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[The Residents - The Bunny Boy](#)

Artist: [The Residents](#)

Album: [The Bunny Boy](#)

Track: [What If It's True?](#)



The Residents - *The Bunny Boy*

(Santa Dog Records, 2008)

4.5 out of 10

A portrait of the reviewer as a young man, yes, but not as young as when I was just past boyhood, when I first heard the Residents as a 14-year-old and decided this Cryptic music was uberphenomenal. Their '70s catalogue, even through the earliest '80s, was and is seen by me as one of the finest and longest runs of fine records made by one artist/collective/band in a row.

I've spent the last decade devouring the entire catalogues of many artists, and none have been so fun and intriguing (and taken as much effort) to devour as the Residents', even as they waded into the '80s and dog-paddled through the '90s. I do not know what they're doing now in recreational-aquatic metaphor. Surfing, maybe. *Demons Dance Alone*, an excellent collection that is probably both their poppiest and most morbid record, killed [the still-iconic eyeball](#) in 2002, and in the experimental phase resulting, they've put out some of the worst — and one of the best — works of their career.

Animal Lover, that goofy, spooky, astonishingly well-crafted masterpiece, was actually the best album by anybody in 2005, and ranked alongside their previous triumphs. The rest of the last six years' musical output, which I have of course been following closely, has fallen pretty much into two unworthy camps: ghastly, poorly-conceived audio plays (*River of Crime*, *Tweedles*, *The Voice of Midnight*); and frustrating, cheesy jetsam, like remixes of older works or miss-heavy compilations of instrumentals. *The Bunny Boy* is the Residents' next song-album, and for a change, it creates the honor of being their most mediocre product in 20 years.

There are aspects to like about *The Bunny Boy*. Nolan Cook, the guitarist by now filling the non-jealous role of Snakefinger's successor, pulls through with the distinctive lead tone that has graced their work for the better in the last several years. The tunes are short, so if you don't like one, hey, it's over pretty quick. Some of the musically dramatic and structural elements are stirring, despite a lot of the others that don't hit their mood-target for being too chintzy, generic, or something like it, even if they do intend it. My favorite song right now is probably one called "What If It's True?," but it doesn't exactly cry out for repeat listens, since its main hook is at the end, consisting of a horror-choral shout of "WHAT IF IT'S-- TRUE?!" ...and it's just over two minutes long...and?

The Singing Resident manages mostly not to irritate in this particular persona. The endless monologue of *Tweedles*, by a twisted, perverted clown that apparently can't shut up, was easily their most dislikable concept in ages; the *Bunny Boy* tones down the ranting, focusing more on the version of the Enigmatic Deranged Guy (or Gal/Child in the case of some of their previous, classic or at least time-tested works) that they've perfected with a certain concision over the decades. Still, try to focus on the story and you'll start to wish it didn't even hint at one. They have left behind the elegant obscurity of *Not Available* or even *Mark of the Mole*, and the more explicit tale told by *God in 3 Persons* remains their finest single-voice narrative. On *The Bunny Boy*, there are some tracks that try to draw character and end up being too specific and a stupid idea at that. A refrain, for instance, made of a couplet that would only be forgivable in the most ingratiating musical context, but instead is intoned apathetically over murky industrial beats: "I wanted to be a butcher, a jolly butcher/ Why doesn't everybody wanna be a butcher?"

Like [Sparks](#), perhaps the Mel Brooks to the Residents' John Waters (or Kenneth Anger), when it comes to pop acts old or young, conventional or eccentric, nobody's doing what the Residents are doing. But unlike Sparks, the Residents' quality control is wavering more strongly than ever before. A moment like *Demons Dance Alone* or *Animal Lover* could happen again, but the reality is that the Residents are essentially comprised now, and probably have always been, of two dudes in San Francisco who are getting older; if it happens, their chances are getting increasingly fluke-like. Like some of their fans, though, they soldier on.

-Spencer Owen

P.S. I'll post my 2005 thoughts about *Animal Lover*, one of my favorite albums (can you tell?), tomorrow. Also, I'll review their *Bunny Boy* show in Santa Cruz on October 3. Hopefully it will be sufficiently insane to distract from the material's problems.

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Posted on 09/10/2008

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[vinylboy20](#) says:

I disagree 100% on *Animal Lover*. I thought it was pretty bad. All I can remember is the guy growling "He touched my peeeeeeniiiiiiiiiss." Tweedles was awful, too. But isn't it funny that it doesn't matter how terrible their albums get, we'll still go to see them live?

Posted

09/11/2008

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[Spencer Owen](#) of [Spencer Owen](#) says:

That's a good line... haha. Maybe you need to listen to it again!

I really did hate Tweedles. And yes, it is funny. It's 'cause they're still bloody weird, and even though I know who they are, mysterious.

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