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Night Watch

Frank Black on the prospect of the Pixies recording again

Charles Thompson — you may know him as Frank Black — was on a tour bus the other day, passing "cornfields and stuff" as he rolled toward Chicago. Thompson/Black is the founder of the Pixies, that legendary rock band that has nailed an addendum on its brilliant, short-lived (so we thought) career.

Long after most fans had given up hope of any kind of reunion, the Pixies stunned the music world with a brief tour in 2004. That tour quickly sold out, and led to more touring over the next two years — and a DVD documentary for ardent fans to analyze.

On the "loudQUIETloud" documentary, when asked if the Pixies — Thompson, Kim Deal, Joey Santiago and David Lovering — will record again, he gives a teasing answer: "I'm ready to go whenever they want to book a session."

That was about two years ago. Where's his mind these days?

Thompson still insists he's game: "If they're all on board — and when I say 'they,' I'm referring to 'she.' "

He's talking about Deal, here. "I think she's afraid of making a bad record. It's a valid fear. I'm not questioning her reticence at all. I'm not as concerned. I have a more flippant attitude, a less reverential attitude. She takes on the kind of gang mentality, 'This [band] is my gang, these are my friends — we're a gang and we're doing our thing.'

"I think she isn't feeling it anymore. I still sort of feel it. I'm enjoying the camaraderie now as opposed to before. I'm more, 'Hey come on, let's go make another record — what's the worst that can happen?' But she's more, 'We don't hang out anymore ... We're in different universes.'

"She doesn't want it to be fake — maybe I'm more of a whore, I don't know," he adds with a baritone laugh. "Joey and David are just letting us figure it out."

The Pixies' influence on alt- and indie-rock from the late '80s onward is difficult to approximate, and perhaps even more difficult to overestimate.

The Seattle scene in particular owes a huge debt to that Boston-born band: Kurt Cobain used to boast that "Smells Like Teen Spirit" was a rip-off of the Pixies loud-quiet-loud (hence, the documentary title) formula, and a few years later Isaac Brock's Modest Mouse borrowed guitar lines and a Pixies-esque world view.

As Ben Gibbard once said: "I don't think you can be someone from our generation or later and not be influenced by the Pixies."

While the Pixies may be the great American rock band, these days, Thompson is an odd rock star, looking more like late-career Brando than late-career Jagger. And his solo career is veering hard away from "rock," with a sound that is



MICHAEL HALSBAND

Charles Thompson, aka Frank Black, digs his past with the seminal Pixies but wants to keep moving forward.

far more country/Americana than alt-rock.

Indeed, he recorded his new double-album "Fast Man Raider Man" in Nashville. "I try not to do too many things consciously. It's a natural — go work in Nashville with those kind of players, lo and behold, your rootsy creative door opens."

Asked about the ambitiousness of a double-disc, which adds to an already sizable body of post-Pixies recordings, Thompson answered with a glimpse into his inner wrestlings:

"I'm a restless guy. To play armchair psychologist, maybe I'm on some emotional level so desperate to escape the shadow of my past, it's probably hard for me to relax and let time go by. 'Oh yeah, I'm still not as good as the Pixies? Well take another record!' I'm willing to give that theory part of the credit ... But from a strictly business point of view, I don't feel like I'm poised ... "

But before Thompson can finish his thought — something to the effect of he doesn't feel he can make it financially as a solo artist perhaps? — he interrupted himself:

"Someone must have tried to break into the bus and steal our gear, there's a big crashed window."

Symbolic, perhaps. On recent Pixies tours, he has played huge venues and festivals (including Bumbershoot and Sasquatch), with the luxuries of a five-star tour. As a solo artist, he is playing the relatively humble Showbox at 9 p.m. Monday (\$20 advance at TicketsWest, \$23 day of show and at the door).

The main difference between a Frank Black tour and a Pixies tour?

"You want to talk romance or numbers?"

Romance, of course.

"I would say, it was nice to go back to those old songs and have it still kind of the same — I didn't realize what kind of a head space I got into when I sang the old songs, especially playing with those guys, Kim and Joey and David. It was kind of a revelation to know I had a band with that kind of thing ... something that would move me into a certain kind of voice or character.

"Having said that, while it's been a pleasure doing that stuff, it doesn't really move forward, does it? No new songs, no new record. We're not really a band. ... We're reliving our last tour. It isn't really a forward thing. It's kind of a time-capsule thing.

"It's like, I used to be in this band, here we are ... 12 years after the fact. The satisfaction is wonderful, especially in terms of the money. Artistically, I get a lot more satisfaction playing solo shows ... playing new songs, having a repertoire of new voices, trying different things."

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