

Band of the Week: Les Rallizes Dénudés

Resident sound-nerd [Tom Killingbeck](#) thumbs through reams of musty vinyl so you don't have to. Here are his weekly recommendations...

Monday 30 May 2011

#29: Les Rallizes Dénudés



Who: Mizutani Takashi, Hiroshi Nar, Moriaki Wakabayashi, Takeshi Nakamura, Toshiro Mimaki.

When: 1960s-1990s.

Where: Japan.

Why: The late 60s spawned several groups globally that held radical leftist political beliefs and crossed over from avant-garde art to pop music to preach their message, three of the most intriguing being [The Velvet Underground](#) in the USA, [The Plastic People of the Universe](#) in Czechoslovakia, and [Les Rallizes Dénudés](#) in Japan. [Brian Eno's](#) now clichéd adage that 'the first Velvet Underground album only sold 10,000 copies, but everyone who bought it formed a band' can similarly be translated to Les Rallizes Dénudés influence over the Japanese noise music scene. Indeed, the group bear startling similarities to [The Exploding Plastic Inevitable](#) band, despite forming hundreds of miles away at Kyoto University in 1967. Their twin influences – the churning atonal drones of [Angus Maclise-era](#) Velvets with the bowel-shaking heavy psych of [Blue Cheer](#) – set them apart as one of the Japanese scene's most out-there bands, exuding white light/white heat mantras with their intoxicating stage show.

Shrouded in mystery, the stick-thin, black-clad, perpetually-sunglassed figures would be swathed in clouds of smoke and whirling lights, but they were a far more dangerous proposition than that of the [innocent flower-child](#) psychedelia erupting in England. Touring in 1968 with an experimental theatre troupe, it wasn't long before the supposedly freethinking actors fled the collaboration due to the [synapse-](#)

[decaying throbs](#) emitted from the stage. The constantly shifting line-up rotated around Mizutani Takashi, whose shards of searing psych guitar fly high over the simple basslines and ominous feedback. The band's early career was plagued with difficulties arising from their connections to various communist political figures. When bassist [Moriaki Wakabayashi](#) was involved in the [Japan Airlines Flight 351 hijacking](#) as a member of the Red Army Faction (a precursor cell to the [Red Army](#)), the association of the band with the incident led to outlaw status amongst the venues of their country, cursing them to eternal obscurity.

That's not to say they simply gave up – the group would continually to sonically terrorize for decades to come. But they rarely, if ever, recorded anything officially – bootlegs form the main part of the band's unconventional discography. The only real release of the first decade of their existence is their appearance on one side of the double-LP compilation *Oz Days Live*, released by Oz Discs in 1973. But after continuing to play in underground clubs for a pittance into the Nineties, their labours were finally brought to attention with the release of several documents of archival material, including a video. '77 *Live* was the best of these, a double LP capturing their transcendental jams at their peak. Since then, the underappreciated freak-outs of these noise guerrillas have trickled into the works of a host of Japanese (a pun in English as well as Japanese: 日本人) musicians. Bands like [High Rise](#), [Hijokaidan](#), and most clearly [Acid Mothers Temple](#) have all taken inspiration from Takashi's free improvisation, pungent psych jamming and trembling drones. This band is up there with [The Monks](#) in the pre-empting noise rock stakes – but be prepared for an arduous trek around their back catalogue!

Influences: The Velvet Underground, Blue Cheer, Plastic People of the Universe, Taj Mahal Travellers.

Influenced: Boredoms, High Rise, Hijokaidan, Keiji Haino, Acid Mothers Temple.

Sample Lyric: ' 〇〇〇〇〇〇〇〇〇〇 '.

Which Record: [Yoda-Go-A-Go-Go \(Flightless Bird Needs Water Wings\)](#) (10th Avenue Freeze Out, 2006)



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