

Mp3 Pushbutton - Close To Final



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Driving Indy Pop Rock. 13 MP3 Songs POP: Power Pop, ROCK: Modern Rock Details: Push Button is: Chris Uhde - vocals, guitar, composer, etc. Backing Push Button: Cora Jane West - vocals, keyboards; Shannon Marshall - guitar, backing vocals; Bubba McDonald - bass A slew of friends - drums As indie rock continues to ride high with its hip interpretation and distillation of the late-'70s and early-'80s New Wave sound, the college rock mecca of Athens, GA finds itself hosting a new band, Push Button, that is ready to join in the current post-modern-pop-music conversation. Fronted and formed by singer-guitarist Chris Uhde, Push Button was initially conceived as more of a new style of songs than a practical band as Uhde sought to write and hone a collection of material that didn't seem to fit his other music projects, neither the playful punk dirge of Annaray nor the '60s garage rock of Flight 19. "People knew I had that underlying pop streak in me," explains the 28-year-old Uhde. "In the other bands I was playing in, it was jokingly known as the pop project Uhde always talked about but could never con people into doing. Eventually I decided that maybe it's something that I should just take the time and do on my own, just to get these other ideas out of my head." After completing work on Annaray's self-titled second album in 2003 -- a record produced by a pair of the band's' local friends, David Schools (Widespread Panic) and David Barbe (Mercyland, Sugar) -- Uhde felt his attention shifting more and more to this "other" kind of style that he was now ready to play. "I really loved what [Matt Sharp] did with that first Rentals record," Uhde says, "I thought it was cool how that one guy did everything, and I had never quite heard anything pieced together like that before." For Uhde, who first played music in his teen years as a drummer, then switched over and learned guitar, it was a simple decision to "go it alone" for these indie pop songs. Armed with scores of Push song ideas, Uhde loaded up on computer software, turned a spare room in his house into a recording studio and rolled the tapes on the songs that would become the band's debut

album, *Close to Final*. The results are a stunning confectionery of pop pastiche and indie rock that fits quite comfortably in an iPod mix of The Cars, The Pixies, The Killers, Arcade Fire, The Raveonettes and the Dandy Warhols. "I just kind of went for it," Uhde says. "By home recording this album, I spent a little bit of money and was able to spend as much time as I wanted on it, as I wanted to do it. If I wanted to work on it at three in the morning, I could, no problem. With the set-up being right there in my house, I could really spread out and work on it rather than pack it up and try to bring it all somewhere. And then the songs came so fast I knew it was the right thing for this project." "The first two songs got knocked out in two weeks," Uhde recalls, "then I think I did three songs in the next week and a half. After that it kind of settled out to about a song a week. But it wasn't that steady. There'd be a week where I'd go without anything, and then the next week I'd have two songs." "After 'Time Well Spent,' the first song, they were written as they were being recorded. It was that fast. Usually, I'd start with two or three scratch tracks with basic guitar, drums and a vocal. Then I'd figure out the melody and I'd start over from there completely with the drums and map it out. Then go back in and put all the guitars, the keyboards, the bass and then finish it out." Recorded in a mere six weeks -- and using only one mic -- Uhde found himself with a collection of 17 songs, 13 of which made the final cut on *Close to Final*. Despite having worked so closely on the crystalline pop purity that encases the album, Uhde was quite unsure if the songs were actually any good -- and found himself circulating copies of the record amongst friends to make sure he hadn't gotten amped up into a fake, sugar-coated high. "I recorded all these songs in one small room," Uhde offers, "so I didn't have the proper perspective on it. I thought it might be one the worst things ever, really. That's why I had to circulate it out, almost to make sure it wasn't bad. I thought it could go either way, but it was hard to tell in my own head. It just made me nervous." There was another reason Uhde wanted to get the Push Button disc pressed into his musician friend's hands: With the record done, he now needed a band. After a few amusingly unsuccessful attempts at securing potential bandmates via a "Musician-seeking-Musicians" ad in a local arts paper, Uhde eventually let the music do the talking, and recruiting, for Push Button. "I kept changing the ad and got no calls," Uhde says, "or got responses that were way off-base with what I wanted. I mean, they were American Idol-type screamers. No, thank you. It was really beginning to irritate me, because I knew this was not the time to be wasting on this project. So, I went down to the bar for a weekend of drinking and gave out some copies of the CD to my friends and said, 'Guys and gals, I need people to play with.'" The first person to join Uhde in Push Button was

singer-keyboardist Cora Jane West, a 22-year-old Salt Lake City, Utah-transplant who moved to Athens in 2003, funding the trip with the sale of her Roland Juno 60 keyboard. As with most artists and performers in the Athens scene, West quickly landed a straight job in the service industry as a bartender, a gig that brought her into constant contact with a wealth of local band and musicians, including Uhde. "I knew I had to have the female vocalist," Uhde says of making the Push Button band. "These songs wouldn't work without that mix of the male-female voices. And Cora, at first, was just going to pass along the disc to a few friends she knew who could sing and play keyboards, which was what I wanted. I went back a few days later to see if she'd heard anything from her friends and she stepped up." "Uhde let me borrow a copy of the disc," West recalls, "and after hearing it, I decided that this might actually be something I'd want to do. So, I went over to Chris' house one afternoon to see if I sounded right with the recordings that he already had. He pretty much had everything done, and was adding on with overdubs. It was very intimidating, because while I've been playing piano since I was seven, I've never played on anything that was recorded." "He basically turned me loose, placed some headphones on me and said, 'Let's go,' and we did it. I was worried about the first song we did, 'See You Again.' but he seemed to like it. I was pretty nervous, because I'd seen Annaray and heard the disc and knew it was good. After we played together that once, it was done. He said, 'So, what are you doing this Friday? When should we have our first band practice?'" After West, Uhde tapped a bandmate and friend from Annaray, Bubba McDonald, to assume the bass-playing duties in Push Button. "I told him that I had this killer singer," Uhde says, "and this new set of songs and it's getting ready to go. We'd been playing together for so long in Annaray that I knew it'd be easy stuff for him to do. Of course, it was. He came in and nailed it." "Chris had talked to me about Pushbutton while we were working on Annaray," says the 26-year-old McDonald. "He was feeding me the songs as he was finishing them, so I have about six different versions of the album. Every week there were more songs added on. 'I did another few,' he'd go. Oh, all right. The songs were so good, it was easy to say, 'Yeah.'" Like Uhde, McDonald admits to getting a kick out of playing the brand of indie pop evidenced throughout *Close to Final*, a record whose songs are a distinct departure from McDonald's work in the angular punk of Annaray and the even heavier rock of his other band, Brown Frown. "No, the change is good," McDonald offers. "It's never bad, really. It's just that we've played in a band together for almost five years, and in that project everybody has something to say about the songs. For this, he wrote the songs and we're coming on and helping him play them. It's a different role, at first."

With McDonald and West on board the Push Button express, Uhde's next step was to land a lead guitarist for the band. Not surprisingly, a random encounter at a downtown eatery turned Uhde onto Shannon Marshall, a 32-year old vet of the Athens punk scene who had just put his most recent band, 3 O'Clock Sandbox, on indefinite hiatus while he focused on a stripped-down solo effort, 47. "Uhde came into the restaurant where I work," Marshall says, "and we just started talking about music, bands and home recording, which I was really getting into. Next thing I know he's asking me if I know any guitar players who might be interested in the new group he was putting together." "I was a little hesitant at first and I had never played just lead guitar in a band. Then I saw Uhde again a couple of days later and after thinking about it I said, 'You know, I could kind of play lead in a New Order-type of thing, if that's what you're looking for.' Turns out that was exactly the kind of style he was looking for in Push Button." "Shannon had been playing primarily as a rhythm guitarist," Uhde adds, "just like me. And he attacks his parts completely differently than most lead guitarists I've worked with. When you add in the fact that he can sing, too, it was practically a done deal. We immediately went and rehearsed a few songs together and it was a done deal." With four members of Push Button now firmly in place, Uhde began searching out for the final piece for the band, the drummer. During the recording sessions for *Close to Final*, it was Uhde himself who either played the drums on a track or sequenced and programmed the drum loops. Of course, there was no way he could pull such double duty in the live incarnation of Push Button. Landing a permanent drummer for Push Button, however, quickly became a daunting task for Uhde. "The problem I ran into is that all of the good drummers in Athens already had two or three projects going on, and would have other band commitments that would put them out of the loop for weeks at a time. So, I realized that it might be best to bring in a couple of guys and let them share the duties." Among those Push Button has enlisted thus far include Steve Scarborough of Maserati, Jim Wilson of Mother Jackson, and Uhde and McDonald's Annaray bandmate, Lamar Flowers, all of whom will rotate manning the drum riser for Push Button over the next months as the band gets its live legs beneath it. "The live show is the harder part," Uhde explains. "I found out that recording the album was actually really easy, but re-creating it was an entirely different monster. Luckily, with the caliber of musicians we've got, they can take the songs and make them their own. They're bringing in their influences, too, and it's making the end songs even stronger and deeper." "But we're trying to do almost two different things. Our ideal goal is that you would listen to the recording and think, hey, that's a good recording, and then you would go see the live show

and go, OK, that was a cool live show, but they're different things. I don't want to play the songs exactly the way they were originally recorded. I want something that has a lot of different angles to be enjoyed." Though they are currently banging around the songs during rehearsals this summer, Push Button is slated to make its live debut with some local shows in mid-August. If those concerts pan out, the band has tentative plans to release *Close to Final* in October and then head out to California for a round of dates with a Los Angeles outfit, Also. "Right now, we've been working on the dynamics of the live show," Uhde says, "testing what works well, what can be stripped down to its basics and what needs the full-on band sound to make the transition from the record to the stage." "But it's been amazing so far. In the last year, I've managed to record an album's worth of songs and assemble a proper band -- which now has a life of its own -- comprised of these amazing players. As a musician, you can't ask for much more than that."

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