

Mp3 Fun With Atoms - Northern Distortion



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This acclaimed 1996 collection of well-crafted electric pop songs features volumes of inventive rocked out guitar hooks, middle eights, layered Beatlesque vocal harmonies, and unpredictably catchy arrangements produced by Jeff Murphy (Shoes). 12 MP3 Songs POP: Power Pop, ROCK: Americana Details: Rick Smith: vocals and guitars Dan Collins: bass guitar and vocals Curt Lefevre: drums and percussion 'Northern Distortion' was recorded at the legendary Short Order Recorder in Zion, Illinois. The acclaimed 1996 Black Vinyl Records release was produced and engineered by Jeff Murphy (Shoes). REVIEWS (band biography follows the review section): There are definitely some major Beatles influences going on with the latest CD from Fun With Atoms. Produced by Shoes Jeff Murphy, this is a hot collection of pure pop tunes with enough harmony vocals to fill an ocean. These tunes are clean cut and well-written, with plenty of hooks scattered throughout. Sure, these tunes are very calculated, but the melodies are way above average and the vocals are excellent. In addition to the excellent harmonies, this groups second greatest strength is their inventive guitar arrangements. Pop purists will certainly want to check this out! -BABYSUE.com Well, Im in love. Its still pretty early in the year, but it will take a batch of very substantial releases for this Green Bay, Wisconsin guitar pop trio not to make my Best of 1996 list. From beginning to end, this is an extremely strong album. There may be no anthems that jump out at you like The One I Love or Its the End of the World did on REMs Document, but theres not a single filler cut among the 12 tracks either. This is a rock solid album that rocks from beginning to end. While never syrupy or sweet, in fact the overall feel is slightly on the dark side, it has enough hooks, earthy harmonies and tasty melodies to appeal to any pop or power-pop fan, while retaining the modern sheen required for college alternative radio without losing its classic rock and roll allure. You can imagine this pleasing fans of Wilco, 3AM, Sugar, GooGoo Dolls, Bush, just as easily as fans of Shoes, Raspberries, The Who, and Oasis. As

Zappa once said, one size fits all. A smart major label would be ringing up Black Vinyl right about now. Drummer Curt Lefevre and bassist Dan Collins are a more than capable rhythm section, and singer/songwriter Rick Smith, like Nils Lofgren, Jeff Beck, or Peter Buck, is a real guitar player. As proof, the album is full of interesting and inventive guitar playing. Aggressive fuzzy electric guitar rhythms offset against chiming acoustics and ripping electric lead runs, overlaid with jangly parts, flanged and fuzzy psychedelic embellishments, and well, neat little flourishes like the Peter Gunn spy movie riff on Indiana Line. All of which never intrude or detract from the songs themselves. The band has a mature and distinctly American sound that doesn't really sound like anyone else to me, so coming up with a comparative reference point is difficult. A regional rootsiness is apparent here, the kind that often colors the music of bands from areas like Athens Georgia, Chapel Hill North Carolina, Minneapolis, or Tempe Arizona. But it's unlike any of them, and I haven't heard enough Wisconsin bands to attribute it to geography, although a friend of mine did compare their sound to local band Spooner. I listen to this album, and I can hear lots of influences: country and western, American roots, sixties garage, and certainly American and British pop. Bits and pieces, a phrase, or a guitar lick here or there remind me of REM, the Raiders, Flamin' Groovies, Springsteen circa Born to Run, Plimsouls, Grass Roots, Jimmy Webb, Grin, Manfred Mann, and the Beatles, but the synthesized result is a collection of distinctive and well-crafted pop songs, with layered backing vocals and dense, slightly dark, beautiful arrangements. Smith's lyrics are intelligent and often surrealistic, creating a dreamlike atmosphere on songs like A Fate Unknown, A New Titanic, Strange Things Happen, and Starlove. The reverb-laden acoustic guitar and British Invasion styled vocals make Hand-Me-Down a short (2:18) but gorgeous pop song, while managing to sound distinctively American. I Believe Her alternates fuzzy chunky Bachman Turner guitars with an intoxicating chorus and melody. Indiana Line is like rootsy electric Springsteen, and could easily be a single, while Call the Losers (without compromising the mood), playfully bounces Louie Louie chords and Beatlesque Yeah-Yeah-Yeah vocals back and forth between the speakers. Shoes' Jeff Murphy does a superb job of engineering, mixing, and producing, and serves to remind me once again of how many interesting bands he has been directly or indirectly involved with over the years (Orange Pop, Stepping Stones, Material Issue, Underground Cartoons, Herb Eimerman, Weird Summer, Critics, 92 Degrees). A subject long overdue for coverage that we'll get to in a future Audities. While many popular alternative bands only seem to know how to do loud, angry, and depressing, or fall victim to taking themselves way too damn

serious like Pearl Jam, Fun With Atoms, as their name implies shows you can make a big noise and a serious record without sacrificing the melodies, pop elements, and well, the subtle humor and fun. -Gary Littleton, AUDITIES: Journal of Insanely Great Pop Fun With Atoms is kind of a surprising addition to the Black Vinyl Records roster, as the band's brand of chunky-chord power pop has more to do with the Replacements or prime Soul Asylum than the more polite jangle of label owner Shoes. The album title is right on, as the guitars are suitably loud and crunchy -- kind of surprising, since the album is produced and mixed by Shoes' Jeff Murphy, whose own albums are nowhere near this noisy. Guitarist Rick Smith's songs are uniformly catchy, and he has a particular knack for bridges that modulate, go into different time signatures, or otherwise vary the songs, a facility that frustratingly few power pop songwriters seem to manage, and his gruff vocals are a nice change from the usual Chris Bell-style tenors. The choruses and riffs are memorable, and Murphy and fellow Shoes singer-guitarist Gary Klebe add their trademark high harmonies to several songs. The soaring "Turn and Go" is the highlight, sounding like Hsker D re-recording a classic Big Star tune. Not everything is that immediately appealing, but Northern Distortion is one of those albums that puts the power back into power pop, always a good thing. Stewart Mason, ALL MUSIC GUIDE Fun w/Atoms made Northern Distortion (Black Vinyl Records) on borrowed Shoes equipment, but their Jeff Murphy-produced record occupies much harder ground than Zions elders. Trip-wire guitars powered by Mssrs. Vox and HiWatt are the plat du jour. Anybody with a Detroit fixation will willingly bounce off the walls with these six-string scientists from Green Bay. - MOJO (UK) Much as Sloan created murder, the Shoes have helped to breathe life into the power-pop world with their Black Vinyl Records label. Fun With Atoms make the kind of music you find yourself singing along to before you know the words. Its all brightness and happiness via guitar and vocal harmonies. This will make my Top Ten list at the end of the year, and everyone will think its on there because I want to be obscure. Itll be on there because its not possible that there will be ten things that are better. Brilliance, from the font of whats left of an American tradition. Believe. The BEST OF MAY List. -Saint Paul Pioneer Press Illinois indie Black Vinyl Records released Northern Distortion, the latest record from rockers Fun w/Atoms. The band vocalist/guitarist Rick Smith, bassist/vocalist Dan Collins, and drummer Curt Lefevre recorded the disc at Short Order Recorder along with studio veteran Jeff Murphy. The resulting 12-song long player is crammed full of pop-rock hooks and country-twanged sinkers thatll have you shakin your money maker faster than a Tums will clean up your intestinal tract. Featured songs on Northern Distortion include Chain

Reaction, Indiana Line and Star Love (Be On-Line). Other standouts include the melodic Changing History and the guitar-driven title track Northern Distortion. -The AQUARIAN WEEKLY Local bands come and go, but Fun w/Atoms just keeps on getting better. Curt Lefevre, Dan Collins, and Rick Smith have been a trio for more than a decade, making them one of the cornerstones on which the rest of the local music scene rises and falls. Never ones to jump on the sound-of-the-month bandwagon, Fun w/Atoms has bypassed post-punk, alternative and whatever they're calling today's music, to stick with the mature, stripped-down, straight-to-the-point pop/rock that's been the band's calling card from the start. The band has arguably never sounded better, Exhibit A: Northern Distortion. The band's second CD released this spring on Black Vinyl Records. - Kendra Meinert, Green Bay Press-Gazette

BAND BIOGRAPHY

Like every kid in America at the time, the British Invaders turned our heads and hearts from the straight and narrow of grade school and Cub Scouts, creating a fork in the road that we still walk today. My earliest recollection of singing along with a pop song on the radio was 'Every Day', by Buddy Holly... the roller coaster song. Also around that time, local radio stations were playing "Ghost Riders in the Sky". That song was chilling when riding in the car at night, probably planting a seed for my love of twangy guitar parts. Although great songs were plentiful at the time, the Beatles were an obvious quantum leap and a half above the status quo. Circa 1964, our transistor radios blasted the exciting sounds of each new pop rock band that crossed the Atlantic. Sunday nights, as we struggled to finish our homework, we patiently waited for Ed Sullivan to get past the puppets and comedians so we could watch the Cyrkle, Beau Brummels, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Donovan, and Rolling Stones showcase their new hit singles. Yeah, 45-RPM singles in the paper sleeves.... always available at Woolworths, right across from the downtown bus stop where we blew our paper route money every Saturday morning. My friends and I began to grow our hair as long as our parents would let us, as we begged in vain for Beatle boots and dickies. There was no turning back at that point. Cub Scouts and knot-tying couldn't hold our interest any longer, as we shared hundreds of songs, ripped from vinyl to an old monaural Webcor reel-to-reel tape recorder. An old acoustic guitar was discovered in my Grandfather's attic. The strings were about a half inch from the neck, but it was a vast improvement over the cigar box guitars that my friends and I made prior to that. That shitty old guitar with the glitter pick guard still hangs proudly in the FWA home studio, strings now about 2 inches above the neck! Dan Collins and I grew up within a stone's throw of one another, in the shadow of Lambeau Field on Green Bay's west side. Our fathers actually worked at the

same company. It was a time when it seemed like every kid owned a guitar and dreamed of being the next Brian Jones or George Harrison. After a dozen garage bands and a few thousand versions of 'Jumpin' Jack Flash', early versions of the band started to emerge. Dan could sing, play guitar and piano, but chose to play bass because nobody else could. It was obvious that we were musically and rhythmically connected. Curt Lefevre, an east-side kid with a great sense of rhythm and a cool record collection, eventually joined us. The fit was perfect....and has been for the past 25 years. The early 1980's were busy, with hours of driving to play \$300 gigs in smoky little bars all over Wisconsin. At the time, we crossed paths with many great musicians who were true believers of their craft, and we became fast friends and supporters of each other. A Madison band called Spooner was very original and special, performing frequently to capacity crowds in our local rock club. We began to play some gigs together, as they shared their local haunts with us. Spooner had a hip little studio in a warehouse on Madison's east side, and they knew how to use it to make great records. We made our first record there, with Butch Vig at the controls. It was called it 'Main Street' ... in honor of the seedy little Green Bay strip where most of our gigs were played, and where our sound was nurtured and defined with the energy of hundreds of loyal supporters and friends. The record was released on Boat Records, an indie Madison label owned by Spooner. That recording garnered some national (and international) attention, enabling us to expand our horizons beyond our home base, playing many club and college dates. It was a time in which good indie rock music received airplay on college radio. Reviews were good and plentiful, including London's New Music Express. A few years later, the band recorded 'Northern Distortion' at Short Order Recorder in Zion, Illinois, with producer/engineer Jeff Murphy. We had been longtime fans of Shoes, his legendary pop-rock band that had previously released three wonderful records for the Elektra records label. Jeff had also recorded two Material Issue records that really got our attention for their production value. 'Northern Distortion' was released on the Black Vinyl Records label, and distributed nationally. Today, Fun w/ Atoms plays select live dates, and maintains a house gig in a favorite music club in downtown Green Bay. The band is currently in the process of completing a record of new material for an anticipated release date in late 2007. We thank you sincerely for your support and interest in our music. We have made many friends over the years, while doing this thing that we love.

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