

Mp3 Opal Foxx Quartet - The Love That Won't Shut Up

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What is the sound of the queer southern blues? 11 MP3 Songs ROCK: Southern Rock, CLASSICAL: Musical Theater Details: 1st 6 songs produced by Michael Stipe of REM, if you listen real close you can hear Michael, Vic Chesnutt, and Kelly Hogan singing backup on some of these tracks. Bio and Reviews below.. Opal Foxx Quartet Biography- by Doug DeLoach "I preach the Church without Christ. I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way. Ask me about that church and I'll tell you it's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption." - Hazel Motes in Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood Maybe it's the heat, or the humidity, or, more likely, it was some inexplicable aberration in the gene pool way back before anybody knew there was such a thing as time. For whatever reason, over the course of American history the deep South has produced more than its share of deviant artists. The South has traditionally been a nurturing ground for creative and driven individuals whose work holds up a mirror to the world, a mirror reflecting dark truths and alternate visions to lives self-perceived as somehow cleaner or holier, more politically or morally correct than thou. Look into the reflecting pools created by Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Sing the beautiful sad songs of Hank Williams Sr., Patsy Cline and Merle Haggard. Dredge up all the wild and wonderful misfit characters, horrifying folk tales and bizarre life stories that give the South its distinctly lunatic character, and you've got a start on where this stuff is coming from. Think of Elvis after-shave decanters and black velvet Crucifixion scenes. Picture lime-green tenement homes with neon pink shutters; double-wide trailer whores with two-story bouffants and side-zipping jeans; rooster-tailed rowdy boys with skinny arms, jacked-up Chevys and blood in their eyes; Richard Petty sunglasses, rebel flag purses, country fried funk and honky tonk blues. Atlanta's own community of Southern fried aberrant artists is a loose-knit group of musicians and performers whose songs and poems conjure up the joyful and tragic, sacred and demonic imagery of black and white trash culture. Sometimes referred to as the "redneck underground," it can trace its origins at least as far back as the original Hampton Grease Band in the late-'60's/early 70's, and now includes bands like Slim Chance the Convicts, The Diggers and Redneck GReece De-Lux (who, technically speaking, hail from Athens, GA). If

we can assume such a community actually exists, then the Opal Foxx Quartet is its Spam n' grits core reactor. England's Melody Maker hailed them as the best band at a recent New Music Seminar in New York. Michael Stipe, among others, is similarly smitten. He produced most of the material on the Quartet's CD and was ultimately responsible for the now legendary Big Apple gig. I sat down with Opal Foxx to try to get a handle on what this is all about. Why would somebody like Michael Stipe (who Opal, with no small affection, calls "Bubba") be so interested in such a wacko collection of musicians? In true Southern style, we got too drunk to figure out much. But the following are a few facts and figures, a couple of lies, and several Opal gems that seemed worth passing along. Opal Foxx (or Benjamin, as he is known in civilian life) was born in 1960 in Jonesboro, GA. He discovered at an early age that his orientation didn't quite dovetail with the rest of the community, so he left home and made his way to Atlanta sometime during the late wonder years. Various and sordid adventures followed. He hitchhiked around the country a few times and once traveled from San Francisco to Atlanta by Greyhound bus ("The most horrible experience of my life"). Asked about early influences, Opal replies, "Music was never part of my life until I moved to the country. That's when I learned how to drink tequila and I smoked really good pot and I discovered that country people were the coolest people around." One night at a friend's house somebody put Patti Smith's Houses on the stereo. "I don't know why, but it hit me really hard. I'd never heard songs like that before." Opal learned a lot that night. "Patti Smith made me realize that you don't have to play by the same old rules," he says. "That you can talk about this girl or that boy and it doesn't really matter. It was the first music I'd heard that was blood and guts and sweat and not a slick studio-type thing." Soon after, Opal embarked upon his musical career. Most of the bands with which Opal has performed over the years have been known as much for their outrageous antics as their music. The first group he ever performed with was The Now Explosion, a band renowned for its elaborately tacky costumes and affinity for disco music. The Now Explosion enjoyed a brief period of stardom during the mid-1980's as the unofficial house band at the now-defunct Celebrity Club on Ponce de Leon Avenue. When the band broke up in 1986 some members headed for Metropolis and Michael Musto's column in the Village Voice. Meanwhile, a spirited industrial music and experimental art performance scene was flourishing downtown. Warehouse spaces such as The Pillowtex, and alternative art venues such as the Mattress Factory gallery/performance shows, provided gathering points and interactive laboratories for artists from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Radio programs like Arthur Davis' "Notes from Underground" and

Glen Thrasher's "Destroy All Music" on WREK-FM, and a series of music festivals under the "Destroy All" banner, nurtured an underground subculture that took its aesthetic cues from such bands as Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire and SPK, and performance artists such as Mark Pauline, Joanna Went and Monte Cazzazza. The basic tenet was Anything Goes, from playing instruments made from turntables and ignition coils to constructing flame-throwing self-destructing robots to hanging animal carcasses around your neck. "Destroy All Music' started happening and I realized that just because I couldn't play or sing didn't mean I couldn't be in a band," said Opal. "After that it was band, band, band." Early notoriety came with the group Easturn Stars which Opal described as "four young dykes and a bitter old drag queen." On-stage, members of Easturn Stars didn't so much play music as conduct cathartic rituals, banging pots and pans, strumming and sawing guitars, screaming a lot and removing their clothing at every opportunity. "It was never great music," Opal admitted, "but it came from the heart. More bands followed. Baby Weemus, Treat Me Seth, Blade Emotion. At the latter's debut at the Celebrity Club the entire set was performed in the nude. Naturally, a huge crowd showed up for the next gig. "So we wore granny dresses buttoned up around our necks." "It's funny," Opal says, "All these people love to read about Karen Finley putting yams in her booty. It's so hypocritical. All these cool people want to be cool and read about Mark Pauline and animal parts. They love reading about Psychodrama but they don't want any of it to get too close. I like to call people on things. If people didn't care if I showed my penis, I'd never think about doing it." One other pre-Opal Foxx Quartet collaboration that deserves mentioning is Freedom Puff, Opal's duet with singer-songwriter-guitarist Debbey Richardson. More than just a rant and noise band, though no shortage of ranting and noise-making was forthcoming, Freedom Puff marked a degree of maturity and sophistication in Opal's career as a performer. Richardson's brutally insightful songwriting and unbridled guitar fury inspired Opal to take his music craft more seriously than before. "That was my proudest band," he says, "I didn't have to show my dick. I didn't have to do anything but sing and play." Then, to make a long story short, for some unfathomable reason Opal was invited to host a series of Sunday brunch performances at The Little Five Points Pub. "When we first started doing the Brunch That Hurts' shows," says Opal, "I really dressed out. I wore feathers and wigs and shiny stuff and hose. The opportunity to dress in drag and entertain people at 2 o'clock on Sunday afternoon was just too good to pass up." Two tracks on The Love That Won't Shut Up were recorded during these early shows. Local musicians such as Bill Taft and Neil Fried often played, and Deacon Lunchbox became a regular.

Meanwhile, the seeds of the Opal Foxx Quartet were planted, and it grew into a 10-piece ensemble: Opal, lead vocals; Deacon, assorted percussion, vocals, and brassiere; Brian Halloran, cello; James Pribble, bass; Chris Lopez, guitar; Alan Page, drums; Connie Haynes, piano; Edgar Parker, violin; Bill Taft, cornet guitar; Todd Butler, slide guitar. The band's music has a murky blues-based feel to it, slightly off-kilter, like a tipsy Delta Minstrel. A deep dark melancholic groove pervades even the up-tempo numbers. "The music sounds that way because I'm Southern and I'm blue," Opal said. "I'm very proud to be from the South. Being Southern means you know how to act, you know how to have fun, and you have manners, too." The Opal Foxx Quartet started out playing covers, everything from 'Over The Rainbow' to 'One Tin Soldier.' Later, the band's songbook filled out with mostly original tunes. "My boys write the music," Opal notes like a proud papa. "I bring the lyrics." Well, sort of. "I sometimes use lyrics and bits of things from other people," he says. "I've stolen lyrics from great local musicians like Grady Cousins, Tracy Terrill and Amy Ray." Opal calls Terrill "one of the greatest songwriters I've ever known." The reclusive singer-guitarist, who hasn't performed publicly for some time, is responsible for Opal's favorite song, 'Clean White Bed.' Opal recites a couple of lines: "I'll probably keep behaving like the boys I've loved forever / But the truth is they could not rescue me / The truth is I cannot rescue you." Asked about his own method for writing songs, Opal replies, "I don't really have a set way of doing things. It's usually when I'm feeling, uh, better, as opposed to [experiencing] reality. But, wait, that's not really true, because reality is when you're the saddest and I much prefer a sad song. Crying is much more of a release than laughing. Look at 'Over The Rainbow.' That song can be so happy and then it can be so sad." Will the Opal Foxx Quartet find success amidst the sadness? Can a misfit Southern boy in a cotton print dress find happiness in this here post-industrial wasteland? "None of us have ever said the words, 'We're gonna make it.' What gets me off is creating magic with my band." OPAL FOXX QUARTET The Love That Won't Shut Up REVIEWS The Bob Atlantan Tom Waits sound-alike Opal, a.k.a. Benjamin, assembled the "Quartet" - actually a ten piece ensemble - in the late-1980's, joining various experimental Atlanta talent to form this disturbingly brilliant band. Opal's confrontational aspects, combined with a discernible Southern Gothic deviance, outstanding musicianship, and self-conscious humor, turn The Love That Won't Shut Up into a twisted, essential, posthumous masterpiece. From the psychedelic folk of "Frail Body" to the eerie, tragic "Dirt," OFQ twists from a spectacle to an incredibly well-functioning unit. All the while, Benjamin's torturous examinations of life, love, and depravity spill throughout, backed by the colorful Quartet's steel

guitar, violin, cello, cornet, electric guitar, drums, and keyboards. A true visit to the underground, you couldn't ask for a more direct, provocative, or powerful release. - by Mark Woodlief

Puncture As RuPaul flounces down international runways and into the hearts of mid-America, fellow Atlantan Opal Foxx pushes a different envelope. Opal (once Benjamin) is a drag-queen sodomite in combat boots and granny dress whose quartet expands into a ten-piece ensemble of wool-capped potheads and bib overalled rednecks (one of whom, chainsaw toting Deacon Lunchbox, died in the tragic car accident that claimed half of the Jody Grind). These vivid personal details would count for less if the music were merely adequate in a deviant-artsy sort of way. But when Foxx opens the shutters of his lungs and bellows like some punk disciple of Tom Waits (call up the gruff melody Waits warbles in "Jersey Girl", its close), with his band pumping vintage pop, country and R&B chord progressions stolen from Neil Diamond, Boyce Hart, Patti Smith, Wilson Pickett, and even Sonny Curtis (a loving rendition here of the "Mary Tyler Moore" theme) it's as pure and unaffected a synthesis of rock as you'll find east of the Chattahoochee river. That's how you should take it, too, before Interview does the inevitable layout and novelty eclipses riffs. If you want weirdness, it's in the music: "Dirt" is a tale of self-loathing with lo-fi cello-trumpet-percussion twists casting a dark cloud. If you want punk cabaret, the cover of "I Don't Know How To Love Him" is one part piano ballad, one part wedding march, and numerous parts stream-of-consciousness rant. Or if you want an anthemic rocker, laced with steel guitar, violin, and non-clichd vocal passion, turn to "Frail Body"; the melody will stick to you like flypaper. - by Fred Mills

Option If a one-night stand in Atlanta between Tom Waits and Captain Beefheart spawned an openly gay, cross dressing love child, it couldn't have produced anything more unique than Opal Foxx. (On "Blue Exception" the late Deacon Lunchbox introduces Foxx as "the man, the wo-man, the paragon of mental health, Miss Opal Foxx.") Despite Foxx's tongue-in-cheek admonitions that the crowd give it up for a "faggot" with a rocking band at the beginning of "M.T.M." (more accurately "Love Is All Around," the Mary Tyler Moore theme song), the quartet plays moody folk/rock, a blusier version of 10,000 Maniacs. Foxx has all the sweat, piss, jizz, and blood Natalie Merchant lacks, though, shriek-growling his way through a series of songs (a mix of live tracks and studio cuts) that alternate between hard-headed and soft hearted, personal reactions to homophobia bouncing off a sentimental paeon to "Christmas." (Ironically, Merchant's buddy Michael Stipe produced six of the 11 songs here.) The album's not focused enough to succeed completely, but anybody who makes Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice rock hard deserves

your attention. - by Eddie Huffman Ray Gun Atlanta's Opal Foxx Quartet isn't a quartet at all, and Opal Foxx is actually the alter ego of Benjamin, a Jonesboro, Georgia-born young man with a Tom Waits-like croon and a penchant for thrift-store dresses. In late 1992, I witnessed this ten-piece ensemble assault Atlantans. Opal stumbled onto the stage - eyes glassy, voice cigarette choked and a thousand shades of blue - to entertain and confront, plunging into "Blue Exception," a song steeped in warm, poignant keyboards, twisting electric and slide guitar riffs, spine-tingling violin and hearty cello. Theatrical, thoroughly inebriated and crying out for amphetamine nourishment, Opal performed brilliantly, tenderly, and maniacally. As powerful a live act that Opal Foxx is, it seemed unlikely this group could pull off a recording. They've pulled it off extremely well, in fact, peppering this 11-song disc with five live tracks and the rest produced by Michael Stipe, whose had an interest in the group for some time. The Love That Won't Shut Up is frank, startling, and mesmerizing, ranging from its bizarre covers (Andrew Lloyd Webber, the "Mary Tyler Moore" theme song) to hearty Dream Syndicate-styled originals ("Nightingale"), sweet, haunting ballads ("Christmas"), and agonizing tales of personal struggle. On one track, you'll meet Opal's tap dancing relative, Laurel, from "Boise, Maryland." Finally, you'll yowl your approval when Opal queries: "For a drag queen, for a faggot, do I have a rockin' band or what?!" -by Mark Woodlief Request Even a just-the-facts-ma'am description of Opal Foxx Quartet, a 10-piece lounge-blues combo fronted by a drag queen with a Bangle's look and Tom Waits' voice, sounds like something out of The Twilight Zone. But don't get the idea that the Atlanta bands stunning debut, The Love That Won't Shut Up (Long Play) is a mere freak show. Fried synapses reveal themselves in covers of "I Don't Know How To Love Him" and Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," but originals such as "Frail Body" and the Hawaiian rhumba "Sleep" capture a band at the crossroads of modern art and the blues. -by David Sprague People who are interested in Tom Waits Nick Cave Nina Simone should consider this download.

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