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## POLVO = FOR LIFE

**Despite smaller fan bases, '90s acts like Polvo continue to reunite**

By Amre Klimchak

Polvo has joined the ranks of a growing number of 1990s indie bands—from American rockers Dinosaur Jr. and The Pixies to British shoegazers My Bloody Valentine and Swervedriver—that have risen from the ashes of decade-old breakups. But unlike many of their counterparts who reunited for probably good (but not immediately obvious) reasons, Polvo re-emerged this year at the request of some indie-rock luminaries for one of the world's most lauded independent music festivals.

When Explosions in the Sky were asked to curate this year's All Tomorrow's Parties (ATP) festival in England in mid-May, the organizers asked them for a "dream list of bands... no matter how far-fetched," says Mark Smith, guitarist for the Austin-based instrumental-experimental rock band. As huge fans of Polvo, one of the progenitors of math rock's off-kilter time signatures and soaring angularity, EITS couldn't resist including the Chapel Hill indie pioneers on their fantasy roster. Although others had unsuccessfully attempted to lure Polvo back into the spotlight after the group's 1997 breakup, ATP turned out to be the perfect opportunity. "We had been asked to get back together before for various things, and came close a couple of times," explains Dave Brylawski, vocalist and guitarist in Polvo. "But the timing just wasn't right, and we didn't feel like we could do it justice,"

When the invitation to perform at ATP came late last year, Polvo's three core members—Brylawski, vocalist/guitarist Ash Bowie and bassist Steve Popson—collectively decided that six months was enough time to prepare. But if anyone was expecting Polvo to play the old songs note-for-note from the albums, as with other reunion shows (think The Pixies), that's wasn't going to happen.

"We're not a nostalgia act. We're trying to stay relevant to the times and ourselves," Brylawski says, adding that with a new drummer, Brian Quast, the band undoubtedly sounds different.



**Indie pioneers Polvo reunited after breaking up in the 1990s.**  
 (Photo/Art: Ashley Worley)

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"We felt like this was sort of a second chance and something we didn't expect. So we just decided collectively that if we were going to do this... We wanted to reconfigure and re-conceptualize some stuff."

Smith cites Polvo as a musical influence, but in terms of the impact that Polvo has had on the sound of EITS, Smith explains that it's fairly subtle.

"We have, to date, always used standard guitar tuning, and we don't have the exotic and atonal qualities of a lot of their guitar playing," explains Smith, who listened to Polvo heavily in college. "But I think we took inspiration from their intricate guitar interplay (so many nice guitar and bass lines snaking in and out of each other, with accentuations and countermelodies galore) and their song structures."

Though EITS and a number of their indie rock contemporaries enjoy huge followings, the musicians who influenced them and paved the way for their success, like the members of Polvo, had a much smaller fan base for a variety of reasons.

"That which is called indie rock now has a much wider audience now than it ever had in the past," says Matt LeMay, a senior contributor at Pitchforkmedia.com, the Internet publication devoted to all forms of independent music. "Indie rock used to be a subculture, and now it's part of culture."

In the '90s, independent bands weren't reaching the masses by placing their songs in hamburger commercials and having their music featured in a hit television series about SoCal teens. And prior to the widespread accessibility of the Internet, bands like Polvo relied on airplay at tiny college radio stations and were largely appreciated by a small but devoted set of fans who made it their business to seek out underground music through local record stores and word-of-mouth recommendations.

"I think a lot of people forget that in the mid to late '90s it was hard for a lot of bands. And the reasons they broke up weren't always strictly personal," says LeMay. "I think what's cool but also kind of weird is that those bands can pick up at this moment where a lot of bands can sell out the Bowery Ballroom and can plug themselves into that even though they disappeared for a length of time."

Despite the enthusiasm of Polvo's longtime fans about the group's reformation, others may meet it with a measure of skepticism. And Brylawski acknowledges that some may wonder about Polvo's motivations for resurfacing now.

"It's easy to be cynical. And I'm sure a lot of



people are like 'Oh jeez, another '90s indie rock band can't give it up,' which is understandable," Brylawski admits. "But what you have to remember is every band does it for their own individual and collective reasons, whether it's money or missing being onstage, and it's complicated. But I can't worry about whether a million other bands get back together. To me it's just, do I want to play with Ash and Steve and Brian again? And the answer is absolutely."

*June 21, Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St., (at Bowery), 212-533-2111; 8, \$15 (also June 22 at Maxwell's)*

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