



Artist: **The Black Heart Procession**

Title: **Six**

Format: **CD / 2xLP / USB**

Label: **Temporary Residence Ltd.**

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The players:

Pall Jenkins
Tobias Nathaniel
with
Brad Less
Joshua Quon
Matt Resovich
Mario Rubalcaba

When San Diego's legendary **Three Mile Pilot** went on a sudden hiatus in early 1998, its members split into two new bands. One became a beloved complex pop band (**Pinback**), the other (**The Black Heart Procession**) has become one of underground music's darkest cult phenomenon. Over ten years and five albums, **The Black Heart Procession** has defined a truly unique sound that is unmistakable, instantly recognizable, and increasingly influential.

More than just a return to numerical album titles, *Six* is **The Black Heart Procession's** first album to be written and recorded simultaneously with a new **Three Mile Pilot** album. As both bands now coexist for the first time ever, coconspirators Pall Jenkins and Tobias Nathaniel have steered **The Black Heart Procession** into a darker, more adventurous direction.

Produced and recorded by the band over the past couple years, *Six* is without a doubt the group's most emotionally resonant album since *Three*. Brimming with pitch-black ballads of discarded loves and forgotten souls, the album paints a bleak yet strangely comforting portrait of heartbreak, self-destruction and religious allegory over some of their most inspired songs to date, drawing a clear line from here to soul-stirring visionaries such as **Leonard Cohen**, **Johnny Cash** and **Tom Waits**.

Track Listing:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. When You Finish Me | 8. Forget My Heart |
| 2. Wasteland | 9. Liar's Ink |
| 3. Witching Stone | 10. Suicide |
| 4. Rats | 11. Back To The Underground |
| 5. Heaven and Hell | 12. Last Chance |
| 6. Drugs | 13. Iri Sulu |
| 7. All My Steps | |

Discography:

THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION *The Spell* CD/LP (Touch and Go 2006)
THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION *Amore Del Tropico* CD/LP (Touch and Go 2002)
THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION *Three* CD/LP (Touch and Go 2000)
THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION 2 CD/LP (Touch and Go 1999)
THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION 1 CD/LP (Headhunter 1998)



Please forward any reviews to **jessica@pitchperfectpr.com** or send any printed clippings to **Temporary Residence Limited, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206 USA**. Thanks.

JANE

May 2006

The Blackheart Procession, The Spell

These guys make lush, melancholic music that more often than not is described as funereal—but that's meant as a compliment. *The Spell* marches to the same bleak-yet-seductive tune—there's the trademark saw that sounds like a howling midnight wind, creepified imagery of venom and tangled webs and the mournful croon of singer Pall Jenkins. (Wonder if he was nicknamed "Pallbearer" as a kid? Sorry, had to go there.) As much as I like to visit the dark side, I have to admit my favorite track is "Not Just Words," the most upbeat and, dare I say, optimistic song on the album. Next thing you know, I'll be into unicorns and puppies. —**Courtney H.**

AAP

ALTERNATIVE PRESS
VOLUME 20 • NUMBER 215

THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION

THE SPELL (TOUCH AND GO, tgc.com)



MAY 09

title track are just a handful of the 11 tracks on this disc that will take late-night music-listening sessions to new levels of unsettling: Piano plunking, vocal wailing and melancholy lyrics are par for the course.

ROCKS LINE >>>

PINBACK / THREE MILE PILOT / DESERT CITY SOUNDTRACK

Having absorbed Jimmy LaValle and Matt Resovich from the Album Leaf into their collective, this long-running (and long-creepy) San Diego group have only upped the ante on eeriness with *The Spell*, their fifth album in nine years. "Return To Burn," "The Walter #5" and the

SINCE YOU'VE BEEN OREGON

The Black Heart Procession cut a new trail

STORY: KORY GROW PHOTO: BRAD MILLER

Amidst the schmoozy industry gawkers and tuned-in locals at Austin's South By Southwest Festival, Black Heart Procession singer Pat Jenkins's moody confessionals seem to dangle in the air before disappearing into audience chatter. As the conversation levels rise at the foot of the stage, keyboardist Toby Nathaniel, who recently moved to Portland, Oregon, in search of a simpler life, looks more and more distressed. It comes to a head when Jenkins puts down his musical saw, a toothless, hardware saw made by violin luthiers Stradivarius that he's been playing since their first album, and brandishes a new weapon against the audience: his cell phone.

"Hello?" The same audience that had been babbling away during the song is stunned. "No, I'm playing right now, sorry." He pauses, for drama. "Yeah, there's about 50 people here. I can't talk. Sorry. Yeah, everyone's answering their cell phones. Anyway, bye." At this point, Black Heart's own publicist answers her phone and heads for the door to talk outside.

"Yeah, I saw that," says Jenkins, as the audience laughs. They shake their heads and start to play again. The lights wash blue and Nathaniel continues his trance-like gaze as they play the title cut from their latest album, *The Spell (Touch And Go)*. After their talking to, the audience seems as captivated as the band from that point on in the show.

Their latest batch of brooding indie rockers sounds more unified than their past releases, more full. And although Nathaniel now lives almost a thousand miles from Jenkins, they've worked closely with the band's three other members for the first time to make a truly unified album. "We did not do the email thing, and I'm proud to say we didn't," says Nathaniel with conviction. Distance only made them more focused when they were writing the album, since each time a member took the two-hour flight between the Rose City and their native San Diego, they stayed for up to a month to solely play music.

Two days prior, seated in a greenroom before playing another one of their four Austin concerts, the band is looking back at everything that's happened since releasing *Amore Del Tropico* in 2002. Immediately after recording that album, they began working on a DVD with videos for each song. It was an arduous process, and all Nathaniel learned from the experience was "that we'll never do it again." Jenkins revises by saying, "I'll never do it with these guys again," making Nathaniel choke. There were almost 50 people on the crew and they spent many hours editing the film, which wouldn't surface for another two years.

The band hit the road as soon as they were done. When they were traveling through Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, their van broke down. The repair shop that was working on it forgot to remove the metal bar that props up the hood, and after about 15 minutes of driving, the van broke down again. As it was being worked on the second time, Jenkins got a phone call: "Yeah, hey, Johnny Cash wants to cover one of your songs." The song in question was "It's A Crime I Never Told You About The Diamonds In Your Eyes," off 1999's 2. After going back and forth with Cash's people, Black Heart hit the road again, and it wasn't soon after that the country icon fell ill. To this day they don't know whether he recorded their song or not but have heard rumors he performed it once at a show in Holland. "It at least made that day more exciting," says Nathaniel.

After touring for months at a time, Nathaniel got sick of living in California, got married and made his way to Portland. "It rains, and people just go have beers," he says about why he moved. "It's a little more of a community than I feel like San Diego was." But then again, everything about Black Heart Procession has to do with the band challenging themselves, whether it's their audiences that talk through their sets or their instruments that fail to hold their attention.

"That's why I started playing piano," says Nathaniel. "I played guitar for a long time and my fingers were moving and it's making noise [but] I'm not feeling what I'm doing... I just try not to know ever what I'm doing and [follow] whatever sounds good."

CREATIVE LOAFING

The Black Heart Procession The Spell

BY CHAD RADFORD
Published 05.10.06

Four years after the Black Heart Procession strayed off-course with the Latin-infused flop *Amore del Tropico*, the group is drifting in a sea of familiar melancholy on *The Spell*. "Tangled" opens with minor-key piano drama that tussles like the tides, cresting in songs like "The Letter" and "Places." Pall Jenkins' lonesome moans over Tobias Nathaniel's swelling bass and piano make a conscious return to the group's haunting, earlier recordings. But rather than rekindling old glories, these songs are cut with a stark rock edge protruding mostly from the pounding of ex-Modest Mouse drummer Joe Plummer. "Not Just Words" is a captivating stab at applying BHP's gloom to straight-forward songwriting. "The Walter #5" is a droning episode of a song cycle that brings BHP full-circle, back to the murky sound that made the group interesting in the first place. 4 stars



Bring Me Dead Flowers

BY NOEL PEARSON
PHOTOS BY NELISSA WELIVER

SYMBIOT

ENTRANCE

SYMBIOT

MUSIC

ART

P.O.

TECH

FASHION

CULTURE

MAY/JUNE 2006

WITH THE SPELL. THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION'S fifth full-length record, the group has left the balmy brothel of *Amore del Tropico* and whittled their sound down to a haunting silhouette. That this was not going to be your run of the mill interview should have been apparent when the *Synthesis* received word that it would take place at a British-style pub in San Diego's Little Italy. The eccentricities continued to blossom as Black Heart Procession's core members—Tobias Nathaniel and Pall Jenkins—walked through the door, only to be joined over the next couple of hours by the entire band plus a few friends. As I approached the table and began to introduce myself, I realized that I was joining The Black Heart Procession for a post-rehearsal dinner. As eyes drifted to soccer matches on sporadic TVs, orders of bangers on rolls began to fly. Guinness and whiskey soon followed and as the bandmates engaged in debate, sharing a basket of chips, it became glaringly clear: The Black Heart Procession will gladly do an interview, but it'll be done their way—that is, the right way.

Not a soccer fan?

Tobias Nathaniel: I'm not a sports fan at all.

Were instruments your outlet?

Tobias: Yeah, that and *Dungeons and Dragons* [laughs]. Well that, and I started playing guitar when I was like 14, that's my main instrument. I used to actually teach at this place called the Blue Guitar. I was a guitar teacher when I was 16 and 17 there. Then after a while I started playing jazz a lot. I really wasn't interested in it. I didn't feel like it was music coming from me anymore. I was just fingering patterns, "Here's the correct way to go through this chord progression," or "Here are the options for seven neutral chords." It wasn't playing music for me.

Did you just not feel it, or did you still enjoy other people playing jazz?

Tobias: Well, it wasn't me. It wasn't music from my heart, you know? And so I actually quit playing guitar for a real long time and started playing piano. I didn't want to know what I was doing. Because I didn't want to get on an instrument where my fingers were just like "Here's where you're supposed to go." I wanted it to be totally foreign and look down and not know what I'm doing. And I still keep it that way. I try not to get too comfortable with the piano.

So you had absolutely no classical training?

Tobias: Well, I had an understanding of how to maintain technique from playing guitar. So I just kinda transferred that concept to the piano, but I never really tried to play scales. I'm sure if a schooled piano player watched me play they'd be like, "You're playing all wrong!" But the whole point of me being a piano player is not to play correctly. [J] have a more direct link to what I'm hearing in my head, that's actually coming out from my brain, through my fingers. Nothing's interfering.

So who is it that plays the saw?

Pall Jenkins: Me.

How'd that come about?

Pall: Just got curious. Tried to figure it out, basically.

Did learning take a while?

Pall: Yeah, I started on hardware saws and it's really hard to get sound out of a hardware saw. Eventually I found a real

musical saw and started playing that...so I just kept practicing and it's kind of like riding a bike. Once you get going, you're kinda like, "All right!" But it's tricky at first. It's hard to get positioning and your hand gets tired really easily, but I could teach anyone to make a sound and in 20 minutes they'd be makin' some sort of noise.

Do you find, like Tobias was saying about the piano, that there's a lot of freedom with the saw and you get to break out of musically structured confines?

Pall: Yeah, but it also becomes a novelty. I start not wanting to do it because I don't want it in every song. I want to play other instruments and some songs [the saw] isn't needed, it isn't called for, but on certain songs it sounds really cool. And it's a fretless instrument, so you can really go anywhere with it.

How much does having your own studio help with experimenting with different instruments?

Tobias: Me personally, it has helped me a lot. I've realized how to make songs and work with songs and recording techniques, stuff that I was real curious about. But at the same time, there's something about just being the musician and having somebody else be in control. It's good and bad, but I think [Tobias and J] both desire to go backwards a little bit. Even though we have our own setup right now, we still entertain the idea of working with outside producers to help us out. It's a lot of work for us to do all that stuff as well.

Is it a case of the grass always being greener on the other side?

Tobias: Like you say, there's always good and bad about the different approaches. For example: we had a [poor] studio, we had to get our act together, we had to write these songs together, we had to push ourselves. But over here, we spend more time than we need to. It can become a pain; it can become a huge pain.

Pall: I think when we do work with other people it's like we're working as a team with them. It's not like we're just there, and they do their thing. We're always very involved with the whole production in everything that we do.

Tobias: It's the difference between, "I want this sound, this is what I'm hearing," versus, "Turn that compressor here, on this part."

Pall: Yeah, we've learned a lot over the years, but there's still always a lot more.



The Black Heart Procession is really art-oriented, does that carry over in your live show?

Tobias: It depends. Lately there's an aspect of doing this that I like—just being some guy on stage playing a show. But sometimes we get a little kooky and dress up and do certain things. Sometimes we'll have a projector with stuff, it just depends. We did this Halloween show where we had a whole bunch of dancers, all dressed up like ghosts. There were like 15 girls up there dancing. But yeah, we like to leave everything open and available to try different things.

Pall: That's with lyrics, too. I feel that lyrics tap into something and you're not sure what they are often when you're doing them, and if they're right. Sometimes you don't know, they're a lot like life, you don't know what you want to do. And then later on, in hindsight, so many lyrics make sense later on, after the fact. It's just kind of how I deal with them. Sometimes I have this solid story, I see this picture and I have an idea and other times it's real vague. There are different ways I try and do things.

Tobias: But the cool thing is, if he has an idea for a song that he writes, a story idea for a song, and he writes the lyrics out, I may not even see it because lyrics are always interpretive anyways to me. [To Pall:] So I might hear something that you do completely different than how you're trying to say it.

Pall: Sometimes we talk about it. Or like this record, we got into discussing what songs were about, and what we felt. Some of [the songs] have a tight, subtle political lean to them and things like that, so there were discussions going on about how could we make this mean this in these kinds of words. Matt [Resovich, violin] is good at that too, so I bounce ideas off these guys. Like "Oh, what do you think of this line?" and they'll be like "That sucks!" or "Change this" or...

They don't pull any punches?

Pall: [Chuckling] Nah, they don't hold back on me, no. But it's a struggle...

Tobias: Well, it's like everything. My piano, any words, anything, we have to make sure we're all on the same page.

Is that difficult with the amount of instruments The Black Heart Procession uses?

Tobias: Well, whatever sounds good, that's our big experiment. It's just seeing what works. Sometimes you put something on and it doesn't work.

Pall: And also, this record we purposely tried to make a record that all the people who were going to be playing live were on the record. And all the instruments that were going to be live were on the record. There wasn't like all this extra cello and all these things. We purposely designed this record, I feel, to be more of a group effort.

Tobias: Yeah, absolutely. As a response to the last record, where it was really way more experimental and we allowed more people to come in and try different things. I think on this one we wanted to have a core group of people who are doing what they're doing on it, so that we can represent it live, better.

Pall: And also, the person playing that part, later on when they are playing it live, will be like, "I wrote this. This is my part that I contributed to the song." I feel that way we're all invested into what we're doing, and feel a part of what the music is. ●

PITCHFORK



Black Heart Procession

Amore del Tropico

[Touch and Go; 2002]

Rating: 7.9

✦ Buy it from Insound

Life is full of surprises, they say. Call me jaded if you will, but I don't believe it. There are twists and turns, sure, but surprises? Most of us, we work all day, whether for our own edification or for hard-earned cash. We read and watch things, and get drunk and perhaps kiss someone, maybe even fall in and out of love. Nothing too eyebrow-raising. Alright, so maybe I'm just getting caught up in the bleak world of the Black Heart Procession. The Patriots, after all, beat the Rams in the last Super Bowl. That was a pleasant surprise. And the September 11th attacks were, in a blasphemous understatement, an unpleasant surprise. But some people even saw that coming, unfortunate as that certainly is.

Did anyone expect the Black Heart Procession's new album to sound like this, though? I'm willing to venture that few people who aren't in with the band expected such a departure. For one thing, the Procession have actually graced their latest work with a non-numerical title, as opposed to their first three albums: 1998's 1, 1999's 2, and 2000's 3. (Well, ok, *Three* was actually spelled instead of written numerically.) And then, there's the music. Now, the change from 3 to *Amore del Tropico* isn't so dramatic as the change from, say, *OK Computer* to *Kid A*, but there's no question that *Amore* is a much different sound and a very welcome progression from the dirges that graced their three previous full-lengths.

The Procession was once funereal through and through, keeping the same slow pace and lonely lyrics throughout. Here, however, they've taken their march somewhere south of the border. Judging from the instrumentation and odd flourishes, the narrator of *Amore* has ventured to a small Central American country of beauty and intrigue. Wherever he is, one thing's for sure: things are not going quite as planned. The first track, after all, is called "The End of Love", a 12-second instrumental spurt that introduces the listener to what will be a 55-minute tale of lost love and vengeful murder. The subsequent titular track, "Tropics of Love" (in translation), opens with the band's trademark instrument, the saw. But then deft strings and hip-swinging percussion set a sexy, noir-ish scene suffused with whispering men and crooning female gypsies. "Was it here where we left our hearts?" sings Pall Jenkins. "Was it here in the tropics of love?" Something bad is coming, if it hasn't come already.

Things are bit shady in *Amore del Tropico*'s storyline, but like a good Lynch-style thriller, time doesn't clarify a damn thing. On "Broken World", the narrator seems to be resentfully coming to grips with his upended emotions. Accompanied by out-of-tune guitars and stumbling drums, Jenkins sings, "I know that you are through with me/ I know that you want to get rid of me/ I know that you have a plan for me/ I know that you want to torture me."

Meanwhile, other tracks, such as "The Visitor" and "A Cry for Love", indeed don't stray far from the Procession's heavy musical past. But then there's the airy Americana of "Why I Stay", the head-bobbing rock of "Did You Wonder", and the keyboard-driven "Sympathy Crime", with its touches of 70s prog, which seems to detail the narrator's murder of his former lover. As possible evidence, the next track offers: "You bleed, you blister in the sun/ You bleed for everyone." (There's also a drawing of a slain woman in the album art.) Yet, in the end, the narrator reveals that he is actually the "one who has disappeared."

Happy times, to be sure. But who would ever buy an album by a band called the Black Heart Procession and expect happiness, anyway? With this record, the band has taken a risky, ambitious leap forward, ditching the capable producer of their previous records, Ryan Hadlock, in favor of manning the boards themselves. The move has paid off in a dense, inspired musical narrative that should, dare I say, surprise fans old and new.

-Ryan Kearney, October 8th, 2002

LOS ANGELES TIMES

★★★ **The Black Heart Procession,** "Amore del Tropico," Touch and Go. Playful dread from San Diego's alchemists of dark, baroque pop, locating the sound of Leonard Cohen hosting an Addams Family marathon. The 56 minutes of early-morning ambience, Old World eccentricity and occasional *tropicalia* in "Amore" (due Tuesday) offer real drama, not melodrama, in mostly acoustic grooves. There's a western swagger (and a fine saw solo) in "Why I Stay" and a touch of romance within the cryptic waltzing piano of "The Invitation." Taunting, haunting, creepy, kooky.

Steve Appleford

TIME OUT NEW YORK

The Black Heart Procession

Musical options are, alas, a little limited with a name like the Black Heart Procession. Effectively cut off from pop, booty-rap and most permutations of polka, San Diego's grim reapers have long lurked in the bleakest corners of dirge-rock. But after releasing three uniformly melancholic full-lengths—imaginatively titled *1*, *2* and *3*—the quartet decided to branch out, trying its hand at that evergreen musical experiment: the concept record.

The result, 2002's intriguing, if flawed, *Amore del Tropico* (Touch and Go), took Raymond Chandler-style noir and relocated it South of the Border, with a lonesome Latin-country twang. A highly cinematic album-length tale of obsession, betrayal and murder, it was later supplemented, appropriately enough, by a creepy DVD adaptation starring the band.

This month, the group expands its boundaries again, collaborating with Dutch prog-rockers Solbakken on a CD for Konkurrent records' "In the Fishtank" series. "Fishtank" graciously allows artists (previous participants include Tortoise, Low and Sonic Youth) to spend two days in the studio however they please, with any band of their choice; the results are then released, regardless of the outcome. Solbakken turns out to be a good match for the Procession, augmenting its habitual bottom-of-the-well darkness with French-language female vocals and oceans of reverb. Live, BHP hardly forfeits its grave deportment, but it also often brings a welcome levity to the otherwise grim proceedings with sly gallows humor. After all, even a black heart still beats.—Leah Greenblatt

D.I.W.

More Than One Way

San Diego's kings of the dark stage, **THE BLACK HEART PROCESSION**, have ditched their original musical formula—as well as the easy-to-follow numbering system—on their fourth LP, *Amore del Tropico*. After speaking with frontman **Pall Jenkins**, **Brian Wallace** is convinced that recording at home is the only way to go.

Over the course of their first three albums, titled 1, 2 and 3, The Black Heart Procession carved out a niche for themselves—a dark corner of melancholy and heart-break, strewn with cobwebs of piano, guitar, musical saw, pump organ and sheet-metal thunderstorms. Though captivating, it's the kind of stuff best kept away from people on suicide watch.

Well, someone must've slipped some Prozac into BHP's Mr. Coffee machine, because their latest album, while still not bursting with rays of sunshine, is such a departure that it didn't make sense to call it 4. Instead, the group's experiment with bossa nova, '60s R&B and straight-up pop is titled *Amore del Tropico* (Touch And Go).

"We didn't want to do the exact same thing," frontman Pall Jenkins says over a cup of unmedicated coffee in the back yard of his San Diego home. "We didn't wanna name it 4, we didn't wanna do exactly another typical Black Heart record."

The biggest catalyst for change, he explains, was the decision to record at his home studio. Not only did BHP have as much time as they wanted, working on and off for nine months, but they were also able to have all their friends play on the disc. That led to the addition of upright bass, cello, lap steel, violin, trumpet and, perhaps most shocking, a quintet of female backup singers.

The ladies make their first appearance on the second track, "Tropics Of Love," a slightly loungey bossa nova number with peppery percussion and whispered gusts of wind. What began as merely a sampled beat quickly took shape once Jenkins and his songwriting partner, multi-instrumentalist Tobias Nathaniel, set about adding layers of instruments and vocals until the original beat was ultimately removed. "We started getting this feeling that was dark yet tropical and had a James Bond-y kind of feel to it," Jenkins says.

Though it was BHP's first time working with backing singers, the process went smoothly thanks in part to ex-jeune vocalist Arabella Harrison. "She works in a studio already," Jenkins explains, "so she has a real familiarity with constructing music and recording it and everything. She would work with the



PHOTO: BRAD MILLER

other girls [to arrange their parts] ... then bam, they had it right away."

Their contributions are perhaps most striking on "A Cry For Love," which starts off sounding like a straightforward '60s R&B ballad until violin and trumpet join the fray. Throughout much of the song, the girls chirp one word per measure, occasionally spitting out a string in escalating registers, and sometimes singing the same word as Jenkins.

"That idea came from [drummer] Joe Plummer," says Jenkins. "He said, 'What if they sang along, and then by the time you got to the last line they hit on the last word?' And that was all he had to say. From there, I was like, 'What if they pulled out certain words at different times and it formed a whole new sentence?' We just played with that whole idea and it came out really great."

Jenkins and Nathaniel began writing together six years ago in the prog-indie unit Three Mile Pilot (currently on hiatus) and formed Black Heart in 1997. "We both have an appreciation for darker stuff, and that's what made it really easy to start writing for Black Heart together," explains Jenkins. "We both had this desire to write in a darker format and not worry about pop music as much."

And yet *Amore del Tropico* features two tracks—"Did You Wonder" and "Only One Way"—that are catchier than half the stuff on MTV's "TRL." "I have no problem with those songs in general," Jenkins says. "They're a little

bit harder to stomach for me. I prefer other songs that are more challenging, but they're still fun songs and they're definitely the kind of songs people always want to hear at shows." Plus, he explains, "I didn't want to do all love songs all the time."

Capitalizing on the diversity of subject matter covered in *Amore*'s songs, the group is working on a straight-to-DVD movie loosely based on the tracks. The ultra low budget "tropical murder mystery" will have little if any dialog, and stars the band, its friends and even some relatives. "Part of me is scared that we'll get done and it's not good," Jenkins confesses. "But it's funny and cool and people who like our music I think will get a kick out of it." ♣

ROCKPILE

CARDIAC ARREST

rock's broodingest duo **Black Heart Procession**
reach out and kill someone

Contrary to popular belief, the two core members of moody rock extremists The Black Heart Procession neither a) live in a shadowy cave with only the company of albino bats to sustain them or b) spend their days ensconced in an ebony cloud of sorrow and doubt from which they emerge only once a year in order to transfer their morbid weltanschmerz to recorded form. Instead, BHP piano/bass organ/optigan maestro Tobias Nathaniel strolls the streets of the incalculably sunny nexus of San Diego, where both he and Black Heart vocalist/guitarist/saw manipulator Pall Jenkins reside.

"People tend to think its very odd or funny that we live in San Diego," mutters a slightly hung-over Nathaniel from his home in one of the shiniest burbs in America. "But they don't realize that the weather is the same here every day. It makes you long for anything resembling a season. And the static state breeds a complacency that is disturbing."

Though Nathaniel suggests his band's hometown may not be so incongruous to their kind of forlorn waltzes after all, he completely deflates The Black Heart Procession's rep as a band worthy of 24-hour suicide watch.

"I think if we were still depressed after playing our sort of music all the time, something would really be wrong," he chuckles. "Sinking ourselves into such a sad, lonely place for the records really gets therapeutic. I think we are all very normal, productive members of society in part because of what we do."

It's not hard to see how Nathaniel, Jenkins and occasional drummer Joe Plummer became saddled with their heroes-of-heartbreak pedigree, however. Since coalescing amid the fragments of Jenkins' and Nathaniel's previous band, the more indie-minded Three Mile Pilot, The Black Heart Procession has released three of the most strip-mixed constellations of isolation and rue since Nick Drake jumped over the pink moon.

This approach culminated in 2000's *Three* (Touch and Go) where we find the gloomy, swashbuckling ballads found on 1998's *One* (Headhunter/Cargo) and 1999's *Two* (Touch and Go) pared down to a slight pulse, with only a faint brush of piano or trumpet fleshing out Jenkins' keening voice and plague-ridden sentiments. *Three*'s unremitting economy stood like a bleak monument on a remote island—blank, puzzling, monumental and astounding. Nonetheless, Black Heart's further distillation of their already stark and stylized aesthetic left many wondering if the band had wandered into a blind alley.

To wring more barefist tragedy out of quiet atmosphere seemed an impossible task, leading to rote and tiresome repetition at best. To marry it seemed as if the Black Heart had finally stopped beating. Enter the new album. Titled *Amore Del Tropico*, it immediately attracts attention as being the first BHP opus not to be christened after a number. The cover art is radically different as well—instead of the mute nightscapes depicted on the earlier records, *Amore* features a colorful drawing of a furrowed man aiming a magnifying glass at the viewer, enlarging his menacing and accusatory eye. Behind the man can be glimpsed the splayed body of a woman, blood pooling around her head. Even without hearing note one, it's easy to discern there's something amiss with The Black Heart Procession.

Nathaniel enlarges upon what exactly is going on.

"The record is loosely arranged around a murder mystery, written from the perspective of the killer," he confides. "Originally we were going to do a more cohesive noir type thing, but it ended up being more vague in the end."

To capture this homicidal atmosphere the band ditched much of the hollowness of its previous work, deciding to utilize the haunting attributes of violin and cello, the lurid sultriness of female backup singers and a spook-twang guitar

technique reminiscent of Chris Isaac and Roy Orbison. The first track, "Tropics of Love," sets all of these elements to an enchanted Calypso tempo, aptly summarizing how terribly far The Black Heart Procession has departed from its earlier methodology.

When alerted to this wide divergence in his band's sound, Tobias concedes the differences but doesn't admit to a concentrated effort on the Procession's part.

"We didn't consciously sit down and plan on doing this story at first or detail how we were going to write this '60s noir pop record or anything like that," he asserts from his sun-shaded lair. "We just started writing music, and this idea gradually evolved as it went along. At some point we decided that we were going to develop and record this certain group of songs rather than some others we were working on, but in the beginning we were just trying a bunch of different stuff."

Nathaniel fingers the recording process behind *Amore* as the primary culprit behind the band's transmogrification. Set to tape in the new 24-track studio in Pall's house, the album was the first BHP work not fashioned under time constraints in a foreign atmosphere.

"Doing it ourselves, we just had so much time to work on it," fills in Nathaniel. "This led to us really experimenting and trying to bring in instruments that were unavailable to us before. We wanted to bring in as many people to play as we could, which is a huge contrast to the bare bones circumstances of our earlier stuff."

This attitude led to as many as 13 people playing on one track, which leads Toby to express some skepticism as to how the songs are going to be translated into the live environment. On record, however, the added numbers flow as smooth as split blood, imparting a rich and vigorous texture to the still-quiet melodies and sinister implications.

As concrete and vivid as the sounds may be, the narrative underlying them is still much more ambiguous. Nathaniel shies away from revealing details, only saying that a DVD featuring all the members of and collaborators with the band as well as bonus audio tracks, is in the works. Like the *Twin Peaks* movie, he promises, it will tie up all loose ends.

Even though *Amore Del Tropico* uncovers the previously submerged theatricality of The Black Heart Procession, its themes of murder and betrayal will hardly dispel the band's image as a bunch of creepy obsessives with a mortality fixation. Nathaniel sighs, glances out of the shades at the glaring sun outside and resigns himself to the perceptions of others, before parting with one last defense.

"If only people knew I drive a white Firebird."

—Reed Jackson

**I THINK IF WE WERE STILL
DEPRESSED AFTER PLAYING OUR
SORT OF MUSIC ALL THE TIME,
SOMETHING WOULD REALLY BE WRONG**

