

**KEVIN BLECHDOM  
MISS AMP  
2000 WORDS**

I don't much like being called mad. I'm funny like that. I don't like being accused of being a psycho bitch from hell; being compared by a boy I hardly know to a nutter who flung pots at his head. I don't much like asking what seems to be a pretty innocuous question and getting The Look instead: a Look I might expect if I had, I don't know, ripped open the buttons of my summer frock, hoiked my tits out of their ribbon-trimmed aqua balconette brassiere, and started rubbing handfuls of raw meat into my exposed areolae while wailing 'Are you fucking with me? OR ARE YOU FUCKING WITH ME?' at the top of my lungs. I guess I'm just unusual. I particularly don't like someone comparing arguing with me to the experience of listening to Kevin Blechdom's new album, 'Eat My Heart Out'. I mean: *have you heard it?*

Kevin Blechdom doesn't mind being called mad, because, for the purposes of that album, she was. I mean, not mental asylum straight-jackets thinking everybody's taping you through radios in your fillings kind of mad - the other kind. The whimpering sobbing caught-on-a-loop not-eating shattering lying-on-pavements utterly broken kind of crazy you only get after the Big Relationship Break-Up. Everyone gets that at least once. Even boys.

Eat My Heart Out is an electronical masterpiece which mixes homegrown laptop ditties with country songs, pirate shanties, electro-skronk anthems, max/msp synthesis exercises and heartfelt achy-breaky ballads: yeah, mad alright, and that's just the *music*: we haven't even got to the lyrics yet. It's brilliant-mad; funny, cute, ironic, menacing: danceable-mad. It speeds up. It slows down. It loops a single voice into an army of voices all attempting to out-do each other to meet the high notes; and every song's got at least three different inter-related sections, if not more. There are songs written and recorded on nitrous oxide, songs where the artist didn't even know what she'd said till she played the recording back, where you can hear her gasping and whimpering as she sucks the laughing gas out of the balloon and into her lungs. ROCK. And...mad.

As for the album's subject matter... Eat My Heart Out is a twisted kind of one-woman off-off-Broadway music hall show about the break-up of a long-distance relationship (\*whispers\* can I spread the rumour that said relationship was between Kevin B and Kid 606?). We're talking raw emotional states, clinical depression, near-hysteria: you know: *feelings*. Ugh. Feelings and all that they entail, from the over-saturated metaphors ('Youuuu are my torrrrttuuuure / and llllll am your chhaaaaammber / get OUT of me' she squeals, operatically) and hideous moments of clarity ('I don't wanna get over you / but I'm so scared that I might have to / in order for me to get on with me / I can't wait around indefinitely'), to the nauseatingly repetitive loops of the futile crush ('I want out of this situation I can't stop thinking about... are you fucking with me? Or are you

fucking with me?', etc ad infinitum). Phew! And yet, even though it's dealing with serious, horrible shit, the album's also funny - piss-takey and irreverent, sticky with irony and self-mockery and awareness of cliché, like the mortifying moment you realise you've been reading your sister's copy of 'He's Just Not That Into You' and actually *underlining things*.

But, you know, the creative female has been accused of being mad so fucking often - a hysterical harpy: disturbed, hormonal, her own muse before she is an artist - think Sylvia Plath, think Tracy Emin, think Anne Sexton - that it's tempting to want to reconfigure this album's outpouring in a post-modern, death of the author kind of way. No of course Kevin Blechdom's not mad, dear - she's just *playing* with the notion of the female confessional mode, transforming her emotion into art through her *quite considerable* technical mastery. Why, it's a *mediated and deliberate self-reconstruction*: not mere emotional exhibitionism, but a *counter-aesthetic designed to reclaim female subjectivity* - right, Kevin?

Er, nope. 'Oh, I definitely was going crazy while I was making the record', says Kevin (real name Kristin Erikson, a matter we shall go into in more detail later), in a breezy, matter-of-fact manner. 'I was pretty depressed most of the time. But I wasn't hiding the depression. I was like, I'm gonna use it, because I'm feeling that way, so fuck it.'

Ok. So you're cool with the notion of entering the pantheon of dysfunctional female artists like Tracy Emin or Sylvia Plath? Are you down with 'Kevin Blechdom' being a name that can be used to critique female behaviour?

'What do you mean?'

Well, when I was in Berlin I had a fight with this boy I was seeing, and he said that arguing with me felt like listening to your album.

\*Kevy B laughs really hard for about half an hour.\*

"Well...I don't like the crazy woman stereotype so much, or a comparison to me being used as an insult, but awkward situations *can* drive women crazy, so what you gonna do? I used to be even more crazy, because I didn't know what to do with the energy, whereas this time I put it into the record. This is cheesy, but I had a dream where a witch came to me. I was so emotionally confused at the time that I didn't know what was happening. I was travelling a lot, and felt really disjointed and fucked up. And the witch in the dream said to me 'If you want to know what's going on, write a song every day, and then you'll figure it out.' And I did!"

Ok. Witch. One of three classic archetypes of woman - virgin, mother, crone. The village wise woman, she lives alone, slightly outside of the society. She is the

bearer of knowledge and medicine, knows which herbs will induce a miscarriage, and is therefore friend to the female - and the enemy of man. What the *<l>fuck?</l>* Dreams, female archetypes, the confessional mode - is this shit for *<l>real?</l>* I mean, since when did digital, computer music - the traditional domain of the navy-blue hoody wearing boy, the traditional speccy IDM geek - ever - EVER - involve talk of such things?

Don't stop reading, losers. Kevin Blechdom is not some kind of hippy. Kevin Blechdom is cooler than you'll ever be. Born in 1978, she attended the prestigious Mills music college in San Francisco, where she learned all about computer music, generating tracks with software she programmed in Max / MSP. She met ex-collaborator Bevin Kelley while both playing at a Halloween party in 1998: they recorded their first record that weekend and started making music together as 'Blectum from Blechdom', which they released on the prestigious Tigerbeat 6 label. After five years and several releases on Tigerbeat 6 the duo split and Kevin decamped to Berlin where her first full-length album, Bitches without Britches, came out on Chicks on Speed records in 2003.

And Blechdom wasn't always such a heart-in-hand, female-confessional-mode kind of lady. When Blectum from Blechdom first started out, the duo avoided involvement with gender issues by simply pretending to be men.

"Back then, I wanted people to listen to the music without thinking about gender at all. At the time, when I was a bit younger, I thought the best compliment I could receive as a female artist was for someone to listen to my electronic music and think that a man made it. If I read a review containing the phrase 'Blectum from Blechdom are two guys from San Francisco' I would be like, 'Thank you!!!!' It's kind of sad really. But it was a reality."

Right now Kevy B couldn't be outing herself as female much more if she tried. The aforementioned cover, for example, features Kevin clutching a handful of animal guts to her exposed and freckly tits. It's both a homage to and a piss-take of 60s and 70s feminist performance art, such as the work of Carolee Schneemann, who organised a show in 1964 called 'Meat Joy', in which the artist and a host of nude participants frenziedly smeared each other with dead fish, chicken parts and raw sausages.

"I love playing with those cliches of feminist art from the past! Like, OK, I'm a performance artist now! And I'm gonna take my shirt off and rub myself with guts! It's like the stupidest thing a female artist could possibly do. But on some levels I'm also serious, like: 'Ok, let's bring it on, all this sex shit. All these rap musicians are showing their tits and asses and that and I say I'm not gonna do that and then I'm like... wait!!! I can do that!!! I don't even give a shit! I don't have the same physical beauty standard but I'm going to fucking do it anyway!' You'd hear all these rumours about why one record sold better than another - 'oh she showed her tits, oh she showed her ass' - and I'm like, ok fine if that's how it

works I'm gonna play the same game! It's like - hey, media! You want tits? You GOT THEM!"

Only, not. The cover artwork, showing a topless Kevin clutching some raw meat, directly subverts the conventions of the female nude, (passively accepting the gaze, coyly displaying her parts, yada yada ad infinitum), to such an extent that the record company decided to conceal the image beneath a more innocuous cartoon cover in order to avoid censorship in Japan, the UK and the US.

"It's ridiculous. You give them tits but then they get mad when they're not plastic tits! Then it's suddenly *illegal!* I mean, I'm just standing there casually. I'm not sticking my tits out. My shoulders aren't back. They're just like another part of my body, like my elbow or something. And that's seen as more offensive than someone who's thrusting their tits forward in this really sexual way! It's like, what is going ON with this world????"

Speaking at a conference at the University of Virginia back in 2000, Gloria Steinem pointed out that women tend to be more conservative in their early years, and become 'radicalized' once they enter the workplace and encounter discrimination, or when they become mothers and find themselves working two jobs with little help. Feminists are made, not born. Blechdom's shift in perspective - from literally pretending to be male to appearing on her album sleeve with her floppy, freckly tits out and yelling about love, heartbreak and disappointment, would seem to bear this out.

"It would be great to feel that you didn't have to talk about feminism, and a lot of people I know say that you should only talk about the music, and not about gender politics. But I'm like, fuck that! Gender politics is FUCKED UP! Music is like a boys' club - look at how many female artists are released on Warp. Across their whole roster maybe 5% of their artists are girls. It's like the most sexist fucking boys club ever and I'm just really tired of it. It's just boring. I want to see some girls rock the mic. Let them talk their minds about their side of the relationship! BRING IT ON, MOTHERFUCKERS!"

You know what? I don't think I mind being compared to Kevin Blechdom any more. This woman's just made the most ferocious, impassioned, visceral electronic album the decade's seen so far, exploring stereotypes of what it means to be fucked-up, heart-broken, artistic - then wrapping it all up in a layer of piss-take, cleverness and irony and genius glitched-up beats (just so we don't get too fucking serious, like). She's putting a human - no - a *female* face on the esoteric landscape of digital music - and it's laughing right at us. Arguing with me's like listening to a Blechdom album? I'll take that shit as a compliment.

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