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Music: King Pop – An Interview with Paul Collins

February 6, 2013 Melissa Zimdars Arts & Entertainment 6 comments

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PAUL COLLINS' BEAT
w. Good Habits, The Blendours
The Mill | Feb. 10 | 8 p.m. | \$8/10

"One of the things I enjoy most about touring now is playing with up-and-coming bands." This was one of the first things Paul Collins said to me when we recently chatted about his 2013 Midwest tour. It makes sense because thirty years ago, Paul Collins was in two up-and-coming power pop bands, [The Nerves](#) and [The Beat](#), who shared stages with some of the biggest groups in music during that time, including [The Clash](#), [Talking Heads](#) and [Eddie Money](#). Now, on this eleven-city tour, Paul Collins—as part of Paul Collins Beat—will be playing with eighteen different up-and-coming bands, including Iowa City's [The Blendours](#) and [Good Habits](#) on February 10 at [The Mill](#). Given his past, I couldn't help but pry into his early touring experiences right off the bat.

Little Village: You've toured with bands like The Ramones, The Jam, The Police ... Do you have a favorite band that you've toured with?

Paul Collins: Actually, no. I'm not one of those kind of guys ... Just listening to you say that, it's like 'Yea, that's true! I have and that's pretty cool!' They're all great memories, but to be able to say that I played with the original formation of The Ramones ... I mean, the first show we did with them was in Cincinnati at this place called Bogart's, and I was like, 'Oh my God, is this really happening?'

*

Playing at random venues still characterizes Paul Collins' touring style. He books most shows by himself or with help from a network of power pop fans, which he calls "The Beat Army." We talked a lot about the differences in his expectations and experiences from when he started out playing with The Nerves and signing with major labels, to becoming known as a DIY artist in Paul Collins Beat.

PC: When I started out, with rock 'n roll everything was like big. We thought, 'We're going to do this gig, there's going to be a record company, we're going to get signed, we're going to make millions of dollars and everyone is going to get down on their hands and knees and say how much they love us.' But believe me, I've been there, done that and it's not as great as it sounds. You get so immersed in doing it for the business that you forget why you're doing it. The day that I stopped doing it for the business ... and stopped caring about whether I'd have a top-ten hit and sell a million records, I think my whole career took a big step forward.

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6:00 PM
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- Southern Valentine with New Pi's Matt**
6:00 PM
New Pioneer Food Co-op Coralville
- PYO Knit & Wine**
6:00 PM
Home Ec. Workshop
- Country Dancing**
6:30 PM
Wildwood Smokehouse & Saloon

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Adding to the 17 records Paul Collins released in one or another of his bands, his most recent, "King of Power Pop" (2010), has gotten a lot of critical praise. However, and despite the album title, that praise doesn't seem to have entirely gone to his head, especially when you listen to him talk about the fact that he considers himself first and foremost a fan of music, and when he discusses the current state of power pop: "[Major labels] are like huge trees that fell in the forest. They are rotting on the forest floor where now all this other crap is able to grow. We are the crap that is growing, and it's great." The crap he is referring to, of course, is power pop.

Power pop began, according to Collins, with bands like The Pop, Shoes, Pezband and (naturally) his band, The Beat, in the late '70s and early '80s. Collins continued, explaining that by the mid-'90s, the genre just couldn't compete with mainstream music the way punk and indie did, pretty much dying off as a result. I asked why that might've been the case.

PC: Power pop is this great musical genre that isn't dangerous, and I think that hurt its mass appeal. Your parents weren't going to have a heart attack if you were listening to power pop music.

*

It makes sense that it would be hard to compete with other genres of music that mark themselves as contrary to mainstream pop music when mainstream pop music and power pop share a lot of the same qualities, particularly their lyrical content, catchiness and three-minute song lengths. Despite these difficulties, power pop has had a recent resurgence, especially in the Midwest. Collins, a New Yorker, thinks there's probably something in the water here.

LV: Out of all these albums you recorded over the last thirty years, is there one that sticks out in your mind or has special meaning?

PC: You know, albums are like kids. You love them all for different reasons, but The Beat's first album (EDIT: This album was self-titled, *The Beat*, released in 1979, not *I Just Can't Stop It* — by the English Beat — as was originally published. Sorry for the error.) will always be a very special record for me. It was my first album out on my own after The Nerves, in the shadow of Jack Lee and Peter Case, and I really wanted to prove that I could do that on my own ...That's also why "King of Power Pop" was an extremely important record for me. I needed to show everyone, including myself, that twenty, thirty some odd years later I still had what it took ... You always have to go out there and prove yourself.

LV: You've also released stuff classified as alt-country, folk, Americana ... what can people expect to hear on this Midwest tour?

PC: On this tour we are going to do very, very avant-garde jazz ...

LV: Actually, Iowa City would probably be very into that ... power pop meets avant-garde jazz ...

PC: (laughs) Really, the live show is like thirty-five years of music ... It's everything from The Nerves to "The King of Power Pop" album. It all goes pretty well together. To be able to play the music I wrote when I was eighteen and not look completely ridiculous is a pretty cool thing.

*

After talking about everything from bands he's currently listening to (Twins from Des Moines and Rev Gusto out of Kansas City) to the problems with major labels (which he referred to as the massive Lady Gaga world), it really hit me that someone like Paul Collins should be a household name. I wondered if he resented putting out so many albums and playing so many shows in a genre with only pockets of commercial success. But I realized he'd already answered that question as he was responding to others: "Whatever is going down, it's not that bad because you are living the dream you had for yourself when you first started out ... If you do whatever it is you do in life with love, you're going to be alright."

Melissa Zimdars would like to thank Brian Thompson and Joe Derderian for contributing to this piece.

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About Melissa Zimdars

Melissa Zimdars is a doctoral student in Communication Studies at the University of Iowa, specializing in all things television.

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Comments

6 thoughts on "Music: King Pop – An Interview with Paul Collins"



Patrick Malboeuf February 6, 2013 at 3:57 pm - Reply

I think that the editor needs to do his homework and realize that they named The English Beat's LP "I Just Can't Stop It" as a Paul Collins' Beat LP...something that has plagued this man for 30+ years...plus the LP came out in 1979...



admin February 6, 2013 at 5:14 pm - Reply

Thanks for pointing this out, and sorry for the error.



Aaron February 6, 2013 at 4:29 pm - Reply

"I Just Can't Stop It" was the debut album by The English Beat, not Paul Collins' Beat.



admin February 6, 2013 at 5:14 pm - Reply

Sorry about that/Thanks...



bud February 6, 2013 at 5:41 pm - Reply

pah-lease!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beat_LP



Derek February 13, 2013 at 10:00 pm - Reply

Came here a bit late to say the same thing as everyone else. Poor Paul, three+ decades later and he still can't get proper credit for his own band's music.

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