

Man or Astro-Man?

There is an undeniable connection between the South and occurrences of extra-terrestrial form. From other worldly jazz guru Sun Ra, to German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun, Alabama has always had more than an ample share of connections to outer space. Such is the case with Man or Astro-Man?, who arrived in a small college town in Alabama some years ago. In order to integrate into human society, they would have to downplay their true identities and take on aliases, most conveniently in the form as students. While studying industrial design and film, the group began formulating a mode in which to learn more about their new earthly environment.

Soon the group became immensely attracted to pop culture and decided that the cliché of a being a rock band would provide a perfect vehicle in which to traverse the globe and further their research. Full integration into Earth society would thus commence for what was soon to be known to the world as Man or Astro-Man?

A discovery of records long stashed away at various dilapidated thrift stores in Alabama lead the entities of Man or Astro-Man? to the scratched-up sounds of Link Wray, The Ventures, Dick Dale, Duane Eddy, The Marketts, The Safaris, and other instrumental guitar oriented music of the late fifties and early sixties. Instrumental music provided a great escape from the sappy, pretentious lyrical drivel emanating from the (then newly christened) "alternative" FM radio. At the same time, offbeat stage set ups and designs by Kraftwerk, The Spotniks, The Residents, Devo, Sun Ra, and The B-52s had a great impact on the rapidly developing troupe.

Around this embryonic time, Man or Astro-Man played innumerable shows in the Southeast with a scene of bands that included Southern Culture on the Skids, The Woggles, Hillbilly Frankenstein, The Subsonics, and The Flat Duo Jets. Developing around the liberating resurgence of the no bullshit sounds of surf and garage music, MOAM soon caught the attention of Estrus Records owner Dave Crider. He was taken with the band's teenage caffeine-induced energy and punkish take on instrumental surf music. Crider ended up releasing their debut full-length simply entitled, "Is it...Man or Astro-Man?" (1993). The Estrus Records aesthetic that revolved around the art and packaging concepts of designer Art Chantry fit perfectly with the Man or Astro-Man? modus operandi. "Destroy All Astro-Men" (1994) and "Project Infinity" (1995), and several EP's were released by Estrus.

Faced with licensing issues in Europe, MOAM embarked on a search for a new record label. From their recent shows with The Jesus Lizard and the Mekons, the band was alerted to Touch and Go Records and their artist-friendly business practices. Upon visiting the fine earth people of Touch and Go, the band decided it would indeed be the best possible label on which to release all future albums.

"Experiment Zero" (1996) was Man or Astro-Man's debut for Touch and Go. Recorded in three days with engineer Steve Albini at the Zero Return studio in Alabama, it stands tall among the great modern instrumental guitar records. After its release, the band began to evolve at a greater velocity than ever before. They morphed by extending their use of samples, computer

programming, homemade instruments, electronic gadgetry, tape splicing, and other bits of random archaic technology. Both the "1000X" EP (1997) and "Made From Technetium" (1997) were darker steps into the futuristic soundtrack music realm.

Over time, Man or Astro-Man? has done countless bits of film and soundtrack work including compositions for Nickelodeon and The Cartoon Network(Space Ghost Coast to Coast and The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron). Members of Man or Astro-Man? have started record labels - Warm Electronic Recordings; recording studios - Zero Return; bio-diesel fuel centers - vegenergy.com; and have written for numerous publications including Chunklet, CMJ, and The Melody Maker.