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AND ONES TO WATCH 2012

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*Beth Jeans Houghton And The Hooves Of Destiny will steal your hearts.
Given the chance, they'll come back for the rest of you.*

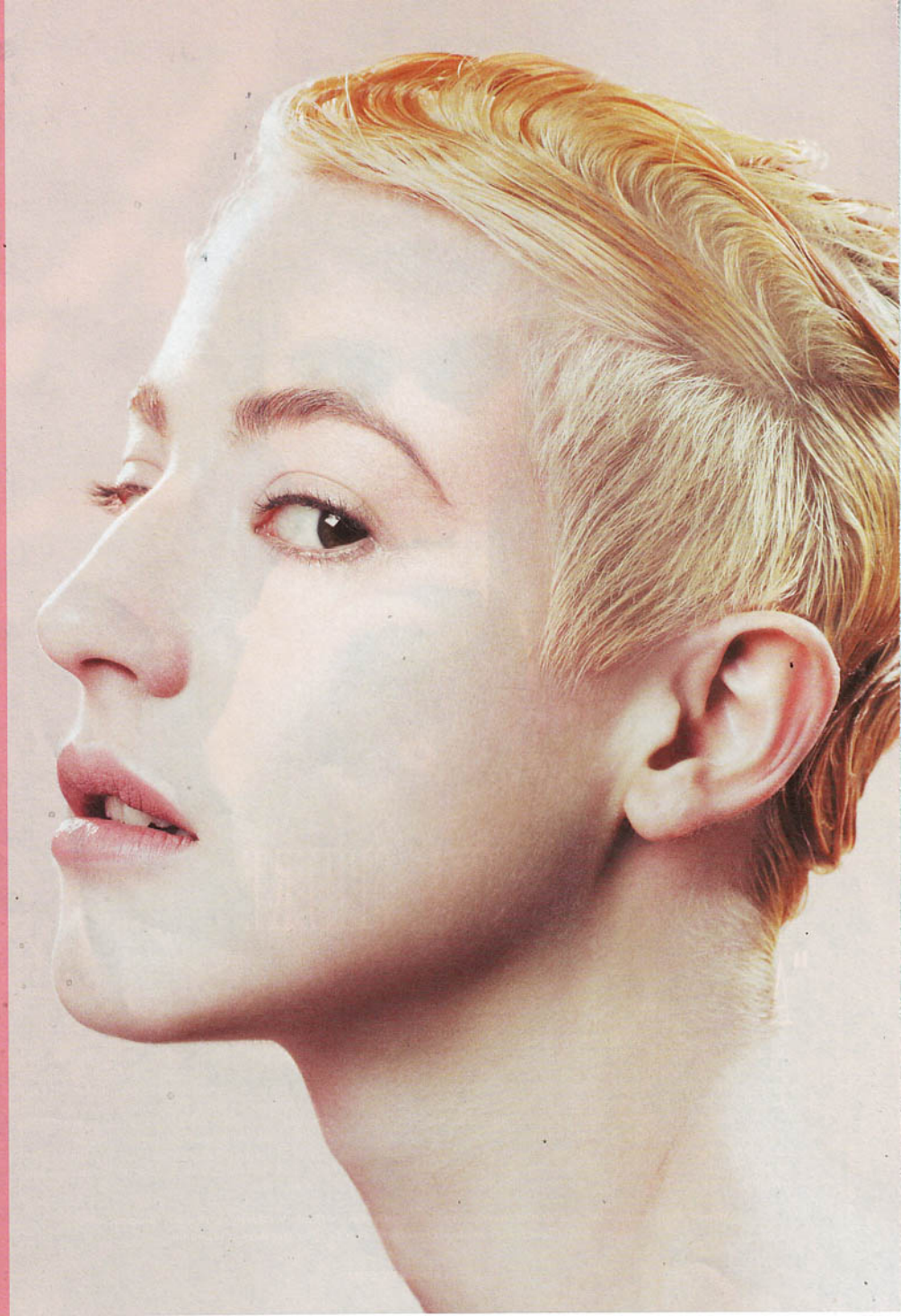
BETH JEANS HOUGHTON IS TALKING about her obsession with crazed Sixties murderer Charles Manson. "I don't love him," she clarifies. "I don't agree with what he did; I'm just intrigued." Well, that's alright then. So, what is about the violent 'Family' sect leader that so intrigues her? "I'm intrigued in the sense of all leaders who did bad things, like Hitler - how the hell did he brainwash everyone? That's fascinating." Hitler now? Really?

Miss Houghton may sound like she's flirting with danger, but the pervading subject of influence is one she's becoming more accustomed to. Topping this issue's chart of new talents is just the first step in what will be a memorable year for the Geordie lass - you're going to be hearing a lot more from her in the coming months. But not for doing bad things!

Clash first introduced you to the charms of Beth and her accompanying Hooves Of Destiny back in 2009 when she was nineteen, and batting off any suggested associations with the then-exploding folk scene. The Hooves were newly formed, and a slew of support slots and festival appearances were sharpening their sound and refining the songs that would eventually become their debut album, which is finally released this month on Mute Records. That time in between was well invested - not only are the band older,

more experienced and tighter, they have fortunately escaped that often fatal overdose of attention that can befall breaking bands who catch a glimmer of scrutiny from the media. "I think that good and bad things have happened since then," Beth reflects. "I think we're all very happy with where we are now, so even the bad stuff is fine. I'm happy now, which is all that matters."

And happy she should be. Following two gorgeous EPs ('EP' in 2008 and 'Hot Toast Vol.1' a year after), their debut album, 'Yours Truly, Cellophane Nose' has been filling the Clash office with heavenly hues for weeks now. Houghton's angelic voice is draped in Spector echo, while the Hooves build a kaleidoscopic wall of psychedelic-folk, all marching drums, plucky banjos, delicate bells and sweet violins. You'll have heard the enchanting 'Lilliput' all over the radio - Beth's haunting and honeyed tones reverberating out the speakers like molten gold - and the album lives up to that single's promise, tenfold. Ahead of its release, the group are in London for a warm-up date (ironic, considering the temperatures outside). The day is spent with Beth in a freezing studio in Hackney - she has her face painted blue, wiped, and then coloured a more natural shade, before the keen Vogue reader immerses herself completely in an hour of stylish shoots. That evening, Clash sits backstage in an East





London venue to speak formally with the band. The boys decide to draw straws to see who'll join Beth - but, due to the lack of straws, they use carrot sticks instead. Drummer Dav Shiel pulls the shortest stick; the others (bassist Rory Gibson, guitarist and trumpeter Ed Blaze, and violinist Findlay Macaskill) make a sharp exit. As we begin by asking how relieved they are that 'Yours Truly...' is finally arriving, Beth explains she's already thinking about the bigger picture: "It's not so much like I'm not focusing generally on this album's release, but just the start of our career as a band as far as it goes, like ten albums down the line. It's the beginning of all of that happening, and the future in general. It will be nice when it's out, but it's just the first step really."

To reach ten albums, their first is going to have to succeed, which, considering that January is becoming more and more competitive for debut records as they all vie for your cash, could mean

hard work for the Hooves. "I don't think that we do stuff to get people's attention," Beth says, considering their options, "we just do it because we enjoy playing together, and if people come, that's great. We're not really after money and fame, we're just after longevity of career and playing the music that we make."

"I've honestly never thought about that," Dav admits, "about who might be releasing an album at the same time, and who might buy their album instead of our album."

"It's completely uncontrollable," Beth asserts. "The thing is as well, it's very likely - and I'm fine with this - that a major label will back an artist who is not that creatively independent, and they will become huge because they have money pumped into them and the radio stations are telling the public to like them. But it doesn't bother me that we won't get that audience, because that's not the kind of people that will probably listen to us anyway."

So, Clash asks, how are they prepared for ensuring the longevity of the group? "Well, I think we've got the whole friendship bit down," Beth insists, the sibling-like chemistry and closeness with Dav during our interview confirming her claims. "I think the most

important thing is that there isn't ego and stuff in the band, so there's no fear of us falling out."

"None of us have a coke habit," Dav handily points out.

"Yet!" Beth laughs. "But friendship is the main thing, and for that reason we can always carry on making music. The label are brilliant and they support us artistically and let us do what we want to do and Mute has never dropped anyone yet. I think if you do things to please people, or if you change who you are or what you do to fit some kind of mould, then you become boring, and I would not be

happy if I was doing that. So we will just be ourselves and trust in that."

This touching promise of teamwork is no mere lip-service on behalf of the front woman. Having started off as a solo singer, performing on the "toilet circuit" of Newcastle, with only a guitar and loop pedal to keep her company, Beth knew she could never achieve her

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musical vision on her own. "The music that I was making as a solo artist, I wasn't happy with," the blonde singer confesses, pulling her hoodie tighter in an effort to keep warm in the dank dressing room. "I didn't think that it was bad, but it really wasn't the sound that I wanted and it wasn't making me happy. It always pissed me off if people liked it, because I knew it wasn't right in my head - and then I met the band." Dav and Rory, as the drummer explains, were in a group together, and left to play with Beth after she guested on some of the rehearsals. The singer later met Fin at a party, while she has known Ed for a decade. "He knew me before I had dreadlocks and when I had greasy hair and braces," she laughs. Ed shares a house with Beth, and Dav lives across the road. Their family unit is admirable and heartening, and, in the case of their music's twisting melodies and changeable rhythms, completely validated.

She appears so demure, and sounds so virtuous, but behind that bewitching voice lies a caustic side to Beth, an astute disposition that finds its way into her more scathing lyrics. It's a dichotomy she thrives on - she once wrote a song called 'Super Cunt' ("It was about a person who shall not be named"). "I'm always a little bit shocked

when people think that I'm sweet and gentle, because I'm not," Beth pleads. "I spend so much time with these guys that I'm very blokey."

"Yeah, she talks about poo a lot," Dav teases.

Her bravado, alongside the utilitarian constitution of the group, reinforces the Hooves as a single component, as opposed to being presented as Beth Jeans Houghton, the solo artist, and her backing band, thus setting her up for direct comparison to contemporaries like Laura Marling and Florence Welch. She looks horrified at the thought of being lumped in with the girls. "I would prefer that we were seen as a boy band - not a boy band in the AI sense," she points out, referencing the vacuous late-'90s teenage girl's limp wet dream. "I feel like I'm in a band of guys, which I am, but I don't feel so feminine myself. I'd rather people didn't judge us on what genitals we have, or where we come from, or whatever. They should just judge us on the music."

"Everything has to be categorized though," Dan reasons.

"Yeah, it does, but they seem to be the categories that matter least," Beth responds.

"Whether you have a penis or not?" he asks.

"Yeah," she answers. "Not, in my case. Just in case you were wondering."

With the contents of Beth's pants assured, we return to predicting what the year ahead will hold for the Hooves. Have they made any New Year's resolutions? Dav wants to stop smoking, but, somewhat more immediately crucial to the band's future, Beth has set her mind on moving to America in 2012. How would that affect the band? "They'd come," Beth says, adding, "all over each other," in a fit of giggles. "No," she starts, this time more serious, "they'd come along, and we would all live in a big house like The Brady Bunch."

Beth has formed a love affair with Los Angeles. Her boyfriend lives there, and her first visit proved pivotal. "For my whole life I think I was traveling and not feeling settled in one place," she declares. "I felt like I was a nomad, and then I realised that actually my home was in California. I got there, and it was the weirdest feeling that I've ever had, and I wasn't expecting it. As soon as I got off the plane, I just felt so safe. Even though it was the first time I'd traveled on my own and I was twenty-years-old and we're in like the fifth largest city in the world."

Following her heart could prove the making of Beth - it's worked so far. If the band are as close and dedicated as they swear they are, taking such a leap of faith and moving to another continent will demonstrate their commitment to each other and belief in the music. When you're strangers in a strange land, you have to rely on each other to be your support, your muse, and your inspiration. Beth is determined to keep the group together, and picks up on her Brady Bunch intentions: "I always wanted to live on a commune. I was always a bit obsessed with cults and stuff, and the idea of loads of people living together in one space. And cooking together, and cleaning up together, and then having little kids around and stuff. But not in a weird way. I think that we should build our own commune in Los Angeles - grow some beards and read some religious books, kill someone..."

Oh no, we're back to Charles Manson territory. This girl is obsessed. Time to split before we get dragged along. Sinister schemes aside, you won't find a better or more beautiful proposition than Beth Jeans Houghton And The Hooves Of Destiny. If the music doesn't slay you, they just might.

"YOURS TRULY, CELLOPHANE NOSE"
IS RELEASED JANUARY 24TH ON MUTE RECORDS.



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