

# Data Entry

NORWEGIAN DISCOPUNK DUO DATAROCK ARE THE UNLIKELY NEW STARS OF THE INDIE SCENE

FREDRIK SAROEVA, THE VOCAL HALF OF DATAROCK, HAS JUST FINISHED ANOTHER DAY'S WORK, REMIXING A TRACK ON SPEC FOR A "MAJOR ARTIST" HE WON'T NAME. "IT'S GETTING KIND OF *BUSY*," SAROEVA SAYS. "EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE OF DATAROCK!" AND HE LAUGHS. IT'S ALL A BIT OF A JOKE, RIGHT? BUT WASN'T DATAROCK SUPPOSED TO BE? BEGIN WITH THE LO-FI KEYBOARD, THEN THE SCANDO-ACCENTED RAP ("IT STARTED AT COMPUTER CAMP..."). ADD A SHOT OF "SUMMER NIGHTS" FROM *GREASE*. SUDDENLY, EVERY HIPSTER FROM BERGEN, NORWAY, TO BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, WAS HOOKED. THE VIDEO FOR "COMPUTER CAMP LOVE" INTRODUCED SAROEVA IN THE GOOFY RED TRACKSUIT AND PORSCHE SHADES, AND DANCE FANS HAD A NEW HERO-NERD. AND THE FUTURE OF INDIE DANCE HAD ARRIVED.

Meanwhile, back in Bergen, Fredrik and programming partner Ketil Mosnes were firing a Gatling gun full of murderously catchy hooks: "Fa-Fa-Fa," with its itchy guitar, sophisticated whiteboy funk and Fredrik's insanely confident vocals; the pop-punk "Princess," with its "Modern Love" beat; the cocktail-y "Ganguro Girl" with its New Romantic melody. All with the energy level red-lined to the max.

An ironic *Hurrah!* rose from Brooklyn. It's the summer kitsch soundtrack! "I'm sure if people knew how long we've been doing this, they would be surprised," says Saroeva. "And perhaps not in the most positive way." So is the joke on the hipsters? Datarock's future-retro sound is actually seven years old, launched in a Bergen club on a lark by two kids angry at how pop culture had betrayed their smarts. The new North American album is actually two years old in Norway.

Dig deeper into it, past the stark keyboards, and learn: "See What I Care" is built like a New Order track. "The New Song" is a punk raver zipping by with nonsense



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lyrics ("KGB, BLT, BMG, MIT!!") – but just try to delete it from your memory. And "The Most Beautiful Girl" is perfect circa-'82 lo-fi balladry. "Datarock is the result of 30 years of the information society," Saroea says, but it's also 30 years of passionate pop scholarship.

How did this happen? This way: it rains 200 days a year in Bergen, which is more than it does in Seattle. With that model of weather-as-foe, you have two options: either you crash into a black hole of booze like some taxi driver in *Night On Earth* or you devour every pop-culture scrap you can. Norwegians, like Canadians, are born witnesses to American culture, and learn how

to fire it back with the IQ doubled. That's how Canada took over the world with Broken Social Scene and Arcade Fire, and that's how Norway is doing it – with Royskopp, Kings of Convenience, Annie, and now Datarock.

But Saroea does not worship disposability. "The way pop culture is structured, nothing is supposed to last very long. But I think it's fantastic when you go to a festival and you have a thousand bands that you're not going to remember in a year, and then you have Neil Young." And get him talking about the Datarock lodestone – the '77-'82 era – and Saroea gets serious. Bono-on-Africa serious.

"If you pick up *Television* – say *Marquee Moon* – you can listen to that over and over. The music from then, for whatever reason, has timeless qualities: good songwriting, new and exciting. Say a band like Devo – we haven't had anything remotely close to them since... Devo. Same with Talking Heads."

Talking Heads? They are the Datarock prime directive: their discopunk only seems like Revenge of the Art Nerds until you realize they've digested and rearranged three decades of music and hung their grooves on a concept.

"Let's take *Remain in Light* [the 1980 Heads album]. Who [in pop] in the last 10 years has worked with someone like Fela Kuti?" Saroea asks. "These guys were highly competent, but they also had an intellectual approach to pop culture."

"When Datarock started, we only used those bands as an inspirational reference point. We blend it with a thousand things – we think. We *hope*." And so a funny thing happened on the way to the novelty bin: Datarock attacked the stage like a rock 'n' roll band. "We've always really, really appreciated the live aspect." They once played for 15,000 in Sydney with a drummer they'd never met. They were all over the hypercompetitive SXSW Music Festival this year, delivering seven rave-reviewed sets. Festivals with Basement Jaxx, Daft Punk, Beck... "If you do 330 shows and you're still a bad live band..."

They are not. Their 2007 North American/European tour will fulfill their mission "to bring indie dance and discopunk to the next level." The model is The Beastie Boys – geeks become auteurs. But now, sincerity is the new irony. Datarock understands: the joke isn't funny anymore. More aquavit, anyone? – **Mark Lepage**