

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT:

THE QUIET ROOM

CUNEIFORM [RUNE 204]

2005

Line-up: Alec K. Redfearn (accordion, piano, vocals, etc.); Margie Wienk (string bass, vocals); Alec Thibodeau (guitar); Ann Schattle (horn); Olivia Geiger (violin); Matt McLaren (drums); Chris Saraullo (percussion); Jason McGill (alto sax, etc.); Frank Difficult (electronics and processing)
Guest Musicians: Sara Stalnaker (cello); Matt Everett (viola)

“...They certainly deserve much wider recognition; their experimental Balkan/East European folk-inspired music is not only cleverly conceived, but executed with wit, style, and just a hint of darkness... Goth elements are reinforced by three minor-key vocal tracks with artfully morbid lyrics. ...Redfearn’s wheezy, rhythmic accordions, both amplified and unamplified, are the dominant instrumental sound, and while much of his playing has an authentic folk base, his compositions and arrangements are filled with eccentric embellishments and exaggerations. Drones and repeated riffs in many pieces take on a hypnotic, almost obsessive quality, giving the music an almost demonic urgency. It’s clear that minimalists such as Steve Reich have been a source of inspiration... the minimalist sensibility is wedded to modal folk melodies, with some skronky free jazz energy... along with occasional, totally unexpected electronic treatments, the most arresting of which are the beeper tone and then repeated rhythmic busy back signal on “Coke Bugs.” The use of telephone sounds brings to mind another similarly oriented futuristic folk group, Simon Jeffes’ marvelous Penguin Cafe Orchestra... The affectionate distortion of traditional materials is common to both bands, and both serve (or served) as vehicles for the vision of an individual leader. ...But...Alec K. Redfearn & the Eyesores...have a rougher, more visceral sensibility. They offer experimental future folk with elements of real dirt and sweat – and a touch of mania. Highly recommended.” – Bill Tilland, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“...this Providence, Rhode Island nontet of reeds, strings, acoustic bass, drums, percussion, guitar, keys and even alarm clock and paper cutter breeze through this pan-folk, jazz and blues continuous song cycle of waltzes, drones, funeral dirges, dances, and ballads with an assured confidence that is breathtaking. One of the dangers of this kind of genre-blending, especially in roots music, is that it tends to be a little too polite and earnest... In this case, though, **this ensemble isn’t afraid to experiment**, whether it be the musique concrete samples and biting electronics on the Waitsian “Coke Bugs” or the innovative accordion/sax dub of “Portuguese Man O’ War” dub or the raucous Sonic Youth guitar; thereby, **giving this gorgeous amalgam of 20th Century Americana, cabaret and theater music, Eastern European folk, noise rock and minimalism, a bracing textural snap**. ...wonderful ensemble interplay...” – Richard Moule, *Signal to Noise*, #38, Summer 2005

“Accordionist Alec K. Redfearn heads up the Eyesores...whose stylistic influences are widespread: Gypsy music, experimental American composers such as Partch and Oliveros, folk, cabaret, and noise rock. This type of mélange sound like it shouldn’t work... On the contrary; *The Quiet Room*, their latest release on Cuneiform, is a delight.

Bizarre instrumentals like the electronica-laden “Coke Bugs” and phase chamber work “Morphine Drip” sit side by side with the TMBG-influenced indie rock song “The Bible Lite” and the hypnotic gypsy trance “Slo-Mo;” a motley, but entertaining, assortment. ...

...after hearing all of the wondrous hi-jinks on *The Quiet Room*, who would want them to change a thing?”

– Christian Carey, *Copper Press*, 2/7/05, www.copperpress.com

“Falling somewhere between psych-folk revival and free jazz, constructed from a diverse and unfashionable set of instruments including accordion, strings, glockenspiel, telephone and pots and pans, Alec K. Redfearn and the Eyesores’ fourth full-length is as bizarre as it is appealing. The pieces change from moment to moment, evoking Eastern European folksongs, Indian sitar music, multi-part madrigals and the sweet-sour celebration of circus music. Although largely organic and hand-fashioned, the tracks also include a substantial measure of electronic sounds...

...his work has a definite theatrical flair. ...all of these pieces...are as much stage-set as free-standing compositions, a space against which unusual and foreign activities might be acted out.

The Quiet Room is divided between longer, more fully-realized pieces and short sound experiments. ...Only the longer pieces provide the space required to appreciate Redfearn’s skilled and collaborative band...who weave an interlocking tapestry of rhythms, harmonies and dissonances.

...during “Punjabi/Watery Grave”, the drum’s pulse provides a foundation for arabesques of violin and accordion, with occasional flourishes of guitar. The sounds never move in unison, instead finding the space around one another in a way that simply would not be possible if the band were less able or less familiar with each other.

The album is mostly instrumental, but vocals occasionally rise out of the texture of the tracks – and when they do, they’re used more as instruments than conveyers of meaning. ...

Many of the best tracks have no words, no voices at all, and are no less interesting for it. ...The title track, with its hazy, hanging tones that shimmer and shift, is pure, brain-stem-level psychotropia, acting on you in ways that elude and precede words. ...

This is wonderful stuff – brave and experimental, yet warmly human. Make room on your folk revival shelf for something that may be influenced by folk, but is in no way a revival.

– Jennifer Kelly, *Splendid*, 3/29/2005, www.splendidmagazine.com

“...Like an avant-rock “marching”-chamber-band their energy is simply captivating. ...musically a lot happens. “Punjabi/Watery Grave” is especially hypnotic. This track is...based upon this hypnotic one note rhythm that could be heard on an Indian hit... Perhaps the most brilliant track on the album...”

A splendid, highly recommended release. Perfect from beginning to end. 4.5 STARS”

– Gerald Van Waes, *Progressive Homestead*, March 2005, progressive.homestead.com

“...homespun intimacy...on this recording by a band that tends to shun brightness and gaiety. “Providence is haunted,” so the booklet notes tell us – something one might attribute to...Lovecraft and his “Old Ones.” ...Led by accordion and winds, with occasional guitar and frequent detours through contrasting textural and mood breaks, Alec Redfearn’s music turns up a clever American twist on the Art Bears/Zamla axis, unafraid to admit having absorbed influences from klezmer and Balkan traditions as well. Alternately there is a gloomy, almost post-rock muse speaking to this band, which appears on the few vocal tracks. *The Quiet Room* doesn’t dazzle you with mind-boggling compositional structure, but rather locks quickly into grooves of minimal development...implying...that **simplicity trumps when shooting for the outre**. ...**place them next to Hamster Theatre and Non Credo on the most approachable side of current American R.I.O. music.**” – Michael Ezzo, *Exposé*, Roundtable Review, #32, Sept. 2005

“...Like label mates Hamster Theater, they’ve completely absorbed the folk influences of Eastern Europe and woven them into a complex musical fabric of their own creation, while retaining an aggression and attitude that gives them a unique twisted character and separates them from the rest of the pack... With accordion front and center courtesy of Mr. Redfearn...a rhythm section of string bass, drums, and multiple percussionists drives the bottom end and creates the structures, while lively guitars, bowed strings, saxes, horns and various electronic gadgetry carry the fragments of melodic turmoil that fill in behind the accordion’s lead. There are...decent vocals...but only on a handful of tracks. There’s plenty going on here to capture

the listener's imagination, and for a band that plays most of their pieces in odd time meter, these folks flat-out rock. ...Those looking for melodic adventure need look no further – the Eyesores deliver the goods and even give you a little extra.”

– Peter Thelen, *Exposé*, Roundtable Review, #32, Sept. 2005

“...a twisted American rock ensemble who capture the bustle and out-of-sequence nature of modern life in their music. ...Individual pieces are often built on themes reminiscent of Scandinavian and East European folk music, with pseudo-minimalist repetition and part layering creating a sense of building, at its best like a combination of Samla Mamma and Velvet Underground. The group is promiscuous in its influences, with a clear appreciation of out jazz and soundtrack-style collages of music and background noises. The vocal parts are infrequent, melodically inventive, and ultimately fairly unobtrusive. ...*The Quiet Room* is one of my top ten releases of the year.”

– Sean McPhee, *Exposé*, Roundtable Review, #32, Sept. 2005

“...The Night It Rained Glass On Union Street is a piece that combines the Middle-Eastern feel of say Alamaailman Vasarat with the angular rock of King Crimson and Present. Sometimes, the music proceeds in a light cabaret like style, other times the tension drips from the music. ...
...Punjabi/Watery Grave... has some mesmerizing, trippy guitars... we hear the combination of the relatively frolic folk melodies and the Crimonesque instrumentation (although more world-music-like than KC). The band can be compared to Paranoise, although this combo seems less rocking, more avant-garde and less serious. ...

Morphine Drip...reminds me of...the minimalist elements of Steve Reich. ...

This is quite a unique album. Take a dose of angular rock, add doses of minimalism, cabaret and quite a lot of Balkan folk influences and you get something that can sound like Steve Reich or Alamaailman Vasarat (although not in the same track). ...they are strongly linked to the avant-garde with which they also share a sense of humor. What makes this band stand out, is the link to the music of Present and King Crimson, which adds the necessary tension in places. ...”

– Jurriaan Hage, *Axiom of Choice*, Oct. 2005, www.cs.uu.nl

“...music writing is typically a thankless occupation. ...For every promo that's even moderately appealing, there are heaping piles of digitally encoded shite that aren't even worth their weight in plastic...but once in a long while you do find something that completely blows you away. *That*, that moment when you realize that such-and-such album is one of the most exciting things you've heard in a long time or that such-and-such band has changed the way you think about music forever, that makes it *all* worth it. ...

...I had a moment like that while working on the review for Alec K. Redfearn & The Eyesores' *Every Man For Himself & God Against All*. ...What I discovered was an immaculately composed world of metaphorically ripe lyricism set against a kind of earnest musicianship that I'd scarcely believed existed. ...

...at his core Redfearn is basically just one of those artists and musicians who's profoundly unburdened by the kind of musical preconceptions that divide the scene into hostile factions and sub-genres. **He doesn't seem to be trying to make indie-rock or noise-rock or punk or experimental-whatever, he's pretty much just making music... quite beautiful music.**

...his new album *The Quiet Room*...**I would today describe as one of the strongest records to come out in '05.** With much richer production-values and a fuller arrangement, *The Quiet Room* takes a decidedly more musical tack than *Every Man*..., reducing Redfearn/Margie Wienk's vocals to a more peripheral role and giving room for the ensemble's wholly unique brand of bastard free-jazz-noise-rock-indie-klezmer. Meandering through a pristine landscape of accordion, strings, piano, various percussion, guitar and noise instrumentation, on *The Quiet Room*, sedate musical promenades quickly explode into manic convulsions of clatter and jarring atonal arrangements before quickly fading...back into gently arranged atmospherics. Nothing like the soft lullabies or cacophonous nose-bleeds that tend to propagate today's instrumental music, this is music...accountable only to its own ever-evolving thematic language and its apparently unceasing creative inertia.

The few vocal tracks on *The Quiet Room*...serve as a kind of grounding, lending a human voice... When the delicate refrains of Redfearn/Wienk's melodies end, their presence nonetheless lingers in the space like a ghost or an echo; as if the music itself was...an elaboration of things that words could not express....

If you're one of those people that does take some stock in what music writers like myself have to tell you...**I strongly suggest you go pick up *The Quiet Room*. ...it's great music that's unlike most everything around.** Hmmm... maybe this job isn't so bad after all.”

– Germ Ross, *ArtNoise*, 6/13/05, www.deadmetaphor.com

“...this nonet provides **a refreshing shot in the arm to progressive rock drenched stylizations.** The band often generates...notions of a gang of gypsies, meshed with a revved-up jug band effect amid...sonorous strings and knotty rock riffs. They...exude a folksy disposition via an organic acoustic element... The musicians also display a propensity for turning up the heat with metallic musings, featuring pulsating, off-kilter rhythms and steely-edged guitar parts. ...Through it all, this band aims to excite, thanks to a surfeit of charmingly inventive surprises. (Eagerly recommended...)”

– Glenn Astarista, *Jazz Review*, jazzreview.com

“Records of the Year 2005: Top 10, Alec K. Redfearn and The Eyesores – The Quiet Room (Cuneiform)– Tiit Kusnets, *Post Times* (Estonia)

“...this is a far more musically ambitious progrock flavored outing. **Fanciful Canterbury ghosts wander through the hedge maze; European folk forms appear and disappear, angular rock frenzy, and odd tempo changes keep things inventively unsettled. Woozy cabaret twilight spills out into the afternoon; genres and centuries blur.** Gypsy dreams, Klezmer stomps, minimalist cycles, ambient drones, psychedelia, folk dance rituals that have lost their meaning... This has the feel of sleeping with a fever, phasing in and out of nightmares and dreams that are as harrowing as they are compelling...” – Gray Parsons, *Dream Magazine*, #5, Spring 2005

FEATURE:

“Alec K. Redfearn: Free Jazz and Gypsy Prog,” by Jennifer Kelly, *Splendid Magazine*

<http://www.splendidmagazine.com/features/redfearn/>

“Every once in a while a band comes along that makes you realize how very narrow the parameters of music are. Alec K. Redfearn's Eyesores are one such band, droning and grinding and polka-ing through dark, experimental territories rooted as much in gypsy songs as they are in French prog and free jazz. They've been at it since 1997, resolutely refusing to fit into any kind of category, even the currently popular psyche-folk niche that's inhabited by many of their friends and fellow travellers.

Listening to the band's *Quiet Room*, a quietly brilliant mix of folk and dub, jazz and prog, pop and drunken tango, you cannot help but question basic assumptions. ... What would the Kinks sound like if they took up Sufi mysticism? And where exactly does this off-ramp from the great pop music highway lead to? We caught Alec Redfearn by phone recently... in his home town of Providence...

Splendid: ...what kinds of music do you look to for inspiration?

Alec K. Redfearn: When I first moved to Providence, I'd been playing in this band called Wavering Shapes, which was kind of like this SST Records-influenced stuff. ... But when I moved to Providence, it was to join this group called Meatball Fluxus. It was a Dada, Fluxist performance art group that also did free improvisational music, and also some Cagian kind of things. ...

While I was playing with them, I started playing accordion. I had been playing bass before that... At the time, there were not that many bands with accordions.

...There's a group in Providence called The Smiling Dog Band. ...they started developing this really weird, almost simplistic, but really driving, primitive folk music. ... I wanted to learn those tunes. So I was moving away from these Palmer Hughes tunes and towards these weird bastardizations of Morris Dance tunes and Irish tunes and that sort of stuff.

At the same time, I had been listening to a lot of gypsy music. ...There's a lot of variation to gypsy music. ...

Splendid: But it does have kind of an anarchic, rebellious sound to it, doesn't it? The accordion?

Alec K. Redfearn: ...what appealed to me about the instrument initially was that it was kind of a confrontational sound. Especially at the time I started playing it -- it was around 1990. You had all this grunge stuff going on, which, to me, just seemed kind of lazy. ... It seemed like this lazy revisionist early 1970s thing that was mostly about posturing. And then I was getting really excited about this whole experimental end of punk rock that was happening during the 1980s. ...during the early 1990s, this whole revolution had faded. The stuff that was getting big...was...grungy 1970s rock. And also the twee-pop thing. I just wasn't that excited about either. I think, as a reaction, I wanted to move as far away as possible from what was hip... That's when I started playing the accordion. It seemed more confrontational than any of the other stuff. ...