

My Old Kentucky Blog, APRIL 18, 2008

This album is really a pleasant surprise and holds up surprisingly well to repeated listens, but for me, everything comes together on Power To Change. Drummer Steve Ferrone (of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers) and bassist John Aldridge get the song moving with a groove that borrows liberally from the aforementioned Life During Wartime as well as Bob Marley's Exodus. From there, Harrison builds verses purposefully; adding layer upon layer of keyboard and percussion to create a snaky, pulsating mass of abstract sound that recalls the best Berlin Bowie/Eno collaborations. Top it off with vocalist Scott Butler's inspired yelping and transient tics and what you are left with is pure ass-shakin' pabulum. Garnish with olives or lemon twist, and clear the dancefloor.

SXSW Platters

The Austin Chronicle, March 2008

BY AUSTIN POWELL

The Black & White Years
(Brando)

The Black & White Years hearken back to a simpler time – 1977 to be exact. The local quartet's eponymous debut sounds like an updated version of the Talking Heads, with angular post-punk guitar carefully structured over jittery synths and polyrhythmic beats. Probably not coincidental, then, is the LP's production by former Talking Head keyboardist Jerry Harrison, who ensures that every layer of sound has its own space to breathe, particularly in opener "A Wetter Sea" and Technicolor ballad "My Broken Hand." Like David Byrne, vocalist Scott Butler seethes with cynical, hyperintellectual lyricism, most evident on "Power to Change," which reads like a summation of God, Germs, and Steel. The disco-glam of "Everyone" and closer "Zeroes and Ones" lean closer to Of Montreal circa The Sunlandic Twins, while "Hysterical Sickness" and "Evil Ape" add hot flashes of surf guitar, the latter boasting a psychedelic organ and mariachi trumpets. Everything sounds familiar, but it's rarely ever sounded better. (Thursday, March 13, Maggie Mae's Gibson Room, 9pm.) ★★★ ½ (out of four)

*"The ... eponymous LP...carries all the Heads' trademarks: scattershot guitar, snaking synths, and quirky, hyperintelligent lyricism." – **The Austin Chronicle, January 2008***

*"... the band reaches for a variety of inspirations to conjure up an eclectic mix of electro-beats, new-wave styled bass lines, and scorching six-string splendor, combined with forays into reggae and ska territories. It is all maintained by Scott Butler's distinct vocal style (as well as impeccable production courtesy of Harrison.) "You Are A Dragon" and "Evil Ape" are crisp ditties, coupling synth powered pop and catchy melodies, while "Everyone" and "Power To Change" incorporate the ska tendencies of the band. The cream of the crop here is "Broken Hand", which fluctuates between calm synth nuances and thumping electro-pop. Also included is an affecting ode to Tejas, "Dense History", ... the album wraps up with the triumphant sizzle of "Zeroes And Ones." All in all, the record is full of unexpected twists and turns, leaving behind a versatile collection of songs suitable for late night dance floor festivities or early morning bathroom activities. – **Soundcheck Magazine, February 2008***

*"genre-blurring, squiggly synth rock" "Difficult to classify" "The Black and White Years aren't what you've heard before, evenly spiking their take on contemporary rock with enough surprises to keep their debut interesting for multiple listens." "If such a thing as a forward-thinking retro band exists, The Black and White Years are it." "Harrison's production sounds pristine."- **The Austinist, November 2007***

*"While they don't actually sound like them, The Black and White Years deserve comparison to the Talking Heads in the way they elicit quirky embellishments and innovative arrangements while retaining a catchy, tap-along pop feel. Gently rubbing shoulders with an assortment of styles, random pianos, congas and synth strings are intuitively weaved in and out of every track, creating a lush, pop sound that's close to perfection. Anything but black and white, these five songs range in hue from "Run, Run, Run," a slow samba-tinged Caribbean jam to "Power to Change," which traces its lineage back to Blondie and the Talking Heads. Other cuts are more on the ambient side but even here vocalist Scott Butler invokes the David Byrne way of stuttering as he sings" - **Austin Music Magazine, January 2007***

The "feel good" story of SXSW 2009 might have been local, buzz-worthy band The Black and White Years, which recently took home five Austin Music Awards, including best new band, song of the year and best producer, the latter for former Talking Heads keyboardist-guitarist Jerry Harrison.

Harrison stumbled across *The Black and White Years* at a small performance at SXSW in 2007. He liked their sound and decided to produce their debut album.

"People think when you play these South by Southwest things that nothing ever happens. Sometimes it does. You've got to be skilled at your instrument, but it takes a little luck. You just never know, it might happen," said drummer Billy Potts. – **CNN.COM, March 2009**

"True to its name, *The Black And White Years* treads a fine line between soulful funk and reggae (the black) and twitchy art-rock (the white), much like its obvious forebears in Talking Heads. Fitting then that the post-punk trio so impressed that band's Jerry Harrison at this year's SXSW that he jumped at the chance to help craft the follow-up to their infectious debut *Real! In Color!*, due this fall. Of course, no band that gets compared to Talking Heads these days actually sounds like Talking Heads, but damned if *The Black And White Years* doesn't come awfully close, wrapping reggae stabs of guitar around sinewy bass grooves and topping it off with the anxious yelps of singer Scott Butler and there's even a hint of *Of Montreal* in there for the kids. *The white boys done did it again.*" - **The Onion, August 2007**

ACL Scene Report: Rock the Vote party at the Blender Music Lounge

By [Melanie Spencer](#) | Sunday, September 28, 2008

Austin's ***the Black and White Years*** took the stage and they tore it up. If attendees were tired from the festival, it did not show during this performance. By the time they played the second to last song, "Power of Change," the room was pulsating and obviously ready for a lot more than just one more. Every electro-pop beat and every crazy face vocalist Scott Butler issued in order to hit those high notes left me thinking that Devo and the Killers had a baby and named it the Black and White Years. Butler's white polyester jogging jacket, white pants and mint green framed glasses also added to the Devo-esque vibe.

ACL Review: Black & White Years

By [Michael Corcoran](#) | Saturday, September 27, 2008

The Austin Ventures stage manager went a bit overboard Saturday ordering the plug to be pulled on **Austin's brilliant Black & White Years** during the band's final song, "Zeroes and Ones." The rude overreaction marred an otherwise splendid set by the quartet with the angular guitar riffs and herky jerky new wave-isms. The final four numbers - "Hysterical Sickness," "My Broken Hand," "Power To Change" and about 3/4 of "Zeroes and Ones" - established Scott Butler and company as a fresh force on the scene and a safe bet to go national. Looks like they picked up quite a few new fans, though none in the festival staging business.

Official ACL Antics Toyota Matrix party by Filter Featuring The Black and White Years and CSS. By [Melanie Spencer](#) | Saturday, September 27, 2008

The last of the Austin City Limits Festival attendees had barely cleared out of Zilker Park before a long line was already forming at the Antics Toyota Matrix party by Filter. The invite-only party was held in a crusty old bungalow in heart of the Red River area, but even barbed wire strung across the top of the fence and a burly door man didn't stop crashers from trying — albeit unsuccessfully — to get through the gate. Once in, the next challenge was wading through throngs of painfully hip guests, who were taking advantage of the free vodka drinks, wine and beer. The house was bumpin' with tunes spun by **The Black and White Years, who had the place grooving** to the likes of Prince, Michael Jackson and Hall and Oates. Large screens flashed colorful Toyota graphics and guests lounged in Adirondack chairs and milled about the yard. It was quite the atmosphere.

The Black and White Years

Sat., Sept 27, Noon-12:30 / Austin Ventures

The noon slot we understand; some excitement needs to be stacked early. But why the short 30-minute set? Good thing it only takes *The Black & White Years* but a minute tops to win crowds over to the dancing side of life. The young, Austin synth-pop quartet were already receiving Talking Heads comparisons when, during SXSW 2007, Jerry Harrison (Talking Heads keyboardist) caught their live set and instantly became B&WY's biggest fan, signing on to produce their debut album. The resulting electro-dance rock is obscenely fun, a quality sometimes overlooked in indiedom. No strangers to unsuspecting crowds, B&WY were invited to

MIDEM (like SXSW, only larger, been around longer, and held in Cannes, France) in January 2008, where the crowd response was so exuberant, festival organizers went on to say they've never seen anything like it in history. So there you have it; the world agrees you should make sure you're up, through the gate, and stage-side before noon.

HOME: OCTOBER 3, 2008: MUSIC

ACL Live Shots

BY DOUG FREEMAN

The Black & White Years

Saturday, Sept. 27, Zilker Park

The Black & White Years' high-noon showdown set Saturday's tone with an electric, jittery jolt. Grinning and bopping about the stage, Scott Butler's frantic vocals were accentuated by his convulsive shudders on "Hysterical Sickness," the local quartet's pulse throbbing like a more melodic version of !!!'s dance punk. "Everyone" grooved with easy lilt, while new tune "Smoke and Mirrors" contorted and trembled behind the band's evolving complex lyrics. It was the anthemic bursts of "My Broken Hand" and "Power to Change" from this year's eponymous debut that most inspired the crowd to move, the former jumping in raggedly shifting rhythms and a pummeling bass line, while the latter raced behind Butler's irresistible pop swagger. Given a half-hour slot, the Black & White Years capitalized on the spotlight, proving as effective on the bigger stage as they are in the clubs.

From *American Songwriter*, August 2008

Austin's The Black and White Years will not be found wasting away in a Texas roadhouse any time soon. On their latest eponymous effort (Brando Records; is it just me, or does summer appear to be too hot a season to bother with album titles?) the quirky quartet makes scintillating dance pop that recalls early Talking Heads and Captain Beefheart, libertine vaudeville circa 1976 Berlin. It may or may not be significant that one of their members is proudly credited not with an instrument but Chilean Sea Bass; then again, music this perky and invigorating could not possibly be created without the suggested daily intake of iron and protein. "I nearly broke your hand trying to hold it...nearly broke your heart when you opened it," croons Scott Butler, just before his band double the time signature and sashays him off to yet another temporary disaster.

The Cusp

Don't Know Them?

Chances Are You Will Soon.

Austin Monthly Magazine, May 2008

by Paul Carrubba

The Black And White Years isn't the first band to tire of Nashville and move to Austin. Yet this group has little in common with the Cosmic Cowboys of yore and everything to do with the synth-pop sound of the Reagan years. "I'm lost in this whole '80s thing," says bassist John Aldridge.

The band has spanned decades in its year-and-a-half existence. "Power to Change," from its debut self-titled LP, is getting heavy spins on 101x. In March, the guys took the stage at the mayor's South by Southwest kickoff party, and before that, they played a showcase at the MIDEM music industry conference in Cannes. They plan to do more touring and record a new EP this summer and release a new album by year's end.

After finishing college in Nashville, Scott Butler (vocals/guitar), Landon Thompson (guitar/synthesizers) and Aldridge were tired of the commerciality there. "It isn't really our scene," says Thompson. So they headed to Austin in search of a community where they felt more at home.

They started here as a folksy band called The Trees, but soon after arriving, their drummer took off with little notice. They had a choice: break up or change their sound. The answer came in the form of a synthesizer Aldridge brought home one day. With the new toy, the boys' sound was transformed. Armed with a drum machine, the trio morphed into a dance-rock outfit. Former Talking Heads Jerry Harrison took notice at SXSW 2007 and produced their debut LP. When they outgrew the drum machine, drummer Billy Potts stepped in. "Having Billy, it feels less like a toy band," says Thompson.

Their first record is hip-shaking cool. Butler's smooth vocals give an after-dark vibe to the

proggy melodies. "A Wetter Sea" oozes with new-wave style, while the brooding yet playful "Power to Change" hops like a long-lost Madness track with electronic flourishes and rock bravado. "Everyone" skanks like a Jamaican spaghetti western, and "Hysterical Sickness" pulsates with fist-pumping aggression. This album isn't just for hipper-than-thou scenesters. It's music that everyone can get together and dance to.