



# Power surge

ELISE OSBORNE

*It's always difficult trying to capture sound in words, especially when the group you're writing about is as textured and sound-dense as These Are Powers (TAP). So we'll let the band describe themselves instead.*

The trio sum up their music by saying it's "Spiritually electric, inspired by art and dance, ghost-punk", which gives you a pretty good idea. Their songs combine frenetic beats with a rhythmic jumble of found sounds from all corners of their living rooms and beyond. The vocals flit between panicked screaming and melodic grunting. It's the kind of music that at first might have you reaching for the earplugs, but ultimately draws you in until you find yourself dancing and shouting along with it.

TAP, formed in 2006, is made up of ex Liars bass player, Pat Noecker, Anna Barie, formerly of Knife Skills & Fxxing Lion, and Bill Salas, who sidelines solo under the name Brenmar. In their own words, they were brought together by "the stars and a show in Chicago" where Pat and Anna first met Bill.

On their MySpace page, "futurists, zeitgeists, earthships, community" are cited as influences. The band is constantly improvising and pushing each other's creative limits. "We are inspired by each other to create something unique and not repeat ourselves," Noecker says.

This drive to generate new sounds can be heard in the churning nine songs of their most recent album, *All Aboard Future*. The relatively easy-on-the-ears vocals and crunchy beats of the opening track, 'Easy Answers', tricks the listener into thinking it might all be like this. But it's actually a roller-coaster ride of sounds all the way through to the final psycho-toy flavour of 'Blue Healer'.

The band has three releases on Dead Oceans Records – *Terrific Seasons*, EP *Taro Tarot* and *All Aboard Future* – as well as a vinyl release with Swedish label, Deleted Art.

The group is super excited about their upcoming China trip. "Seriously, this is what you think about when you first start playing, going to far off places, seeing new things and playing your music for totally awesome strangers," Noecker says.

While they're trying not to have any expectations for the trip, he says they're imagining something quite different from their previous tours.

"I try to go into situations without expectations so I don't set myself up for disappointment or unwanted surprises. So I don't have any expectations other than the simple fact that this tour will be very different from our usual US or European tours."

As for what we can expect from the TAP gigs, it's probably also a good idea to throw out any preconceived ideas. The band will be jamming and improvising with local musos, as well as whipping out some crunchy bits from their albums. Noecker says he'll have his recorder rolling much of the time so future These Are Powers tracks might just include some of our own favourite China sounds. The mumbled unintelligible garble of a local bus conductor? The stutter of the 15 year old spruiker trying to woo you into some night-time den of *mala tang*? Or perhaps the sound of those middle-aged amateur musos who take over parks and public spaces on weekends with erhu, guzheng or warbling Chinese opera?

*18 July, These Are Powers, supported by PK14. RMB 100 (RMB 60 for students with ID). Zhijiang Dream Factory, 4F, Building B, 28 Yuyao Lu, near Xikang Lu (inside New Factories).*



# Folk for the Masses

DUNCAN BALL



War and peace are topics so big that in the hands of an 18th century literary giant, they result in a book that runs for 1,000 pages containing 500 different characters.

The many sentiments that are brought to the surface by the ideas of war and peace have also, more recently, been drawn together to create a piece of classical music by Welsh composer, Karl Jenkins. The intellectually and musically challenging piece, 'The Armed Man', will this month be part of the repertoire on show in Shanghai from American folk songstress, Johanna.

Johanna seems up to the challenge, and approaches it well-prepared, as a classically trained singer who graduated from Syracuse University with a degree in vocal performance.

She's already performed the US premiere of 'The Armed Man' at Carnegie Hall and is looking forward to bringing it to China. "I've never been to China, but I can't wait for the culture shock," she says. "I came out of university and was like ... I need to see the world."

Johanna has done just that, spending time travelling around Europe, and managing a few performances along the way. "I did a few gigs in Italy and around whilst I was passing through ... but I've never been to Asia," she says.

As well as wielding a terrific voice, Johanna manages a unique blend of pop sensibility and musical composition, mixed with her love of classical music, making her performances something out of the norm for the audience.

She believes that this musical combination will be a winner at her Shanghai show, as it's a way to break down any language barriers that might exist with the audience. "Melody and rhythm are languages anyone can understand," she says.

"My music is honest and I like to think it contains an essence of purity ... which I hope separates me from other songwriters." Shanghai has recently played host to a string of male songwriters with a folksy edge, including both Jens Lekman and José González, but there's been a noticeable absence of female talent.

"It's a fantastic opportunity," she adds. "I get about 10 days, so I'm hoping to see some of China as well ... I'm hoping to find a few open-mic nights and just have fun. I've always wanted to go East and never had the chance, so this is a great way to see a new part of the world and to take my music to more and more people."

*8pm, 21 July, Shanghai Oriental Art Centre, 425 Dingxiang Lu, near Shiji Da Dao, Pudong. Tel: 5109 5091. Web: www.shoac.com.cn*