

MEET THE WORMS



It's not every day you receive mail from a Worm. But a short while back, that's exactly what happened. An E-Mail arrived out of the blue from one Mark Worm of The Worms, suggesting I take a look at his bands' myspace site. I liked what I heard. We became "friends"!

The Worms are: Jonathan Dowman (aka Jonny Worm) – music, instruments; Mark Foulkes (aka Mark Worm) – lyrics and singing; and Chris Stewart (aka CS Worm) – music, beats, programming and everything else.

Based in Reading and South London, they deliver an earthy mix of wholesome homemade music and honest good tunes... some, I'm sure, you can even hum along to. They describe their music as "experimental/folk/punk", which is as accurate as you're likely to get.

It all began back in 2005 "when a cassette of scratchy guitar lines was sent from South London to the leafy edges of Reading. A sheaf of poetry travelled in the other direction and, before long, The Worms were born."

I like the sound of their recordings. There is a reassuring warmth to them. A little old-fashioned, perhaps (in a late-70s Peel Show kinda way) and all the better for it. Indeed, The Worms are a welcome tonic to the more digitally done stuff that's around today.

I have yet to meet The Worms in person but I look forward to doing so. They have an untidy attitude... one that's refreshing and unpretentious. No doubt they'll be worming their way through the underground to a venue near you soon. Go see them if you can!

- Clive

The Worms Interview (September 08)

1) Who chose the band name? Who existed first: Mark Worm or The Worms?

(Mark Worm)- The Worms definitely came before Mark Worm! Jonathan (J. Worm) and myself chose the name very shortly after we started writing together. We liked it because it was so obviously not a rock star name. I think it is fair to say none of the Worms has any interest in being a rock star. If we did this particular vehicle would be a disastrous choice. I think it is also saying something about the way we saw ourselves at the time... cruising through the musical detritus sucking it up and shitting it out of the backend. An unpleasant yet enriching process. The whole issue of us all being called 'Worm' is definitely my idea of a joke and definitely nicked wholesale from The Ramones and partially from Beefheart. I also think it is hilarious, bears relentless repetition and sort of cements us together as a 'band of brothers'....my fellow Worms may disagree!

(Jonny Worm) The Worms was Mark's call originally. It's become more like the right name for us as we've gone along, I think. Of course all the themes of recycling , natural processes, para-invisibility, mutation etc. are there. Obviously it is the anti-Rock name par excellence, which can only be a good thing in these reactionary times. (Always thought it was good that we gestured in the general direction of Tradition with a name taking the form of "The Somethings", but gleefully refused to join in the tedious procession of skinny-trousered graverobbers). Hints that there could always be more or less of us, too, such that they'd never know if they'd actually got all of us. The most important thing about a band name is the extent to which it doesn't tie you down to sounding like anything in particular. The much-despised U2 are a case in point here. The name becomes defined by the sound you make, not the other way around. Talking Heads is the lodestone group name, obviously. Exception that proves the rule: Only Iggy Pop can get away with striding onstage and announcing: "We are the muthafuckin' Stooooooges!". If you aren't Ig, you won't cut that shit.

2) Tell us a little of how the band came together...when did you first get together? Who is in the band?

(Mark Worm)- Jon and I started writing songs together in 2005. We were friends for a long while before this, sharing an interest in the hairier fringes of independent music. Jon is a veteran of the London pub scene where he played in the criminally neglected and perpetually disorganised 'Graft Versus Host'. We realised fairly early that what we were coming up with was 'a bit odd' and this only spurred us on. My own interest is definitely more focused on the lyrics. I have always written poems and bits of prose. All I needed was a bit of encouragement and Jon provided it. Chris (CS Worm) is another refugee from 'Graft Versus Host' who has a long and chequered history of playing the drums in various beat combos. He is rapidly developing into a dab hand with the music software and after a long courtship we convinced him that resistance was useless...so he joined our happy band about 3 months ago.

(Jonny Worm) Surely the answer here is- the insatiable urge to create? Anything else is just careerism, marketing, cultural eat-your-own-shit-and-eat-it-long (law of diminishing returns), or an extended form of socialising. Please save us from talk of guitarists who recruited bassists who had the chops to add the Latin baile-funk

element that the management felt would play well with the publicist. Etc. Robert Wyatt: "You cannot plan it. If you do, you are being a cynical media bastard and it will always show up".

3) The sound of your recordings are primitive but have a certain warmth to them. Can you explain how and where you record?

(Jonny Worm) Up to this point we have recorded with Garageband on a Mac iBook G4, using M-Audio midi keyboard and pre-USB sound module, with a Fender acoustic guitar and Shure vocal mic. Chris's advent will change all that primitive tin-can-and-string business though. The most important thing we record with is our ears. "Roisin Murphy's Blue Smoke Pig" has a glittering pop-song production living somewhere in its bowels. "The Slider" is almost unrecordable, despite being a simple folk affair when played. So perhaps we record when we have to (to remember how the songs go) and when we have built up enough of a relationship with them to let them live outside our heads. You've got to trust your own songs enough to let them be what they have to be.

4) There is something gloriously old-fashioned (I mean that in a positive way) about the sound of the tracks at your myspace space. Was this planned?

(Mark Worm) Somehow the way the lyrics come together with the music lend a creaky medieval feel to the music somehow. It does not seem like we tried to do this...it just happened.

(Jonny Worm) Clearly we are not a shiny pop act. I'd hate to think we are consciously or even unconsciously fetishist about 'olde tyme' sound. It has to be a means to an end. Music has the power not just to evoke a distant time; it can bring the past (it's ghosts, its unwanted associations, its unwelcome memories etc) right back into the room. Much as we love the clinical beauty of electronic music, recorded sound that has its environment carried within it, the breaths-in, the echoes, the ambient hum, will always be indispensable. It is weird that a sense of physical place should be so powerful in an entirely auditory medium.

(CS Worm) People i've played worms recorded stuff to seem divided equally between really liking the fragile spindly quality of the sound and those who like the material but want to hear it 'recorded properly'. I'm sort of in both camps on this...the trick will be to make some quality recordings without losing that essential worminess...whatever that turns out to be.....also will it be better just to put down what sounds good to us at the time without having a dogmatic idea of how it should turn out. Having the best acoustic recordings of guitar and voice we can manage as a start point is surely the way to go - spindliness can be added later.

5) Can you describe the live Worms experience?

(Mark Worm)I feel that performing live has turned out to be the best bit of producing music and is an end in itself. We have certainly got a lot better at it. We let the songs speak for themselves but try and vary the pace and atmosphere. Jon has always been good at splicing together sounds to produce interesting backdrops to our natural sparseness and Chris has definitely added an element of sophistication in the production of drones and beats. We do like to travel light though and can set up

quickly anywhere and perform with a minimal amount of faffing about. This is important when frequenting venues where we are asked to do short sets or playing 'open mics'.

(Jonny Worm) I think we are very much still learning what the strengths of the Worms live might be. I'm sure a sense of studied seriousness will always be there or thereabouts. I'd like to think that there might be a feeling that songs or ideas that most would leave behind in their rehearsal rooms or bedrooms are precisely the ones we would drag kicking-and-screaming out onto a stage. In a supposedly rebellious, transgressive form (pop, punk, music), the level of self-censorship is asking to be breached and we are the kind of group well-equipped to do this. A poetry-club audience thought that "Shag" was a comedy song for the first verse-and-a-half; during the final "not often given to the act of love" chorus a real chill settled over the room, and we'd like to think that is our trademark. The sound of people has to be free from editing-out: "we always want to keep the dirt; the dirt is what's important" (Mark Stewart).

(CS Worm) As the 'boffin' I do have a slight concern about looking as if i'm checking my email while playing - I'm used to being hidden behind the kit but it's great to being able to go home on the train with my instrument rather than heaving flight cases into the car while everyone else is having a nice chat and a pint inside...

6) What's the reaction to The Worms in Reading?

(Mark Worm) Reading has generally been good to The Worms. We cut our live teeth in the excellent Bohemia night at the Town Hall. Reading and its environs have certainly inspired/appalled me into a few sets of lyrics... 'Kite' may be the only song ever to name-check Didcot. In terms of gigs we tend to venture into London as there are more opportunities to play the sort of stuff we play.

In Reading generally, and in my place of work specifically, I have established a reputation as a tolerated nutter who plays and performs strange music. I am the only Worm who lives in Reading the other two-thirds of the Worms residing in South London and Kent respectively.

(Jonny Worm) Songs like Kite, Science Park, A Berkshire Song (of course), Tufton Beamish are all very much at home in Reading, so we might consider ourselves as chroniclers of modern life in a particular stratum of England. Perhaps there is a same-but-spookily-different set of songs to be set in or near Southborough.....or anywhere.

7) You mentioned you've had airplay in the States. How did this come about?

(Mark Worm) For some reason we have been a lot more successful at getting airplay in the States. I have no idea why this should be the case other than the thriving independent radio scene out there. I *do* know that the internet opens up a whole world of possibilities that simply did not exist 5-10 years ago. We have been fortunate in having DJ's who have picked up on our music and played and promoted it. Almost unbelievably our biggest supporter is a chap called Morgan P Salvo who has his own show on KPOV Radio of Oregon. He is a really interesting musician in his own right and has a great show. He plays something by us pretty much every weekend. We also were picked up by the British musician Ergo Phizmiz who has his own show on

WFMU New York. He asked us to record a session which was then broadcast in its entirety. I do try and catch up with like-minded individuals on the internet but there is no overall plan...pretty organic really.

8) When will the Worms be on tour? Any plans for Europe?

(Mark Worm) The Worms play fairly frequently these days. We generally try to get under the radar in folk clubs and open mics. You also get to hear a lot of good music this way. We were asked a couple of months ago to perform at the Poetry Society Cafe in Covent Garden along with some slightly better known experimental folky types. This was pretty much our ideal sort of gig really. Intimate, interesting with other artists to see and chat to. Our only true limitation is juggling our commitments..all of us work full-time in the NHS and two of us have young families.

(Jonny Worm) One of the best things about being in a group like the Worms, is that none of us has to be doing this. 2 of us have fatherly duties and all three of us have full time jobs in the unforgiving NHS, so the art we make will always be subject to constraint, pressure, prosaic influence, and domestic quotidian limits. This is a good thing, I think, as it immediately strips away any tedious pretensions to 'rebel' status and makes us work harder for the impact we want. We used a sample of Sylvia Plath's voice (reciting 'On Parliament Hill Fields') for the intro noise at the recent Poetry Society show- her work was profoundly rooted in the un-glamorous reality of life in the home, and all the stronger for it.

9) The debut Worms CD... can we expect it soon?

(Mark Worm) I think you can expect a full debut album some point soonish. We certainly have enough songs. We are planning to get into a studio later this year or early next. I would like to call it 'La Petite Mort - Songs of Love And Death' but the others may beg to differ.

(Jonny Worm) Yes. There will be one. It should be called "PlayThings". Or "Don't Forget To Live Your Dream". "Same Thing Different". Or "Appetite Rises Up, Against Suppressant". Or "Waste Not". Or "Mal-Chemy". Or "Hazard Meets Victim". Or "Language Users". Or "Identity Crisis Management". Or "This Hurts Us More Than It Hurts You"..or... something else.

(CS Worm)

I still think we should recycle 'Now Look What You Made Us Do' at some point. (this was the title of our first demo)

10) Finally, a message for Big Untidy readers from TheWorms....

(Jonny Worm) 'the medium is the message' (M McLuhan)

Oh, and how about some Worm Top 10s (all-time faves or current loves)...

LISTMANIA

Mark Worm's top 5 songs of all time (for this month!!)

- 1) Roadrunner - Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers
- 2) Winter - The Fall
- 3) Blackwater Side - Bert Jansch
- 4) Transmission - Joy Division
- 5) Abba Amma (Babylon Destroyer) - Current 93

CS Worms Top 5 Songs of all time (this week)

- 1) XTC - respectable street
- 2) Randy Newman - sail away
- 3) Ron Sexsmith - while you're waiting
- 4) Brian Eno - anything off 'Music for Films - One'
- 5) David Shire - theme from 'the conversation'

Jonny Worm's Current top 10

1. Diamond Family Archive - "Runaround Sue"
2. Junior Boys - "Teach Me How To Fight"
3. Ornella Vanoni - "Rosetta e Cioccolato"
4. Simon Breed - "C**ts, P***ks, W*****s and S**ts"
5. Goldfrapp - "A&E"
6. Infernal - "From Paris To Berlin"
7. Alias - "Dying To Stay"
8. The Fall - "Tommy Shooter"
9. John Foxx/Harold Budd - "Here And Now"
10. S.I.N - "Remegio"

PS: Apologies to The Worms for the late arrival of this article. I was...um... distracted!
- Clive

myspace.com/thewormery

The Worms live:

Big Untidy Night Out (Silver Street, Reading), January 9th 2009.