

**UNION WIRELESS
SATURN ASCENSION
EXPERIMENTS**

Elefant (9 tks/45 mins)
HOW far gone do you like your so-called "post-rock"? Maybe on the cusp of the conventional, maybe from another planet (just to annoy mum), or maybe anything goes just as long as it doesn't leave a heavy air of contrivance. The part-English, part-Spanish Union Wireless belong in the first category.

Now it's true that in the space of their debut record's blissfully short opening brace "Saturn Ascension" and "Come And Tell Me", Union Wireless recall Suicide, Neu, The Clean and early Joy Division; guitar and drums and Moogs all in a dark land of repetition. But melody is prevalent, whether by way of Ben Morris' gruff, near-monotone voice (Greg Sage meets Robert Lloyd), an infectious semi-riff or a stray flute, and ideas are

allowed to run their course. "Saturn Ascension Experiments" is an inexhaustible treasure trove; the net(ted) result of a year of honing these open-ended pieces, followed by a brief, intense studio session nailing them. Single-minded groovers, just a little bit jazz, and one streaming, relieving, closing guitar solo ("Ten Miles Of Bad Road") to their name. Give 'em an inch.
JAMES ROBERT

RADIO DAYS

UNION WIRELESS move from garage to jungle via all points in between



A wireless union? What will they think of next?

IT'S a good feeling, exciting, tracing where Union Wireless are coming from and going to. Run a finger from Sixties garage and the inquisitive fall-out of Seventies punk, sidling up to free jazz and hinting at jungle and hip hop. This south London foursome got bored with playing the heavy riff game and retreated into an exploratory rehearsal routine. As guitarist Gonzalo explains, "It's a long drawn-out approach, changing songs every day. We write regularly from a core idea, expand on it in the studio, and then strip it down again for playing live." Gonzalo and cohorts Ben (vocals, guitar and Moog), Russell (bass) and Andy

(drums) have worked under the Union Wireless guise for a year now. "The name suggests Fifties technology, big American corporations. I think it ties in with the music's pseudo-technological feel." Union Wireless' live forays have been infrequent. "We don't have any commercial pressure on us, our record company is in Spain, and we don't have them saying, 'You've got to play more.'" Sounds ideal.
JAMES ROBERT

'Saturn Ascension Experiments' is out now on **Elefant**. Union Wireless play London's Dublin Castle on June 13



15 June 1996

UNION WIRELESS
Saturn Ascension Experiments
(Elefant/LP/CD)

THE TITLE alludes to a brew too many dahn the local Krautrock emporium. But while legions of undernourished youth fight their way inside this suddenly voguish establishment, London's Union Wireless have already legged it back into the real world, clutching the patents for their revolutionary new take on The Wibble.

We're looking at a sort of drone-folk-jazz hybrid that's saved from suffocation in its own navel fluff by a commendably unself-conscious pop sensibility. Specifically, it

seems Union Wireless are rather taken by early New Order. Extremely specifically, they reckon the first NO album, 'Movement', would be improved by being re-recorded by them, substituting the primitive electronica with real primitive stuff like clarinets, flutes and a lead vocalist who sounds like The Laird Of Loopy, Ian Anderson out of Jethro Tull.

Most preposterously of all, it works. After the opening 'Saturn Ascension' misleadingly beckons us towards a robot attempting to be Spacemen 3 attempting to be the Velvets, 'Come And Tell Me' sets what prove to be the predominant themes: deft, understated riff patterns and the earnest angst-mongering of Ben Morris.

The high point comes with an epic dirt trip

called 'New Time Styling', essentially Suicide with acoustic bass and woodwind and a choir chanting, "You'll do it again". In this context, their mutation on the closing 'Ten Miles Of Bad Road' into peerless antipodean garage dwellers The Clean, makes perfect sense.

Although lyrically callow - "Come and tell me that I ever made a difference to you", again, very early New Order - the sheer ingenuous warmth of the music averts the spectre of farce. Indeed, the acoustic interlude 'Breathing, Space' is a cherubic delight, as Morris discovers sunnyside-up isn't such a bad place to be.

Pop noodle, ultimately. (7)

Keith Cameron

15 June 1996

July 13, 1996

RADIO AHEAD

Ex- hardcore punks turned noodlers
Union Wireless (l to r): Russell, Gonzalo,
Andy and Ben



ANDY WILLISHER

JUST DON'T expect any snappy, three-minute pop songs. In fact, don't expect much in the way of 'songs' at all, because UNION WIRELESS – like their kindred spirits from 1970s Germany – aren't afraid to ditch structures, and get 'droney'. Although, don't call them Krautrockers either, because – y'know – they "feel uncomfortable being specifically tied down to any one thing".

Yikes! Well, the story begins several years ago, when they used to sit around together listening to hardcore punk, doubtless idolising The Dead Kennedys' Jello Biafra and generally being a bit 'aggro'. After attending various universities in the north of England, the four of them (respectively Gonzalo Vina – guitar/Moog, Ben Morris – vocals/guitar, Andy Pyne – drums, and Russell McAlpine – bass) relocated to London in 1994 and spent a whole year simply planning how they wanted their band to sound.

Deciding that being 'raucous' was out, the nagging influence of Can (the '70s German rockers *par excellence*, natch) began to take over their lives and they ended up as ex-hardcore punks in a band best described as 'noodly'. What price principles?

"I must admit," explains Ben, "when I was 18, I never thought I'd ever listen to a jazz record, but now look. Still, all the people in Tortoise used to be in hardcore bands in the '80s – John McEntire was definitely in Gastr Del Sol – so I think it's alright."

Even if they aren't hellbent on smashing the system with three-minute, anti-government rants, Union Wireless are still awkward cusses, keen to buck usual music business trends. Their debut release – 'Saturn Ascension Experiments' – is an album, undiluted by commercial concerns. Being signed to a Spanish label, Elefant, has helped.

"We work to our specifications rather than theirs," reveals Gonzalo, "and there's certainly no pressure to do a 1,000-date tour of small towns in northern Britain."

A bonus, definitely – but aren't tours a time for hilarious on-the-road antics?

"Shows are only useful because they make you more critical of what you do," claims Ben. "Anyway, we've all got jobs, so if the record doesn't sell we can still pay the rent. And that freedom encourages us to take risks."

Specifically, that means switching unexpectedly from the motorik Joy Division of 'Come And Tell Me' to the spacemen-pop of 'I'm Not Used To It' – all on one handy album. They're pretty sure, though, that you're not going to be too interested in that.

"I just can't see us ever being that massive," admits Gonzalo. Well, he might just be surprised by the number of people who tune in.

James Oldham

● 'Saturn Ascension Experiments' is out now on Elefant Records. Their sporadic live shows include London Dublin Castle on June 13.

UNION WIRELESS THE HOPE AND ANCHOR, LONDON

THERE'S an engaging fluidity, an odd grooviness to Union Wireless that places them somewhere around that loose Tortoise/Labradford/Stereolab axis.

Unusually, the band are at their most absorbing when they dispense with vocals and build upon passages of repetitive riffs, lucid and lulling bass and sparse pulses of electric piano. The ebbing and flowing guitar is strung out, slowly mutating in the slipstream of measured, (largely) metronomic percussion. And the lyrics, sung so deadpan that they seem to hold no emotional resonance, are merely codas to latch onto, a device to draw you into the music. Mostly, the words are repeated lyrical motifs.

For a final burst of brilliance – though it almost seems inappropriate to talk about individual tracks, since there's a momentum, a *wholeness* to Union Wireless – the pianet keys are held down with tape, thus enveloping the song in a gorgeous, compelling drone.

These sounds seem physically rather than emotionally affecting; Union Wireless might become even more engrossing if they were to take on board the idea of remixology, moving even further away from the fixed templates and rigid structures of "the song" and becoming even more functional.

DAVID HEMINGWAY

Union Wireless Saturn

Ascension Experiments ELEFANT RECORDS ER 1015 CD **Windsor For**

The Derby Calm Hades Front

TRANCE SYNDICATE TR46 CD/LP UW go for the full locked bass groove, space-rock approach, but with an underlying warmth — partly due to the use of clarinet, flute and electric piano, contrasting with the twisting basslines and repetitive drumming. At times it's more space-folk than space-rock, particularly when Ben Morris's clear voice is added to the equation. They reach a quiet intensity without recourse to minimalist overkill, particularly on "Flame Out" and "Ten Miles Of Bad Road". Windsor For The Derby take a similar joy in repetition but their sound is more distant and measured, building up layers from ambient machine noise to repeated guitar/percussion patterns. *Calm Hades Front*, produced by Adam Wilzie from Stars Of The Lid, is a more conventional variation on the Lid's sound. □

Stereolab & Nurse With Wound "Simple Headphone Mind"/"Trippin' With The Birds"

DUOPHONIC DS 45CD-11 12"

Union Wireless Mid-Tonal Tracking EP ELEFANT RECORDS ER 308 CD

The Stereolab/Nurse With Wound collaboration coasts on the Lab's now familiar motorik groove, but it's augmented with all manner of electronic samples — treated voices, looped guitar, bubbling synths — which flit across the unchanging rhythmic template. The two sides to this release are like variations on a single theme: lengthy explorations of dreamlike pulses frequently shattered by jarring electronic interference.

Union Wireless explore similar rhythmic themes but with a warmer, more 'organic' sound. There's a pervasive sense of restraint across these four tracks; the songs' carefully built-up layers and inherent dynamism make them quietly compelling, particularly "Now Time Re-Styling", which appeared in a very different version on last year's underrated debut album.

UNION WIRELESS
SOME MORNING (*Elefant*)

More low-key, fundamentally instrumental music of note, this time from the London-based, Spanish-signed Union Wireless. The group have been quiet (even for them) for some time, but people with no close friends and large record collections should note that an album lurks behind the next corner. 'Some Morning', meanwhile, features what sounds like a muted banjo twangling affectingly through UW's charmed post-rock landscape, dusty with clarinet and viola. The strings are sad, the twangle is happy. Then suddenly, a voice announces with equanimity, "I think I've found my place in hell", and the whole thing meanders gently to a conclusion. And it's beautiful, in a less-is-more kind of way.

UNION WIRELESS
ALL HER LIFE

(ELEFANT RECORDINGS)

OUT NOW ★★★★★☆

THE nights get longer. You feel more like spreading out at home with a bottle of wine than heading out on the streets. You look for something that will get right inside your skull and spread some potent autumnal dreams across your creamy-grey frontal lobes.

Union Wireless are what you're looking for. Ben, Gonzalo, Steve and, well, about a million other people, make the sort of music that staring out the window was invented for. Skronky jazz gear ("The Best Time Of The Day"), rich, cinematic dub themes ("Smoke And Deception") and the pure phase-electric, mainline-drone fantasies of the title track.

Think visionaries like Talk Talk and Nick Drake and you're getting

close. With warm, swarming violas and cellos, lightly brushed drums, and, way off in the distance, tortured guitar squeaks and you're naturally

thinking, "Piss off, Fitzpatrick, this sounds shit", but you'd be wrong and doing yourself a walloping disservice.

If you've ever been moved by Tom Waits or Spiritualized, ever desired to experience more than the low-level hum of indie mediocrity you could do far worse than start here. All round to mine then, my treat.

A BIT LIKE? Opening up the space between your ears, man

ROB FITZPATRICK

