

WHAT WE DID - Saucers (Grand Theft Audio)

Saucers were a band that literally fell between the cracks. Like the Dead Boys and Pere Ubu, they formed after the break-up of Rocket From The Tombs. Ubu went on to plumb new depths in sonic weirdness and achieve fame if not fortune and the Dead Boys panned out to be the consummate NYC punk band before running out of songs/losing interest. Saucers, however, have remained a cult item with a capital 'C'. Spanning 1977-80, this archival collection redresses that imbalance and shows that Saucers, too, deserve a large chunk of respect.

RFTT bassist Craig Bell was the force behind Saucers, moving to New Haven, Connecticut, and recruiting the first line-up via the wanted ads in 1976. A handful of Bell co-writes were carried over to his new band but Saucers developed a distinctive sound that straddled New Wave and Garage.

"What We Did" chronicles three line-ups who left behind a modest legacy in two singles. The balance of the songs are unreleased studio work or rehearsals. Vocals were a shared job with band-leader Bell not making his recorded debut until the second single.

The evident thing is the difference between the first line-up and the two that followed. Original keyboardist Malcolm Doak is starkly prominent in the early band's sound which throws up an obvious if unintended link to Pere Ubu. By the time of their second single, 1980's "A Certain Kind Of Shy", Saucers were plying a tough garage-pop sound riddled with hooks. "A Certain Kind of Shy" even sports girl group choruses and a whistling outro. Saucers clearly weren't rote spike-topped copyists.

The first single, "What We Do", is DEVO-like in its freneticism, and if Saucers' take on "Final Solution" doesn't match Ubu's heart of darkness it's still pretty damn menacing. Keen RFTT will note "Muckra ker" and "Frustration" (recorded once apiece by the first two line-ups) from that band's set lists.

There's a gnarled edge to many of the latter songs with Seth Tiven and Katherine Cormack's guitars grinding against each other nicely. By this stage, there was a wider variety coming through the songwriting with Cormack's breezily raucous "Quiet Boy" and Bell's "I Need Drugs" stand-outs.

(And yes, if you've been following things closely, that is the same Seth Tiven who went on to form Dump Truck. Saucers also boasted their drummer, Mark Mulcahy, in the third line-up.)

As healthy as the CT underground music scene was and realising that they did play the Boss-town/NYC live music hot spots, it's hard not to speculate that Saucers probably had the goods to attract major label action had they been based in a bigger city. So keep wondering but grab a copy of "What We Did" while you're at it if you have an inkling of interest in the scene that preceded and paralleled their existence.

- The Barman (i94bar.com)