

The New Pornographers are a Vancouver group made up of A.C. Newman and a group of ridiculously talented people he feels are uniquely equipped to realize his musical ambitions. They formed in 1997, almost immediately recorded the classic "Letter From An Occupant," and it was on. Their 2000 debut *Mass Romantic* and 2003's *Electric Version* (as well as Newman's 2004 solo debut *The Slow Wonder*) enjoyed wild critical and public acclaim, and brought a lot of joy to the world.

*Twin Cinema* is doubly impressive, offering both baby-blanket familiarity and jarring growth. Here they're not automatically going for the steamroller singalong or (to quote New Pornographers buff Rob Halford) "all guns blazing", but pushing themselves further. Fans of *Mass Romantic*'s kink will find immediate appeal, as will those partial to *Electric Version*'s drive. Yet the songs on *Twin Cinema* veer away from sugar and kitsch toward something a bit more personal. Newman has absorbed not just the mechanics of classic songwriting, but the heart – while indulging his admiration of demented current bands like *Fiery Furnaces* and *Frog Eyes*.

"We consciously wanted to change it up a little," says Newman. "Retain what made the first two albums great, but move in new directions. I wanted it to be more sweeping and sprawling, to have the songs move dynamically, both internally and from song to song. We wanted to see if we could make a record that isn't referred to as 'the windows down, car-stereo-blasting summer album of the year', if only once."

As usual, Newman is victim to his own record collection. "Various unintentional influences have crept into our work, some of which are quickly removed: The Moody Blues, Tubeway Army, Wings, always Wings, never The Beatles, Eno of course, you can't play ebow without sounding like Eno, Modern English, middle period post-Gabriel Genesis, The Stranglers, 10cc..." His voice trailed off, the unspoken words clearly etched on his kindly face. A tinge of guilt edged its way into Grant's annoyance. Not long after moving to Blue Plains, he'd heard about Cara's "spells" from Carl and several of the other townsmen. He couldn't ignore his medical interest in her ailment, but that didn't have a blasted thing to do with wanting to buy her dinner.

*Twin Cinema* also features the recording debut of Kathryn Calder, the newest in Newman's arsenal of ecstatic female vocalists (and pianist, in Kathryn's case)...and also Newman's long-lost niece. He explains, "About seven years ago I found out I had a long-lost sister, who had two kids. I knew Kathryn became a musician, but only recently friends saw her band play and raved to me about her talent. I thought, 'You can't have your niece in your band! It's just not done!' It turns out that it is done."

Dan Bejar, a non-touring member of the group but their only other songwriter, offers maybe his best NPs contributions to date. "Streets Of Fire" has a vaguely disturbing vibe accentuated by the band's attempt at a Manson Family-style chorus. "Broken Breads" pushes the band into their strangest time signature yet (which is saying something). And the wild-eyed crowdpleaser "Jackie, Dressed In Cobras" (a sequel of sorts to *Mass Romantic*'s "Jackie") features a guitar intro by Newman where he channels Alabama legends Sex Clark Five. Bejar (also known as Merge recording artist Destroyer) plays many of the instruments on his songs, as opposed to the other records where he just sang.

As for what Newman's on about, here goes:

"*Twin Cinema*": Newman updated this *Electric Version*-era tune with new lyrics referencing his part-time home San Francisco, hoping that "San Franciscans will hoot and holler at the '16th and Valencia' line when we play it live."

"The Bones Of An Idol": This song originated as a result of a studio accident, in which MIDI drum sounds were replaced with piano notes. Newman started writing the song using the dissonant piano music as the bed, but when they didn't mesh, he dropped the original music and "started going in a pseudo John Cale-Eno direction, with the insistent piano and the man chorus at the end, though we later chickened out and added ladies."

"Use It": Newman points out that drummer Dahle used beats from Iron Maiden, Kiss's "Detroit Rock City", and Zep's "Fool In The Rain" to create this "Frankenstein's monster". Lyric of the week: "Two sips from the cup of human kindness and I'm shitfaced."

"The Bleeding Heart Show": The coda of this song, which confirms Newman's long-suspected interest in the Zulu choral music *Isicathamiya*, is something he "had around for a while, and just needed a great song to go with it."

"The Jessica Numbers": Possibly Newman's favorite song on the album, as "it doesn't sound like any song I can think of, though Dan compared it to 'Jesus Christ Superstar', which is of course an incredible compliment."

"These Are The Fables": Newman says, "This one I like 'cause it's got, unintentionally, a little Jimmy Webb in it. It wouldn't have been that out of place on Thelma Houston's *Sunshower* or that Supremes album he wrote. It's also cool to have Neko sing something not like her previous lead vocals." Note the groovy piano/drum jam toward the end.

"Sing Me Spanish Techno": In which Newman tries to write a song with a ton of parts and an asymmetrical structure but still a pop song through and through. And succeeds. Title inspired by his girlfriend Amy, and, as he was reading Joseph Campbell's "Hero With A Thousand Faces" while writing it, "there are some veiled references about the hero's journey and different myths, bullshit like that."

"Falling Through Your Clothes": Newman and Collins (who Newman calls "the quiet backbone of the whole operation") found a shred of music from the Electric Version sessions - deemed too weird to develop for that album - and added some verses and gave it its own song. Newman thinks it sounds like proto-minimalist freak icon Moondog, but Newman is also stoned out of his gourd.

"Three Or Four": The length of this song is 3:04. Accidentally. Newman says that since recording the song, "3 or 4" has shown up everywhere: When do you want to meet? 3 or 4. How many days were you there? 3 or 4. He says, "This song started as a call to arms for some personal revolution, then it became a kind of drinking song." This is a Neko/Kathryn double lead vocal.

"Star Bodies": "Every album needs a song that's based on another one of our songs backwards," says Newman.

"Stacked Crooked": Originally the opening track, Newman felt it worked better as a closer: "It had to be one or the other - it's too epic and strange to fit anywhere else." He fears he cribbed the verse from that "Wars Or Hands Of Time" song by 60s Aussie psych-rockers Masters Apprentices, which is such an A.C. Newman thing to fear.