

Nothing Negative

The Bad Plus are not Dick Cheney

What would the music world be without its purists? Those stiff-necked traditionalists vigorously cling to the old legends and “authentic” essence of the artform. They constantly remind us in that nasally, slightly condescending tone, “Such-and-such just wasn’t the same after this-and-that” or “What’s-his-face is just butchering the hell out of so-and-so.” Rock purists stick to vinyl and don’t trust any music after 1970. Blues purists think that any blues without an acoustic guitar is blasphemous. Polka purists hate ... wait, are there polka purists? Some of the most opinionated, though, might be the jazz purists, though. Also known as bop snobs, these myopic dogmatists often think that all jazz post-1955 is worthless. Don’t even whisper the words “avant-garde” or “fusion” around them for fear of getting slapped upside the head

with a Charlie Parker album. So, with all the jazz purists out there, what’s a modern-day jazz band to do? Well, if you’re The Bad Plus, you simply embrace it all and say, “Deal with it.”

Comprised of Ethan Iverson (piano), Reid Anderson (bass) and David King (drums), The Bad Plus is a bop snob’s worst nightmare. In fact,

the band is a musical Frankenstein, grabbing a rock limb here, a pop torso there and creating a mighty postmodern jazz monster. Their mongrel sound owes as much to Rush and Radiohead as it does to Miles and Monk, and they even dare to incorporate covers of rock songs into their repertoire. The Minneapolis/New York trio’s first album, 2003’s *These Are the Vistas*, made a stir in both the rock and jazz worlds with their free jazz deconstructions of Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” and Blondie’s “Heart of Glass.” Talk about making the purists cringe. The affable King

says, “Yeah, when we were first dropping the bomb on people, we freaked out some of the jazz purists. But all the classics freaked out the purists. Coltrane freaked people out. At some point it’s like, dude, we’re avant-garde jazz musicians, we’re not Dick Cheney. We’re not out to hurt anyone. Are you really that upset at us?”

Honestly, how could you be upset at a group that flows seamlessly from Tears for Fears’ “Everybody Wants to Rule the World” to the roaring epic assault of “Physical Cities” as they do on their latest album, *Prog*? What’s so offensive about three tight-as-caulk musicians jazzing up and breaking down Rush’s “Tom Sawyer” and then lulling you into a late-night trance with Burt Bacharach’s “This Guy’s In Love With You”? More often than not, people have been rubbed the right way by The Bad Plus’ dizzying, idiosyncratic take on jazz, and for the last few years the trio has seen some of the naysayers come around, too. “We get some real bourgeoisie Cosby sweater-wearing motherfuckers out there and we play Ornette Coleman’s ‘Street Woman’ and they’re jumping out of their seats,” says King, laughing. “People start to realize that we’re here, we’re not some flash, not some gimmick.” Purists, take heed **EW**



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