

POP MUSIC PREVIEW

The Faint and that sound of dark dance tunes

BY JAY GENTILE | Special to the Tribune

Nothing starts a party like songs about death and paranoia. Just ask The Faint, the synth rock post-punks who have been exporting their signature brand of dark wave, nightmarish party music for the better part of 15 years, long before a new generation of kids draped themselves in neon in order to first-bump to techno beats at dance music festivals across the country.

While the Omaha, Neb., band has always been more of a rock band than the current crop of candy-coated electronic dance music

contemporaries who dominate the airwaves, there is no denying The Faint's instrumental role in helping to remind bored-looking, cross-armed hipsters how to ditch their inhibitions and have fun again at shows.

By dancing.

But after years at the forefront of the 2000s-era dance rock resurgence the group helped usher in with its manic, high-energy sound and morose lyrics that revel in exploring humanity's dark side, The Faint went on indefinite hiatus following 2008's "Fascination." The members were exhausted. But their sound was not.

As more and more bands continued to incorporate keyboard-driven synths into guitar-based rock music, The Faint was pulled back into the live music scene in 2012, performing its classic 2001 dance-rock opus "Danse Macabre" in its entirety at a series of shows.

Now The Faint is back with its first new album in six years, "Doom Abuse," and a tour that's all about recapturing that original primal energy with "see-through LED walls" and "really punchy moving lights that are kind of like fat lasers," said Faint frontman

Todd Fink. We spoke with Fink during a break in touring from Tallahassee, Fla., where he was quietly relaxing by the pool. Excerpts from that conversation follow:

On the music's perceived dark sound:

Most of the time, I have a hard time finding a song that I want to sing with a happier melody. I like tons of songs that do it but when I do it, it doesn't seem like me. ... Sometimes we'll think it would be a fun juxtaposition to make a song overly

dark-sounding because of the lyrical content or something like that. And those are usually the ones that are the most misunderstood. People don't really get that, but that's fine I don't care. ... They think that we really are this superdark thing, but it's all playful to us. What it comes down to is I'm into balance. I'm indecisive about everything, or about a lot of things, because I have both opinions about everything.

On turning 40 this year:

I have a hard time understanding that I'm 40 years old. I always think of myself as 27, honestly. It's not a vanity thing, but that's how old I feel. And that's how old I feel that other people around me are a lot of times, whether they are or not. ... It really matters how old you think of yourself as. I see older people die right away after they start thinking of themselves as old, or when their spouse dies. I think what you think about actually ages you.

On using music to converse with himself:

It's a way of explaining things to yourself. I write songs where I don't really know what my opinion is about the subject and, by



PHOTO BY BILL SITZMANN

"I have a hard time finding a song that I want to sing with a happier melody," says The Faint's Todd Fink, center. He is joined in the Omaha, Neb.-based band by Clark Baechle, from left, Jacob Thiele and Dapose.

writing the song, I figure out what I can say about it and what my real confusion or understanding of it is. A lot of times I don't come up with a conclusion, but I'm still making progress understanding what I do and don't know.

On finding music as a way to avoid getting a "real" job:

Everybody has to decide what they're going to spend all their time doing and what they're gonna contribute to the world. ...

At one point, I just decided that I didn't need a lot of stuff. I don't need to be rich or have nice stuff, but if I do that's totally fine. But freeing myself from caring about that, I think, allowed me to just quit working and just play music. And it's been good since then. ... I was just lucky enough to think of the right question to ask myself.

On making music for himself versus others:

I think it's great to make music for other people. I think that

sounds like a generous thing to do. And on some level, I think we all know when we're making any kind of art that there's an audience and they will think one thing or the other about it. But you don't know who the audience is going to be, so it just seems a lot easier to make something that you know you'll like. And so we pretty much just do that.

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Hip-hop's Future finding balance in music and life

BY STEVE KNOPPER
Special to the Tribune

Future spent his bachelor days mainly in one place: the recording studio. "I'd stay there until the sun comes up," says the 30-year-old hip-hop star. "I love recording. When I first wake up, I like to perform, because my brain is fresh, and that's when you get to be most creative. You haven't had a chance to think. I'd sleep and stay over and wake up and have my engineer. I'd come up with something to the beat that I went to sleep listening to."

But his 20-hour days boarded up with microphones, synthesizers and beats are basically over. The Atlanta-area singer and rapper born Nayvadius Wilburn is engaged to Ciara, the beautiful R&B singer best known for sexy hits like "Goodies" and "One, Two Step," and they're about to have a child. "In a relationship, I have to come home at a certain time," Future says, in a scheduled 11-minute phone interview that stretches to a luxurious 16 minutes. "I try to stay in as much as possible, and go home and get some rest. I guess it just balances me out and makes me complete, you know what I'm saying?"

Future's work ethic has served him well as he spent more than a decade launching to rising hip-hop superstar whose album "Honest" recently hit No. 2 on the pop charts. He took up rapping as an Atlanta teenager, then learned the intricacies of recording studios through Rico Wade, a well-known local producer who happened to be his cousin. Through Wade, he worked for Dirty South stars such as Outkast and Goodie Mob and became a member of the influential group Da Connect — Dungeon Family 2nd Generation. Nayvadius Wilburn became Nayvadius Cash, and he appeared on his way to the top. Then the Dirty South hit some dead spots, as Outkast began to disintegrate.

Wilburn found himself on the streets, and he was arrested in 2006, for drug possession and other charges. But he collected himself and started to climb again, rapping on other stars' mixtapes, such as Gucci Mane's "Free Bricks" and YC's "Got Racks," as well as his own "Streetz Calling." Although he plowed through typical gangsta territory, rapping about balling,



PHOTO BY JONATHAN MANNION

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blunts and blood, his style was something new. He didn't rap, he sort of slurred; he didn't sing, he sort of half-spoke; he drenched much of his delivery in the electronic voice-disguising effect known as Auto-Tune; and, most unusually of all, he spent much of his songs duetting with himself, employing a variety of inflections.

"No one else does it," he says, in his thick, methodical drawl, by phone from Los Angeles. "I want to sound like a different person throughout the song. That makes it sound like you're listening to three different voices. It makes you keep from getting bored. ... So you can be able to listen to my album from the beginning to the end because it's so many different changes. I've done that from the very beginning."

On "Honest," Future draws in hip-hop superstars such as Wiz Khalifa, Drake, Pharrell Williams,

Kanye West and Lil Wayne for strong guest verses. But they never distract from his central performance — the album suggests Future has finally found his voice. On the title track, as well as "Blood, Sweat & Tears," he holds conversations with himself, calling and responding, moaning and squeaking, adding echoes, Auto-Tune, bits of guitar and snippets of unexpected melody. It's a step forward from 2012's "Pluto." "When you're able to be versatile," he says, "it's like you've got a whole other album."

Growing up in Atlanta's Kirkwood neighborhood, Wilburn was the son of an absent father and a 911-operator mom. He told Rolling Stone she frequently dropped him off with a great-aunt — in a dope house — that took in numerous aunts and uncles using drugs.

He learned music from church: "That's what made me even want to go to church — just to see the man play the drums." His mother dutifully bought him a drum set, which he banged on so hard that he "tore it up." She was supportive, but when he became a teenager and began to hint at hip-hop as a lifelong vocation, she became reluctant. "She was like, 'No, you can't be serious,'" he says. "Your mom wants you to go to school, go to college, get a degree, get a job. That's the American Dream for a mom to have for a kid."

During his arrest phase, Wilburn's mother "turned her back on me," as he told Rolling Stone. But the two have since reconciled. Today, Future empathizes with his mom — he says he may well dissuade his own children, ages 1, 5 and 11, as well as the one on the way with Ciara, from pursuing music. For now, he's trying to figure out how aggressively to push them into learning instruments. "I want them to follow something on their own — not because I forced them to," he says. "My littlest one has a drum set and piano. My daughter had drums — she had a piano also. They recognize it, because I do music, and they understand it from me, but they don't know what they want to do. ... (They may) start falling in love with it as they grow older. They might get to that part — in love."

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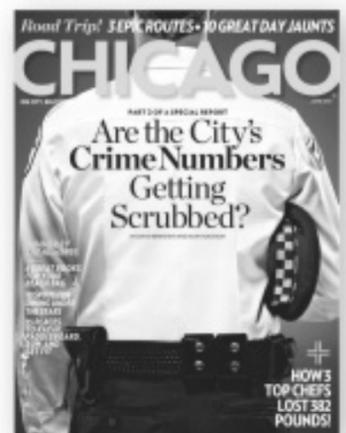
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