly, if your heartstrings aren't tugged completely undone by the second aching "I'm so far from being over you" (chorus of *NLYM*), then - well, your heart must've come from the frozen offal section at Tesco's, that's all I can say. Actually, you're probably now wondering why neither of those songs (or *Headlights*, or *Letter Never Sent*, which is the one which, in my dreams, milkman up and down the land whistle as they go about their daily round... sorry, I have weird dreams... mostly involving milk... or cheese...) is the single. And the answer is (A) we wanted something as unlike the last album as possible, and (B) we figured something vaguely poppy and succinct stood a better chance of airplay than a sprawling 6 minute tear-soaked epic.

If there were gigs, I would tell you.

#### **"Western Europe water-soluble": help urgently requested**

Since releasing *Love Yourself* last year, recorded as a duo of Keith (vocals) and Paul (guitars) - with Keris from Brighter on keyboards - **Blueboy** have swollen ominously, recruiting James (bass), Ian (drums) and Cath (vocals), and have just finished recording a new album, *The Bank of England*. Unfortunately, because everybody has day-jobs, only one of them drives, and the studio is in a barn in the middle of Warwickshire, they can't actually mix it until January - so expect a single in February, and the album in March. Perhaps.

I phoned Keith to see if there was any other news, and here's a brief summary. Paul's had

a baby, called Jack - or Michelle has, to be biologically pedantic, but she's not a famous guitarist, and you probably hadn't even heard of her until this very moment. Keith

hasn't had a baby, by any definition, and isn't likely to if he carries on the way he does, but he has taken up growing herbs. And he's having a problem with his thyme: the plant itself's gone all bushy, while the flowers went white, then brown, and then dropped off. So, if you have any, er, herbal remedies, Keith would like to know. Also - deep breath - he's always

wanted to go on a caravanning holiday, and has asked me to ask if anyone is planning such a thing and has a spare, um, berth. He says he's willing to work his passage - I've no idea what he means by that, but I wish he hadn't told me. (N.B. this phone-call actually took place in July, so some of this might no longer apply. Thyme waits for no man.)

... tap tap tap... tap tap tap... tap taaaAARRGHHH!!!!

Before leaving Bristol, we released two new **East River Pipe** records. First was *Miracleland*, a 7" wrapped in a hazy-blue fold-out photo of a solitary swan in a misty East River. The single's sold out now, but *Miracleland* (and *The Way They Murdered Me*, originally a U.S. B-side) was added to our version of *Mel*, the subsequent album. And... I know it's a bit difficult to get excited by a 4th album by any band but - to quote the press-release, it's *probably their finest work to date, taking the best parts of previous albums and adding a new clarity and precision (3 of the songs are under 2 minutes...), offering snapshot fragments from the lives of the people in Cornog's Queens neighbourhood in settings ranging from the sparse, haunting guitar lines of *Miracleland* and melancholic*

*keyboard washes of We're Going to Nowhere to the full-on electric blaze of The Club Isn't Open and...* that's the sort of dreadful drivel you have to write in press-releases - embarrassing, isn't it?

Anyway, it turns out my opinion is neither here nor there, because in the summer **East River Pipe** signed a world-wide deal with E.M.I. More interestingly, the band Lambchop cover no less than THREE East River Pipe songs on their new album. There were also plans afoot for a split single between East River Pipe and the

still wonderful Baby Bird, but nothing seems to have happened with that.

#### **Please do not lean on the barrier; it's got enough problems of its own**

Things have been pretty quiet on the **Tompot Blenny** front, largely because I completely failed to keep in touch with them. They sent a new demo a couple of weeks ago, though, so I guess things are still ticking over. They also told me they'd lost their bassist - but I think it was a deliberate, mutual thing, so don't ring up demanding a reward if you find him, or waste your time dragging him to the Lost Bassists' Tent and trying to get a message broadcast over the PA. Finally, on a recent visit to the London Aquarium\*, I saw a real tompot blenny, and it was very similar.

#### **Clip-clop, clip-clop. Uh-oh, I thought we'd seen the last of Him...**

Sensitive souls more than usually susceptible to the chill winds of historical perspective will know that November brought the 10th anniversary of the birth of **Baby Sarah**. Yes, 10 years to the day since *Pristine Christine* (SARAH 1) was released.

Sadly, we can't actually remember which particular day this would happen to be, because back then we were all giddy and silly. We're fairly sure it was either the 16th or 23rd... and if, for sake of argument, an incredibly cute sparkly kitten were being dangled by a piece of thin flammable string over hot coals by someone insisting it wouldn't be untied till we came up with a definitive answer, we'd probably plump for the 23rd, which was yesterday. A day singularly unmarked, I note, by street-parties, lewd dancing, and wild orgiastic feasting, so maybe we're wrong. Or maybe we just weren't invited, because you figured we must be too old for that sort of thing these days, what with it being ten years and all. Humpf.

Incidentally, I'd better quickly add that dangling kittens over hot coals for any sake other than that of argument is not something we at Shinkansen Recordings in any way condone, or do, much. Unless we're drunk.

Finally, although **Sarah** is now dead dead DEAD I tell you, there are still a few things left for sale, including the SARAH 100 CD/booklet, and I can send you a list. Bear in mind, incidentally, that, now we're down to the dregs on many items, things will sometimes disappear and reappear randomly because, at very low levels of stock, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle comes into play, as any particle physicist will happily explain to you, and it becomes impossible to count things precisely. Or maybe it's because our old distributors don't really give a toss, and haven't done for about five years now. Either way, it never hurts to ask, just like it never hurts to be told to piss off. Oh my God - is that blood???

\*The more ethical of you might disapprove of me visiting the London Aquarium, but... oh, zoos are bad, obviously, because it's not fair to put a polar bear in a cage the size of a Clapham bedsit with nothing to read or listen to or anything, but my gut feeling is that fish are pretty stupid and that, by the time they've reached one end of the tank, they'll already have forgotten what the first end was like, and thus probably won't be greatly bothered if they never get to see what lies on the other side of Westminster Bridge Road, let alone get to make it back to their traditional spawning-grounds in the mid-Atlantic. That said, I'd never put a photo of an aquarium on a CD sleeve, so, yeah, I'm a hypocrite.

### **MAIL ORDER**

	U.K.	EUROPE	WORLD
7" single	£2.20	£2.60	£3.00
CD single	£3.20	£3.80	£4.40
CD album	£9.00	£10.00	£11.00

Prices include p&p. Please make cheques payable to SHINKANSEN RECORDINGS. If writing from abroad, Eurocheques or International Money Orders/Bank-Drafts are best (in POUNDS). You can send cash (bank-notes) at your own risk, but if they're foreign notes please include an extra £2 - £3 to cover conversion charges.

### **SHINKANSEN RECORDINGS**

PO BOX 14274, LONDON, SE11 6ZG

Tel: 0171 582 2877

e-mail: [shink@dircon.co.uk](mailto:shink@dircon.co.uk)

<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~shink/>