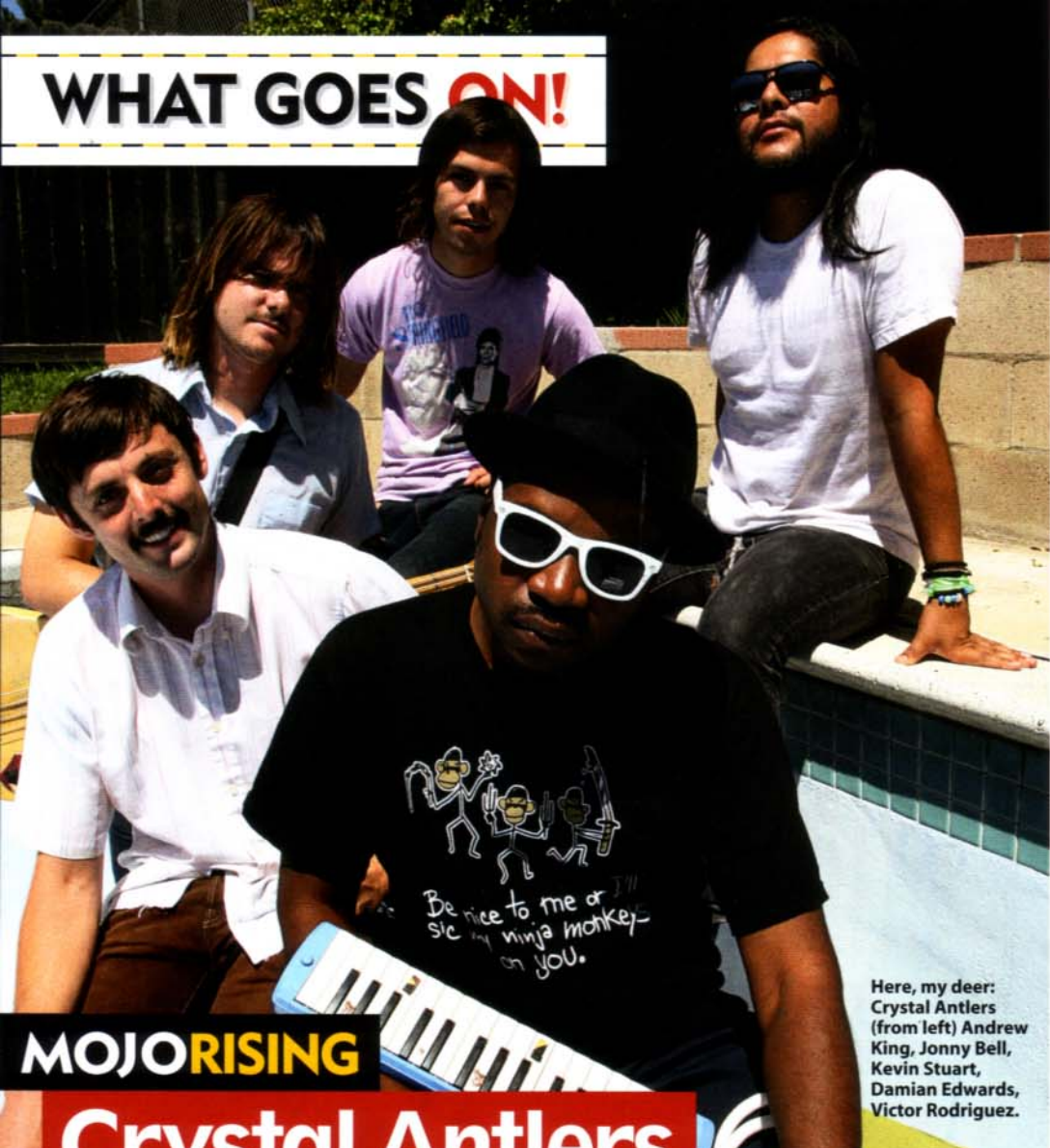


WHAT GOES ON!



Here, my deer: Crystal Antlers (from left) Andrew King, Jonny Bell, Kevin Stuart, Damian Edwards, Victor Rodriguez.

MOJORISING

Crystal Antlers

SOUND THE HORN FOR HIGHLY ECOLOGICAL PUNK-SOUL THRILLS!
BY KEITH CAMERON

Any restaurants across the USA recently visited by a group of five young men from Southern California – three longhairs, one moustache, one porkpie hat – may well have contributed to the frying of brains as well as food. Whatever fires Crystal Antlers' voluminous psych-punk and free-form skronk bouillabaisse, it's what's fuelling their van that counts at this early stage in the Long Beach quintet's journey. And that sweet elixir is waste vegetable oil.

"We've driven 6,000 miles on this latest trip and spent less than 25 dollars on gas," bassist/vocalist Jonny Bell tells MOJO as the Antler-wagon belches its eco-friendly way from Chapel Hill, North Carolina to Athens, Georgia. Crystal Antlers tour a lot; after barely two years together they're close to notching up shows in all 50 states. But spreading the word doesn't yet pay the rent. Hence their fat-feasting Ford, a basic diesel to which they've added an extra tank with fuel lines running to a converter. Instead of carrying their own supply, they ask nicely at local eateries.

"We use the stuff they would be turning into cattle feed," notes Bell. "It's the only way we can afford to do this, because the shows barely cover costs. It's a big struggle at the moment. Which is great. Struggle is great for being creative."

Crystal Antlers first locked horns with the world ("we want to destroy capitalism, basically") in 2006,

initially as a trio of Bell, guitarist Errol Davis and drummer Kevin Stuart, but adding Victor Rodriguez (organ) and Damian Edwards (percussion) saw their sandblasted gospel-grunge vision ripen nicely. Covering Blue Cheer's version of Mose Allison's Parchman Farm on the B-side of debut 45 Parting Song For The Torn Sky encapsulated the gonzo gameplan: organ-led grooves and incensed vocal supplication affirm that the Antlers owe as much to Curtis Mayfield and Miami soul belle Helene Smith as The Stooges or fellow Cali crud-kickers Comets On Fire. "We all come from a punk background but we wanted our music to have that soul spirit," says Bell.

Having replaced Davis with Andrew King – who like Edwards had previously played with ex-Bad Brains singer H.R. – and recorded a self-titled mini-LP with Mars Volta keyboardist Ikey Owens, the prospect of their debut album for Touch And Go means 2009 promises to be the year Crystal Antlers scorch the earth sufficiently to give up their regular jobs. For Jonny Bell, that means his days as a chimney sweep are numbered.

"A lot of people don't understand they have to clean their chimney," he says. "We have to go door to door to get work. But there's a symmetry there: we're cleaning the dirt from people's ears with the band."

"Struggle is great for being creative."

MORE MOJO

GO TO WWW.MOJOMUSIC.COM TO HEAR MUSIC FROM CRYSTAL ANTLERS' EP AND BEYOND...

