

BABYLON CIRCUS

Babylon Circus are back, so listen up.

They've done more than just change or even progress: they've undergone a complete renaissance.

And they're as powerful as ever on stage: in terms of explosive live performance, Babylon Circus have little to fear from the competition, here or anywhere. Then when you've felt the cold hand of death on your shoulder, it does tend to alter your view of life, leaving you with different things to say.

More profound, more important things... and that's apparent right from the start of their new album, which is going to win these buccaneers (we're prepared to bet on this) the massive recognition they deserve!

It all began in Lyon in 1995 (or even two or three years earlier, given that David and Manu have been making music together since they were thirteen). The duo are the mainstays of Babylon Circus, its two spokesmen and singers - although Manu was a drummer for many years, until he decided he'd had enough of lurking behind his kit and stepped up to become David's "faithful left winger". Today, in the Porte de Clignancourt cellar where they honed the new album's eleven tracks, the pair work with seven partners in crime who are at least as mad about music as they are: Georges on guitar, Olive on keyboards, Dadé on drums, Basile on bass, Rimbaud on accordion and saxophone, Laurent on trumpet and Clément on trombone. Quite a set-up! Once, there were clowns (more Bérurier Noir than Coco), which led to the name Babylon Circus. Some arrived; others left. Naturally... with a band of around ten musicians, there's bound to be a little ebb and flow, especially when the group clocks up 900 concerts in more than 30 countries.

Ireland was one of those 30 countries. There was a festival in Dublin. The next day, the group decided to go busking in the street in the heart of the bar district. A quarter of an hour later, the road was jam-packed and the police came to move the crowd on. Fans offered the band a drink as consolation for the truncated concert, so the police came back again: in the land of Guinness, there's no open-air drinking, mister. The subsequent row in pidgin English ended up with David in the cells for a day as the only one of the band clumsy enough to get caught during the chase (yes, instead of running in front of the cops, he ran behind them, so it only took one officer to turn

round and the lad was nicked). A beating, police custody, a caution and court appearance: what a performance!

Russia was also among the 30 countries: Moscow, city of contrasts, home to a proud race... of heavy drinkers. Tanking up with bathtub vodka may not be the best of ideas when you haven't had a wink of sleep for 48 hours after two concerts and an exhausting journey, and all this on Friday 13th. So why were the cigarettes left in the dressing room one floor below, down a stupid, treacherous flight of stairs? When they found David at the foot of the stairs with his skull cracked that day, they thought he was dead. He was rushed to A&E. The prognosis was bleak.

David: "I lost twelve days of my life. Double concussion. I couldn't speak French for a while or even feel a thing, I turned into a Mr. Hyde. Endless weeks of hospital tourism. In fact, that was nearly it for me. I ended up suffering from deep, deep depression and after-effects that are still on the mend."

To battle the blues, Babylon Circus decided on shock treatment. Just four months after the accident, the group appeared in New York's Central Park. They were all looking pale. The singer was listless, apathetic, withdrawn and aphasic. But then something clicked on stage. David: "The band kept me afloat. I would have sunk without them. We gave around twenty concerts in summer 2007, then began to work on the new album. And here we are."

The fourth album in ten years, no less. After their 100% indie period, we remember the group being looked after by Yelen, a Sony subsidiary that nurtured such untamed pedigree acts as Tryo, Java and La Rue Ketanou.

New life

We knew Babylon Circus as an alternative rock band back in the days of *Dances Of Resistance* (2004); now we find them in off-road mode, still with every last milliwatt of their all-consuming energy. Once, David's band listed The Clash / Mano Negra / Bob Marley as their influences. Today, they freely lay claim to other inspirations, including Higelin, Renaud and Téléphone. This comes across in their music. Add the dramatic events mentioned above and you get songs that no longer look to the papers for their inspiration, but rather everyday life, feelings and even - yes, anything's possible! - love stories. Or friendship. Or both. Like *Marions-nous* (Let's get married), introducing a 'Bonnie & Clyde' style couple engaged in daydream nuptials. David: "I'd actually say the style was 'Buster Keaton meets Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas', but it's up to you. Anyway, I thought it was fantastic, getting together and finding all that synergy with Eugenio Recuenco, who's mainly a fashion photographer from a sophisticated, outré world. He directed the *Marions-nous* video, where I talk to Karina Zeviani, a model and singer with Brazilian roots who, apart from her own group, sings with Thievery Corporation and Nouvelle Vague."

On *Marions-nous* and *Nina*, David tried his hand at co-writing (with musicologist, violinist, music teacher and composer Jérémy Dirat).

L'Envol (Takeoff), is a Babylon Circus revamp of a song given them by Erwan from Paris quartet Java. Then there's *Le Fils caché du pape* (The Pope's secret son), a song by Mickaël Furnon of Mickey 3D.

David: "Mickaël helped me with the vocals. I had to avoid overplaying the lyrics. I had to put them across as neutrally as possible to increase their effectiveness.

In real life, I'm more the Clash's *Daddy Was A Bank Robber* than the Holy Father's son. My real dad, I don't really know... I've seen him two or three times in my life, between two stretches in jail. I owe everything to my uncle and his group Les Barbarins Fourchus. It was him who showed me the basics on the guitar, who had me busk and pass round the hat for the first time at the Lille Grande Braderie. I was 14. At school, when they asked me what I wanted to do later, I put "rock singer". My teachers and classmates laughed. Well, they were wrong!"

Babylon Circus have covered Les Barbarins Fourchus's *La Cigarette* - the one lit up after making love, like Charles Dumont, but more cheerful.

So it's been touch and go for Babylon Circus. David had his brush with death, coming so close he felt its touch, before knocking it back with a firm "Go to hell!". He's seen the world turned upside-down. The sky has fallen on his head and now he wears it like a cap. Anyway, Babylon Circus are off again on a never-ending tour, crossing the country from end to end. The country? What am I saying? The world!

Gilles Verlant

New album on the 9th March

"1st single: "Marions-nous au soleil" (Let's get married in the sun)