

CLEAN LIVING

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IT'S A WONDERFUL NIGHT'S BEING HERE



If you've not already heard of Dry Cleaning, stop what you're doing and stream them now. You can thank us for the introduction later. The band is comprised of four members, vocalist Florence Shaw, bassist Lewis Maynard, drummer Nick Buxton and guitarist Tom Dowse. They achieve a difficult task with a unique sound that simultaneously reminds you of artists you know and love, and is also refreshingly new at the same time. The pace and texture of the music calls to mind the tenderness and tension mastered by revered acts like Fugazi or Sonic Youth, but is elevated to an entirely new place by Florence's hypnotically deadpan delivery of the lyrics.

If there's a driving force in Dry Cleaning, it's creativity. The band's method of working tends to be improvisational and collaborative and there's an ease and trust amongst them that's evident. Largely because the band are all friends, drawn together by a love of similar things. Tom met Flo at art college and bonded over an appreciation of the American artist Ryan Trecartin. When in search of a singer, something called him to approach Flo. "I recall feeling that it was a good idea because it was something different from anything that I'd done as a musician before—just ask someone from outside the music world." Immediately, working with her became very freeing. The rest of the band had a long history of playing together—and experienced some of the negative aspects of that—but in this iteration a lot of that was removed, especially in terms of lyrics. "The singer in most bands, you sort of don't really ask what the lyrics are because inside it's like, 'I don't wanna know.'"

As Tom says: "It was really refreshing to work with someone who was actually thinking about what they're writing and actually trying." Notable in Florence's lyrics are the ways she takes the abstract and banal and weaves them into clever commentary. The band have created odes to Meghan Markle and set legions of fans querying the significance of bouncy balls. There's something of a Cocteau Twins' Elizabeth Fraser approach in her lyrics but instead of making up words, she crafts them in a unique way which creates a compelling curiosity in the songs. "It's interesting that you mentioned Elizabeth Fraser. I remember reading that some of the lyrics of their songs are just made up words and being like, 'wait, you can do that?'," she laughs. "It had quite a big effect on me. I always thought that was really cool." Most of the lyrics are assortments of things Flo has collected. "I like using phrases that aren't sort of beautiful, you know? That are a bit lumpy or not quite adequate or don't quite mean what you want them to mean. I like the clumsiness when people say things wrong or pluralize something that isn't supposed to be plural—but they just plow on talking anyway. It's a listening thing more than a reading thing I think."



Observation is at the heart of Dry Cleaning's charm as a band, not just in their wry lyrical musings but in how they create as a whole. If there's any place art school might be evident in their music, it's that seeing is the first gateway to creating. In terms of how the band themselves are observed, though, there's often a desire to lump them in with other bands where spoken word is a large part of the sound. Case in point: Sleaford Mods, who they're compared to frequently. "They're really good mates of ours and so supportive to our band but we are not the same kind of band at all. Even between two singers that both talk about their way of performing and the world that you are creating when you use language, they're two totally different things I think."

One thing they do appreciate about Sleaford Mods is their visible anger. Not that there isn't anger in their writing too, as Florence puts it: "I think occasionally my writing's angrier than [Jason Williamson's] but I don't sound as angry," she laughs. "And his writing can often be funnier and sillier than mine but sounds a lot angrier." Some of Florence's narratives— whilst surrealist—do speak a lot to women's experience and have some distinctly feminist principles. We discuss how that translates when you're collectively sharing but there's also this experience of one. Flo says she's also wondered about this but Tom is quick to answer. "I think sometimes when Flo comes up with something that's quite uncomfortable to listen to, I kind of really appreciate it, you know what I mean? I don't need to agree all the time and I don't look for agreement in the people around me all the time. The four of us come together to make something and [Flo] and I wouldn't want to be in a group where someone's singing about ships of gold all the fucking time."

Lewis has a similar perspective. "It did make me feel a bit uncomfortable but I like that. I think about it from that way around really and this sense of world building really comes into it, where you try and bring other things in." They're also proud to be able to represent her views. "If someone is the mouthpiece of your band, I think it's a privilege to have someone who's thoughtful and intelligent enough to do that with style. Because there are a lot of other bands singing about similar themes that don't. It's just an all-male representation or they might be doing it in quite an aggressive way or something like that. And I don't really relate to that in the

way that I relate to maybe some of Flo's lyrics." Nick adds, "I feel quite proud of it. It's sort of some badge of honor to where I feel like I'm in safe hands."

The spirit of collaboration is alive and well in their way of working says Nick. "We're very democratic as a band, which I hear is not normal but pretty much every decision we make as a group, there isn't like a leader. I think that that has kind of contributed to the world building thing. It's not one person's vision at all." They approach making music in the same way they would a visual project. "That helps guide what we're doing and start thinking, 'what's the color of that thing?' So it's almost like this was a painting, and you'd mix in a bit of that color or something to make it a bit more exciting. That's the great thing about doing it collaboratively. One of the other three will do that. They'll bring some kind of flavor to it that you weren't expecting which then makes it more interesting."

Their success seems unexpected to them and they're genuinely humble, if not slightly awed, by the reception they're getting. Their years of experience have given them the ability to trust and be present in their writing. "We're all keen on dealing with what's actually in front of you rather than just lots of hypothetical stuff. We're always keen to do as much as we can, just the four of us, and it can be quite an unadulterated process." One thing is evident though; for them the joy of this work is in the doing and not the promotion—they're firmly uninspired by social media. They prefer to focus on the music. As Nick puts it, "I don't want people to get bored of us. I like the fact that people can relate to our music and can have an experience with our music." They're excited about recent new opportunities, highlights like meeting Duran Duran and a show on top of Rockefeller Center where Tom caught a glimpse of Serbian conceptual artist Marina Abramović watching them which Flo says took weeks to get her head around.

At their very heart though, Dry Cleaning are artists in every sense and their collective way of working is always channeled with this in mind. As Flo describes it, "I definitely feel very strongly about the different decisions that we make and I never put things better in talking than I do in writing lyrics. I feel that's kind of what I'm striving towards in the writing. The idea that maybe it's a powerful thing to just be us. That seems good to me."

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