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Tussle – *Telescope Mind* November 2006

Tussle came on the scene some years ago and immediately made a name for themselves with their uncontrived take on rhythm music. Their "coveted 12inch singles" (*The Wire*) on Troubleman Unlimited first caught the eyes of international crate-diggers and tastemakers alike - among them the Optimo DJs, John Peel (RIP) and Trevor Jackson. Behind those records, they toured Europe and Japan and played alongside a diverse cast of bands and artists, mirroring the band's no-genre approach - Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Karlheinz Stockhausen, !!!, Gang Gang Dance, eYe (Boredoms), Andrew Weatherall, Zongamin, Sunburned Hand of the Man, Deerhoof and this November they share a stage with The Slits.

Upon release of their debut album, the critically-lauded *Kling Klang*, the group were selected for *URB's* prestigious Next 100; and *Pitchfork* picked the group as one of 5 artists to watch in the future. They continued playing unorthodox spaces/venues and in that time played in art spaces such as Deitch Projects, the Frieze Art Fair in London, San Francisco MOMA, and Jack Hanley Gallery, travelled to Scandinavia and did U.S. tours with Architecture in Helsinki, Outhud, Eats Tapes and Yellow Swans.

Since then, the group's line-up has shifted. Bassist Andy Cabic left the group amicably in 2005 to be a permanent fixture in Devendra Banhart's group and to concentrate on his solo project, Vetiver. Initially, this called the very future of the band into question. But sometimes blessings come in disguise. On *Telescope Mind*, Tussle's original drummer Alexis switched from drums to bass and percussion and new drummer Warren - who's played with Damo Suzuki and Daavid Allen of Soft Machine/Gong fame - taking his place, the resultant album captures a group expanding their scope to dizzying effect.

Tussle today still consists of two drummers, (Warren Huegel and Jonathan Holland), bassist Tomo Yasuda (electronics guru of Hey Willpower) and knob twiddler Nathan Burazer. Nathan and Jonathan have been making music together since their North Carolina days in the early 90s, where they became roommates shortly after Nathan left his father's religious cult (where he learned to play the guitar). The two moved to San Francisco to go to art school, eventually meeting Warren (originally from Southern California) and Tomo (originally from Japan) through mutual friends. To this day, Tussle still lives in San Francisco, California.

The overt nod to Jamaican Dub that defined their early sound is now downplayed. In its place, *Telescope Mind* is more experimental and yet more pop. One moment, they hone in on explicit dance jams (kindly refer to tracks such as "Warning", "Second Guessing" or "Trappings" - the last of which will appear as a limited edition 12" released by White Columns art gallery in Manhattan), yet others happily pursue more abstract atmospheres (see "Cloud Melodie" and "Elephant"). There are traces of Faust and Cluster-like ambience, This Heat-ish and Tropicalia-like experimentalism, Bollywood rhythms, even Sound Library-like experimentation. On "Pow!", the group is joined by Sal Principato and Dennis Young of Liquid Liquid, the legendary NYC rhythm group, recently heard on DFA's "Compilation #2". Tussle was thrilled to have them contribute and to meet the members of Liquid Liquid, as they are heroes to the young men. A meeting, which in effect could have amounted to a 'passing of the torch', (or should we say ...'drumstick'?) to the next generation of rhythm music architects.

In the end, *Telescope Mind* points to a group who prefers to make music for music's sake and to this day are still doing what they originally set out to do: to make a motherf**ker dance. This is an album that is adventurous and captivating and just too easy to love. And it may just prove to be one of the highlights of this year.

Prior to the album, Smalltown Supersound will release a 12" single with two remixes -- a 10 minute long epic mix by Hot Chip as well as a mix by Glasgow's hottest; Optimo.

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TEXT: Jolie Mayers PHOTO: Sam Buffa

TUSSLE

MAKING ROCK



San Francisco's **Tussle** are here to reclaim the much maligned term 'jamming.' Inspired by the non-traditional band set ups used by groups like *The Raincoats* and *Delta 5*, Tussle put their rhythm section front and center. Their preferred method of improvisation is to let the groove present itself, grab hold of it and take off, not stopping for naps. The rhythm and groove becomes the thing – this is one dance party that doesn't quit.

When did you first start playing music?

Andy Cabie: Drums, the womb.

How do you write your songs?

Alexis Georgopoulos: It's like throwing spaghetti at a wall and seeing what sticks. If one of us is excited about something, usually all of us are excited about it, and then we just sort of try to piece it together to try to recapture the organic process in which it was made.

Jonathan Holland: There's always a song out there. We just try and grab one and hold it.

What other bands are you guys involved with?

AG: The Alps, a new collective of people making blissed-out pastoral noise. I think Chris Johanson's new label, *Awesome Vistas*, is going to put (our record) out. A Tension, a guitar/drum/vocalist trio of v-neck park that Troubleman may put out. Alpaca, my solo bedroom space folk project.

AC: Vetiver, that's my other bag.

JH: Nathan and I perform improv sets to live video by Alison Childs.

Nathan Burazer: Me and Jonathan started playing shows with just electronics and drums (while Andy was touring with *Devendra Banhart*). We don't really have a real name yet – we were calling it 'Rustle.'

Will Tussle ever have a singer?

AG: If the right singer just showed up to practice one day, sure. Maybe we'll do what Can did when Malcolm Mooney left the band. Say the first person that walks around the corner is our (new) singer. But actually,

we've already talked to a few friends, and we're hoping the next album will be half us, and half with guest vocalists.

Do you remember Tussle's first time playing together?

AG: Probably too stoned to remember... I do remember I was playing one of those clear plastic drum sets. Nice!

NB: No, it's gone forever. Maybe that's a good thing.

How do you feel when your music gets categorized as 'disco punk'?

NB: I guess people have to file us into a category of some kind or another, but that term makes me nauseous and itchy. Someone called us 'Discoart Disco' once, because all our equipment was so junky, borrowed, broken or found.

How did you end up collaborating with Chris Johanson?

AG: We met through Adobe Bookshop. I think that's where we met Chris and Jo Jackson and a lot of the local artists. We became friends, and when we had to figure out what we wanted to do for cover art, Chris just naturally came to mind because we figured his non-figurative stuff seemed to fit what we were doing with sound. I've always liked when bands have a very distinct artwork or almost create a micro-mythology through their choice of titles or cover art.

Any recommendations for good books from Adobe?

AG: My sweetheart bought me Caetano Veloso's autobiography *Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil*.

AC: *Indian Tales*, Jaime de Angulo, *Among the Things*, Bill Buford, *The Master and Margarita*, Mikhail Bulgakov and anything by Ryszard Kapuscinski.

TUSSLE KLING KLANG

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND CD

BY MIA CLARKE

After a vinyl trail of coveted singles, San Francisco quartet Tussle released their debut album, *Kling Klang*, on the Brooklyn label Troubleman Unlimited in 2004. As a US-only release, it was available elsewhere only on import until this special UK and European edition from Smalltown Supersound, adding cover art by Kim Hiorthøy and various highlights from the group's earlier material, including remixes by Soft Pink Truth's Drew Daniels and Death Comet Crew's Stuart Argabright.

An intoxicating melee of scuffling rhythms is the driving force behind Tussle's textured, instrumental punk/funk. Although the individual beats are concentrated and clipped, the sprawling structures and kinetic flow of the group's drum exercises steer Tussle away from the icy perfection often associated with their Techno influences. Like Out Hud, their sound is organic and unrestricted, while keeping to an insistent, raw pulse. The double drums (one traditional kit, one percussive scrapheap) are layered beneath rubbery, prowling basslines and an assortment of delayed handclaps and skittery cymbals, as on "Decompression" and "Nightfood". Despite a lack of melodic hooks or feeling that any song has a 'centre', the highly sprung grooves are likely to stay locked in the

listener's memory long after the track has faded

Five different engineers recorded *Kling Klang* in a variety of locations, including the group's basement practice space. Despite this, the album has a very consistent sense of dynamics. *Kling Klang* delicately captures a complex ebb and flow in its furious tempos. The 45 second "Comma" is subtly accentuated by the interplay between a low synthetic hum and sudden blasts of a louder, similar sound, while the group's auxiliary percussive work relies heavily on sensitivity to dynamics to keep it in shape.

Just as Tussle's music provides an ample playground for remixing (an album of *Kling Klang* remixes is due out later this year, with contributions invited from Munk and Gang Gang Dance among others), the quartet also rework their own tracks. This disc appends the original version of "Eye Contact" with the group's dub-influenced makeover. Handclaps are brought to the foreground, and beats slowed down and panned to create a warm, delay-washed infusion of fragmented rhythms.

RADAR

TUSSELE SAN FRANCISCO

WORDS: EMILY ZEMLER



The word tussle alludes to struggle, yet the band Tussle has no struggle when it comes to creating music. It's difficult to categorize the band's style into a specific musical genre. At least, according to their members, Tussle is a group that strives to exist without falling into any specific category.

"I don't know what we consider ourselves," says drummer Alexis Georgopolous. "It seems like other people have opinions and tell us what we are. I don't think we consider ourselves a noise band, but chaos is definitely part of what we do. I also don't really consider us a dance band, but we always love it when people dance at our shows. I suppose we just make what we make and leave it to people to decide for themselves."

Based out of San Francisco's Mission District, Tussle's four members may not consider themselves to be a noise band, but their music and their presentation of that music certainly contain traces of the avant garde. The band

plays instruments made from "found objects," and has recently begun experimenting with video projection during their shows. Their shows usually attract quite a veritable crowd of stoners and hipsters alike—making them, of course, an up-and-coming buzz band.

The foursome, which includes bassist Andy Cabic (who is also in indie folk outfit Vetiver), second drummer Jonathan Holland and electronics guru Nathan Burazer, along with Georgopolous, formed Tussle about three years ago when "we were in the basement studio and there were some instruments lying around," Georgopolous says. "We just started playing them. They were all instruments we had never played before."

Cabic, in fact, doesn't even own a bass; he has to borrow Georgopolous' bass whenever the band plays. And Holland, who had never played drums before Tussle, has since constructed a custom-made, sound sculpture drum set. "It's a collaboration of everything from five-gallon

plastic tofu buckets to things he soldered when he went to the Art Institute here in San Francisco, but there's a few regular drum pieces too," Georgopolous explains.

After jamming together for several months, "we were like 'hey, should we be starting a band?'" Georgopolous says. They did, and a few years later the boys found themselves signed to Troubleman Unlimited, who recently released Tussle's debut full-length, *Kling Klang*.

The album's title aptly describes the "rhythmic centered" (as Cabic put it) sound it contains: the garagey instrumental beats sound like structured improvisations that are almost too mild for heavy listening. But at risk of offending Cabic, who says he doesn't "want to predetermine someone's response to something by coloring the music in a way that may not describe it to them," let's just go with Georgopolous' description of Tussle's music: "When we four people get together, this is what we create."