

# DAILY NEWS

## LETTING 'FREAK FOLK' FLY

**BROOKLYN DUO COCOROSIE RUNS FREE AS PART OF A FOOTLOOSE NEW STYLE**

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According to Bianca Casady, the first person who ever heard her music with CocoRosie instantly pronounced it "crap. He said you should hire some real musicians who can play."

The next people who encountered her music said, "This is interesting, but you should get a producer and maybe he can do something with you."

Casady admits that even her friends "weren't that excited about it at first."

That would change crucially over the next few years, as CocoRosie become well known enough to appear in a joint show at Carnegie Hall, headline area clubs like Warsaw (this Friday), and celebrate their just-released third album, "The Adventures of Ghosthorse and Stillborn." Yet, even now, Casady could hardly blame anyone for going slack-jawed upon first encountering her sonic netherworld.

CocoRosie - a duo comprising Bianca and her sister, Sierra - plays music that seems like it was made by two spindly dolls trapped in a snowglobe. Sounds crinkle, beats creep, and voices crack and sputter. At times, Bianca sounds like Billie Holiday - had she been dug up and stuck in a David Lynch movie. At other times, she sounds like a creaking door in a horror flick, or a horse neighing. Sister Sierra provides an unlikely contrast, bellowing in a classically trained operatic soprano.

For musical accompaniment, CocoRosie will seemingly use anything: slamming drawers, the sound of wind, a cat's meow. Occasionally, you'll hear a hip-hop beat, but the pair have a greater fetish for children's instruments - shrunken drums, keyboards or marimbas that, together, give their music the mythic pull of infantile desire.

Live, CocoRosie sometimes uses back projections featuring their own artwork, thereby obscuring themselves in the dark. "We don't put a huge emphasis on us as people," Casady explains. "We let the sound and projections tell the story, like you were reading a book."

It's not the kind of approach that would seem to fit into today's pop scene. Yet, in the last few years, CocoRosie has found itself comfortably ensconced in a growing - if ill-defined - movement. Along with Devendra Banhart, Joanna Newsom, Antony and Vashti Bunyan, CocoRosie have been anointed as part of a tribe dubbed either the "New Weird America" or "freak folk," admittedly inadequate terms considering none of these artists sounds remotely alike.

"A lot of the people that get cast in this category I just see as full artists who happen to use music to speak to the world," Casady says.

Accordingly, Bianca and her sister identify more with art in general - from painting to poetry - than to the world of records and concerts, specifically. They grew up that way, with an art teacher for a mother (Mom divorced their dad when the singers were toddlers). Bianca, 25, and Sierra, 27, are half-Cherokee and were given the nicknames by their mother: Coco and Rosie, respectively. Growing up, the sisters and their mom moved all around the country. "We were in a lot of contrasting environments: cities and suburbs, trailers, warehouses and deserts," says Casady. "There were nonresidential places sometimes. We used horse troughs for baths."

Casady credits her nomadic upbringing for her creative openness. But it left her with a feeling that she has no home. The girls became estranged as teens. They went to different schools and wound up living separately, on their own. By 2000, Bianca moved to Brooklyn and Sierra to Paris, where she studied opera. But in 2003, the younger sister decided to travel the world and one day showed up at Sierra's place, unannounced. The siblings hadn't seen each other in 10 years but found a deeper creative connection than they ever could have imagined.

They began to explore the acoustics of Sierra's apartment and then the world around them. They started recording their strange pieces in Sierra's bathroom, local tunnels, anywhere where sound and silence inspired them. Casady says they didn't have any career goals in mind at the time, though they did record a CD for friends, "La Maison de Mon Reve." When the guys in the celebrated band TV on the Radio heard it, they talked it up to the folks at the respected Touch and Go Records. The company wound up releasing the disc in 2004.

The CD's whole approach to music - tactile, spooky, internalized and free - intrigued avant listeners and musicians as well. Some of the duo's earlier work took inspiration from French author Jean Genet. The new album draws more from the Scottish children's book character Wee Willie Winkie, a creature who lives in his pajamas. "We recorded the album at night on a farm so we rarely changed out of our nighttime clothes," Casady says. "It created this bizarre reality, a presexual, genderless childlike state."

The Casady sisters bring nuance to that state, mixing innocence with menace. In the process, they have created a credible, separate world.

Now they're working to bring as many others into that world as possible. Bianca has started her own indie label, Voodoo Eros, and opened an art gallery and performance space at 123 Ludlow St. In all these projects, the woman who never felt she had a solid base growing up says she's "trying to build a home - not just for me, but for other artists, too. It's somewhere we can all take refuge."

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Sister act: Bianca and Sierra Casady of CocoRosie. They like to mix innocence with menace.