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Norwegian group Datarock at the Beacon Theatre

BY RAFER GUZMÁN

rafer.guzman@newsday.com

September 27, 2007

When the Norwegian group Datarock played at the Brooklyn nightclub Studio B in June, it initially seemed like just another goofy novelty act: The five members wore matching red tracksuits, noodled around on keyboards and sang a preposterous song about motocross biking: "BMX! Better than sex!" (The tune, for some reason, is called "Bulldozer.")

But then something even funnier happened: About halfway through the set, Datarock turned into a tightly knit rock unit. The lyrics were still ridiculous - "Close encounter of the third kind! I wouldn't mind! But would I see you on the dance floor?" - but now the band was whipping up an irresistible groove, with front man Fredrik Saroea standing atop an amplifier with a guitar and unleashing some impressive rock riffage. By the show's end, the audience was caught somewhere between moshing and booty-shaking.



"Let me tell you a sad, little story," Saroea, with the slightest trace of an accent, said in a phone interview from his home in Norway last week. "The first gig I ever did in New York City was the Knitting Factory on a Sunday in, I think, 2003. And it was seven people there - including the bartender, the guy at the door and the sound engineer."

What's changed since then? Maybe it's the band's constant touring - 400 shows in 27 countries by Saroea's count - or maybe it's the glowing write-ups in the British press. At any rate, Datarock is quickly becoming the indie band of the moment, with appearances scheduled during the upcoming CMJ music marathon and on ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" on Oct. 10.

Datarock - a core duo of Saroea and his mysteriously-named collaborator, Ket-III - formed in 2000 in Bergen, Norway, the same small town that gave rise to Kings of Convenience and Royks'pp. At the time, electronic music was veering away from dark-hued techno and toward a more lighthearted pop sound. One fellow Bergenite was Annie (of the song "Chewing Gum"), who ran a nightclub called Pop Till You Drop where Datarock made its debut in December 2000.

The climate suited Saroea, 31, who grew up loving the music, movies and subcultures of 1980s America.

The ballad "I Will Always Remember" harks back to the unctuous theme from "The Love Boat" TV series; "Computer Camp Love" makes the Commodore 64 sound almost sexy.

But where Americans may see camp humor, Saroea sees deeper meanings. BMX bikes, he said, weren't just cool, they were rebellious and liberating. "When I was a kid, if you wanted to do anything athletic, you would join a soccer team or some sort of organized sports," he said. "But then you had this weird phenomenon of skateboarding and BMX bikes, which is supposed to be done without any adults present."

Datarock's next song will be called "Molly," and it doesn't take much brainpower to figure out the inspiration there. "The whole song is about Molly Ringwald," Saroea said, and then he got an idea: "Let's invite her into the music video!" he said. "Molly, I'm reaching out to you."

WHEN&WHERE: Datarock opens for Kaiser Chiefs at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Beacon Theatre, 2124 Broadway, Manhattan. Tickets are \$37. Call 631-888-9000 or go to ticketmaster.com.

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