

BLUNDETTO

BAD BAD THINGS

Blundetto started life as the kid the neighbours tried to avoid in the staircase. Growing up as a teenager in Dijon in the nineties, Max Guiguet was a little brat. Not nasty. Just not clean. The kind of kid who kept trampling on the wide, dragging hems of his jeans. The type who plastered Fishbone posters all over the pretty wallpaper in his bedroom. The type who sneaked out to tear his jumper moshing to the Beastie Boys or NTM. A whole battalion of hardline teachers could have fought to give a kid like him an education, but it wouldn't have changed anything - he would never have become a solicitor, a dentist or gone into any other respectable profession.

He went to music school from the age of six on, but he used the first things he learned to get himself noticed as part of a horde of young, noisy, rockin' revellers who went by the hair-raising name of 'Boom in' Da Brain'. "Some of that was the effect of the Hôpital Ephémère [an early nineties' squat in the north of Paris], which we outside Paris looked on from a distance, but also of rap, ska... We mixed styles, we fucked around," he remembers today. Excuse his language.

His parents kept on bravely persevering and enrolled him for university. He spent more time at the mikes of Radio Campus Dijon than he did in the lecture theatre. In 1998 he decided to "go up to the capital" with the hope of getting work experience at a radio station. "For the first few weeks in Paris, I missed my mates and I missed my band. I couldn't play the drums coz I was sharing a tiny flat where any noise got on the neighbours' nerves. So I bought a MPC 2000 and some headphones, and I started making music on my own." This was probably the moment his destiny changed a bit. He spent his evenings alone with his machine listening to the same sample loops over and over again. He soon became one of these autistic guys that psychiatric wards in Parisian hospitals are afraid will come through the door each night. All the more so since he had fallen under the influence of a guru, another freak like him, a media crank who the leftwing press thinks is great, but whose misdemeanours are not to everyone's taste. Jean-François Bizot, the founder of Actuel and Nova, hired him for one of the radio station's programming teams. First he put him in charge of his musical asylum's record

collection, which was a godsend for this budding artist. "I was young and stupid, I thought I knew all there was to know about life and music. Bizot had seen and heard so much, he brought me back down to earth pretty damn quick. He taught me what culture was, in the broadest sense of the word. He didn't hog the best things. He was a guy who'd lend his favourite ten records to an intern who'd only been working for the radio for a week. That's how I found out about mystic jazz, all the different psychedelic scenes too, and I gorged myself on the reggae singles he brought back from Jamaica."

Max gobbled down dozens of records every day and regurgitated them every night into his sampler. Radio Nova was the first school he'd ever been to where he didn't drag his heels all the way there (he bought himself a scooter). He also rubbed shoulders with DJs Dee Nasty, Laurent Garnier, Gilles Peterson, DJ Gilb-R and Lord Zelko, and he began to spin the decks at the Pulp nightclub. Then he had a time as one half of Vista Le Vie, releasing three albums of very movie-sounding electro on F.Com (including the album 'A Futuristic Family Film' in 2005). As the years passed, he rose through the ranks. He was soon head of programming for the radio station. He was in demand for other projects too and tried his hand as 'musical adviser' for Arnaud Desplechin's film 'A Christmas Tale' (nominated for 7 Césars, the French Oscars). When they read his name in the closing titles, his family almost began to feel proud of him again. Then suddenly it was relapse time; Max announced that he'd never really given up the nightlife. He even admitted to having released a few singles on the Paris underground scene under the pseudonym Blundetto (a reference to a character in the series 'The Sopranos'). He confessed that he wasn't satisfied any more with his damn sampler and was now inviting other weirdoes round to his home studio to play live - guitarists, bassists, vocalists and other dropouts. His girlfriends walk out, his dog leaves him... Only one friend refuses to give up on him: Jérôme Caron aka Blackjoy, another Burgundy kid exiled in Paris who had just launched his own label, Lucien Entertainment. "He sprang it on me one evening, with ultimatum in his voice!" Blundetto says. "He told me: 'That's enough now! You've done 80

demos, now you've got to go the whole hog. Choose 15 of them, finish them and we'll produce your album together.' He told me to collar some of the artists passing through Nova's offices and suggest we work together." And that's how he got the Budos Band, the brass squad associated with the Daptones label, to come and dazzle with their trumpets and trombones on the tracks 'El Carretillo' and the irresistible 'Mustang'. General Elektriks sings, plays some well funky keyboards and puts him in touch with some other Californian troublemakers like Lateef The Truthspeaker and even his boyhood idol Tommy Guerrero ('Ken Park'). He met Hindi Zahra even before the young Berber singer signed to Blue Note. They shared a studio one day in spring 2009, coming up with outlines for two ethereal reggae tunes ('Voices' and 'White Birds'). He has even messed around with 'Nautilus', Bob James' classic, to open the album. Unfortunately, the kid still a little unhygienic and there are still a few bits of grot clogging up the works of these digital fiddlings. He can't quite wash that dusty old roots sound out of his skin. This album is a hotpot of gently simmering soul-reggae spices with a few bubbles of emotion rising delicately to the surface. Blundetto shows himself to be an obsessive chef who ponders over every detail and pays painstaking attention to every ingredient. The rascal never learns; he composes his tracks like he used to do his maths homework - by copying his neighbour. "I often get my ideas from other people. I'm not going to pretend I don't because I believe there isn't anything really 'new' in music; it's all about recycling. One day I was listening to a track by the pianist Michel Sardaby in which he holds down the same note for three minutes in the intro... It gives real colour to the piece and that intrigues me. I wanted to try it out on 'Mi Condena'. That's how I make all my tracks, with one simple idea that I then try to pad out."

The class dunce will be handing in his paper to the Heavenly Sweetness label on June 7th.

Heavenly★Sweetness

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