

The Kaviar Collective



In some ways, the music of Kaviar presents a stark contrast to what fans of Kevin Gilbert may be used to hearing. Virtually everything about the earlier work--killer hooks, trenchant observations, subtle wordplay, brilliant playing--all of these remain right up front with Kaviar.

But,

This band had a harder edge, drastically different from most of the work previously associated with KG. Of course, just like all of that work but in a different way, it was *tight!* Where *Tuesday Night Music Club* tended toward classic singer-songwriter vibes, Kaviar had a feel to it that most hadn't heard from KG before.

So how do we get from NRG, Giraffe, Toy Matinee's studio prog feel, TMC's more folksy feel, the mixed sounds of solo album *Thud*, to the first track of *The Kaviar Sessions*, where a thrumming industrial bass underlies the sound of wrenched metal while an insistent vocal calls to us all, "Saturday, Saturday, don't stay home"? How did that leap come to be?

During the Tuesday Music Club sessions of the early 1990's, more than one project was in its inception. Between takes or tracks, some of the songwriters might be discussing politics, or talking amps, or just having a smoke. During some of these moments when things were not going to plan, drummer Brian MacLeod and Kevin Gilbert, finding themselves alone in a very costly studio, decided to pound away and record on their own terms, as an "aside" to what the larger group was working on. One of the tracks created in this way became "The Ghetto of Beautiful Things," which can be heard on the rock opera. But in many cases, tracks such as these stored ideas that had yet to find a home. Kevin and Brian would tuck ideas like these into a side project they called Foetus Grapes.

Also during this time, KG funded much of his studio, Lawnmower and Garden Supplies, by working on music for movies and TV, including for a few Glen Larson productions. It is among these musical moments on tape that we hear parts and beginnings of songs...ideas, concepts not fully realized – Moments that deliver that Kaviar feel of rawness, roughness, cynicism, wit. Into this category, we might place “The P fear” used in the movie, *Angel 4: Undercover* (1994). Or the 90-second variation of Kaviar’s “Broken,” used in *My Teacher’s Wife* (1996). Or the tongue-in-cheek track listed, as though introduced at an academic conference, as being from the spoken word and free improvisational CD *Unsung* (1997): “An Essay On Ciccone’s Contributions to Women’s Liberation” – aka “Madonna’s Fart.”

And into this category also falls the transformative Keta-Men version of TMC-era “Strong Enough,” which appeared on the compilation *Dance Across the Universe, Vol. 1* (1997). Elsewhere, Brian MacLeod has spoken of this track as “an off-shoot of Kaviar,” stating, “we had Kaviar and then we did “Strong Enough” and said, “Oh, We gotta follow that up with something! We never got that far, unfortunately.”

A careful listener could hear a thread through many of the side projects and soundtrack scores, in the way that these songs explore satire, go dark, and have a bit of fun upending expectations.

Now, to back up slightly, it should be noted that KG’s solo album *Thud* (1995) had been released on PRA Records, and a promotional band tour was arranged. November 3, 1995 was the last formal performance of the band called Thud, which at that moment included just KG and Nick D’Virgilio. When 1996 came around, Kevin, Brian, and Nick made a concerted effort to turn Kaviar into a living entity while simultaneously working on the rock opera.

According to MacLeod, the concept of Kaviar already existed, but apart from stalwart musicians who had recorded with KG during many of these projects and sides, there wasn’t really a band. Just a couple of guys with

some instruments and some publishing rights. NDV, who was present at the start, soon become busy with a promising new path: Nick had been called away to a career-altering tour--the kind of opportunity no professional musician can refuse. The spirit was there, but Kaviar as a band was a concept that had yet to coalesce.

They made sure NDV knew his spot in Kaviar would remain secure, but for the moment, it was just down to Kevin and Brian.

They wasted no time in recruiting the talents of Paul Ill (bass), Susie Davis (keyboards), and David Levita (guitars), musicians that were already creating their own grooves in LA.

And so, in the spring of 1996, it came to pass that Kaviar became a band. You can see all five eventual members credited in songs like "Making Kristy Cry" and "The Sultan of Brunei." The band did flesh out some of the already written songs. The agreement in Kaviar was that all songs would be attributed to everyone present in the room during the writing. Not terribly different from the old TMC days, but surely heartening for the participants. "You were there? Then your name is in the credits." This band was an entity, and ready.

Part of the idea of Kaviar was liberation from what the music companies wanted. It was about being professionals, but in an enjoyable way. Even in the early days, some of which took place during TMC sessions, Kaviar was about poking fun and wrestling with dark corners where people might have thought songs couldn't go. Or shouldn't go.

It has been expressed that these guys were recording music that was more cynical, more sarcastic, lyrically darker than some wanted to appear. For KG, though, Kaviar may have been the "primal scream," the advance into what MacLeod has termed KG's Punk Rock time, a phase that might seem natural after years of writing and performing perfectly wonderful pop, and "coloring within the lines."

Kevin adopted the idea of wearing a somewhat cumbersome vintage gas mask for performing. He wanted to present Kaviar songs without it being truly, identifiably “him,” partly to keep from confusing fans, partly protecting his identity, but no doubt also keeping the listener’s focus on the music. He knew his fans would have an interesting time grappling with these new sounds, completely different from the ballads and prog songs he’d participated in before. And that’s how The Bug Man was born.

Some of the songs recorded for the album feature the “gas mask” voice. It was an idea of KG’s that he could install a microphone into the bugman mask, and perform that way, taking advantage of the intimate and sometimes disturbing ways a voice can be so concentrated. He never recorded in the mask – it was an effect he was using – mentioned here simply to highlight that intimate vocal quality. Listeners can definitely get the feel of it in the outrageous “Death Orgy 9000,” the hard-edged “Picnic,” the fanatical ravings of “Pretty.” Not to mention the historically ironic and cynical “Indian Burn,” the dank stirrings of “Making Kristy Cry,” and the sadly unfinished, and yet oh-so-perfectly-finished lyrics of “Broken.” From there the original album presents us with the inner vs. outer dialogue of “Single,” and the hilarious “Sultan of Brunei,” before the album finishes strong with Kaviar’s smoky rendition of the Iggy Pop classic, “Fall in Love with Me.”

Sadly, Kaviar would never perform live with this band formation. As it came to be in May of 1996, Kaviar was a band without its leader. But, the Bug Man would be heard! The album was presented as a 9-song CD, *The Kaviar Sessions* (2002).

Their short time together notwithstanding, Kaviar were a great damn band, and the album they recorded is shockingly good, in all of its sardonic glory. For some, perhaps a favorite line from the album will be the chorus, “Everything in my everyman life is, broken.” It’s the kind of line that sticks with the listener, at least partially for its slow, frenetic, yet rhythmical delivery. But its call is responded to with “Now you’re gonna break my heart, you must be, joking!” In Kaviar, things go from dark to jocular on

a whim, and then back and forth again. The band was having fun, having its way with us. For some, those lines speak to a powerful and unmistakable undercurrent, both dark and fun, that many will find reflected in all of the work presented by Kaviar, from concept to collective.

-- B. Neal Kirchner, 2023

The Kaviar Sessions, CD (2002)

Kaviar, LP (2023)

Kaviar, CD (2023)

The Guilty:

Kevin Gilbert – vocals, keyboards, guitar, bass

Brian MacLeod – drums, keyboards, vocals

Nick D'Virgilio – bass, drums

Paul Ill – bass, vocals

Susie Davis – keyboards, vocals

David Levita – guitar, vocals

Guilty by Association:

Bill Bottrell, Tommy Dunbar, Jennifer Gross, Ron MacLeod, Jon Rubin, Cintra Wilson

Produced, Recorded and Mixed at Lawnmower & Garden Supplies Studio, Pasadena, California by Kevin Gilbert

Associate Producer – Brian MacLeod

Reissue Producer – Wayne Perez

Executive Producer – Jon Rubin

Mastered by John Cuniberti at Digital Therapy Lab

Kaviar logo – Marcus Dell

Packaging – Hugh Brown

 KevinGilbert.com

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