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SWERVEDRIVER

THE JUGGERNAUT RETURNS

SUFJAN STEVENS



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info@drummedia.com.au



SWERVEDRIVER RECENTLY RETURNED TO ACTIVE DUTY AFTER A TEN YEAR HIATUS. THE MAN WITH HIS HANDS ON THE STEERING WHEEL, FRONTMAN ADAM FRANKLIN, TELLS STEVE BELL THAT FOR HIM IT'S LIKE THEY'VE NEVER BEEN AWAY.



never lost that FEELING

UK sonic powerhouse Swervedriver burned brightly during the '90s, stunning folk all over the globe with their thrilling guitar work and seemingly effortless fusion of brutal heaviness and deft melody. It was a rollercoaster ride for the Oxford-bred outfit, whose roots can be traced back to mid-'80s band Shake Appeal, tellingly named after a track by US rock monsters The Stooges. Once they morphed into Swervedriver in 1989 following a lineup change, things happened quickly for the nascent act, pumping out a slew of sterling EPs in quick succession before releasing their revered debut longplayer, *Raise*, in 1991.

This all took place amidst an exciting time for the verdant UK rock scene, which also spawned bands such as My Bloody Valentine, Ride, The Jesus & Mary Chain and Slowdive, so – despite some personnel changes to their rhythm section – the world seemed to be Swervedriver's oyster, until a string of business-related mishaps seemed to derail them and stifle their considerable momentum.

They signed to Alan McGee's esteemed indie label Creation Records in 1995, but funding problems saw the label drop them and stop promoting third album, *Ejector Seat Reservation*, just one week after its release, with that album never even seeing the light of day (at the time) in the US, one of the band's strongest markets. Then in 1996 Swervedriver signed to illustrious US label Geffen Records, only to be unceremoniously dumped prior to release of their fourth album, *99th Dream*, which was finally issued on a small US indie in 1998. No wonder they pulled the pin at the end of an Australian tour in that very same year.

But while the terminally-underrated band may have called time, the ensuing years saw the Swervedriver legacy continue to blossom. The music never dated so it kept reaching new and sympathetic ears, while 2005's sprawling *Juggernaut Rides* compilation also dragged them back into the spotlight to a degree. Then, in 2008, it was announced that the band were reforming for a tour of the US and now, finally, they're making their way back down to Australia. Just don't ask them why this resurgence has happened...

"I don't know. In a way it was quite strangely spontaneous," muses the band's songwriter, singer and guitar-slinger Adam Franklin. "The thing is we never really officially broke up or anything, so I guess over the years there was always kind of somebody offering us the chance to play a show somewhere or do a tour. I guess it would go amongst all of us and either one of us or all of us wouldn't be into the idea at the time. Usually most of us; I don't think that anybody really had much interest in doing it for quite a while.

"But then for some reason it cropped up again in 2007 and Jimmy [Hartridge – guitar] had called me, then he called the others and then he called back and said, 'Well, I think everybody's up for it! Perhaps we could do this?' So I was like, 'Yeah, let's do it! Why not?' It was quite an exciting feeling for me, just thinking about the intro music that we used to have and thinking about the buzz we used to get when you were backstage and the soundman puts the lights down and

hits that intro music – it was quite exciting getting that whole buzz."

First, of course, the quartet had to get their groove back, so to speak. Franklin had been busy in the intervening years with his Toshack Highway and solo projects, but that still hadn't prepared him properly for a return to the Swervedriver engine room. "We just got back together in a little rehearsal room in London – it wasn't one that we used to use or anything, we just thought that we wanted to get back together in a room really. We didn't even bring all of our pedals. The drumkit was just the drumkit that was in the rehearsal room. And then we just sat around chatting for a bit and somebody said, 'Well, I guess we should get on with it, what are we going to play?' Somebody suggested *Sandblasted* so we just sort of creaked into it. It was amazing; it was like riding a bike again I suppose.

"I've been playing pretty constantly in the interim period and I thought the music I'd been playing was much the same – maybe some of the stuff I've been doing over the years is a bit more chilled out obviously – but what

"What struck me straight away was how incredibly loud and fast Swervedriver is."

struck me straight away was how incredibly loud and fast Swervedriver is. My fingers almost cramped up first time around on *Sci-Flyer*, but then you quickly get back into it again."

And there was no gently easing back into proceedings on the live front either, with their first gig in a decade being at the esteemed Coachella festival. "Yeah, I guess that was okay," Franklin chuckles. "We were kind of a late addition to it, but it seemed like a good place to go to play. We'd never been there before and it's almost of like the classic venue for bands getting back together; you play Coachella. It was good, we were just in the middle of the afternoon. It was a sweltering hot day and we were on just before Spiritualized and it was cool. I thought the other guys would be a bit more nervous about playing because they hadn't played so much in the intervening years, but in the end everyone was really cool. There was no stress or anything, we just went up there and played and people loved it."

Swervedriver had always enjoyed a strong following in America, partly due to the nature of their music and partly because they'd toured there so often during their original incarnation. "I don't know why really, it's difficult to say," Franklin suggests, considering this Stateside success. "I think one of the things possibly is the fact that Swervedriver has all of these songs about cars and driving miles and miles and stuff like that and of course there aren't many places in the world where you can do that – you can drive across Europe or you can drive from the top of Scotland down to the south of England, but of course the wide open spaces which are really receptive to rock music would be the USA

and I guess Australia. Certainly there was a different perception of the band over there."

Part of the connection also had to be due to the band's early influences, which were almost exclusively from the far side of the Atlantic. While Swervedriver had a definite sonic connection with what was happening around them in the UK, they seemed to be coming from a different place from their local contemporaries, although there was, as Franklin points out, a lot of subliminal cross-pollination going on behind the scenes.

"Early on we were going against the grain a little bit, because we'd just suddenly discovered The Stooges and MC5 and people were saying that we were like a grunge band before grunge. We were certainly out of step with the times," he admits, remembering his Shake Appeal days. "But then I remember us going up to London to go to squat parties and there'd be bands like Spacemen 3 playing, and we'd see them and think, 'Well, this is kind of cool.' They were coming from a different angle but you could hear their Stooges and MC5 influences as well.

"I think round about the late '80s it seemed like there was all of this stuff bubbling under – the Mary Chain had been there and Shake Appeal played a show with the very early version of My Bloody Valentine in a squat in London and they seemed to be doing something a bit different as well. It just seemed like something was happening and then I guess for us to really evolve into Swervedriver meant discovering these new bands – we'd already discovered Husker Du, but then it was really Sonic Youth and Dinosaur Jr, bands who still had the guitar attitude, but who seemed to have a more contemporary thing they were doing.

"I mean with Sonic Youth when you first listen to *Evol* or *Sister* you felt like this was music that hadn't been made before 1986 or '87, whereas what we'd been doing was almost too reverential towards what had gone before. They were already playing around with alternate tunings but still having this rock edge to it, so we started to realise that there was something actually happening and it got exciting. And Ride were another band from Oxford and they just suddenly showed up, this bunch of kids who seemed like a cross between The Byrds and The Stooges, sound-wise. It was a really exciting time; all of a sudden there was all this stuff going on – down the road there was a band called Thee Hypnotics and Chapterhouse were over in Reading. And then we moved to London and suddenly there were all these bands – and some of them ended up being the bands that were supposedly 'shoegaze' bands and some of them were more kind of grunge bands – but at the time there wasn't really any scene; it was just a bunch of musicians all hanging out and playing gigs together. It's funny how with time people talk about 'this scene' or 'that scene', but in reality all of these bands were sat in the same bar."

WHO Swervedriver

WHEN & WHERE Friday 18 February, The Metro Theatre

WE'RE GETTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER!

To some pundits, once a band has stopped playing for a while they're off the artistic rollcall for good, but many people such as Swervedriver mainstay Adam Franklin refuse to be bound by such arbitrary convention – a good band is a good band. "It seems like since we've got back together there have been a hell of a lot of bands reforming," Franklin admits. "I swear at the time, in 2007, the only bands that had got back together were the Pixies and The Stooges – both of those were pretty exciting. I remember with the Pixies I was in New York and a friend said, 'Oh the Pixies are back together,' and at the time I wasn't that blown away. I remember seeing them back in the day – I mean I love the Pixies, they're a fantastic band – but for some reason the idea of them getting back together didn't really energise me that much, but I said, 'Yeah, yeah, I'll come along.' And then of course it was when we were actually at the show that it hit me, when the support band has finished and the tension is building and everyone's getting excited – there were people here who had never actually seen the Pixies – and when they finally walked out on stage it was quite an incredible sort of feeling, and I thought, 'That's quite something!' Then I saw The Stooges in New York as well and that was more incredible for me because I'd never seen them back in the day obviously – I was too young to have seen them. So that was quite mindblowing, like, 'I can't believe I'm watching The Stooges!' But of course with both those bands it would be worth nothing if they didn't actually deliver and both of those bands did deliver in spades. I'm sure there are loads of bands who have gotten back together and people go and see them and think, 'Oh my God, what a disappointment!' So both of those things I suppose influenced the sentiment of us getting back together.

"I can't think of any examples off the top of my head, but I'm sure there are some bands where the magic about them was the fact that they couldn't play or whatever. Perhaps they were teenagers when they got together and they had this sound that was unique and then maybe they get back together and they've got proper amps and proper gear and they've all learned to play and it's not quite the same. I think there are probably some bands who shouldn't get back together. But when we played at All Tomorrow's Parties last year it was an incredible lineup from our point of view, because there were all of these bands that were either our heroes or our contemporaries – there were people like Sonic Youth and J Mascis there, plus Bob Mould and My Bloody Valentine themselves. It was amazing and a great thing. It is bizarre at the same time that all of these bands are twenty years old, but I guess rock'n'roll's kind of changed now – it used to be a young man's game and now it's not."

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