

PORTUGAL. THE MAN - BIO

"Save me, I can't be saved" -- opening line from *Satanic Satanist*
"...I don't believe." -- closing line from *Satanic Satanist*

"These two lines are like bookends to the new album. They tie into the way my dad and other people escaped to Alaska in the 70s, and represent their proud independence and courage. The album's last line finishes the thought of the first line. It was Alaska. Everything we've gotten to be and everything we've gotten to go through, we've been lucky enough to have what we have." -- John Baldwin Gourley

"But it's the songs themselves that truly set this band apart." -- *Alternative Press*

Within days of *Alternative Press* including *Censored Colors* on its list of 10 Essential Albums of 2008, the members of Portugal. The Man were trudging through the Boston snow to start work on their fourth release in four years, *The Satanic Satanist*. As John Baldwin Gourley, named the year's Best Vocalist in that same issue of *AP*, explains the pace at which his band has turned out any number of the decade's more inspired moments, "Honestly, I think we should be putting out *more* music. It keeps you thinking, keeps you growing and progressing. If you stop and let it sit for too long, I feel like you start to lose track of where you were going."

For 2008's *Censored Colors*, Portugal. The Man spent two weeks in Seattle with their friends in Kay Kay and the Weathered Underground making an album Gourley says he wrote in tribute to the music of a youth spent tuned to oldies radio as his parents drove around Alaska. One of his earliest musical memories, finding a tape of *Abbey Road* in a box of his parents' cassettes, resulted in *Censored Colors'* second side where all the songs are strung together in an epic suite.

For *The Satanic Satanist*, Gourley and his bandmates - Zachary Scott Carothers/bass, and Ryan Neighbors/keyboards, and the drummer for the album, Garrett Lunceford - flew to Boston's Camp Street Studios to work with Paul Q. Kolderie, whose previous clients include both the Pixies and Radiohead, with additional production help from Adam Taylor (The Lemonheads, The Dresden Dolls) and Cornershop sitarist/keyboardist Anthony Saffery.

This was a big step for the band. From the time Gourley started the group in Wasilla, Alaska as an outlet for his growing fascination with tape loops and sampling - as captured on 2006's *Waiter: "You Vultures!"*, through the soulful yet art-rocking swagger of 2007's *Church Mouth*, and then to the richly textured majesty of *Censored Colors* - the band had always recorded with friends.

But the group, now based in Portland, Oregon, was clearly ready for the next big step, Historically, the band waited until they actually entered the recording studio to begin writing music or lyrics; this time, they did some pre-production.

"Save me I can't be saved I'm a president son, I don't need no soul."

"I was terrified," Gourley confesses, with a laugh. "We've only worked with friends, you know? It's always been people we knew really well. And this time around, we were working with Paul, Anthony and Adam who have all been involved in very successful projects. So we wanted to do what they would have expected us to do rather than just throw something out there. And actually, it felt so much better doing it that way."

Gourley also did his best to tighten up the structure.

"I was really trying to go for the more Motown structure than anything," he says, "the really short, tight songs with three parts and that soul vibe that we've been trying to go for this whole time. It really took stripping things down to even get that sound. You know, 'Ain't No Sunshine' is the same riff for two minutes."

As bassist Carothers, who started the band with Gourley, admits with a laugh, "We always say we want to make a straight-up soul record. I think we've said that every single time before we've gone into the studio and it never totally comes out that way. But we were definitely listening to a lot of more rare soul and funk lately. And Adam and Anthony and Paul all had a big effect on that, because from the time we decided to go with them, they were sending us just tons of music over email."

***"What a lovely day yeah we won the war, May have lost a million men
but we got a million more."***

"People Say," the lead-off track, finds Gourley speaking out against the human cost of war. On "Lovers in Love," the band works the groove like Isaac Hayes or Curtis Mayfield in their blaxploitation days, while "Work All Day" could pass for ?uestlove slowing down the beat to "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)."

The Satanic Satanist also finds them working more with loops and samples than they have since their 2006 debut.

"We played all the songs live to begin with," Gourley recalls, "then went back and tweaked it. But I've always loved loops and samples. I think it has such a cool vibe and such a specific sound that you can only get from sampling. You can't get those sounds from real drums. We just hadn't had the chance because we'd been touring so much and I guess *Church Mouth* needed to be that stripped-down record coming off of *Waiter*, when we realized that we couldn't do the samples live. And recording *Censored Colors*, was done with Kay Kay, so it didn't make sense to be messing with loops when we had so many real instruments lying around the place."

And, it's not just the beats that were sampled.

As Gourley tells it, "I would play some of the lead lines and Adam would go back through and chop 'em up. I'm really glad we're the way we are as a band, where we're not precious about things like that, because he spliced together some really cool lead lines that we wouldn't have thought of."

They also made use of the studio's vast array of classic keyboards, allowing Ryan Neighbors to play a more prominent role on this, his second album with the band.

"Ryan brought a lot to the recording this time around," says Gourley. "He and Anthony just went for it. They pretty much used every instrument that ever had keys."

For Neighbors, as much of a departure as this album represents, it still feels like it's part of a continuum with everything they've ever done.

The songs all just kind of work together," Neighbors says. "They all have the Portugal sound even though the ideas themselves can be drastically different. It's all still Portuguese."

"We took that trip out in '87, yeah found that place where we don't fear heaven."

"The whole record is between 1987 and 1993 of my life growing up where we moved around a lot," he says. "It felt like we were constantly escaping something and constantly running. And it made me think a lot about my mom and dad leaving New York and coming to Alaska in the '70s. They just went out to the woods and lived in cabins, away from everything."

"When I lived in the woods, everything was alright."

Alaska's been a constant source of inspiration on Gourley's music.

"It was just amazing," he says of his growing up. "I think it really spawned a lot of thought and a lot of imagination. We had this video store down the street from my house and every animated film that came into that place would be put in the family section, no matter what it was. So I would watch *Fantastic Planet* and *Light Years* and *Fire and Ice* and *Wizards*, all these crazy, intense stories that I can look back on now and know that they have made me the person I am. All these sci-fi movies that I watched in combination with the cold and the dark and the snow and isolation really painted some cool pictures and cool memories."

"Do you believe there is loyalty in man..."

You get the feeling Gourley would have stayed there if it hadn't made more sense to base a band that does an average of 250 dates a year a little closer to the action, which is why he and Carothers moved to Portland.

As to what effect all that touring has had on their evolving sound, Gourley says, “We’re playing every single day. It’s so much practice and so much playing together and so much getting to know each other as musicians. When we go into the studio now, it’s just very obvious what’s going to happen the second the first note is played. I mean, this being the first time we’ve done pre-production, these songs came out basically the way they sound on the album without us even talking about it. We just walked into our friend Jake’s house and sat down and started playing and it all just came together. It’s really just being able to see that every single night and being able to see each other every day. It’s playing in front of people and knowing what works and what doesn’t. We could have eight hours a day of practice in a practice space and I don’t think it compares to the 45 minutes to an hour and a half we get a night out on tour.”

"If you look real high, you just might find sitting in the stars, glistening, glistening, waiting for the band to come..."
