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Nat and Megan:
"The Cocteau Twins
swallowing The
Stanley Brothers"

'Burbs of paradise

Belated UK release from rapturous, Brooklyn-based dream-poppers

The Last Town Chorus

THE LAST TOWN CHORUS BLAST FIRST PETITE

★★★★

FIRST ISSUED IN their native USA in 2002, this highly seductive debut is finally set to spellbind a whole new set of languid disciples. Floating on the lap-steel and thawed-crystal voice of songwriter Megan Hickey, and anchored by Nat Guy's understated guitar-plucking, the sound they make is a liquid tension of urban and rural, transplanted souls with an impossible longing for the best of both. In their own words, they "feel canals, flight patterns, subway rumbles and riverbeds". More specifically, by pushing lap-steel to the forefront (soaked in reverb and delay), it's the stark economy of old-time folk adrift in the rich dreamscape of '80s pop. Welch and Rawlings bathed in the oceanic rapture of AR Kane, perhaps. Or, as Hickey herself describes their sound to *Uncut*, "The Cocteau Twins swallowing The Stanley Brothers."

Both Hickey and Guy grew up on the fringes of suburbia (she in Pennsylvania, he from Delaware farm stock), pooling interests as diverse as Culture

Club, Joni Mitchell and Hendrix once they'd relocated to Brooklyn. They're clearly smitten with New York, evinced most passionately by "Dear City", an open love letter scored by abrupt ascents and dips of steel, minimal guitar and organ providing the faintly paranoid undertow. As Hickey becomes lost in steaming city heatwaves, she declares: "We're all freaks without fear/We float up your avenues/And we ring in your ears".



But it's a spirit in constant transit, hankering for the red midsummer skies of the country on "Ten Mile" (with filmy frontier-town ambience) or singing 'til dawn down by the

lake on "Little Star". Imprinted by memory and place it may be – each with its own peculiar resonance – but it's not always cosy. "Brooklyn Navy Yard, 1950" begs her returning lover to "please leave town" after years away ("seven fucking letters is all you wrote"), against subtle backwards effects and upright bass, while "State Fair" recounts the grisly tale of a teenage thrill-ride tragedy, set to steel shivers, urgent flurries of guitar and a sickly beautiful carousel waltz. Hickey's voice is never less than hypnotic, the cool clarity of Laura Veirs combined with Cat Power's lonely ache. Highly recommended. ROB HUGHES

Q&A

Megan Hickey on New York, Boy George and ditching the nine-to-five



UNCUT: How much of an inspiration is New York?

HICKEY: The enormity of the human life force here is a daily marvel to me, and it's both exhilarating and exhausting at once. The music is so much about this... "Dear City" was written in late 2001, in the months when New York was still cloaked in soot and smoke, but everyone

here was sliding back into life, even more vibrantly than before – including me. I knew that I couldn't leave anytime soon.

What's this about Boy George being your idol?

You Britons just love to flog Boy George. He made brilliant, soulful pop records. And I adore his sense of daring. Actually, he turned up at a recent show we did in

New York, but he was in a very cranky mood, so we didn't cross paths.

Are you now a full-time musician?

Alas, I continue to slave over a hot laptop here in New York. Perhaps a goodly number of *Uncut* readers will pick up the album and thus liberate me sooner rather than later. Could that be arranged?