



Photograph by ANIA GRUCA

# FRENCH TWIST

NOUS NON PLUS'S FAUX FRENCH POP IS THE REAL DEAL.

The members of Nous Non Plus want you to know that, for the most part, they're not really French. Their lead singer — the sultry Céline Dijon — is a native Parisian, but the rest of the band is a motley crew of what the French like to call “zee ugly Americans.” Started as a tribute to their favorite French pop icons of the '60s — including Serge Gainsbourg, Jacques Dutronc and Brigitte Bardot — Nous Non Plus decided early on they wanted to go beyond the covers and come up with their own fabulous sound — despite the fact it would be *très, très faux*. The early days were bumpy, recounts guitarist Dan Crane, as they went through the token fits and starts, including firing a band member who couldn't sing or write music. “We even got sued in federal court over the whole thing — isn't that crazy?” he says. Subsequently, they changed their name (they used to be Les Sans Culottes) and became Nous Non Plus (a.k.a. “Us No More”). Revamping brought on a slew of new punny personas as well. The band now includes lead singer Dijon, guitarist Jean-Luc Retard (a.k.a. Dan Crane), chanteuse Bonnie Day, guitarist Cal d'Homage, percussionist Professeur Harry Covert, keyboardist Mars Chevrolet and trumpet genius François Hardonne.

Together for nearly ten years, the band is releasing their second album this month, and it's a musically diverse and ambitious *mélange*. Recorded in Paris, New York, Los Angeles and Sacramento, the album is aptly titled *Menagerie*. Still heavily influenced by the '60s, Nous Non Plus has opted to introduce new sounds, mixing moog synths with strings, horns and distorted guitars. Nowhere is this more evident than on tunes like the bouncy, disco-infused “French Teacher,” in which the chorus literally translates to “I want to fuck my French teacher.” The guitar-driven “Claque Claque!”, which means “snap snap” or “a slap in the face” in French, tells the story of a small-town freak who wanders around snapping his fingers until severe ridicule drives him to chop them off. Directly translated, the lyrics might sound harsh, but throw in those French trills, and suddenly it's like a good Bordeaux — rich and fulfilling, with every sip becoming even more delectable.

“We've been on a bit of a whirlwind tour,” says Crane, adding that some of their international gigs feel like scenes straight out of *Spinal Tap*. Case in point: Their song “Lawnmower Boy” — an ode to that wondrously exciting facet of gardening — was recently picked up for a national Mobitel commercial... in Slovenia. The band was such a resounding hit in the country's capital of Ljubljana, they were invited by the Green Party to be the entertainment for the closing ceremonies at the first-ever Green European Summer University, an eco-conscious summit held at the German-Polish border of Frankfurt and Oder. It turns out that when you're discussing heavy-duty topics like the future of your continent, a little faux French music can really lighten the load. **SUSAN MICHALS**