

# wired for sound

## Unklejam's lead singer, Tyson, gives Tasty Talia a lesson in Electrosoul...

Confident, daring and bursting with love, Unklejam are Tyson, Bobby and Adonistar, who all met under the glitter ball of the seminal club night Antisocial. The first time you hear their current single, *What Am I Fighting For*, you'd be forgiven for mistaking it as a lost disco classic, revamped for 2007. As for the video, it's almost as if the charisma and freakiness of Grace Jones has been channelled into the modern day.

"I never wanted to be a singer," claims uber cool Tyson. "I was going to be Puff Daddy, sitting back creating the beats. Singing was a mugs game. Then Bobby walked into Bar Music Hall, looking all shiny and glittery, and off we went making music. A few weeks later, Adonis showed up, and Unklejam were born." While Tyson covers coolness, the rest of the boys have their own strengths, "Adonis is just sexy, and he loves to gyrate. Bobby? Well he's got amazing hair, it's so pretty, like a girls. It's like a lion's mane!"

Music was always in Tyson's veins. His dad was in John Peel-fav's Misty in Roots - he spent most of his childhood playing Pac Man backstage and sleeping in speakers. "It was so boring, Roots is made up entirely from bass and I found it really dull, but it meant bass and kick were the only things I knew how to do. Unklejam started with the basic beat, I couldn't make it complicated." Meanwhile on the other side of the world, Adonis was spending his Miami childhood in the church singing gospel with his family, while Bobby honed his voice much in the same way. Nowadays though, they are more into funk than fundamentalism, "Religion breeds hatred," Tyson sighs. "It's all very well saying, 'Oh I'm a Christian', but then what if you're gay? And yeah 'I'm a Muslim' but you don't let your woman do anything? Unklejam is all about expressing yourself and being free to do what you want, it's the religion of love."

That's why the Antisocial and Foreign crowd are so important to them. "I hate going clubbing everywhere else" says Tyson. "We're all attracted to that scene because it's all about being yourself. Anywhere else, there is always an atmosphere or a sense of competition. We are all quite extreme people and we've never been anywhere else where there is such total, utter freedom. Scottee and Molaroid have created a brilliant place. They are proper dudes."

It'd be easy to look at Unklejam, see three black men, and label them as R&B but that would be both lazy and wrong. While old school soul, in the shape of the Isley Brothers and Sam Cooke, surrounded the boys while they were growing up, the first album Tyson bought with his own money was David Bowie's *Greatest Hits*. "I saw 'Ashes to Ashes' on TV and just thought 'Wow, this is sick!' I'd never heard music like it before, so I tried to absorb as much of it as possible. I started looking deeper into music and listening to alternative stuff that really pushed the barrier like Depeche Mode. But y'know I'm not white, singing like them would be strange, so I took the attitude, the alternativeness; the feel of the music and mixed it back with stuff like Womack and Donny Hathaway, turning it into electrosoul."

The genre "electrosoul" is there own creation, fusing a mix of P-funk, electro-pop and of course soul. Purposely every release has included their quirky logo rather than their own fan-winning good looks, to avoid, "Oh let's liken them to Outkast" labelling. "Our faces aren't there because we

want opinion to be formed on our music. We want people to think, whoa, 'what is that?' and come and see us live. They've got to see the show, because the show - it's diabolic!"

After a day of loud rehearsing in a London studio, they caught the ear of a manager who begged them for a demo tape, promising he'd get them signed within days. Virgin Records took a chance. "The songs were all done and ready, but Virgin came along and put us in touch with Mike Spencer who produced people like Jamiroquai. He pumped up the bass lines and gave it that finished polish and we were ready to go."

Debut single, the funkalicious, *Luv Ya*, which inspired pop critics to make those Outkast comparisons, failed to make any major impact on the charts, but Virgin weren't worried. "They're unlike any label I've ever known. They don't seem stressed about the charts at the moment. They just say, 'You're the greatest band in the world, we don't care when the public wanna realise that, but they will'. And they're right. In these days of disposable pop with some labels dropping bands after 1 single, Virgin are remembering that the greats take time to develop. Fan bases need to be earned, not just bought with a gimmick. Having recently returned from a support tour with Justin Timberlake, Tyson jokes, "We allowed Justin to perform after us! I say give it maybe two months, and we'll be playing as big a venue on our own tour! Doing one of those shows can make you a million quid for an hour - that would make me very happy," he grins.

So how will this gigantic show fit into Popstarz when they take to The Scala stage in July? "I swear", says Tyson slightly terrifyingly, "It will be an amazing show - if we do not blow the hell out of the building, burn it down, wee, spit, kill, murder and eat everyone's corpse in that building, I will bite my own knob off, chew it, swallow it, and regurgitate it. And you can quote me on that!"

With such a promise, do Unklejam think there is anyone else out there who touches them? "We like Gossip. I like the way Beth Ditto takes off her knickers and puts them on her head. I look at other people and compare them to us, and I thought there was no-one who could take us when it comes to a show. Then I saw the knickers come off and thought, oh my fucking god, we've got competition. That's what it takes to compete with us." While we'd rather not imagine too much the idea of a panty-less Unklejam Gossip duet, the two bands share that "we're here, and we're doing exactly what we want ethos."

Their next single *Stereo* is due later in the summer and is a smooth, multi-layered affair. Soon there will be the all-important self-titled album where we will see if the cult of Unklejam has really made its mark. "We are the greatest band in the world! I have no doubt about it, and one day everyone will realise it. Until then we're happy people, playing for happy audiences, doing what we love." ★

- ★ *What Am I Fighting For* (single) is out now
- ★ *Stereo* (single) is out late Summer
- ★ Unklejam play Popstarz @ The Scala on Friday 13 July
- ★ For more info visit [www.unklejam.net](http://www.unklejam.net)