

Few groups of recent times have been quite so mythologised as Boards Of Canada. Whether it's down to their veiled musical

references to numerology and occultism, or their impressively low public profile - few interviews, even fewer live shows - but you could say that these two brothers have become something of a cult themselves, with an online fanbase that picks over everything Boards with forensic vigour.

Hailing from rural Scotland, Mike Sandison and Marcus Eoin started making music together as children, influenced by sci-fi cinema and the documentaries of the National Film Board of Canada. Their music - which first properly crystallised on their debut album, 1998's *Music Has The Right To Children* - is a spectral, nostalgic electronica into which is encoded a wealth of half-submerged samples and subliminal messages, from robotic voices and the sound of children at play to references to the Branch Davidian cult that perished at Waco, Texas.

The new album *Tomorrow's Harvest* was announced back in April in a manner designed to stoke their mystique - a 12-inch record that popped up in the racks of the New York record shop Other Music, blank but for a shimmering melody and a robotic voice intoning a string of numbers: a cipher for the fans to crack. The record itself, their first in eight years, strikes a darker note than 2005's sun-dappled *The Campfire Headphase*, its pulsing synthesisers and woozy drones implying a creeping, radioactive menace.

Having agreed to a rare interview with the Guardian, the duo insist that it is conducted via email and they are not altogether keen to unpick the themes of *Tomorrow's Harvest*. "I think it would kind of neuter it if we completely spell it out," writes Sandison. But their answers provide plenty for Boards of Canada cult members to pore over in the months to come ...

What have you been up to during the eight years since your last full-length record, *The Campfire Headphase*?

Marcus Eoin: "We took some time out, and spent some time travelling. Then we expanded our studio space a great deal, and these things take time. But we're always working, all the time, whatever else is going on. So we'd begun sketching out things for this record straight after the last one, and got heavily into tying it all up last year."

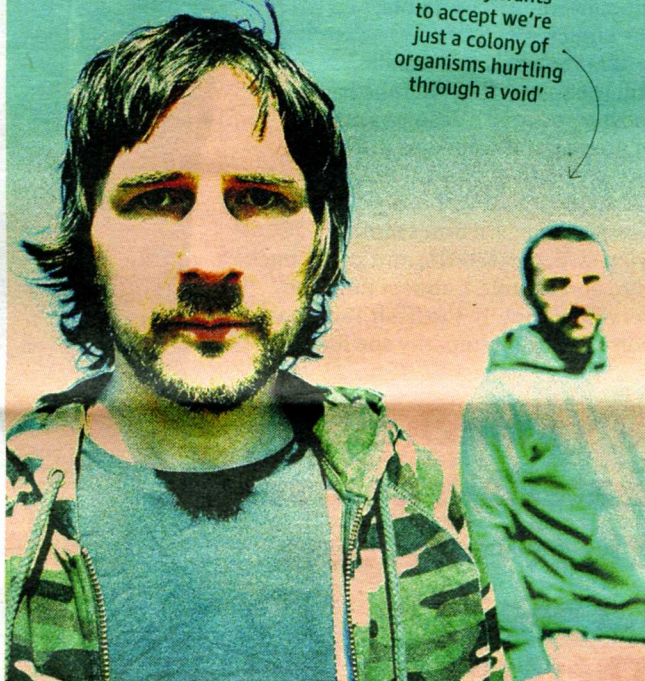
Is creating music a long and drawn-out process for you? How did making this

'WE'VE BECOME A LOT MORE NIHILISTIC'

Their music is veiled in mystery and they rarely give interviews. But on the release of their first album in eight years, brothers Marcus Eoin and Mike Sandison - Boards of Canada - talk to **Louis Pattison**

Michael Sandison:
'We're into grim
70s and 80s movie
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Marcus Eoin:
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album compare to previous ones?

Mike Sandison: "It's different with every track. We often jam something down quickly and you tend to find those things are the ones with a great instant melody. The challenge with this record was crafting the tunes into a specific style and time period we want to reference. In this case there's a deliberate VHS video-nasty element."

Could you elaborate on the "deliberate VHS video nasty element" a little?

A few people have noticed the arpeggiated synth bits have a sort of John Carpenter feel ...

Sandison: "Carpenter is kind of an easy reference point for most people though I'd say the main ones would be Fabio Frizzi, John Harrison and Mark Isham. We're very much into grim 70s and 80s movie soundtracks so there are maybe nods to composers such as Stefano Mainetti, Riz Ortolani, Paul Giovanni, Wendy Carlos, even Michael Nyman."

Boards Of Canada's music has always employed a sense of nostalgia in a way that was by turn dreamy or creepy.

Now it feels as if you can hear this sense in a raft of music, from Ariel Pink and chillwave to Broadcast's later work and the hauntology-inspired groups such as those found on Ghostbox.

Can you hear your influence on other groups?

Sandison: "I don't think we hear our own music the way other people hear it, so it's difficult to say whether we hear our sound in other people's work. I've definitely noticed some newer electronic artists latching on to specific techniques or styles from the past. Some of them are great."

What do you look for in terms of musical equipment?

Sandison: "We're definitely vintage hardware freaks. We've always used older gear. Everything we use is decrepit. Our studio is full of wooden things covered with red LEDs. We'll go to great lengths to get hold of a specific instrument just to get a particular sound. For example, there's a sound in *Cold Earth* that is something like only one second of audio. It comes from an obscure old effect unit that cost us a lot of time and road miles to source, and it ended up being one second of audio on the record."

You've spoken in the past about how mathematics and science have been an inspiration on Boards Of Canada. Have you found more musical ways to integrate mathematics into the fabric of the music on *Tomorrow's Harvest*?

Sandison: "Yes, it's loaded with

patterns and messages. There are various tricks embedded throughout the whole body of this album, so it'll be interesting to see whether people pick up on these things. Some things are just simple structural things. For instance, *Come To Dust*, the second-to-last track, is a musical reprise of *Reach for the Dead*, which comes in as the second track. There's a palindromic structure centred around the track *Collapse* in the middle. There's actually more use of subliminals on this record than on any previous album we've done, so we're interested to see what people will pick up on."

The cover appears to be a photo of the San Francisco skyline, shot from the vantage point of Alameda Naval Air Station, a now defunct military base operational during the cold war. Is this coincidence, or does it point to something thematic/conceptual about the record?

Eoin: "Yeah, definitely - of course that's an ingredient of the theme on this record. In fact if you look again at the San Francisco skyline on the cover

it's actually a ghost of the city. You're looking straight through it."

A spot of web sleuthing reveals that *Tomorrow's Harvest* is the name of an online clothing and supplies store that seems to cater for crisis scenarios - frozen and sealed food supplies, gas masks, solar power. I gather that you're both fathers. Could we maybe read *Tomorrow's Harvest* as a sort of anxiety or fear for one's offspring in an unstable or uncertain world?

Sandison: "Being a father fills you with a healthy understanding of your own mortality, and on a bigger scale that responsibility highlights the fragility of our society, or the problems with it. We've become a lot more nihilistic over the years. In a way we're really celebrating an idea of collapse rather than resisting it. It's probably quite a bleak album, depending on your perspective."

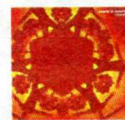
Is it fair to say that the tone of this album is post-apocalyptic?

Sandison: "It's not post-apocalyptic so much as it is about an inevitable stage that lies in front of us. But it's better if

THREE BOC ALBUMS



Music Has The Right To Children Warp Records debut nailed their template of bucolic, sun-faded electronica with a gently eerie undertow.



Geogaddi A turn to the dark side, with subliminal messages pointing to occultism, hypnotism, and the Branch Davidian sect.



The Campfire Headphase Divisive among fans for its acoustic guitars, it hides echoes of pastoral British folk in its dreamy grooves.

listeners find the narrative themselves, in the titles and the sounds."

In the context of history, we live in an age of unparalleled science and rationality. But despite this, religion and ideas of mysticism - along with other fringe concerns such as conspiracy, etc - continue to thrive.

I gather that you're rationalists, atheists, etc - but the idea of the mystic obviously has an appeal to you ...

Eoin: "There's a lot to play with there, for an artist. It affects people even if they don't consider themselves to be religious. Nobody really wants to accept that we're just a colony of organisms hurtling through a void on a ball of rock. The most rational individual doesn't really want to have his beliefs completely confirmed. It's in human nature to pursue spiritual or fantastic things, for whatever reason, that's why we like art and escapism, isn't it? Humans like to feel there's a purpose, even if there isn't one!"

i To read the full interview - along with an extended review of *Tomorrow's Harvest* - visit guardian.co.uk/music

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