

HOLY FUCK - 'EVENT BEAT'

At a time when even entire classic rock bands are being AI generated, Holy Fuck are now more relevant than ever. The Canadian quartet have forged their reputation for making electronic music with a human touch. While many artists create that core electronic via laptops, loops and drum machines, Holy Fuck keep every element as live as possible. The intoxication they inspire comes not from cold, staid perfection, but from the ragged energy that comes from four musicians relishing sharing a moment. Factor in the chaos born from improvisation and skipping a click track in favour of loose, raw, real percussion, and it's easy to see why Holy Fuck are renowned for their pulsating, unorthodox thrills.

As the passage of time marches to its own relentless beat, it's almost frightening to note that it has been six years since their previous set, 2020's 'Deleter'. Given the well-documented events that followed that year, the normally road-weary band - Brian Borchardt, Graham Walsh, Matt 'Punchy' McQuaid and Matt Schulz - spent two years entirely apart from each other.

In March 2022, they finally reconvened in an old village hall in rural Nova Scotia. The main purpose was to simply reunite and rehearse, but new song ideas soon flowed out of them. And that was the starting point for their upcoming album 'Event Beat'.

"The catalyst for this record and the beginning of the recordings that we did was us just getting back together again," states Graham. "It was something unique to us. It was all of us living together one in space and with no distractions and just working on music in the middle of nowhere. It's a way I really like to work. For at least half of the songs on the record, it was just us holed up together. Which was great!"

Intuition, muscle memory, an almost telepathic link? Call it what you will but the shared synapses between the quartet were soon fired up. "Having our own language that we can speak so easily together is really important to us," asserts Brian. "We all have our own piece to bring to the conversation, and it's idiosyncratic to us because we've been dedicated to it for so long. Hopefully that's encouraging to other bands who feel like they're on a similar path."

Nonetheless, there were challenges. At one point a storm knocked out the power, forcing them to start up a generator. More importantly was the presence of a local who objected to the volume of their sessions. You can talk long into the night about musical influences, but nothing shapes the direction of a record quite like the practical obstacle of having to placate a neighbour.

"That became a production challenge," notes Graham. "We still wanted to jam, but while being as quiet as possible. Matt couldn't hit the drums really loud. So we made these more low-key ambient things. It was like, how quiet can we be and still do what we do?"

Brian concurs. "We were making these quite pastoral, vibey soundscapes, and I thought we were going to have an ambient record on our hands. I thought this was going to be almost like new age music or something."

Hitting play on 'Event Beat' reveals that Holy Fuck totally circumvented that idea, as opening track 'Evie' swirls between pulsating bass, punk-funk grooves and luminous synth flourishes to offer an hypnotic calling card for the rest of the album. It was an idea that dated back until 2016's 'Congrats' and that was salvaged after Brian spent six years listening to its initial idea on headphones until they could unlock what made it work. It also provides what he calls an "infinity loop" or a "streaming hack" for fans who play the album on repeat, as the end of the final song, the title track, loops straight into the 'Evie' intro.

At the other extreme, 'Gold Flakes' is a typical "Holy Fuck studio jam" driven by Matt McQuaid's rolling bass. But its dreamy Krautrock march is given an additional flair with a flurry of musique concrète-style sound collage elements which unveils more details with each repeated listen. Instigating movement more than provoking the mind is the swaggering 'Czar', full of popping J. Dilla-ish bass, happy accidents and random chaos that is proving to be a challenge as they plan future live shows. As Brian sighs, "I'll have to get really tight with my imperfections."

'Elevate' is the one track that leans most heavily into those new age preconceptions, but with Holy Fuck being Holy Fuck it takes a detour into the unexpected and keeps layering up fresh sonic elements at every turn. "I really like those epic techno songs like Orbital and Underworld," smiles Graham. "This was my attempt at something like that. Just dance floor euphoria."

Throughout the record, the vocals drift through the ether like a conversation with an imaginary friend. There's no overarching concept, but Brian highlights a recurring motif of momentum "towards something that is beyond personal control, either at the mercy of some bigger system or some unspoken will." And while 'Deleter' called upon guest vocals

more than ever, this time they're conspicuous only by their absence. There was no grand strategy though, just the realisation that the record excelled without them. Brian did, however, call on two members of his spacious semi-classical ambient project Quilting: Mairi Chaimbeul who contributed harp to title-track 'Event Beat', and Sahara Jane Nasr, the South Asian violin-like instrument the sārangī

The album also emerged in the wake of an unexpected Holy Fuck rediscovery after 'Tom Tom' featured in a key scene in Amazon Prime Video hit animated series 'Invincible' - and it's now their most streamed track with twelve times the number of its nearest competitor. Brian and Graham recall a discussion with their then-label, who were somewhere between curious and indifferent about their choice of 'Tom Tom' as a lead single for the 'Congrats' album. As Brian continues, "There's something validating when something happens years later for such a random reason that you wouldn't have predicted."

The unpredictable happened once more when 'Lost Cool' resurfaced in the Academy Award winning body horror 'The Substance'. Graham took the opportunity to see it on the big screen. "I was in the big theater watching it, and then remembering back to listening to the demo that I made of just the drum beat and the synth bassline in my car, cranked up driving through Toronto, just like, this is fun. It's kind of cool to put it all into perspective, and have that cycle happen."

Between those spotlight moments and the vibrancy of 'Event Beat' and it's clear that Holy Fuck are as relevant as ever. It can't be attributed to any one thing. Perhaps it's the conviction to keep going and sticking to their guns regardless of music's latest trends. Maybe it's the pure compulsion to keep at it even after many of their early peers have drifted away. Or it could be them setting an example to younger musicians that playing live off the floor can still be a creative thrill - as demonstrated by their incoming 'At Work' video performance series.

"What I hope people take away from it is an appreciation is the togetherness and the humanity in the music," concludes Graham. "Music should be played and enjoyed together. When that raw punk sound comes off the stage you should just enjoy it and relish that experience. It's wonderful and awesome."