

Two's Company: An Interview with Slow Club

Sam Briggs talks band politics with Slow Club

Wednesday 1 June 2011



The pitfalls of being in a two-man band are apparent. From the musical restrictions of a limited limb count, to the tendency towards a tense personal dynamic, most brave-faced duos are inherently faced with a career lacking in variety, and overwhelmed with inescapable White Stripes comparisons. It requires a spark of originality (and preferably a half-decent drummer) to overcome such musical hurdles.

However, speaking to Charles Watson, the guitar-playing male half of Sheffield based duo Slow Club, he seems blissfully disinterested in the pressure of these stereotypes. Having met Rebecca Taylor, his female counterpart, through music days bringing local schools together in their youth, the ethos of the band has remained entirely focused on enjoyment and friendship.

Through a local community of friends and musicians, Watson and Taylor started playing together, before "forming Slow Club on the side, after a slow start..." Despite finding a wider audience, Watson still admits that "Sheffield still definitely feels like home", and that Slow Club still feels like an extension of "friends at home that we've been playing with since we were 13". For Watson, "music makes a lot more sense when you know where it's come from", and the series of bands that he refers to as friends suggests that Slow Club's outlook mirrors the sense of community the band developed from. He doesn't believe in people who take themselves too seriously – "music is supposed to be fun!" – and his friendly manner is instantly infectious.

Asking him about the possible limitations of being in a duo, Watson admits that "it's all we've known". However, through glimpses of other bands on tour, the personal dynamic seems far more manageable for him and Taylor. He compares seeing other bands out of the spotlight to "going to a friend's house and seeing what the family are really like. We avoid all the politics of that!" He sees touring as much easier

having Taylor with him, as "bands behave much better when there's a girl in the room".

The subject of touring brings up another different element of being in a two-piece. Watson sees Slow Club as producing "two different elements", in their live and recorded manifestations. "We don't really have any thought out set ideals on tour", says Watson, and admits the duo prefer "just to wing it", meaning "we don't like to play old songs!" "We seem to start and stop in the same place", he jokes, adding that "I think we might have a reputation for being a bit shonky".

Although Watson remains humorously honest, the duo's live show conjures up a spark that envelopes the audience. Melding elements of folk, rockabilly and jangly twee-pop with a sense of dry humour, Watson and Taylor buzz off each other, creating an irresistibly endearing ramshackle affair. Owing to Taylor falling ill, resulting in a recent postponement of a national tour to September, their last show was a now traditional Christmas celebration. Alternately performing alone, and with a backing string section, the band is suitably festive, warming the audience with cuts from their new album, and ending with an encore of songs from their Christmas EPs. Indeed, the event seems impossibly heartwarming as the middle aged group next to me break into a synchronised dance routine.

It would, however, be unfair to assume from moments such as this that Slow Club can be dismissed for being overly saccharine. Although early gigs featured Taylor playing household items for percussion, from bottles to chairs, and early videos were punctuated by homebaked cupcakes and colourful bunting, meant that the band were quickly tarred by the "twee" brush, debut album "Yeah So?" deserves further consideration. Ranging from the garage-pop of "Giving Up on Love" (the video for which featured Mackenzie Crook) to the melancholic "Come on Youth", the whole album is tied together by strong melodies and harmonies, and an overwhelming sense of fun. As Watson testifies, "It is sweet to be doing this for a job".

Asking about the development of their upcoming sophomore album, Watson gives a different approach to songs, and songwriting as the major development. Produced by Luke Smith, of Clor fame, who Watson described as "a great musician", Watson describes his attempt to use "different keys, different aesthetics, and different instruments" as the album's musical basis.

"I've stopped playing guitar really. I love picking up something you don't know how to play and writing on it - there are no boundaries". "The record is sounding like more than just the two of us". Mentioning a greater reliance on keyboards, and drum machines, Watson details the much more developed sound of the album. However, he remains of the belief that "the best songs are the ones which take 15 minutes to write." Songs seem to be wholly natural for the duo, with both members of the band contributing to both the lyrical and song-writing process. "We both work in different ways, but it just happens. There's no formula! We just write about what we know". Watson admits that although there are benefits of having a band to tour with, he is happiest when the Slow Club numbers two, and that touring makes you "really enjoy there just being two of you".

When asked about musical inspirations, Watson refers to an American road trip "travelling up Route 101. We listened to Neil Young for about 3 days, and it just clicked". From tracks aired at the Christmas show, from the beautiful "Gold Mountain" to the soulful "You, Earth, or Ash", the band will soon be even more deserving of transcending the "twee" tag. In a previous interview, Taylor describes her ambitions for the band as "making a second album that doesn't get called twee", and her frustrations with these limitations are clear when considering the band's far broader output.

Watson laughs off any resolutions for 2011, joking that "January's depressing enough anyway - make resolutions in November!" However, with their second album and a national tour approaching (including a September stop at the Duchess), Slow Club seems to be moving on to greater things, and content to hurdle any preconceptions of being pigeonholed as either twee, or a two-piece. It would appear that two is company indeed.



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