

Back in Black

The incomparable Frank Black reinvents himself once again for new album

MUSIC »»PREVIEW

FRANK BLACK

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MacEwan Hall (U of C)

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With a second career that has been longer and more diverse than his first, 41 year-old Frank Black (a.k.a. Black Francis or Charles Michael Kittridge Thompson IV) has been one of music's most revered influences. His record releases span a legendary career as the enigmatic front man for the Pixies and, moreso, as a solo artist.

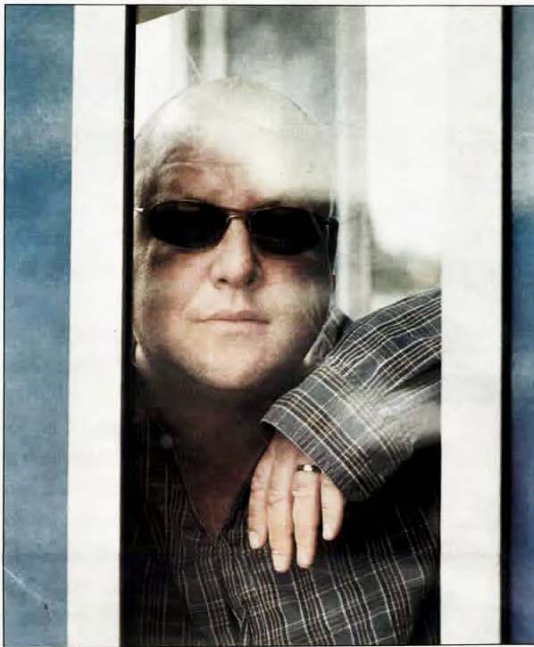
Comments about meeting Black in the early days usually allude to an altar boy type of innocence. An extremely polite and soft-spoken blonde, Black was born in Long Beach and looked every bit a Californian. Part of the thrill of watching him perform live was seeing him appear to methodically lose composure behind a microphone, while still maintaining deep artistic control of his voice. He learned how to scream from his boss at a flower shop, a man from Thailand who instructed him to sing along to the Beatles' "Oh! Darling" by screaming "like you hate the bitch."

Despite repeatedly reinventing himself and creating some of the most gripping and mesmerizing music over the last two decades, Black doesn't reveal an ounce of pretension or posturing. Twenty years later, he's still wearing the same brand of New Balance sneakers that he wore while composing what would become 1987's *The Purple Tape*. His favourite movie is still the sci-fi environmental film *Silent Running* and his absolute favourite book is, fittingly, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. He's remarried to a lady named Violet Clark, has a brood of children, lives in Eugene, Oregon and is now a vegetarian.

With this summer's *Fast Man Raider Man* and last year's *Honeycomb*, it seems like the noise-pop warrior is taking up spiritual residency in Nashville. They're both rock recordings, but are Black's most country-influenced affairs yet.

On the double LP *Fast Man Raider Man*, Black has never sounded more comfortable, loose and carefree.

"It's hard to gauge what you do based on this is hard or this is easy. It's all kind of both," he laughs. "It all depends on the moment. It depends on the song. It depends on the session. It



Frank Black has had a legendary and influential music career

depends who was playing on the session. It depends on how much caffeine you had that day. How late you stayed up the night before. I mean, there's so many little factors that trip it one way or the other. It depends on the day and the moment."

His moments are full of children these days. He, his wife, their four children and nanny have been rolling across the continent on a tour bus this year. It would seem like a sure fire recipe for mass chaos, but Black admits that life has become sublimely uncomplicated since having children.

"Yeah, I'm probably a lot more relaxed because all that poignant perspective suddenly happens around children. An awful lot of things just seem kind of dumb. You don't really fret over a lot of things that you used to fret over. You're less self-absorbed. I can't say that I'm entirely free of self-absorption, but I'm thinking probably less so."

Black seems like the least absorbed person on *LoudQUIETloud* — a revealing rockumentary on the Pixies reunion tour of 2004. The band shares many intimate moments with fans including Black climbing into his tour bus bunk to put on headphones and decompress by repeating centering affirmations. Kim Deal, who is humorously fuelled by Starbucks venti Frappuccinos these days, is shown coping with sobriety and recording new Breeders material with her sister Kelley in the

their own words as pieced together by authors Josh Frank and Caryn Ganz. Flavourful commentary also comes from the likes of recording engineer Steve Albini, Gary Smith (the first person to record the Pixies), Ivo Watts-Russell (4AD), Chas Banks (a former tour manager) and a collection of friends and former lovers. The book was released last spring and came as a bit of a surprise to the band.

"Apparently, the *Fool the World* book is good. I know the writer (Josh Frank), I know that people like his book. I'm mildly disappointed in that he stood out to do a Broadway musical with a lot of my music and life in it and he had a hard time with it. So, when the Pixies got back together, he said, 'well, I'm just going to take all my research materials and write a book instead about the Pixies.' I feel a little funny about that. I don't blame him in the end."

Frank wasn't the only one to capitalize on the Pixies' reunion tour. *NME* has been having a field day starting rumours of a new Pixies album in the new year. Black shrugs it off, "Well, y'know,

they do it all the time, it's no big deal."

However, in time for the holiday season, Black will be releasing his second album of the year. Consisting of songs recorded in the studio, live material from Canadian and American concerts, as well as hotel room recordings, the album tentatively called *The Water* is comprised of seven songs, Pixies songs and a DVD. It was produced by Myles Mangino, who has been with Black for 20 years, since the beginning of the Pixies days. In the meantime, Black is eager to reunite with Canadian audiences and put on some great rock concerts.

"I basically just play what I want. It's a new band that I'm touring with, so we're just doing whatever sounds the toughest. We're not trying to replicate the record or anything like that. We're just trying to be a band playing a club and trying to achieve some sort of, mmm, I don't know... we're trying to ring some sort of bell, you know what I mean?"

Respectfully, sir, boy do we ever.

Pixies' tour bus. The cameras follow Joey Santiago as he works in his new career as a soundtrack composer. David Lovering is captured during the heartbreaking moment of finding out that his father has lost his battle with cancer.

This autumn's *LoudQUIETloud* comes on the heels of the DVD *Pixies Acoustic: Live in Newport* and the biography *Fool the World*. *Fool the World* is the expectedly absorbing story of the Pixies in