

Carsick Cars are Sick of Cars & Back in Asia

THE BEIJING TRIO TALK TO YING LO ABOUT TOURING THE WORLD AND ANSWERING DUMB QUESTIONS ABOUT CHINESE POLITICS

Driving across the US and Canada for four months straight is enough to make just about anyone carsick. Even a band like the Carsick Cars. And they're nowhere near stopping. Having just finished North America, the Beijing-based indie trio are back in Asia promoting their new album *3*, starting in Hong Kong's Hidden Agenda with locally-loved HK band The Yours.

Arriving in Hong Kong only a few hours before the show the band goes straight through their warm-ups and spend the rest of their time before the show being interviewed. We head to a restaurant so they can get some food beforehand, and as we walk over the Carsick Car boys explain how they were simply sick of, well, driving. And more importantly, Zhang Shouwang explains that to his dismay, "since we started our American tour, I've had nowhere to cut my hair."

"We travelled long distances through US and Canada so we didn't have much time to stop between shows. It's better now we're back in China. I have a bit of time to hang out and walk around," says front man Zhang Shouwang, whose calm and collected aura has a way of making his responses to questions look skillful. His English is pretty good and as a result, can be found doing most of the talking in almost every interview conducted.

The lead vocalist and guitarist started the band with Li Weisi and Li Qing (from Snapline) and after the two left, recruited Ben Ben (of Boyz and Girls) and bassist He Fan to continue. Ben Ben left and Sun Heting, aka Monkey, took her place on the drums.

To say that the Carsick Cars hasn't received their share of fame would be a gross understatement. The band has toured Europe with Sonic Youth and have been on the bills of top-notch music festivals across the world— multiple SXSWs in Austin, All Tomorrow's Parties in London and the list goes on. They've been covered by all the big Western media outlets: The New York Times called the band's sound "nervy, consonant euphoria," and Rolling Stone described them as one of the best bands from China.

"So many people seem so interested in China and are always asking us about politics, which if you think about it, is actually kind of funny. You don't hear anyone asking Germans musicians about their government," says Zhang. "We're getting pretty tired of everyone asking us about the politics in China. It's like we're Chinese so we have to talk about China in our songs. I think they have some sort of idea what our life and political situation is like but there are some stereotypes of Western thinking about the Chinese."

The band has even been asked to play everything from classical Chinese instruments to traditional Mongolian music. As Zhang puts it, "We're Chinese, we don't live in wild mountains or anything. We're from

Beijing and Shanghai and other big cities, our life is not all that different."

Simply put, the band doesn't want to see their music as a polemic weapon. "I think rock and roll is international," says Zhang. "We're Chinese, things we write about and play are obviously going to be influenced by that but I don't think including traditional Chinese instruments or Beijing opera is going to make us more Chinese-sounding."

This isn't for lack of love for China, however. Underground music and alternative culture has been sprouting in different areas of China, with Beijing at the center. "Almost every musician I know has at least two side projects. They have so many different ideas and projects to play around with. I think that's why the Beijing scene is so



Fang Zhou



張守望說道：「每個人都會問我們有關中國的政治問題，其實也很疲累。就好像因為我們是中國人，我們的歌就非談論中國不可。我想他們腦海裡對我們的生活及政治處境已有一定的想法，但這都是西方人對中國人的一般看法。」

樂隊曾被要求演奏各類型樂器，由中國古典樂器到蒙古傳統樂器都有。正如張守望所說：「我們雖是中國人，不過我們並不是住在山頭原野的。我們都是來自北京和上海或其他大城市的，我們的生活跟別人是無異的。」

簡單來說，樂隊不想他們的音樂成為辯論的武器。「我想搖滾樂是非常國際性的。我們是中國人，我們所寫和所玩的音樂都深受這事實影響，但我不認為我們需要加入中國樂器或京劇，使我們的音樂聽起來更中國。」

這並不代表他們不愛中國。地下音樂和另類文化早已在中國不同地方萌芽，並以北京為中心點。「幾乎我所認識的音樂人都有兩手計劃，他們大都有很多主意和計劃。我想這就是北京在音樂方面發展得如火如荼的原因，因為每個人都製造不同的東西，且互相合作。」

何凡補充：「有時候一班來自不同樂隊的音樂人走在一起，就會即興演奏。」張守望的另一個計劃「White+」則大玩實驗性的電子音樂，猴子則剛從實驗性的噪音搖滾樂隊Chaos歸隊。何凡的樂隊Birdstriking就獲CNN追捧為中國地下青年的先驅，他的另一樂隊Deathly Cradle Death更於SXSW 2012表演。

「所有中國的大城市現正有很多的轉變，上海有著大型的派對及一些非常戲劇化的搖滾樂，北京則純粹是搖滾樂；武漢的龐克十分盛行，廣州則有一些非常好的後搖滾樂隊，還有很多雷鬼音樂的樂隊也正在日漸壯大。」張守望說，而其他隊員亦附和著。

團隊看似很高興回到中國，但幾位男孩都認為紐約是他們最愛的城市。「我們曾看過Lady Gaga的演出，」何凡說著，猴子則興奮地點著頭。張守望解釋：「她的表演場地頗小，所以我們可以近距離看到她，實在令人驚艷。」我問他們有沒有機會跟她見面，但張守望只笑著對我說：「哈，她活像一個天王巨星呢！」

長途車程

由美國駕車四個月直達加拿大，的確足以令任何人暈車。即使如Carsick Cars這樣的樂隊亦如是，但他們並沒有打算停下來的意思。剛完成了在北美洲的表演之後，這隊來自北京的地下三人樂隊已返回亞洲宣傳他們的新專輯《3》，由香港的Hidden Agenda開始，聯同本地受歡迎樂隊The Yours一同演出。

他們在表演前數小時甫抵達香港，旋即進行熱身，並將他們表演前的休息時間都用來做訪問。我們選擇在餐廳進行專訪，這樣他們就可以先吃一點東西。我們剛到達，樂隊即馬上解釋他們如何討厭駕車，更重要的是隊長張守望開始表達他的不滿：「自我們的美洲巡迴表演開始後，我便再也找不到地方理髮了。」

「我們長途跋涉由美國巡迴到加拿大，因此一直沒有時間停下來。現在返回中國，情況就比較好一點，總算是有點時間外出和閒逛。」隊長張守望說。他的冷靜和魅力令他對答如流，而且英文也不錯，因此在所有專訪中，都是主要由他來回答問題的。樂隊初期，是主音及結他手李維思和李青（本屬樂隊Snapline）組成的，在二人離隊後，樂隊邀請了斑斑（本屬Boyz and Girls）及鼓手何凡繼續。斑斑離隊後，孫鶴庭（又名猴子）便取代了她鼓手的位置。

說Carsick Cars還沒有成名實在是大錯特錯，他們已跟Sonic Youth完成了歐洲的巡迴表演，還獲邀橫掃各個世界的頂級音樂節，先後在美國奧斯汀的SXSW表演、倫敦的All Tomorrow's Parties，而且還陸續有來。他們的名氣已覆蓋西方主要傳媒——New York Times說樂隊勇敢、團結、愉快；Rolling Stone更形容樂隊是中國最好的樂隊。

「很多人對中國很感興趣，經常問我們一些關於政治的問題，想深一層，其實也確是很有趣，想想應該沒有人會問德國音樂人關於他們政府的問題吧。」

as one of the pioneers of Chinese underground youth and his other band, Deathly Cradle Death, also played at SXSW 2012.

"All the big cities in China have so much going on right now. Shanghai has a huge party scene and some very dramatic rock n' roll, whereas Beijing is just straight rock and roll. Wuhan is very punk and Guangzhou has some good post-rock bands as well as a lot of reggae bands getting big," says Zhang and the other members agree.

The band seems happy to be back in China. But the boys agreed that their favourite city was New York. "We saw the Lady Gaga show," says He Fan with Monkey nodding enthusiastically. Zhang explains, "She played in a pretty small venue, so we got to see her up close. She was awesome." I ask if they had the chance to meet, but Zhang laughs and tells me, "Nah, she's like an ultra-celebrity."

"ALMOST EVERY MUSICIAN I KNOW [IN BEIJING] HAS AT LEAST TWO SIDE PROJECTS."

exciting now, because everyone is just working on so many different things and collaborating with each other."

"Sometimes a bunch of different musicians from different bands will get together and just jam," He Fan adds. Zhang's side project White+ plays with experimental, electronic sounds and Monkey hails from the experimental noise rock band Chaos. He Fan's band Birdstriking, was hailed by CNN